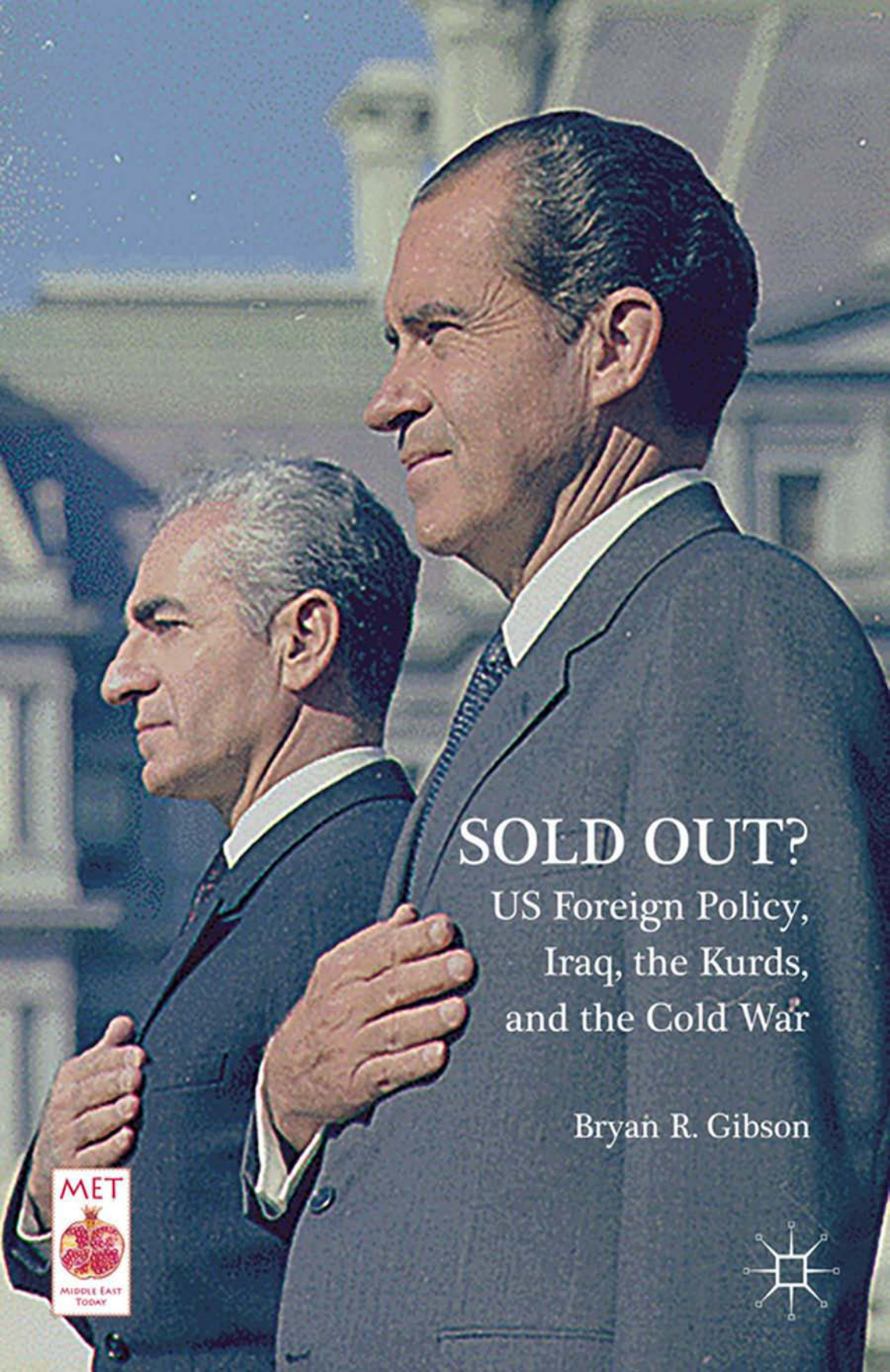
SOLD OUT?
US Foreign Policy,
Iraq, the Kurds,
and the Cold War
Bryan R. Gibson
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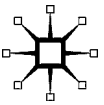

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For my supportive parents, my wife and partner in crime,
and my little bear, Maximus

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Introduction

In a perceptive remark made during a meeting of the US National Security Council in January 1959, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles observed that America was "not sufficiently sophisticated" to meddle in the complex mix of internal Iraqi politics.[1] Nearly two decades later in 1976, another secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, who was also President Gerald Ford's national security adviser, was in an uncomfortable meeting in Baghdad with Iraq's foreign minister, Sa'dun Hammadi. Only a few weeks earlier, Daniel Schorr, a reporter for CBS News, had revealed top-secret details of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation to aid Iraq's Kurdish minority between 1972 and 1975.[2] When Hammadi asked about the leak, Kissinger, while denying direct US support for the Kurds, explained that he was "not opposed" to Iran providing support to the Iraqi Kurds, because at that time he "thought [Iraq was] a Soviet satellite." After assuring Hammadi that the United States was no longer engaged in covert action against Iraq, Kissinger explained, "We have a more sophisticated understanding [of Iraq] now."[3] This book will show how the United States moved from being an unsophisticated observer of events in 1958–59 to becoming a direct protagonist in Iraq during 1972–75 through its own covert program to support Iraq's Kurdish rebels. The motive for America's shift seems clear: in the two decades since its revolution, Iraq had become an important player in America's global and regional Cold War strategy to contain the Soviet Union.[4]

Despite the important role Iraq played in the Middle East theater of the Cold War, only on a few rare occasions did it dominate US foreign policymakers' attention as it has for the last two decades. Because the American foreign policy establishment was focused on the Soviet Union for nearly 50 years, peripheral countries—like Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Afghanistan, *and* Iraq, among many others—were important insofar as they were Cold War battlegrounds. Given this, US foreign policy throughout the Cold War period was, by its very nature, reactive, responding to threats—both real and imagined—as they arose. Consequently, America's policy toward Iraq was driven by America's perception of the Soviet threat. This book underscores the reactive nature of US foreign policy during the Cold War, while assessing America's policies toward Iraq.

As a study of the Cold War, this book is situated within a wider debate about superpower interventions in the Third World. In his seminal book, *The Global Cold War*, Odd Arne Westad argued that American and Soviet interventions in the Third World during the Cold War have had a destabilizing effect on international

affairs today.[5] The consequences of interfering in the affairs of postcolonial states was nowhere more evident than in the case of Iraq. This book uses the history of America's relations with—and interventions in—Iraq during the 1958–75 period of the international and national disorder sown by American meddlesomeness. In order to be consistent with Westad's analysis, this book abides by his definitions of Cold War, Third World, and intervention.

> "Cold War" means the period in which the global conflict between the United States and Soviet Union dominated international affairs, roughly between 1945 and 1991. "Third World" means the former colonial or semicolonial countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America [and the Middle East] that were subject to European (or rather pan-European, including American and Russian) economic or political domination… "Intervention" means any concerted and state-led effort by one country to determine the political direction of another country.[6]

With these definitions in mind, this text shows that America's interventions in Iraq—a Third World nation—at the height of the Cold War contributed to the country's political and economic destabilization and its continual national upheavals and agonies.

This book weaves together a number of threads—American foreign policy, Cold War strategy, the Cold War in the Middle East, the Arab Cold War, Arab nationalism, Ba'thism, communism, and the Kurdish question—into a complex tapestry of interests, intrigue, betrayal, and deceit. It shows that whenever US officials in Washington believed that Baghdad was developing closer relations with Moscow, they took steps to counter Soviet influence, often relying on covert interventions. Three instances stand out: (1) in 1958–59, the Eisenhower administration engaged Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser to find ways to prevent the communists from coming to power, including the possibility of overthrowing Iraq's strong leader, Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim; (2) in 1962, the Kennedy administration ordered the CIA to seek Qasim's overthrow after he nationalized the concessionary holding of an American-owned oil company; and (3) in 1972–75, the Nixon administration financed and armed Kurdish rebels to destabilize the Iraqi regime and prevent communists from joining the government after Iraq had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. However, when the United States believed that the Iraqi regime was anticommunist, it took steps to bolster and maintain its power, irrespective of the views of its allies. Two examples are prominent: (1) after Qasim was overthrown in February 1963, the Kennedy administration lent support to the Ba'th Party, which was engaged in a brutal war against the Kurdish rebels, who at this point were being assisted by the Soviet Union; and (2) in the mid-1960s, the Johnson administration propped up the anticommunist, Arab nationalist regimes of Abd al-Salim Arif and then his brother Abd ar-Rahman Arif in the face of British, Iranian, and Israeli efforts to depose them. In all instances, America's interventions in Iraq were based on the perceived need to check Soviet influence, reinforce potential pro-Western allies, and undermine perceived enemies. This was a logical extension of America's broader Cold War strategy.

Traditionally, the United States had viewed the Gulf as a "British lake" and preferred to rely on Britain for its defense.[7] However, as tensions between Washington and Moscow escalated following the Second World War, both the Americans and Soviets began to recognize the vital role that access to Gulf oil would play in the event of a third World War. As early as 1945, American policymakers believed that Moscow's designs on the Gulf were evident when it demanded that the Iranian government provide it with naval bases in the Strait of Hormuz and began supporting the fledgling Azerbaijani and Kurdish breakaway republics, who sought independence from Iran.[8] Similarly, a US military study from 1946 concluded that losing Iraqi and Saudi Arabian sources of oil would force the United States and its allies to fight an "oil-starved war" against the Soviet Union, and vice versa.[9] This meant that America's regional strategy was aimed at defending the Gulf, preventing Soviet domination of the region's oil resources, and ensuring the survival of the region's Western-backed autocrats.[10] To achieve this, the United States sponsored the development of a regional defense system aimed at reinforcing what Secretary Dulles called the "Northern Tier" states, consisting of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey. By the mid-1950s, this group had organized itself into a regional security alliance known as the Baghdad Pact.[11] This study will show how the overthrow of the pro-Western Hashemite monarchy in 1958 upended America's Cold War strategy for the Gulf region, displaced Britain's influence, and led to direct competition with the Soviet Union over what direction the new regime in Baghdad would take.

This contest would last for 17 years—through four coup d'états, five different regimes, innumerable failed plots, and a 14-year-long Kurdish War—before the Ba'th Party, led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, achieved absolute control of Iraq in 1975.[12] In assessing US-Iraqi relations during this period, it will be clear that the driving force behind US policy toward Iraq was the application of the broader principles of America's Cold War strategy on local political developments. In practical terms, this meant ensuring the flow of oil from the region, while undermining Soviet influence through lavishing military, economic, and development assistance on regional allies.

The Soviet strategy toward Iraq and the Gulf virtually mirrored that of America. As Galia Golan points out, "Soviet interests in Iraq have been tied up with the fact that Iraq borders on a number of traditionally pro-western states: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey and Iran, the last two on the Soviets' own border."[13] In the 1950s, Iraq's central role in the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact alliance system only increased Moscow's perception of Iraq's importance in the Cold War. In short, Iraq was viewed as a threat. However, Iraq's revolution in 1958 and its abrupt departure from the pact in 1959 transformed the Soviet Union's strategic calculus for the Gulf region. As a result, Moscow's primary objective in Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s was to keep Baghdad out of the Western—or rather American—orbit. In the military sphere, the Soviets sought to cultivate a military-supply relationship in order to make Iraq dependent on Soviet arms. Between 1958 and 1975, the Soviets and Iraqis signed a series of major arms deals, worth millions. As Golan observed, "The Soviets saw a special role for Iraq in the Gulf, to help Moscow obtain a political foothold for bases."[14] This was a

by-product of a shift in Soviet policy in the 1960s following the US Navy's deployment of nuclear-armed Polaris submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.[15] With Soviet military needing to project itself southward, Iraq and the Gulf took on greater salience, leading to Moscow securing basing rights at Iraq's only viable Gulf port, Umm Qasr, following the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972. The Soviets were also interested in Iraqi oil and encouraged successive Iraqi regimes to nationalize Western oil companies. For instance, when Baghdad faced a boycott after nationalizing the Western-owned Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) in June 1972, Moscow provided an alternative market for Iraqi oil and assisted in the development and production of Iraq's southern oil fields.[16] Taken together, all of these steps suggest that Moscow's approach to Iraq in the years following its revolution was a success; however, this would be misleading. Soviet-style communism was never an attractive ideology in Iraq, and the ruling regimes in Baghdad often used the superpowers' Cold War rivalry to their advantage.

The historiography—or the history of the evolution of a historical debate—of US-Iraqi relations during the Cold War is still in its infancy. To date, only a single book focused on US-Iraqi relations: Peter Hahn's *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq since World War I*.[17] Relying mostly on primary documents made available through the Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the US* (*FRUS*) series and other secondary works, Hahn's analysis of US-Iraqi relations is aimed at "undergraduate students" and tends to overlook many key events covered here. Nevertheless, this study supports his central argument, which asserts that the United States "monitored Iraq from a distance, aiming to deny any inroads by Soviet-backed communism and to prevent any flair-ups in violence between Iraq and its neighbors."[18]

In particular, Hahn and other notable scholars have recognized Iraq's revolution in 1958 as a pivotal event for both Middle Eastern politics and the Cold War. Malcolm Kerr, for example, viewed the coup as a key turning point in what he called the "Arab Cold War," because the Qasim regime turned against Nasser's radical brand of Arab nationalism—a nationalist ideology celebrating the glories of Arab civilization, Arabic language and literature, and calling for the political union of the Arab world—which undermined Nasser's efforts to bring the Arab world under his command.[19] The revolution has also been termed an important turning point by numerous Cold War scholars.[20] From the outset of the Cold War, Iraq had been a key player in America's "Northern Tier" containment plan and was the namesake for the Baghdad Pact. Therefore, the overthrow of Iraq's pro-Western monarch by a group of radical, Arab nationalist military officers jeopardized America's Cold War strategy. Despite this, there is some debate among scholars over America's response to the revolution. For instance, Stephen Blackwell has suggested that the United States and Britain had a "common perception" of the communist threat to Iraq after the coup, but others, like Nigel Ashton, have argued that Anglo-American perceptions toward Iraq were not so closely aligned.[21] This study disputes Blackwell's notion and argues that the Eisenhower administration viewed Iraq as part of its geostrategic contest with the Soviet Union, whereas Britain saw Qasim as an alternative to Nasser in the

Arab world and sought to maintain him. Of course, this assertion contrasts with the widely held notion of an Anglo-American "Special Relationship" during this period.[22]

A core theme covered in this book is America's use of covert action to intervene in Iraq in order to deny the Soviet Union influence in the Middle East.[23] It is accepted among scholars that the CIA tried to assassinate Qasim in the fall of 1959;[24] sought to "incapacitate" him again in 1960;[25] and finally, assisted the Ba'th Party in its overthrow of his regime in February 1963.[26] It is also believed that the CIA provided the Ba'th Party's death squads with lists of known communists, who were rounded up and in many cases killed.[27] In recent years, a group of young scholars have waded into these debates, using declassified documents available at the Kennedy Presidential Library. While these analyses advance the study of US-Iraqi relations, none was able to provide conclusive evidence proving the CIA's involvement in these plots.[28] However, a careful examination of a wide range of documents and interviews raises important questions about the veracity of these claims as to whether the CIA was behind the 1963 Ba'thist coup.

Despite this, there is considerable evidence that the CIA developed an interest in the Ba'th Party starting in the early 1960s. Michel Aflaq, a Lebanese Christian, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Syrian Sunni, founded the Ba'th Party in 1943. Its motto, "unity, freedom, and socialism," pointed to its Arab nationalist, anti-imperialist, and socialist ideology and its dedication to bringing about a complete transformation of Arab society through revolutionary activism. After first coming to power in Iraq in 1963 and being overthrown later that year, the Ba'th returned to power in a coup in 1968 and ruled the country until the US invasion in 2003.[29] Joseph Sassoon argues that although "the party's ideology was at odds with Western democracy" because of its belief that democracy masked the tyranny and exploitation of the masses, the Ba'th Party was not inherently anti-Western.[30] This book will show that this was evident during the first Ba'th regime in Iraq in 1963, in 1973–75, when the Ba'th Party improved Iraq's relations with France and the West, and finally during the Iran-Iraq war, when Iraq established a covert military, economic, and diplomatic relationship with the United States.[31]

For much of the 1958–75 period, the dominant issue affecting US-Iraqi relations was an ongoing civil war between Iraq's Kurdish population and the central government in Baghdad that broke out in 1961. The Kurdish conflict had its origins in the aftermath of the First World War, when the Allied powers reneged on their promise to give the Kurds a state composed of the southeastern corner of Turkey in the Treaty of Sevrès. Instead of establishing a Kurdish state, the Allies carved up the Kurdish territories into modern-day Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.[32] For the rest of the 1920s, the Kurds in Iraq rebelled against their new British colonial masters, only to be put down by force.[33] The leader of the Iraqi Kurds during the period covered in this analysis was Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a born revolutionary. Having first engaged in combat during a rebellion against the British authorities in 1919 and again in the early 1930s,[34] he later went on to play an integral role in the formation of the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad during 1945–46, in Soviet-occupied

Iran. As Archie Roosevelt explained in his analysis of the Kurdish republic, after Mahabad collapsed in late 1946, Barzani led his followers on a 50-day-long running battle with the Iranian military until reaching safety in Soviet Azerbaijan.[35] The Soviet Union's overt attempt to annex the Kurdish and Azerbaijani regions of Iran in 1946 would have a long-standing impact on America's perceptions of the Kurds.[36]

Following Iraq's revolution in 1958, the Soviets exploited Baghdad's Kurdish problem, using large arms sales to establish a degree of military dependence.[37] Following the outbreak of the Kurdish War in 1961, Moscow exploited the Kurdish problem to its full advantage by alternating support for Baghdad with that for the Kurds, depending on the Cold War orientation of the regime in power. During the Qasim regime, for instance, the Soviets advocated greater autonomy for the Kurds, simply because they believed the Kurds had the potential to destabilize his pro-Soviet regime. However, when the Ba'th Party first came to power in 1963, Moscow shifted its support toward the Kurds, providing them with overt political and diplomatic support. Similarly, during the Arab nationalist Arif regimes in the 1960s, Moscow kept Baghdad at a distance, focusing instead on cultivating close ties with Nasser in Cairo. Unexpectedly, the second coming to power of the Ba'th Party in 1968 led to a rapid improvement in Soviet-Iraqi relations. The Soviets urged the Ba'th to resolve its differences with the Kurds and helped facilitate a four-year ceasefire in March 1970. However, when the agreement collapsed in 1974, the Soviets provided considerable military assistance during the 1974–75 Kurdish War to help Iraq crush the Kurds once and for all.

This study will show how Moscow's support for the short-lived Kurdish project in the 1940s convinced US officials that the Soviets intended to use the Kurds to bypass America's Middle Eastern containment strategy in the 1950s and 1960s. Likewise, the massive shift in the Gulf's geostrategic balance following Britain's 1968 decision to withdraw its military from the region led the Nixon administration to reevaluate its position on the Kurds, leading to a massive covert assistance program from 1972 to 1975.[38]

In terms of historiography, only recently has the US policy toward the Kurdish War gained new importance, as a number of scholars have published articles revealing new details. In his 2010 article, Douglas Little claims that the Kennedy administration had played a role in encouraging the outbreak of the Kurdish War.[39] In a review of his article, Roham Alvandi argues by contrast that there is "no substantial evidence to support Little's claim" that the United States urged the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad.[40] Evidence unearthed at the Soviet archives in 1994 by Vladislav Zubok, a researcher from the Woodrow Wilson Centre, suggests the outbreak of the Kurdish War was part of a Soviet plan.[41] This fits with Golan's analysis, which suggested, "the Soviets wanted some degree of continued Kurdish unrest in the North of Iraq…so as to create an Iraqi need for Soviet arms, political assistance and Communist support for the regime in order to stay in power."[42] Using declassified primary materials and interviews, this study will support Alvandi, Zubok, and Golan's conclusions and argue the United States played no role in the outbreak of the war. Conversely, Hahn suggests that the Kennedy administration had suspected that the Soviets had "encouraged and abetted" the

Kurds to "gain influence in the country."[43] This argument stands in contrast to Little's additional assertion that the CIA had also encouraged Iran and Israel to support the Kurds.[44] Again, this is disputed. As Alvandi observed, "the CIA may well have been pursuing its own policy of covert intervention in Iraq, without the knowledge of the State Department."[45] Finally, Edmund Ghareeb has claimed that the Nixon administration established a secret relationship with the Kurds in August 1969.[46] Again, this is a questionable assertion. While this analysis will reveal considerable evidence on Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds from the early 1960s onward,[47] there is no evidence available today that suggests that the United States supported or encouraged the Kurds in any way prior to 1972.

Scholarship on the Lyndon B. Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq is limited, with Little and Hahn offering the first accounts. In *Missions Accomplished*, Hahn argues the Johnson administration "adopted a policy of detached friendliness," while awaiting opportunities to improve US-Iraqi relations. This approach was successful and eventually resulted in the Johnson administration providing Iraq with foreign aid, political consultation, and other forms of normal diplomatic activity. Hahn's work is also significant because it provides the first account of the American response to two key events in US-Iraqi relations: the breaking of diplomatic relations during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the second Ba'thist coup in July 1968.[48] He suggests that the United States regretted Iraq severing relations and was forced to monitor events from afar—such as the Ba'thist coup in 1968—using information provided by Belgium, which had agreed to run a US interests section. Hahn argues that the Johnson administration's initial favorable assessment of the Ba'th Party waned as Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and his nephew, Saddam Hussein, brutally consolidated power and pulled Iraq toward the Soviet orbit.[49] Although Hahn's study neglects the impact of the British withdrawal on US policy toward Iraq and the region, there are a number of excellent studies detailing the Johnson administration's adoption of the "twin pillar" policy that sought to build up Iran and Saudi Arabia to take Britain's place and prevent the Soviet Union from filling the power vacuum left behind.[50] However, this study will provide greater detail than that previously available on the challenges faced by the Johnson administration over US policy toward Iraq during the 1960s.

Until recently, scholarship on US-Iraqi relations during the 1969–71 period has been limited, even though the Nixon administration's policies toward Iraq have been the subject of considerable debate. Even Kissinger's account of the Kurdish intervention in his memoir, *Years of Renewal*, avoids a discussion of US policy before 1972.[51] This is because Nixon was uninterested in Iraqi and Gulf affairs during his first term, focusing instead on more urgent matters like the escalating war in Vietnam, the opening to China, and achieving détente with the Soviet Union.[52] Like previous administrations, the Nixon administration maintained a strict noninterference policy toward Iraq and the Kurds. However, in mid-1972, the US policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift, leading to Nixon's approval of a covert operation to support the Kurds.

There has been substantial debate over why Nixon approved the Kurdish intervention. The overwhelming majority of scholars explain it as a retaliatory response to the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in April 1972,[53]

with Little arguing that the operation was based on "Cold War logic."[54] In his review of Little's article, Alvandi dismisses the Cold War argument and suggests that Little downplayed the Shah's role in drawing the United States into the Kurdish War.[55] Alvandi reasserts this argument in an article on US-Iranian relations, stating, "Nixon and Kissinger were seeing Iraq and the Gulf through the Shah's eyes."[56] This theory is supported by Jonathan Randal, who argued that the Shah overemphasized the Soviet-Iraqi threat and played the "superpower rivalry card" to convince Nixon to build up Iran as the regional hegemon and tie down Iraq, his only regional rival.[57] However, both Alvandi and Randal seem to ascribe the Shah too much agency, as evidence suggests that the American decision to aid the Kurds was driven by Cold War strategic considerations in response to Iraq's growing importance to the Soviet Union.

The title of the book points to a key controversy surrounding the way in which the Kurdish intervention came to an abrupt halt in March 1975, with one scholar stating that the Nixon–Ford administration never "cared one whit" about the Kurds and "dropped [them] cold" when the Shah traded his support for them in exchange for a border concession from Iraq at an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) conference in March 1975.[58] The source of this outrage stems from articles published by William Safire in 1976 that accused the Ford administration of selling out the Kurds, abruptly halting its Kurdish intervention, ignoring Barzani's heartfelt pleas for help, and failing to provide the Kurds with humanitarian assistance.[59] Safire's claims are based on a leaked copy of a top-secret congressional report on the CIA's activities, known as the *Pike Report*.[60] While the report provides valuable information on aspects of the Kurdish intervention, this study shows that it was not an objective analysis. Furthermore, since the leaking of the document in February 1976, numerous scholars have uncritically repeated the arguments presented by Representative Otis Pike, who was the chair of the House Select Intelligence Committee that drafted the *Pike Report*, and William Safire, without investigating the sources on which their claims were based.

In recent years, Kissinger has tried to challenge the *Pike Report*'s assertions. After leaving the White House in 1977, he published a memoir, *The White House Years*, but appeared reluctant to reveal his side of the story, allocating three sentences and a brief footnote in which he promised to "explain these [events] in a second volume."[61] Two decades later, Kissinger published *Years of Renewal*, which provided a detailed account of Nixon's decision to aid the Kurds in May 1972; US interests in the operation; his efforts to stave off a Kurdish offensive against Iraq during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war; and details about a US-Israeli operation to transfer captured Soviet weapons to the Kurds during 1974–75.[62] In effect, Kissinger set out to challenge the existing historiography and explain his reasons for supporting the Kurdish intervention. Prior to this publication none of these details was publicly available. While self-serving at times, Kissinger's account reflects records now available at the Nixon and Ford presidential libraries and the State Department's recent publication of documents detailing US policy toward Iran and Iraq between 1969 and 1976. What has become clear is that the *Pike Report* has distorted the study of US-Iraqi relations and the Kurdish

intervention. Recently declassified documents support Kissinger's argument that the Shah's decision to abandon the Kurds was presented to the United States as a fait accompli. Thus, this analysis will, to some extent, exonerate Kissinger and will disprove many of the *Pike Report*'s most controversial assertions.

This study revises our understanding of US-Iraqi relations during the 1958–75 period on the basis of newly available documentation. As a whole, this study relies on recently available primary documents, interviews, and the available secondary resources to construct a detailed narrative of US-Iraqi relations and the Kurdish War between 1958 and 1975.[63] It advances existing historiographical debates by bringing to bear a significant body of newly available primary source material. In doing so, it underlines that the established historiography has relied excessively on the *Pike Report*, which has distorted our understanding of events. As a complement to this research, interviews were conducted with General Brent Scowcroft, Ambassador Ronald Neumann, Pulitzer Prize–winning *Washington Post* journalist Jim Hoagland, and a former high-level CIA official. This former CIA official was a bonafide participant in the events detailed in this book. He was stationed in Iran between 1958 and June 1963, assigned to Tabriz to monitor the Kurds in 1959, in charge of the CIA's "denied area" operations in the Middle East from late 1968 through June 1970, and deputy station chief in Tehran from August 1973 to 1976. He has asked to remain anonymous because he still consults for the CIA.[64] Two Israeli intelligence officials, Zuri Sagy and Eliezer Tsafrir, were also interviewed on the subject of Israel's involvement in the Kurdish War. Sagy played a crucial role in directing Kurdish military operations against Iraq during the 1960s and later in 1974–75, and Tsafrir is a former senior Mossad official. Both explained in detail Israeli operations inside Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s. While interviews have their methodological limitations, details provided here have either been confirmed or supported by documents or secondary sources.

This book seeks to redress these historiographical deficiencies and further develop the argument that the US policy toward Iraq between 1958 and 1975 was based on denying Soviet influence over Iraq, inline with its Cold War strategy. Chapter 1 will assess the Eisenhower administration's response to Iraq's revolution and its leader, Abd al-Karim Qasim. Chapter 2 recounts the Kennedy administration's policy toward Qasim, in the period between Kennedy's coming to office and Qasim's overthrow in February 1963. Chapter 3 examines Kennedy's policy toward Iraq during the brief, nine-month rule of the Ba'th Party and argues that Iraq was a Cold War battleground. Chapter 4 analyzes the Johnson administration's evolving relationship with the two nationalist regimes of Abd al-Salim Arif and his brother, Abd ar-Rahman Arif, and the clear divergence of the perception toward Iraq between the United States and its closest allies, particularly Britain, Iran, and Israel. Chapter 5 examines the Johnson administration's response to the Six Day War, Britain's decision to withdraw from the Gulf, and the coming to power of the second Ba'thist regime. Chapter 6 assesses the Nixon administration's policy toward Iraq and the decision-making process that led to the Kurdish intervention in 1972. Chapter 7 details how the Nixon administration set up the Kurdish intervention in the period leading up to the Arab-Israeli war

in October 1973. Finally, Chapter 8 focuses on the central role of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in both running of the Kurdish intervention and the tragic way in which it ended in March 1975. In doing so, it will be evident that from Eisenhower to Ford, US decisions and actions were based on a single, unifying perception: the Soviet Union posed a threat to Iraq's sovereignty. Because of this, the US policy toward Iraq between 1958 and 1975 was based on Iraq's perceived role in the Cold War, leading to a series of major and minor interventions, which have contributed to the country's ongoing instability.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAD	Access to Archive Database
AU	Arab Union
BNA	British National Archives
BPC	Basra Petroleum Company
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CFPF	Central Foreign Policy Files
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPL	Carter Presidential Library
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DNSA	Digital National Security Archive
DOD	Department of Defense
DoS	US Department of State
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EPL	Eisenhower Presidential Library
ET	Electronic Telegrams
FCO	Foreign Commonwealth Office
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FPL	Ford Presidential Library
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOI	Government of Iraq
HSF	Harold Saunders Files
IAF	Iraqi Air Force
ICP	Iraq Communist Party
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
INOC	Iraqi National Oil Company
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
JCS	Joint Chiefs of State
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KPL	Kennedy Presidential Library
KSF	Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files
KT	Kissinger Transcripts
LBJL	Johnson Presidential Library

MR	Mandatory Review
NARA	National Archive and Record Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCRC	National Council of the Revolutionary Command
NDP	National Democratic Party
NEA	Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NPL	Nixon Presidential Library
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NSF	National Security File
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PHF	Phillip Halla Files
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PRF	People's Resistance Force
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
RG	Record Group
RKF	Robert Komer Files
SAVAK	National Intelligence and Security Organization (Iran)
SCI	Special Committee on Iraq
SN	Subject Numeric Files
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SOV-MAT	Soviet Military Materials
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USINT	United States Interests Section
USIS	United States Information Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USUN	United States Mission to the United Nations

1

Eisenhower and the Qasim Regime: July 1958–January 1961

Iraq's revolution on July 14, 1958, upended America's regional containment strategy and opened a dramatic new chapter in the superpowers' Cold War rivalry in the Middle East. This chapter will provide a brief overview of America's Middle Eastern strategy following the Second World War, and then analyze the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration's response to Iraq's revolution and the chaos that ensued. Moreover, it will review the American decision-making process, assess the effectiveness of the Eisenhower administration's approach, and identify any missed opportunities, where, had the United States acted differently, it might have been able to salvage a working relationship with the new Iraqi regime. Finally, it is important to understand how US officials in Washington and Baghdad perceived these events, how these perceptions compared or contrasted with those of its allies, and how they translated into the implementation of the US policy. In doing so, it will become clear that following Iraq's revolution, the Eisenhower administration's policy ran against the approaches of its regional allies due to concerns about the new Iraqi regime's flirtation with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and its perceived Soviet patron. Consequently, rash decisions were made, opportunities to ensure Iraq's non-alignment in the Cold War were missed, and America's actions helped push the Iraqi regime closer to the Soviet Union.

A Chaotic Region

Before examining the Eisenhower administration's response to Iraq's revolution, an understanding of America's policies toward Iraq and the region needs to be established. Israel's defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 led to profound changes throughout the region, as Arab nationalism emerged as a dominant ideology. Egypt's revolution in 1952 was the first instance in which Arab nationalist, military officers overthrew the corrupt, Western-backed monarchy of King Farouk, and eventually brought to power Egypt's longtime, charismatic president, Gamal Abd al-Nasser, who soon adopted a fierce anti-British attitude. The loss of Egypt

from the Western camp was a cause for concern for the Eisenhower administration, leading Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to ponder bringing together the "Northern Tier" states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan into a collective security alliance aimed at containing a potential Soviet thrust southward toward the oil-rich Gulf.[1] With Iraqi premier Nuri as-Said taking the initiative, the Baghdad Pact—as the alliance was commonly known—was formed in 1955, sparking a fierce debate among the Arab states—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—about whether to join. However, when Britain joined the pact in April 1955, Nasser used this as a rallying point and formed a mutual security alliance with Saudi Arabia and Syria.[2] The debate over the pact underscored just how fractious Arab politics was in the aftermath of the 1948 war. It also showed that Iraq stood out from the rest, joining a non-Arab, pro-Western alliance.

The United States and Britain differed greatly in their understandings of and approaches toward Arab nationalism. As Fain observed, the United States was predisposed toward sympathizing with anticolonialist attitudes and was able to view British imperialism in the region as "both morally wrong and politically destabilizing."[3] By the mid-1950s, US officials had begun to recognize that Arab nationalism could be used to America's advantage by channeling its ideological adherents in directions consistent with its containment policies.[4] This, of course, put the United States at direct odds with the British, who viewed Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism as a direct threat to their national interests, particularly the Suez Canal, through which nearly two-thirds of Britain's oil supply sailed. The threat was deemed so serious that Britain devised a plot to attack Egypt—along with France and Israel—in October 1956, with the objective of removing Nasser from power and regaining control over the strategic country. However, because Britain and its allies failed to consult the United States in advance, the Eisenhower administration was forced to issue threats to bring about their reluctant withdrawal. The war left Nasser relatively unscathed, allowing him to emerge as a hero and a champion of a new anti-imperialist, pan-Arab, and nationalistic ideology known as Nasserism. Buoyed by his success, Nasser commenced a subversive effort throughout the region aimed at overthrowing Western-backed, "reactionary" monarchies and replacing them with Arab nationalist regimes. This state of belligerency was what Malcolm Kerr called the "Arab Cold War."[5]

Responding to the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, during his State of the Union address in January 1957, President Eisenhower issued a war cry, announcing his eponymous doctrine that offered economic or military assistance "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations…against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism." The Eisenhower doctrine was aimed not just at containing the Soviet Union but at Nasser's radical brand of Arab nationalism.[6] The doctrine would prove important in the coming months, as people in the Arab street began to question if Arab unity was the solution to the region's problems, especially Israel. Meanwhile, the situation in Syria deteriorated rapidly, with communist elements maneuvering to seize power, leading to an unexpected union with Egypt in February 1958 to prevent this from happening. This union brought about the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR).[7]

The UAR's creation alarmed Iraq's premier Nuri as-Said, who sought to establish Iraq as a counterbalance by forging a union with Jordan, known as the Arab Union (AU), two weeks later. As tensions escalated, in early July 1958, King Hussein of Jordan requested Iraqi assistance to quell internal disturbances. Unknown to Nuri, the military units he had dispatched had been infiltrated by self-styled Iraqi Free Officers, who paid homage to Nasser's own Free Officer movement in Egypt. The unit had to pass close to Baghdad on its way to Jordan and upon receiving his movement orders, Abd al-Salim Arif led it into Baghdad, seized the radio station, occupied all strategic buildings, and announced the formation of an Iraqi Republic. After a prolonged battle, the rebels killed King Faisal II, Crown Prince Abd al-Ilah, and eventually Nuri as-Said, who had initially escaped but was soon discovered dressed as a woman and executed.[8]

By mid-1958, British and American policies toward Arab nationalism were already at odds with each other. With its colonial empire in decline, Britain appeared to be clinging haplessly to its Middle Eastern assets, which were considered crucial to its postwar economic survival. This was evident in the British-inspired—though Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-led—coup in Iran in 1953.[9] Consequently, Britain viewed Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism as a threat to its national interests and could not allow him—or anyone else for that matter—to dominate the Gulf region and its vital oil supplies. For the Americans, the region was viewed in terms of its Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, and its policy was geared toward preventing Soviet control of the region's oil resources, even if this meant aggravating the British or accommodating Nasser. America's Middle Eastern policy was based entirely on Cold War considerations. As one American analyst put it, "By the late 1950s we had to recognize that the Soviet Union had leapfrogged the northern-tier barrier, using basically political and economic methods, and had become a Middle East power in fact."[10] However, to the United States, the only precondition for working with Nasser was that he kept communist forces on the fringes of power, which his union with Syria suggested he was willing to oblige. In short, by the time of Iraq's revolution in 1958 the stage had already been set for further disagreements between Washington and London over not just how to assess the revolution but also how to respond.

The July Coup

It took almost 11 hours for officials in Washington to determine that a coup had taken place in Baghdad on July 14, 1958. At 8 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time [EST]), Foster Dulles informed Eisenhower that elements of the Iraqi army "had moved upon the royal palace and had murdered Crown Prince Emir Abdul Illah." He was uncertain about the king's fate and that of his premier, but feared the worst. This led Eisenhower to call in his national security team to review the situation and "make sure that no facet of the situation was overlooked." When the group gathered in the Oval Office, Allen Dulles, who was the Secretary of State's brother and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), explained that "pro-Nasser elements of the Iraqi army" executed the coup, King Faisal and Nuri

as-Said were presumed dead, and a republican government had been established. However, the CIA director was uncertain whether Nasser was behind the coup, noting that while the conspirators were pro-Nasser, the CIA "lacked hard evidence implicating [him]." This conclusion dispelled the notion that the United States thought that Nasser had played a direct role in the plot.[11] Eisenhower agreed that little could be done in the short term and adopted a "wait-and-see" approach.[12]

The Iraqi coup had a profound impact on America's strategy to contain the Soviet Union. As a vital member in the Baghdad Pact, Iraq was pro-Western, and held considerable oil wealth. US companies also had a 23.75 percent stake in the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC).[13] Given the zero-sum nature of the Cold War, whereby a loss by one side was viewed as a gain by the other and vice versa, US policymakers feared that the Soviets could leapfrog past the Northern Tier containment shield, establish a satellite in the Gulf, control Iraq's vast oil reserves, and transform the regional Cold War balance of power. While this was a worst-case scenario, it was not beyond the realm of possibility. The problem was that on the question of intervention in Iraq, the British and Americans departed. Whereas the British wanted the United States to intervene militarily in Iraq, the Eisenhower administration was more inclined to "wait-and-see" how the new Iraqi government behaved before it would react. This did not, however, mean that the United States and Britain would not take action to shore up the West's now-tenuous regional position.

The coup prompted the United States and Britain to intervene in Lebanon and Jordan to protect Western interests. A civil crisis had broken out in Lebanon in May and June 1958, as the newfound UAR proved to be an attractive alternative to Christian rule for the country's large Sunni and Shi'a minorities.[14] Just a few hours after the coup in Iraq, Lebanon's embattled president, Camille Chamoun, informed the Eisenhower administration that he "wanted US military intervention in Lebanon within 48 hours." This meant that the United States could use military force to shore up Lebanon under the basis of the Eisenhower doctrine. After rapid consultations with Congress, on July 14, Eisenhower ordered the Commander of the Sixth Fleet to land US Marines in Beirut the next day.[15] As the marines arrived on the sunny beaches of Beirut, they were surprised to be greeted not by hostile forces but by friendly crowds of beautiful women in bikinis and street peddlers hawking everything from Coca Cola to hummus.[16]

Throughout the same period, a political and economic crisis had engulfed Jordan. Since the formation of the AU, King Hussein had struggled with the practicalities of the union and was concerned that the political turmoil in Lebanon would soon spread to Jordan.[17] Of course, his concerns were only further exacerbated by the Iraqi coup, which not only wiped out a branch of his family but also meant the loss of subsidized petroleum and led to massive shortages inside Jordan. On July 17, the Jordanian foreign ministry informed the US Embassy that it wished for military assistance to "crush [the] insurrection [in] Baghdad, [and] restore peace in accordance with AU constitution."[18] While King Hussein was the rightful heir to Iraq's throne—as stipulated in the AU constitution—he believed he could call on the US to intervene on Iraq's behalf, but the Eisenhower

administration proved hesitant.[19] There were several reasons for this: (1) there was no guarantee a US intervention in Iraq would work; (2) it could spark a regional war; and (3) it ran the risk of pushing the new Iraqi regime, which had already shown some signs of moderation, right into the arms of the Soviets. Given this, the United States refused to endorse such a move, advising King Hussein:

> [The] US believes [the] primary concern at [the] moment . . . should be preservation [of the] independence and integrity of Jordan. [The] New request for assistance to destroy [the] insurrection in Iraq goes far beyond scope of purpose for which [the] US and UK were requested and agreed to help Jordan.[20]

However, according to Ashton, Britain soon uncovered a UAR plot to overthrow King Hussein, which prompted its decision to send a British expeditionary force to Jordan and the implementation of a petroleum airlift to help alleviate the economic crisis. The Eisenhower administration endorsed the mission and provided the British with diplomatic and logistical support, but refused to commit any American ground forces in the operation.[21] Taken together, the Iraqi coup clearly served as a catalyst for both the American intervention in Lebanon and the British operation in Jordan, which were aimed at shoring up the West's uncertain position in the region.

On July 15, the new leader of Iraq, Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, met the US ambassador to Iraq, Waldemar Gallman, to offer assurance of the safety of US citizens and property. Reporting to Washington, Gallman described Qasim as "affable" but appeared "anxious to get [the] revolutionary regime off to as good a start as possible with [the] US." Although a brief exchange, Gallman was pleased that Qasim was willing to meet him so soon after the coup. He then returned to the embassy, where he learned that Nuri had been discovered trying to flee Baghdad and had been shot.[22] As Ashton pointed out, his body was then dragged through the streets and mutilated as a vehicle was reversed repeatedly over it.[23] Gallman could not help but note the irony of the situation when he reported the killing to Washington: "How tragically ironic that on [the] very day [of the] landings made from [the] Sixth Fleet [in Lebanon], which Nuri had so long pleaded for, [that he] was put to death."[24]

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

> The former Iraqi government maintained a very complete intelligence net within the Army itself which did not discern any questionable contacts on the part of Col.

> Qasim, even though the Iraqi government was itself aware (as were we) that Col. Qasim had been exposed to Syrian subversive efforts while stationed in Jordan in late 1956.

The NEA concluded that the closeness of the conspirators, the absence of outward signs (like social discontent) of an impending coup, and skillful deception efforts had made detecting the plot difficult.[25]

The American team on the ground in Baghdad worked hard in the days after the coup to assess the situation. On July 17, Ambassador Gallman met with the newly appointed Iraqi foreign minister, Abd al-Jabbar al-Jumarad, who reiterated Qasim's assurances and the regime's desire to maintain good relations with the West. He also emphasized that Iraq would adhere to all international treaties, maintain the flow of oil, and wished to preserve Western technical assistance. These were all good signs, which led Gallman to conclude that there would be some moderate civilian influence within the new government.[26] On July 19, the embassy in Baghdad explained that the coup was "remarkably rapid and successful," the new regime was dominated by military figures, and was trying to "encourage normal functioning civilian departments."[27] The next day, the INR concluded that the regime was in complete control of the country and warned that any "move by force from outside into Iraq would meet very little Iraqi support and its success would be highly unlikely."[28] That day, Hugh Cumming, the INR's director, sent Foster Dulles a memo suggesting additional positive signs coming from Iraq.

> Reports reaching us from Baghdad indicate that the new regime in Iraq 1) desires friendly relations with the West, 2) will maintain existing international agreements, 3) at least for the time being will retain membership in the Baghdad Pact, 4) will not nationalize the production of oil, and 5) recognizes the UAR but is not joining.[29]

With these assurances, the Iraqis had met all of the traditional requirements for diplomatic recognition: de facto control of the country, the consent of the people, and a willingness to fulfill its international obligations under treaties. Later in the day, Foster Dulles agreed in principle to extend diplomatic recognition to the new regime in Iraq, but wanted to consult with the other members of the Baghdad Pact first. Fortunately, a prearranged meeting of the pact was scheduled later that month.[30]

When the Baghdad Pact members met in London during July 28–29, talks focused on three questions: (1) the formation of a new alliance; (2) whether the United States would join it; and (3) diplomatic recognition of Iraq. As Foster Dulles later reported to Eisenhower, "we canvassed the prospects for…a new form in which to express the mutual security commitments for which all the Northern Tier countries are eager." He was pressured to join the new pact, but remained noncommittal, stating that it was a "very loose" obligation that required consultation and preferred instead that the existing pact members develop a new "formula" built upon the present organization. This would become the Central

Treaty Organization (CENTO), and while the United States never joined, it signed bilateral military agreements with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey—the key member states—and participated in a consultative role.[31] On the question of recognizing Iraq, the pact members urged the United States to do so "without delay" to protect its interests while maintaining the option of exerting constructive influence on the new regime. Right after Foster Dulles reported this news to Washington, Eisenhower directed the State Department to approve diplomatic recognition of Iraq.[32]

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this period. Notably, the United States believed that the Iraq coup was indigenous, though inspired by Nasser. Fearing that the crisis would spread throughout the region, the United States intervened in Lebanon and supported Britain's intervention in Jordan logistically and by implementing an emergency airlift of oil. Soon thereafter, the new Iraqi regime made clear that it would abide by international agreements, while protecting US citizens and assets. With the popular regime in clear control of the country, the Eisenhower administration consulted its allies in the Baghdad Pact and agreed to extend diplomatic recognition to Iraq. It was July 30, 1958.

Consolidating Power

During the fall of 1958, a power struggle emerged inside Iraq between three distinct groups: (1) the coup's leader, Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, and his followers; (2) UAR-backed Arab nationalists, led by Colonel Abd al-Salim Arif; and (3) Soviet-backed Iraqi communists. The power struggle went through two distinct phases. The first involved a contest for power between the two Iraqi officers who overthrew the monarchy: Qasim, who masterminded the plot, and Arif, who actually led the operation. The wedge between the two was the question of joining Egypt and Syria in the UAR. For his part, Qasim was suspicious of anything to do with Nasser, while Arif endorsed the idea openly.[33] The second phase emerged in late-1958, after Qasim foiled a Nasserist plot, which forced him to increase his reliance on the Communist Party for support. This, of course, generated great concern among US officials in Washington, who misjudged the depth of Moscow's support for the ICP.[34]

Iraq's power struggle was not lost on the Eisenhower administration. Throughout September and October, the National Security Council (NSC) met regularly to discuss the situation unfolding in Iraq. The first meeting took place on September 18, where the CIA's deputy director, Charles Cabell, informed the NSC that Nasser was concerned "over the factional struggles among the leaders in the new regime in Iraq." A week later, he reported that "internal maneuvering" was ongoing and that despite Qasim's opposition to union, "there was still obvious military cooperation between Egypt and Iraq."[35]

Qasim was aware of Arif's ambitions, but he bided his time until early September when Arif went off script during a provincial tour—whipping up nationalist fervor for unification. Afterward, Qasim stripped Arif of his military posts, cutting him off from regular contact with the army, and while he allowed

Arif to continue as deputy premier and minister of interior, it was not for long. On September 30, Qasim sent Arif into exile as Iraq's ambassador to West Germany. With this, Nasser's designs on Iraq appeared to be slipping away. On October 1, the NSC discussed the implications of Arif's dismissal with General Andrew Goodpaster, noting that Qasim had also sacked two other pro-UAR cabinet members. The next day, Allen Dulles offered the NSC the CIA's assessment that Qasim was consolidating power while setting himself up as an ideological counterweight to Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism. On the question of Arif, Dulles added, "in all probability…we have not heard the last of [him]."[36] He was right.

Following Arif's banishment to West Germany, Nasser sent agents to Bonn to plot his return to power. The plan called for pro-Nasser sympathizers to incite uprisings in Iraq's provinces while spiriting Arif into Baghdad, where he would lead pro-UAR elements in the army in a putsch against Qasim. On November 4, riots erupted in the countryside and Arif arrived safely in Baghdad as planned, but he was soon discovered and arrested. The plot was a failure.[37] Viewed from Iraq, there was no question to Nasser's direct involvement. According to an INR report, the attempted coup "precipitated the showdown stage in the power struggle within Iraq itself but has also created an open challenge to President Nasir." With Arif languishing in an Iraqi prison and his pro-UAR, nationalist allies cut off from power, Qasim had become the "sole leader"—as he preferred to be called—of Iraq. At the same time, in what US analysts described as a "public slap," Qasim had sent a clear signal to Nasser that he had no intention of allowing Iraq to join Egypt, which also suggested that he saw himself as an alternative pillar for influence in the Arab world.[38] This marked the end of the first phase of Iraq's power struggle, while ushering in a new phase where Qasim, having alienated the Arab nationalists, now needed a new political base to rely upon and there was only one alternative: the communists.

Reaction to Crisis

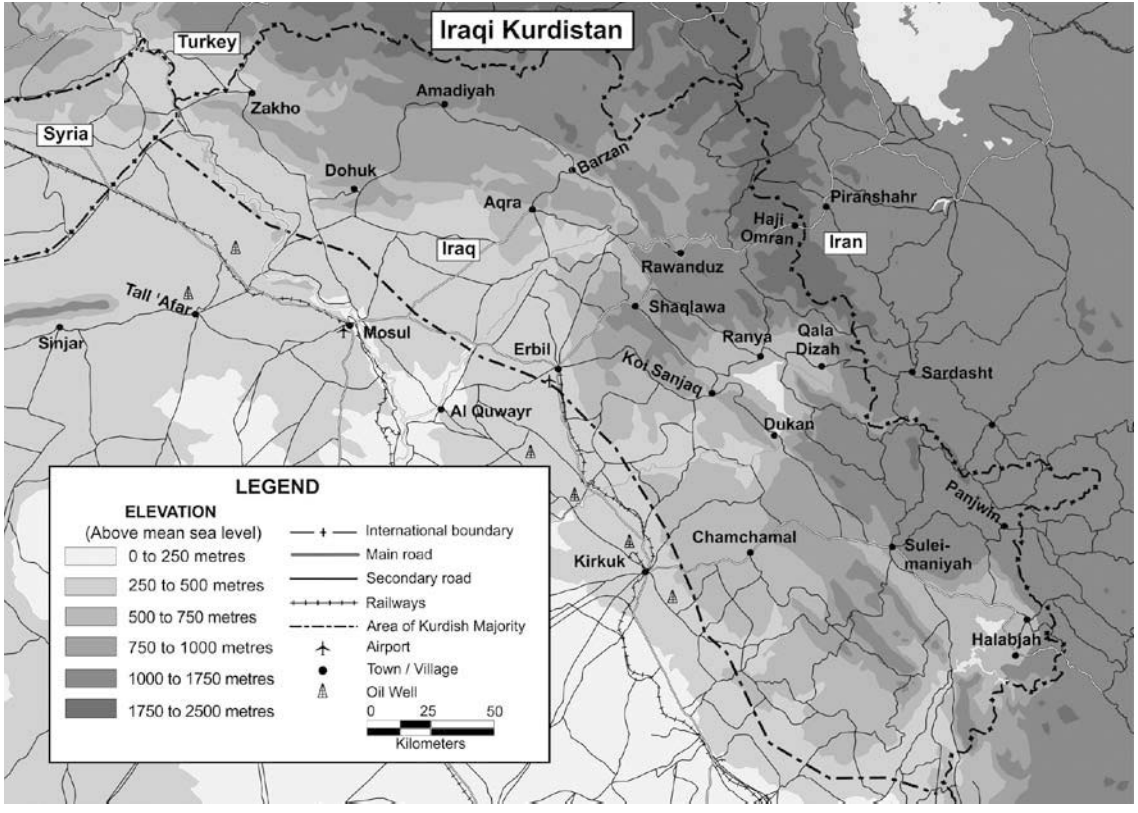
In October 1958, the Eisenhower administration completed a review of its regional policy. Since May, the Eisenhower administration's "Basic National Security Policy" had set out that in the event of "an imminent or actual communist seizure of control from within," the United States should "take all feasible measures to thwart it, including military action if required and appropriate to cope with the situation."[39] In its review, the NSC agreed that this policy was still adequate to manage the regional crisis and adopted NSC 5820, which identified five secondary policy considerations: (1) seeking a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli dispute; (2) continued availability of peaceful navigation of the region; (3) promotion of stable governments, political evolution, and economic and social development with the aim of resisting communist influence; (4) continued availability of strategic positions, military overflight, and staging bases (i.e., Bahrain); and (5) the expansion of US influence at the Soviet Union's expense. In each of these instances, the overriding objective of US policy was to deny the Soviet influence in the region and ensure the flow of oil to the West.[40]

Regarding Iraq, the NSC reaffirmed the existing "wait and see" policy, which consisted of paying very close attention to developments, while preparing for the worst.[41] With specific reference to Iraq, on November 4, the council approved NSC 5820/1, which identified US policy objectives in Iraq as: (1) maintaining friendly relations; (2) acquiescing to Iraq's eventual withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact; (3) giving sympathetic consideration to the continuance of "limited amounts" of military assistance; and (4) encouraging friendly "elements" in Iraq, while avoiding identification with "specific individuals and political issues."[42] Unfortunately, it will soon be evident that these guidelines were deeply flawed and based on the false assumption that Iraq would remain "relatively stable," though with "various degrees of cooperation with the Arab nationalists."[43]

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

Following the revolution, Qasim needed to find a secure base of support and saw the Kurds as natural allies (his mother was of Kurdish descent).[44] To do this, he knew that he had to win over Barzani and quietly sent out feelers to Prague after the revolution to offer Barzani and his followers amnesty. The Kurdish leader accepted this, settled his affairs, and returned to Iraq after a brief stopover in Cairo, where he met with Nasser. When he arrived in Baghdad in October 1958, Qasim greeted him with a hero's welcome, apologized on behalf of Iraq, offered financial restitution—like Nuri as-Said's former residence in Baghdad—and promised to give the Kurd's a degree of autonomy. Qasim's inability to follow through with his extravagant promises proved to be a grave error. In 1961, Iraq's Kurdish population erupted into open rebellion and Barzani became the leader of a 14-year-long armed struggle against the Iraqi state.[45]

It is clear that few high-level American officials actually understood the nature of Barzani or of Kurdish nationalism. Upon hearing of Barzani's return from the Soviet Union, US officials were concerned that the so-called Red Mullah had the potential to act as a Soviet agent. After all, Barzani had a history of troublemaking inside both Iraq and Iran, and was no friend of Turkey, which also had a large, repressed Kurdish minority. Given Barzani's immense popularity among Iraq's large Kurdish population, US officials saw his return from exile as a bad omen for Iraq's future stability. On October 14, Gallman expressed his concern to Washington about Barzani, indicating his belief that the Soviets would use him to subvert the new regime. He also pointed to the impending repatriation of Barzani's followers and their families, which had swelled to 850 and included a number of Russian wives, who could also be Soviet agents. Barzani's Soviet connections and unrivaled popularity among Iraq's Kurds meant his "ability [to] disrupt [Iraq's] stability [is] almost endless."[46] In retrospect, it is clear that both Gallman and US officials in Washington had failed to recognize that Barzani was not a Soviet agent or that Soviet attempts at indoctrinating him in communist ideology had failed and had left him jaded about socialism and untrusting



MAP 1.1 Iraqi Kurdistan.[47]

of Moscow's intentions.[48] Not knowing this, Gallman's instinct was to distrust Barzani and paint him as an enemy. However, in doing so, the United States missed an opportunity to learn more about a leader who, despite his exile, did not actually threaten American interests and could have been a powerful ally. It would take the United States another 15 years to figure this out.

Throughout the fall of 1958, further indicators convinced the Eisenhower administration that Soviet influence was growing in Iraq. On October 16, Allen Dulles informed the NSC that the Iraqi regime had concluded an extensive trade agreement with the Soviet Union and it was believed that the deal included a large military component.[49] On November 25, Cumming sent Foster Dulles a memo warning about the growing communist threat in Iraq. According to the memo, "tension between Qasim and the [pro-Nasser] faction [may] have induced him to lean more heavily on the support of [the left-wing National Democratic Party (NDP) leader Kamil Chadirchi] and the Communists."[50] Complicating matters further, on December 2, the United States learned that a Soviet vessel had delivered a shipment of military hardware to Iraq, which was believed to be the first of a larger Soviet supply program. Viewed from Washington, US officials were uncertain whether Iraq had shifted its arms-supply relationship to the Soviets or if it was adopting a "positive neutrality" policy similar to Egypt, which welcomed commercial and military relations with both blocs but remained neutral in the broader Cold War.[51]

A historiographical point needs to be addressed here. By the end of 1958, the Eisenhower administration appeared convinced that the ICP was operating on behalf of the Soviet Union. However, as Johan Franzén explains in his work, *Red Star over Iraq*, while Moscow was generally supportive of the ICP's actions, there was actually little direct contact with its leaders. While some elements may have looked to Moscow for inspiration, by the time of the revolution, the ICP had abandoned the notion of seizing power directly, preferring instead to support the so-called national bourgeoisie, which Qasim seemed to represent.[52] Tripp supports this view. He argued that the ICP was unlike other communist groups around the world. To be a communist in Iraq, he wrote, did not mean a strict adherence to the doctrines of Marxism–Leninism. Instead, the ICP focused primarily on social injustice, economic exploitation, and questions of wages and conditions of workers, which won it a wide base of support.[53] Other scholars, like Walter Laqueur, saw Middle Eastern communist parties as foreign, and only appealed to the urban intelligentsia, as opposed to social movements that managed to garner popular support.[54] Indeed, during the opening phase of the Cold War, Islam was believed to be a potential bulwark against communism, which is an atheistic ideology.[55] While these views were widely held at the time, the Middle East was unlike much of the rest of the world, largely because it did not have an established "proletariat" or "working class," and so communists had to reconsider its approach to appealing to "the indigenous social structure of Middle Eastern countries."[56] With respect to Iraq, according to Galia Golan, the reality of the situation was that Qasim needed communist support to consolidate his regime during the postrevolutionary period of domestic instability. Likewise, as Qasim began to rely upon the ICP for support, the Soviets used this

to leverage the establishment of an arms-supply relationship.[57] However, to the United States, the matter was black and white: any communist-inspired group must be opposed; a view that would cloud the Eisenhower administration's ability to comprehend Iraq's postrevolutionary power struggle.

In December 1958, the struggle between Qasim and the nationalists was decided when the British informed the regime of an Egyptian plot to overthrow it. The United States was also aware of the plot. On December 3, an unnamed representative of a "Free Officers' movement" in Iraq approached the US Embassy in Baghdad to seek support in overthrowing Qasim.[58] While embassy officers were intrigued and recommended that Washington provide "limited support," the plot alarmed the State Department, which cabled the embassy to urge it to exercise "extreme caution and reserve" and inform the provocateur that the United States cannot interfere in Iraq's internal affairs.[59] The department's assessment proved correct. According to US documents, the British had also caught wind of the plot and, fearing the coming to power of a pro-Nasser faction in Iraq, had informed the Iraqi regime.[60] Armed with this knowledge, the regime infiltrated the conspiracy, recorded the plot's details, and moved against it on December 7, arresting Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and two others. Before long, the regime broadcasted the full recordings over the radio, leaving no doubt that Nasser's government had been behind the plot.[61]

The importance of Britain's role in foiling the Rashid Ali plot cannot be understated. By tipping off Qasim, the British had hoped that they could cultivate him as an Iraqi alternative to Nasser's influence in the Arab world. This divide-and-rule strategy seemed to have worked in the short term, since the Qasim–Nasser rivalry escalated throughout 1958–59. However, it eventually backfired in 1961 over the Kuwait Crisis, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. For the Americans, the Rashid Ali plot proved to be a decisive turning point in their understanding of Iraq, because Nasser's meddling soon forced Qasim to turn to the communists to secure a base of support to protect his regime from the nationalists. This, in turn, alarmed officials in Washington, prompting the Eisenhower administration to ponder ways to halt this trend, options that included working with Nasser, Britain's arch-nemesis.

Going Red?

An important shift in US-Egyptian relations occurred in mid-December 1958, leading the Eisenhower administration to coordinate actions taken against Iraq with Nasser during 1959 to prevent a communist takeover. Given the disparate motives both Nasser and the Americans had in seeking to undermine Qasim, it is tempting to conclude that Nasser manipulated the Eisenhower administration's fears about communism to receive assistance. However, Qasim's reliance on the communists for support and his efforts to undermine Nasser created a rift that US policymakers thought could be exploited to achieve their regional objectives. While the Eisenhower administration failed to understand the complexity of Iraq's internal politics, Nasser clearly did. Therefore, the Eisenhower

administration opted to work with Nasser against Qasim to advance America's broader interests in Iraq, while gaining the additional benefit of simultaneously drawing Cairo away from Moscow. However, as Fain observed, the Eisenhower administration's actions clashed with Britain's policy of supporting Qasim as a counterbalance to Nasser, an indication of "very different perceptions of threat to [both] their regional interests."[62]

By the end of 1958, divergent views about the nature of Iraq's revolution emerged within the US government. According to Assistant Secretary of State William Rountree, one camp was concerned that the communists were gaining the upper hand in the government and that US policies needed to be "based on the assumption that we either were then or would soon be dealing with a highly unfriendly communist government." A second camp disagreed with the basic premise of this argument, arguing instead that Qasim's strength continued to keep the communists in check. To test this argument, Rountree sought Foster Dulles's approval for a mission to Baghdad. Foster Dulles agreed and, in mid-December, Rountree departed Washington for a tour of the region that included stops in Cairo and Baghdad. Almost immediately after the trip was announced, the ICP, as well as the Soviet and Chinese communist parties, initiated a campaign designed to discourage the trip. Before long, crowds began to appear in the streets of Baghdad with placards carrying messages like "Rountree go home" and "Rountree don't dirty our soil." It was already clear that Rountree's regional tour would not be a pleasant one.[63]

During Rountree's stop in Cairo on December 14, he met with Nasser, who raised the possibility of US-Egyptian cooperation against Iraq for the first time. Nasser initiated the matter, telling Rountree that while he had indigenous means of dealing with Egypt's "communist problem," doing so in another country was "quite a different matter." He observed that the United States had greater experience in covert action and asked if Rountree had "any ideas" about what could be done in Iraq. The assistant secretary replied that the United States was "following [the] matter with interest" but felt that it was best if the Arab states found a solution. Ignoring this, Nasser said that the communist threat was a "common problem," which transcended inter-Arab relations and insisted that Egypt would oppose any Soviet attempt to assert itself in the Arab world, just as the United States would do in the West.[64] This conversation was the catalyst for a US-Egyptian rapprochement in 1959–60 and would lead to tactical coordination—though not outright American support—of Egyptian operations against Iraq.

When Rountree arrived in Baghdad on December 15, it was already clear that the situation was dangerous. Recalling the events decades later, Rountree explained that an angry mob began to pelt his vehicle with rocks, tomatoes, and any other objects they might pick up. After escaping the airport, even larger crowds protested his arrival:

> Thousands of people had us circled before reaching the embassy. They had assembled a small herd of cows and as the lead truck passed at a traffic circle, they forced the cows in front of my car. Fortunately, my driver just shot right through them

> and knocked them out of the way, otherwise my car would have been isolated there; the crowd had cut off the follow truck. We were not stopped, and in passing the crowds I could see the expressions on the faces of these people, including children…I'd never seen human faces bearing such hatred.[65]

When Rountree met Qasim, the Iraqi leader "expressed regret" for the incident and pointed to the implication of a "foreign power" in a recent plot against the regime. Rountree issued a blanket denial of any American involvement, saying that the United States "had every intention of working for good relations" with Iraq, and warning that hostile states "would use every conceivable device to create suspicion and doubt" about America's intentions.[66] Despite Qasim's assurances that he wanted to have friendly relations with the United States, Rountree was left with the impression that he was "a man of questionable mental competence," who "had the appearance of a highly unstable person."[67] Even so, Rountree left Baghdad convinced that Qasim had no intention of turning his country over to the communists. These impressions would have a profound impact on the actions that Eisenhower took next.

In the aftermath of the Rountree mission, on December 17, the CIA produced a draft estimate on the likelihood of a communist takeover in Iraq. While the CIA acknowledged that the situation in Iraq was "confused" and its intelligence was "inadequate for a confident estimate," the agency felt that the report deserved circulation because the prospect of a communist takeover was "a matter for most serious consideration." Significantly, while the CIA concluded that Qasim was not a communist, it worried that his determination to keep Iraq free from Egyptian dominance had led the communists to gain unprecedented influence in the government. The CIA believed that only the army was capable of challenging Qasim but if it did not move in "the next few weeks, its capabilities [were] likely to dwindle rapidly." Unfortunately, the CIA warned, there was "no other significant source of anti-Communist energy and influence among the Arabs at present." This reality led it to conclude: "a Communist takeover in Iraq would be a threat to basic US interests in the Middle East area and that it would set in train a course of events which would be extremely difficult to reverse."[68]

Given the CIA's dire conclusions and the hostile reception Rountree received in Baghdad, the mood was grim when the NSC met the next day. Despite the CIA's limited intelligence on Iraq and the lack of any firm conclusions, Allen Dulles, its director, told the council that Qasim was "in the hands of the Communist mob" and questioned whether he could retain power. Pondering the situation, Eisenhower wondered whether "it might be good policy to help [Nasser] take over in Iraq." Overthrowing Qasim was no simple task, Allen Dulles responded, and even if successful, "there were no important civil political figures in Iraq" to replace him. The only logical substitute would be someone from the military, but not Arif, who he felt was "not controllable." Nevertheless, Eisenhower argued that because "the Kremlin [is] our principal enemy" and "Nasser does not want to be dominated by [it]," then the logical solution was to cooperate with him to prevent a Soviet takeover in Iraq. This was a profound statement. Of all the NSC members, Eisenhower was the most interested in working with Nasser. At this point,

Gordon Gray, Eisenhower's special assistant for national security affairs, recommended the NSC Planning Board review the existing policy toward Iraq, which was based on the premise that the Iraqi government "was one that we could support." With no viable alternative available, Eisenhower agreed.[69] This exchange is very significant. Not only does it show that Eisenhower was prepared to work with Nasser against Qasim, but it revealed his belief that Iraq's communists and the Soviets worked as a single entity, seeking to gain control of Iraq.

Prior to the next NSC meeting, held on December 23, Rountree met privately with Eisenhower, Vice President Richard Nixon, and Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter (Foster Dulles was undergoing cancer treatment) to discuss Nasser's secret proposal. After giving his account, Rountree suggested he send Nasser a telegram expressing appreciation for the frank discussion, recounting his trip to Iraq, and indicating that the president had been briefed on his proposal "off the record." Eisenhower approved and a cable was sent to Cairo that evening.[70] When the NSC convened later that day, Rountree told the council that Nasser understood the danger of communism and was at last prepared to "do something." He explained that Cairo and Moscow were at odds on the question of Iraq, while US-Egyptian interests were nearly identical, though questions remained whether the United States could trust Nasser.[71] The next morning Nasser sent the United States an unambiguous signal of his intention, when he delivered a speech that denounced communism "as among the enemies of Arab nationalism."[72]

Over the course of the next few weeks, Nasser initiated a campaign against Egyptian communists and increased his rhetorical attacks against Qasim. In late December, the Eisenhower administration demonstrated its approval of Nasser's actions by providing emergency food aid to Egypt, less than 24 hours after the initial request.[73] The confluence of interests on the question of curbing communist influence in both Egypt and Iraq led to a rapid improvement in relations between the United States and Egypt in the late 1950s. It appeared as if the chilling of relations in the period surrounding the 1956 Suez Crisis had finally been overcome.

There was no debate in the Eisenhower administration over the dire implications of a communist takeover in Iraq. Rather, what was discussed was whether a communist takeover was "imminent or actual." The CIA was correct in its assessment: "Communist control of Iraq would establish the USSR in the heart of the Middle East—contiguous to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait, and outflanking two US allies, Turkey and Iran." The agency believed that a Soviet-dominated Iraq posed a threat to Western investments and vital oil supplies and could spark a wider Middle Eastern crisis.[74] However, in retrospect, these points were speculative: Qasim was not a communist, the Soviets were not in control of Iraq, and subsequent research has questioned the extent to which the ICP took orders from Moscow.[75] Yet, Eisenhower was eager to work with Nasser against Qasim and the ICP. At this point, the basic national security policy required the White House to "take all feasible measures" to prevent an "imminent or actual" communist takeover in Iraq, but this was a subjective situation, dependent on the individual views of analysts. Consequently, the US intelligence community

struggled throughout the spring of 1959 to reach a firm conclusion that the "point of no return" in Iraq had come.

On January 7, 1959, the CIA circulated a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) arguing, in vague terms, that Qasim had to take immediate action to curb communist influence or Iraq "will *probably* be transformed into a Communist State."[76] However, US diplomats in Baghdad did not share this view. On January 13, the new US ambassador, John Jernegan, cabled Washington to argue against the "point of no return has arrived" thesis. He believed that anticommunist forces in the government still existed.[77] A few days later, an INR report reached the same conclusion, arguing that while the communists had a "slight but possibly decisive advantage," the pro-Nasser Arab nationalists were not finished yet.[78] Clearly, US officials held mixed views about whether communists posed a clear and present danger to Iraq.

Views among US officials about the prospect of working with Nasser against Iraq were equally mixed. For instance, an NSC document from January 7, 1959, suggests the CIA was not confident that Nasser's conspiratorial apparatus in Iraq was "sufficiently organized to enable him to initiate a successful coup," though it acknowledged that he "may still have the ability to stimulate senior officers of the Iraqi army to attempt a coup aimed at establishing a nationalist government free of Communist control."[79] The INR's view was closer to that of the CIA's. It saw Nasser's newfound opposition to communism as helpful because it inspired anticommunist elements in Iraq. At the same time, the INR saw considerable risks: an "indecisive coup attempt" by Egypt could trigger a "long-drawn-out civil conflict." Similarly, Iraq's neighbors—Iran and Saudi Arabia—were concerned about the prospect of Nasser gaining influence over Baghdad, which it feared could lead to covert action against his efforts.[80] In Baghdad, Jernegan continued to advise a more cautious approach and warned against becoming too associated with Nasser, lest he push Qasim further into the Soviets' arms.[81] Jernegan's cautious analysis eventually won out in the debate, even though Eisenhower personally thought that working with Nasser to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq was worth the risk.

When the NSC convened again on January 15, Allen Dulles informed the members of a new conspiracy against Qasim, though its chances for success seemed unlikely.[82] Foster Dulles reported that the British were "somewhat less pessimistic" about the situation in Iraq. He opined it was "essential to keep our hands off Iraq," since the United States was not "sufficiently sophisticated to mix into this complicated situation." Regardless, Eisenhower reiterated his interested in the Nasser option and ordered the NSC to determine how far the US government should be willing to go. To this, Foster Dulles cautioned against giving "carte blanche approval to everything that Nasser does." In the end, the council agreed that the United States had to examine all possible options to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq. While no decision was taken, the CIA once again began to review the situation.[83]

The Iraqi crisis took a negative turn on February 7 when six prominent nationalists, including Foreign Minister Abd al-Jabbar al-Jumarad, resigned in protest after Qasim signed a "vast" technical aid program with the Soviets. According to

US officials, the ministers hoped their resignations would force Qasim to alter his pro-Soviet policies, but the opposite happened. Instead of weakening communist influence in Iraq, the resignations allowed Qasim to appoint in their place leftist or pro-communist ministers.[84]

Qasim's appointment of pro-communist elements to his cabinet generated alarm in Washington, prompting the CIA to again reassess its estimate on Iraq. On February 17, the CIA circulated a new SNIE that highlighted the differences between the analysis of America and that of its allies on Iraq. While Britain was "far from oblivious" to the dangers of communism, its outright hostility toward Nasser led it to conclude that Qasim was a viable alternative. As case and point, the CIA pointed to Britain's decision to tip Qasim off about the Nasser-backed Rashid Ali plot. In short, Britain's geopolitical competition with and visceral hatred toward Nasser stood in the way of a more pragmatic policy—from an American perspective—aimed at preventing Soviet penetration into the Middle East. Another important ally, Israel, was equally concerned about the communist threat to Iraq but also shared Britain's concerns about Nasser. Like Britain, the Israelis viewed Nasser as their primary geopolitical challenge. Therefore, any move that brought Nasser and the United States closer was not in its interests, particularly if it resulted in him taking over Iraq and confirming him as the undisputed leader of the Arab world. In both instances, America's approach to the Iraq crisis contrasted starkly with its two closest regional allies. The reason for this, it seems, is a difference in perception. The SNIE emphasized that the Americans viewed the Iraq crisis in terms of its Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, believing that Iraq's communists were a Soviet proxy, whereas America's allies were concerned with advancing or protecting their national interests. These differences would persist until the mid-1960s.[85]

The next day, the NSC Operations Coordinating Board issued guidance for US personnel dealing with Iraq. In many ways, it built upon NSC 5820/1, advising the United States to seek to dispel any suspicions that it was plotting against Iraq; counsel regional allies against provocative measures; and maintain enough US officials in Iraq to meet any requests made by the government. At the same time, the United States needed to show a "correct" attitude toward Iraq and its desire for friendly relations; seek to develop contacts within the regime; take advantage of any opportunities presented; cultivate friendships discreetly to create "a more favorable climate for US-Iraqi relations"; and "use every appropriate opportunity" to warn Iraqi leaders of the communist threat.[86] Together, the operational guidance suggests that the overriding goal of the US policy was to build friendly relations with the Qasim regime, while avoiding provocative action. It is, however, evident that elements of the Eisenhower administration were already not following its own policy.

According to the *Church Report*, within days of the NSC guidance, the CIA's Near East Division sought approval from the "Health Alteration Committee"—a euphemism for the CIA's assassination unit—for a proposed "special operation" to "incapacitate" an Iraqi colonel believed to be "promoting Soviet bloc political interests in Iraq." Although CIA officials, testifying 15 years later, could not recall exactly who the Iraqi colonel in question was,[87] it is widely held that

Qasim was the target.[88] However, this seems questionable for three reasons: (1) it seems unlikely that the CIA officials would not recall trying to kill a head of state 15 years on; (2) Qasim did not promote Soviet interests overtly; and, while recognizing that this is semantics, (3) Qasim was a brigadier general, not a colonel, whereas the pro-Soviet Colonel Fadhil al-Mahdawi fit the description perfectly. For example, Mahdawi, in his role as the president of the so-called People's Court, had played a key role in the regime's repression of anticommunist forces and was an established communist sympathizer.[89] In addition, the *Church Report* made clear that the division chief was not actually seeking the assassination of this individual, as has been suggested,[90] but rather "to prevent the target from pursuing his usual activities for a minimum of three months." Finally, the CIA added, "we do not consciously seek [the] subject's permanent removal from the scene," though "we also do not object should this complication develop."[91] These points raise questions as to whether the CIA's target was actually Qasim and, if so, whether the intended outcome was his assassination. Even so, it is nevertheless significant that a group of CIA officials were seeking approval for covert action against Iraq within days of the NSC issuing operational guidance that advised the exact opposite.

On March 6, the Iraq crisis escalated when a protest organized by the communist-backed "Peace Partisans" in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul drew in as many as 250,000 people. Before long, tensions flared and a group of disgruntled Arab nationalist Free Officers seized control of the city. Eventually, on March 9, Qasim ordered the Iraqi Air Force (IAF) to bomb the city, and the People's Resistance Force (PRF)—the regime's militia set up in August 1958—began a campaign to retake control of the city with Barzani's support.[92] Between 200 and 2,500 civilians were killed.[93] US officials in Baghdad were stunned by the nationalist's defeat at Mosul. They believed that the failed uprising had increased Qasim's strength and his pro-communist allies at the expense of the pro-Nasser nationalists. "It [appeared] that the Mosul attempt was almost a last gasp of nationalist, anti-Communist forces in Iraq," and provided ample justification to purge all pan-Arab nationalists from positions of authority. On March 26, the embassy reported that Iraqi security forces had rounded up approximately 15,000 of the regime's opponents and nationalists had been purged from all government ministries, except the foreign ministry.[94] In their place, Qasim appointed his own protégés, thereby "extending his own patronage networks." As Tripp observed, "[the] ICP gained the impression that, by rallying 'the people,' it could check any attempted coup d'état, reinforcing its belief that it could now play an active part in the direction of the Iraqi state.[95] It was in this context that Iraq announced its withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact on March 24, leading US officials in Baghdad to warn Washington that the "Iron Curtain [is] descending" over Iraq.[96]

When the NSC convened on April 2 to discuss Mosul, Eisenhower reiterated—for the third time—his interest in working with Nasser to save Iraq—an indication that he had not yet decided on the matter. Allen Dulles was not certain this was a good idea, pointing out, "not all our friends and allies seem to have the same view on Iraq as we did." The new under secretary of state, C. Douglas Dillon, rightly warned that if it became known that the United States was plotting

with Nasser against Qasim, it could drive Iraq further toward the communists. At this point, Gordon Gray reminded the council US policy required them to "take all feasible measures… including military action" to thwart a communist takeover. Everyone agreed, but there were no new ideas of how to prevent this.[97] Eisenhower ordered the State Department to produce an analysis of the Iraqi situation for the next NSC meeting and asked Acting Secretary Herter (who became secretary of state on April 22) to organize an interagency committee composed of the heads of relevant departments and agencies (Defense, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, etc.) to review the matter and devise an action plan.[98]

When the NSC next met on April 17, Vice President Richard Nixon was in the chair. The meeting arrived at pessimistic conclusions. Having read the State Department's briefing paper, Nixon was concerned that little could be done to prevent a communist takeover and was reluctant about working with Nasser, believing it "unlikely that we could find any middle ground between Communistic control of Iraq and control by Nasser." Likewise, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General Nathan Twinning, was concerned about the state of contingency planning, reminding the council that military action was sanctioned under the existing policy guidelines. While major decisions had to be deferred until Eisenhower's return, the NSC approved the president's earlier instruction to form an interagency committee for Iraq, directing it to develop integrated views, keep their department heads informed, and to report to the council each week unless directed otherwise. The NSC advised the committee to reassess the State Department's recent analysis, monitor current developments, and formulate feasible courses of action, while taking into account the urgency required to prevent a Communist takeover in Iraq.[99] With this, the Special Committee on Iraq (SCI) was formed.

By the time the Eisenhower administration formed the SCI in April 1959, concerns about communist influence in Iraq dominated its thinking. By this point, the CIA had pointed out that the US policy toward Iraq diverged sharply with its key regional allies, Britain and Israel. In both instances, they feared Nasser's control of Iraq far more than the communists. Yet, the administration's concern about the communists trumped any other consideration. By April no firm decision on working with Nasser had been reached, though the president clearly favored the option, even though most of his advisors were opposed. This disagreement led to contradictions between official policy and American actions, like the CIA's application for covert action just as the NSC issued guidance designed to improve relations with Iraq. What this shows is that the Eisenhower administration's fear of communism in Iraq put it at odds with not just its allies but with itself.[100]

The Special Committee

Throughout the spring of 1959 the SCI and NSC met regularly to discuss the ongoing Iraq crisis. During this time, clear divisions over how to respond to Iraq were evident. On the one side, the State Department continued to urge a "hands-off policy" and felt that the United States "should not act precipitously in Iraq,

since the consequences might be worse from the point of view of [their] overall interests than not acting at [that] time." On the other side, CIA and Defense felt this was a mistake, believing that the crisis had reached a "now or never" point and called for immediate action or at the very least contingency planning should the communists actually seize power. Rountree agreed and ordered CIA and Defense to prepare contingency plans.[101] These divisions would make it difficult for the United States to achieve consensus about what to do about Iraq.

In late April, the SCI identified the wide variety of potential options the United States could adopt to help prevent a communist takeover in Iraq. It is important to clarify that these were options and not actual actions taken. The CIA was focused on ways to help Nasser against Qasim, including collecting, collating, and evaluating intelligence; offering financial assurances and arms to groups plotting against Qasim; and assisting Radio Cairo in its propaganda efforts. The CIA felt that these options fit the requirement of "doing something" to stem the communist tide in Iraq.[102] The JCS took a much more aggressive approach, which included: (1) encouraging Arab countries to bring pressure on Iraq to curb the communists; (2) ceasing all economic and military aid to Iraq; (3) stopping all oil purchases from Iraq to cripple the regime's finances; and (4) helping pro-Western Iraqis, who could serve as a rallying point for opposition. The JCS also suggested promoting revolts inside Iraq and overthrowing Qasim with a military coup, but it acknowledged that this risked reinforcing the communists. More broadly, the JCS suggested reinforcing the militaries of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Jordan, and encouraging the British bolster its forces in Kuwait; increasing the deployment of American forces in the region; possibly establishing a US Middle East Command; imposing a naval blockade of the Iraqi coast to prevent Soviet arms deliveries; denying Iraq's ability to export oil; and encouraging Turkey and Jordan to intervene militarily. Of all the options available, the JCS recommended the United States to explore working with Nasser, either overtly or covertly, "in detail and on an urgent basis." Finally, the JCS called for the formulation of contingency plans for a military intervention in Iraq, but this would require consultation with Baghdad Pact members and key North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, which increased the risk of a leak.[103] After reviewing these options, the SCI decided that it would review the existing military plans "without consultation with any other nation," which implied that both Britain and Israel would be cut out of the loop.[104] The SCI reported these options to the NSC on April 30.[105]

When word of the CIA/JCS options for Iraq reached Jernegan in Baghdad, he was "horrified" and asked to return to Washington for consultations.[106] During that time he was called before the NSC to offer his assessment, where he presented a five-point explanation of Iraq's leftward trend.

> The first … was a reaction against the pro-West attitudes and policies of the former Nuri regime. Secondly, Qasim himself and many other Iraqi leaders distrust the West and feared that we were working to destroy the new regime. The third reason was widespread fear that the regime would be brought down by Nasser and the UAR … [Fourth] the Communists themselves in Iraq had worked very hard and were extremely well organized. The fifth reason was that Qasim may really want

> events to take the course they have been taking. He might be a Communist or a pro-Communist. [But Jernegan felt]…that Qasim was scared and that [was why] he was tolerating the Communist activity.

On contingency planning, Jernegan warned that "overt hostility" would drive Qasim "into the hands of the Soviets." As a case in point, it had been Nasser's involvement in the Rashid Ali plot and the Mosul uprising that pushed Qasim toward the communists and Soviets in the first place. And even if he was overthrown, "there was no one in sight who could replace Qasim." Given this, Jernegan suggested the best step to urge Nasser to cease his direct attacks against Qasim and focus instead on Iraq's communists, the real enemy. The NSC agreed and approved his recommendation.[107]

When SCI met on May 19 it was reported that Nasser had agreed to shift the focus of his propaganda away from Qasim and toward the communists.[108] When this development was reported to the NSC the following day, there was agreement that "some progress" had been made in Iraq.[109] By the end of May, Nasser's easing of pressure on Qasim, when coupled with the ICP's demands for the legalization of political parties,[110] was beginning to have an effect. For instance, in late May, just before Qasim was to meet with Jernegan, he delivered a speech emphasizing Iraq's neutrality in the Cold War, an act that led Jernegan to take a friendly tone when they met on May 26.[111]

Despite the State Department's victory in this debate, its differences with CIA/JCS continued to persist. In early June, Philip Halla, the SCI's secretary and a member of the NSC staff, sent Gray a memo summarizing a conversation he had with a senior CIA official. According to the memo, the CIA felt that the State Department was being "excessively cautious" on Iraq, disagreed over the scale of communist entrenchment, and was not fooled by Qasim's recent efforts at limiting communist power.[112] Nevertheless, during a June 4 NSC meeting, Allen Dulles reflected Jernegan's sense of cautious optimism observing that while Iraq was "far from out of danger," the "drift toward Communism in Iraq had at least slowed down." This, according to the CIA director, was because Moscow had apparently cautioned Qasim to "go a little slow" with his relationship with the ICP and that his declaration of "positive neutrality" was actually a "tactical" move aimed at quelling Western fears of communist encroachment.[113]

By mid-June 1959, the Iraqi crisis appeared to stabilize, leading some US officials to question the need for a weekly SCI meeting since there was general agreement on continuing the "wait and see" policy already in place.[114] Rountree agreed and recommended that the NSC release the SCI "from the obligation to make weekly reports" on the condition that any significant developments be raised. The NSC approved this suggestion when it next met on June 18.[115] Soon thereafter, the CIA issued a report that admitted that its earlier estimates on Iraq had "been too gloomy" and there were "signs of growing resolve on Qassim's part to move with increasing determination against the Iraqi Communists." However, the CIA cautioned, "this [did] not mean that the tide has turned finally and irrevocably against the Communists." Qasim's recent distancing himself from the ICP could lead it to "strike back to protect themselves and their position against

the reprisals that would be likely if the nationalists gained dominance."[116] This assessment would prove to be accurate.

On July 10, a communist-inspired riot broke out in southern Iraq, which led to a physical clash between the communists and security forces. Before long, US officials in Baghdad learned that communist government officials would be purged soon after the anniversary of the revolution.[117] On July 13, Qasim pledged that elections would be held and a new parliament would be formed within a year and announced that he was expanding his cabinet by four members, including a female communist, Naziha Duleimi.[118] Interpreting Qasim's move as an affront to their access to power, the next day the communists instigated a major crisis in the northern city of Kirkuk.

The Kirkuk uprising was a crucial turning point in the history of postrevolutionary Iraq. By July 1959, tension between the Kirkuk's large Kurdish and Turkmen populations had escalated due to an influx of impoverished Kurds moving into the city to avoid deteriorating economic conditions in the countryside.[119] Since the Mosul rising, the Kurds had aligned themselves with the communists against the Turkmen, creating a situation that has widely been described as "explosive." Together with Qasim's actions, the local catalyst for the crisis was the appointment of a Kurdish mayor in early July 1959, the first of its kind. On July 14, fighting broke out when a communist-organized rally crossed paths with a Turkmen protest. The Kurds, backed by the PRF, went "berserk" and attacked shops and their owners.[120] It took two days for the Iraqi army to bring an end to the violence, leaving dozens dead and scores more injured. On July 19, Qasim condemned the violence, which he attributed in vague terms to "anarchists."[121] Before long, images of mutilated bodies were broadcast on Iraqi television with editorials saying, this was what "Communists are really like."[122]

After some initial confusion, US policymakers realized that the Kirkuk massacre was a watershed for the communists' standing inside Iraq. When Allen Dulles briefed the NSC on the clashes on July 23 it was immediately evident how limited the CIA's resources inside Iraq were: "Apparently the Kirkuk outbreak had been put down more rapidly than our own or the Egyptian press had indicated. Still, however, no one knows much about why the outbreak began or how it began." What was important, however, was that Qasim had singled out the communists for condemnation. This, of course, appeared to worry the Soviets, which extended Qasim an invitation for a state visit, which could be interpreted as confirmation of ICP–Soviet links.[123] At the end of July, Qasim accused the communists directly for the massacres, which led the ICP to issue a public apology in early August. Meanwhile, Qasim began to purge communists and their sympathizers from the military and to rein in the PRF.[124]

All of this led Jernegan to cable an optimistic assessment to Washington on August 9, stating the "tide [was] running against Communism"; the ICP had "gone too far"; and Qasim "will now not only . . . check any [communist] attempts to increase power but will also take concrete steps to reduce its present power." The regime also moved against the communist's key sources of support: the PRF, trade and student unions, and pro-communist army officers.[125] With these positive developments accumulating in late summer 1959 some US officials believed

that the high tide of communism in Iraq was receding, a conclusion that proved to be too optimistic in the short term.

The Crisis Continues

In the aftermath of the Kirkuk massacre, Qasim's actions were both contradictory and confusing, making it difficult for US policymakers to accurately assess the situation. For instance, a CIA estimate from December 1959 described Qasim as an "enigmatic figure," who "considers himself uncommitted to any faction, and capable of playing a role above the struggle." However, he was likely to be "central to the short-run outlook in Iraq."[126] While the White House was pleased with the crackdown, Qasim soon became convinced that his policy of balancing the communists and nationalists was in danger and took actions to redress this imbalance.

Throughout August, a drama played out between Qasim and the nationalists when a group of Free Officers involved in the Mosul rising were brought before Mahdawi's court.[127] In the resulting trial, Mandawi ordered the execution of five military officers and a civilian on August 25.[128] Both Nasser and the Iraqi nationalists were outraged and the CIA learned in early September that Nasser had recommenced plotting against Iraq.[129] The real tipping point came on September 20, when Qasim approved the executions of a senior Free Officer and 12 other nationalist officers involved in Mosul, in addition to 4 civilian members of the monarchy to balance criticism.[130]

Iraq's renewed instability prompted by the executions led the United States to once again revaluate its views on Iraq. On September 24, a new SNIE was circulated that concluded that Iraq had grown "even more unstable and uncertain" than ever. It also noted that while ICP activities had been limited in recent weeks, Qasim had "continued and even expanded" his ties with Moscow. Meanwhile, "reports of coup plots, including the assassination of Qasim, [had] increased in recent weeks," though no organization "capable of bringing off a successful coup [was] known to exist."[131]

The instability also prompted the SCI to convene on September 24 to assess the situation—its first meeting since June 1959. Chairing the meeting was G. Lewis Jones, who had replaced William Rountree as the under secretary of state for the Near East. At the outset, the CIA representative warned the group that "an assassination effort [was] likely" and "could set off violence," but because the White House had "abandoned intervention as a policy" there were few options available should a coup occur. One was to convince Egypt and Jordan to work together on Iraq; another was to work through the Arab League, which could be supported by Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. However, because of America's nonintervention policy, all the CIA could do was prepare "operationally in the area." The CIA's representative did, however, explain that there was a "small stockpile [of weapons] in the area" and that it had been supporting "elements in Jordan and the UAR to help Iraqis filter back to Iraq." The SCI agreed that nonintervention was the best policy and decided to seek Jernegan's assessment.[132] This document

was significant for three reasons: (1) it reconfirmed that the Eisenhower administration's policy was nonintervention; (2) the CIA had been moving forward with some elements of Defense's proposed contingency plan; and (3) to date, this is the most extensive acknowledgment that the Eisenhower administration was working with Nasser against Iraq.

When Jernegan responded on September 28, it was clear the Iraqi situation had gotten worse and warned of a potential coup. He said the short-range prospect for internal stability in Iraq was worse; the anticommunist trend was slowing; US capabilities were limited; and that intervention "would only make matters worse."[133] Moreover, he warned of a coup attempt "within a week" that would "start with the assassination of Qasim." Jernegan's warning was confirmed two days later, when the United States learned that "Nasser [was] counseling conspirators involved in [a] plan for [a] coup in Iraq within a week, including [the] assassination of Qasim," and was preparing to send troops "to oppose any counter-move thereafter."[134]

The seriousness of Jernegan's briefing prompted the SCI to send the NSC a report outlining America's options to prevent a communist takeover. Based on recent developments inside Iraq, the SCI raised important concerns about Qasim's mental stability, his ability to maintain control, and his usefulness in checking the communists. Importantly, the SCI believed that the execution of the nationalists had paralyzed any potential coup leaders with fear, "thus making [an] imminent organized coup unlikely." This, in turn, increased the likelihood of a "civil war and chaos, possibly triggered by the assassination of Qasim, from which the Communists (as the best organized political group) could benefit most." The report reached a number of important conclusions. Notably, any form of "military intervention by the [US] or its allies would be unwise," because it could unleash a wave of nationalist hostility throughout the Arab world, which the Soviets could exploit at the United Nations (UN). Worse, it could also lead to direct or indirect Soviet intervention, "thus risking global war." The report emphasized that Western military action would only be effective "so long as our troops occupied Iraq, leaving a situation as bad or worse after their withdrawal." This, of course, was untenable. The second major conclusion of the report was that it would be useless for the United States to engage in any form of open opposition, such as public declarations, issuing ultimatums, or stern warnings. Third, it makes clear that any attempt at covert action against Iraq "would be folly," since it was already a country that is highly suspicious of the United States. Finally, the report concluded that America's best hope "lies in influence and action emanating from Iraq's Arab neighbors, particularly [from Egypt]." In this connection, the report added, Nasser's efforts to improve relations with the other Arab states and his open opposition to communism have been highly beneficial to US interests.[135]

The report lists off a number of possible courses of actions that the United States and its Arab allies could take against Iraq. These include (1) isolating Iraq psychologically from other Arab states; (2) cutting off Iraq from a key oil pipeline through Syria and refusing to allow air traffic to and from the country; (3) engaging in political and subversive action against Iraq; and (4) supporting Egyptian

and/or Jordanian military intervention as a last resort. As for direct American actions, the United States needed to avoid escalating external problems, which could "divert Nasser from [his] Iraqi task"; urge restraint on America's regional allies when dealing with Iraq; and consult with the British for a "coordinated approach" to the crisis. Specifically, the SCI advised adhering to a "business as usual" approach to Iraq, consisting of seeking correct, friendly relations with Iraqis (but not actively); taking steps to improve America's standing with non-communist elements inside Iraq, including training programs and cultural exchanges; maintaining a "cautious and discreet liaison" with Nasser over how to isolate Iraq psychologically; and having the CIA and JCS continue to contingency plan in the event that a drastic action in the future appears necessary.[136]

The importance of this analysis soon became clear. On October 1, the NSC invited both Jones and Armin Meyer (the NEA's director) to brief the council. Relying on the report, they explained that the SCI had reached three main conclusions:

> 1) dramatic action by the US in Iraq was not desirable; 2) restraint by the Arab countries [was] the best means of restraining Iraq; 3) [Qasim] should be encouraged through third parties to maintain an independent Iraq which would resist the Communist threat.[137]

Jones reported indications of an impending assassination attempt on Qasim, but suggested that these could be "Communist provocations." Commenting, Director Dulles told the council that Nasser had "urged the assassination plotters not to move too fast" and might "be laying plans to intervene in the event chaos ensues." Reflecting a lack of concrete intelligence, he predicted that the assassination attempt could occur "in the next two months."[138] America's spy chief was wrong. On October 7, the Ba'th Party thrust itself into Iraqi politics for the first time, when an assassination team including a young Saddam Hussein attempted to kill Qasim, striking him in the shoulder but not killing him. He spent the next six weeks in the hospital recovering.[139]

Despite claims to the contrary,[140] the body of evidence available does not suggest that the United States was directly complicit in the attempted assassination. First, the SCI analysis makes clear that the communists would be the primary beneficiaries of covert action against Qasim. Second, just days before the attack Allen Dulles predicted that it would occur within the "next two months," not a week. Third, the SCI and NSC had just reaffirmed the nonintervention policy. Fourth, the SCI had raised concerns that Qasim's assassination could lead to a communist takeover.[141] Fifth, while the CIA was preparing for the contingency of a communist takeover, it had previously indicated that it had few assets that could influence a post-Qasim Iraq.[142] Finally, the CIA was not confident that pro-Nasser elements could even carry off a coup, which proved accurate.[143] This raises the question as to why the United States would back a plot that was likely to fail? In addition, the Eisenhower administration's public and private actions do not suggest involvement. On October 10, Eisenhower sent Qasim a "friendly message" to express relief that he had "escaped serious harm" and wished him a

"speedy recovery."[144] When Jernegan visited him in hospital the next day, Qasim "gave no indication that he thought the US had been involved." Furthermore, the Eisenhower administration had also taken steps to discourage Jordan and Iran from "taking military action" against Iraq.[145] Taken together, the body of evidence raises questions as to whether the United States was behind the assassination attempt on Qasim in 1959. Indeed, documents from the period leading up to the attempt all suggest that, while the United States was aware of several plots against Qasim, it had still adhered to its nonintervention policy.

On October 13, the SCI's CIA representative sent Jones a memo outlining the agency's contingency plans for Iraq. The CIA anticipated a troubling scenario. While Qasim was "applying a measure of control over Communist activities," the September 20 executions "caused an irreparable breach between Qasim and Nationalist elements within the country." There was a "strong possibility" that the regime would begin a harsh crackdown on the nationalists, potentially leading to another desperate attempt to remove Qasim, which the CIA felt could push him back toward the communists. If that happened, the CIA believed that the nationalists would request Nasser's help. The CIA knew that nationalist elements inside Iraq were in touch with Nasser at this point and that he was "seriously considering intervention under certain circumstances." In terms of contingencies, the CIA was quite vague: "There [were] any number of possibilities, but most of those which would demand prompt policy decisions… [were] permutations and combinations based on a single central fact—the removal of Qasim."[146]

When the SCI met on October 22 there was again disagreement. Barring Qasim's removal, the group saw three scenarios: (1) Qasim becoming dependent on the communists for support; (2) reconciliation with the nationalists; or (3) continuing to counterbalance the opposing forces. While the majority of the group felt that the last scenario was most likely, a minority still felt that Qasim would again embrace the communists.[147] Even so, following the attempted assassination, scores of nationalists were arrested and dragged before Mahdawi's court.[148] This appeared to confirm the SCI's worst fear that the communists were once again in a position to seize power.

The regime's crushing of the nationalists was cause for concern in Washington, since it left only two viable groups that could bolster the regime or overthrow it: the army or the communists. When Qasim was released from the hospital on December 2, he held a six-hour news conference where he reversed many of his earlier positions. In particular, Qasim reversed himself and absolved the communists of any blame for the Kirkuk massacres a few months earlier, despite overwhelming evidence suggesting otherwise. This prompted the CIA to call a meeting of the SCI to once again review the situation. When the group met on December 4, there was again no clear consensus about what direction Iraq would take, but all believed that the situation was dire. Observing events from Baghdad, the speech had finally convinced Jernegan that Qasim had now sided with the communists. With McCarthyist witch hunts of the early 1950s still fresh in the memory of the SCI's members, both the CIA and JCS representatives raised concerns that "losing" Iraq to the communists could jeopardize their own

careers. State officials were skeptical about the extent to which Iraq would go communist, with Meyer reminding everyone that Qasim was "a man who [could] change his attitude tomorrow." The uncertainty surrounding the situation eventually prompted Jones to ask the CIA representative to draw up a new assessment.[149] When the CIA circulated its analysis on December 15, its conclusions leaned toward Meyer's interpretation. "[We] believe that Qassim will continue his attempts to maintain himself in power by relying on the support of the armed forces while maneuvering between the various political factions." Importantly, while it could not discount a rapprochement with the nationalists or communists, the agency believed that only Qasim could ensure his survival was with the army's support.[150]

According to Wolfe-Hunnicutt, in early February 1960, two CIA operatives, Miles Copeland and James Eichelberger, authored a "highly alarmist" report on the "reality of Communism in Iraq." Their analysis warned that the ICP had "infiltrated both the government machinery and the military forces to a great, but as yet un-measurable extent," while rejecting the State Department's longstanding view that Qasim was capable of balancing the political forces inside Iraq. In contrast to the SCI's belief in finding an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem, Copeland and Eichelberger endorsed the idea of providing covert assistance to Nasser's efforts to overthrow Qasim.

> Apparently, nobody of any significance in Iraq thinks there is any chance whatever of stopping the Communists through the internal mobilization of non-Communist elements. All apparently feel that the real choice before them is between accommodation with the Communists or the elimination of Communists through external intervention.[151]

The Copeland–Eichelberger memo is significant because it stands in stark contrast to the prevailing views held at the time, including those held by the highest levels of the US intelligence community. By the time these two drafted the memo, a clear shift was already underway inside Iraq.

During the spring of 1960, Qasim had taken a series of measures that resulted in a significant reduction of communist influence inside Iraq. For instance, in January 1960, Qasim moved against the ICP, refusing to license it as a political party and approving the application of a fictitious Communist Party, which had no organizational capacity or members, instead.[152] US officials in Baghdad and Washington saw this move as a favorable development. According to the minutes of an SCI meeting on March 24, the military had reasserted its influence over the country and appeared to be in firm control; a number of pro-communist officers had been dismissed; measures had been taken to restore confidence in the economy; and the Iraqis had begun to show interest in establishing cultural and business agreements with America. However, on the negative side, Qasim continued to support Mahdawi. Even so, these developments helped to confirm the State Department's view that a "policy of friendship, non-involvement and being ready to help if asked was beginning to pay off."[153] Gray reported news of the encouraging situation in Iraq to the NSC on March 24.[154]

The reason for Qasim's sudden shift away from the communists can be attributed to the rise of two moderate generals, Saleh al-Abdi, the military chief of staff, and Najib al-Rubayi, the president of the Sovereign Council and Iraq's de jure head of state, who had run the country while Qasim recovered in the hospital.[155] During this time, both leaders achieved an unprecedented degree of independence in the running of the country. Despite this, a CIA analysis from May 1960 observed, "Qassem has made no move to punish [these] two generals or to take back the functions [they] arrogated during his hospitalization, and he now appears content to allow the army to play a strong behind-the-scenes role." This, in turn, created an unprecedented period of stability in Iraq, which led US officials to conclude that the Iraqi crisis had finally come to an end.[156] Indicative that the Iraqi crisis was coming to a close, the SCI's meeting that same day would be the last time it would ever convene. Given this, the Copeland–Eichelberger report stands out as a peculiar irregularity at a time when the situation inside Iraq was in fact stabilizing.

Throughout April, the United States continued to see encouraging signs that Iraq had finally stabilized. On April 7, Deputy DCI Charles Cabell informed the NSC that the Iraqi army had crushed a number of communist-instigated strikes and that Iraqi officials had shown interest in bids from Western firms on its development program.[157] This led to the CIA revising its SNIE in May to conclude that while it "seems unlikely that Qasim's tightrope act can go on indefinitely," the "surface calm" in Iraq "belies some short-term predictions of impending crises that were plausible on occasion last year." Qasim's continued reliance on the army was an encouraging sign and seemed to be "primarily responsible for this tenuous stability." Should this arrangement prevail, the CIA concluded, it was unlikely that any spectacular developments would take place in Iraq over the next six months. The only continuing uncertainty, the agency added, was the possibility of Qasim's assassination.[158] When the CIA reassessed the situation again a few months later in July, it reached the same conclusions.[159] In short, by the summer of 1960, the US intelligence community had concluded that the communist crisis that had gripped Iraq following the revolution had finally passed.[160]

At this point, the Eisenhower administration turned its attention toward preparing the transition to the new administration of John F. Kennedy, who had defeated Richard Nixon for the presidency on November 8, 1960. As part of the transition, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) drew up plans for the region and Iraq in mid-December for the new administration. Regionally, the plans reflected the Eisenhower administration's traditional policy of denying Soviet penetration into the area and securing continued Western access to cheap oil. With respect to Iraq, the OCB recommended the United States to "continue efforts to develop firm but friendly relations with the Iraq Government." Next, because Iraq appeared to have stabilized, the OCB believed that Iraq's suspicions of American intentions could "continue to diminish" and the new administration should "make every effort to develop contacts, both official and unofficial, with personalities of the regime and other individuals of potential political importance." Third, if Iraq requested any form of cooperation with the United States, the OCB advised giving "prompt and friendly consideration,"

though depending on the prevailing situation. Fourth, since restoring the Iraqi confidence in America was crucial, the OCB recommended that the United States Information Service (USIS) establish personal contacts and develop cultural programs, including language programs and exchanges, in a "discreet and unostentatious" manner. Finally, if the internal power structure shifts in a manner that brings a pro-Western regime, "the US should be prepared promptly to support it and to take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen its position in the area."[161] With transitional guidance in place for US policy toward Iraq, the Eisenhower administration was confident that the incoming administration would be on the right track.

Conclusion

Prior to Iraq's revolution, US policy toward the region was premised on two objectives: (1) denying Soviet influence and (2) maintaining access to Middle Eastern oil. At that time, the United States viewed Arab nationalism as an ideological force that, if harnessed, could be used to advance both these goals. The Iraqi coup exacerbated ongoing challenges to US interests, forcing it to intervene in Lebanon and support a similar British military operation in Jordan to shore up the West's remaining allies. However, the United States stopped short of intervening in Iraq due to concerns that military action might spark a regional war and push the Iraqi regime toward the Soviet Union. Given this, the United States recognized the new regime in November 1958 and adopted a policy of seeking friendly relations, acquiescing to Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, considering limited military sales, and encouraging friendly elements within the country. In short, so long as nationalists were in power, the Eisenhower administration could accept the Qasim regime.

The power struggle that emerged in the fall of 1958, which pitted Qasim and his communist allies against Nasser-inspired Arab nationalists, raised concerns among US officials that the Soviets could use the crisis to leapfrog over America's containment shield to establish a presence simultaneously in three key regions: the Levant, Gulf, and Indian Ocean. The basis of these concerns was the return of the troublesome Kurdish nationalist from exile in the Soviet Union, Mulla Mustafa Barzani; the establishment of a Soviet-Iraqi arms-supply relationship; and Qasim's increasing reliance on the communists for support against the nationalists. While the first two factors were reasons for concern, it seems that the United States overestimated the depth of the ICP's relationship with Moscow. This was because, by this point in the Cold War, the Soviets had established a model in both Eastern Europe and East Asia during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, whereby it worked actively through local communist groups to manipulate and shape events in order to secure power. Given this, American concerns about the ICP's proximity to power in Iraq were justified. However, in retrospect, it seems likely that the ICP was influenced but not necessarily controlled by Moscow.

The Eisenhower administration's fear of Soviet encroachment in Iraq led it to consider working with Nasser to intervene in order to avert a communist

takeover. It is clear that the US government was split on this question. On the one side, Eisenhower clearly favored working with Nasser, while on the other, Foster Dulles advised caution, arguing that the United States was not knowledgeable enough in Iraqi affairs to entrust a foreigner—let alone a crafty leader, like Nasser—with advancing US policy. In the end, there is enough evidence to conclude that the Eisenhower administration coordinated some of its actions toward Iraq with Egypt, particularly in the field of propaganda and cautioning restraint. However, there is no documentation that ties the United States directly to any of Nasser's many covert attempts to overthrow the Qasim regime, though there is evidence that the CIA had helped Jordan and the UAR infiltrate Iraqis back into the country.

Another problem was that the American response to the Iraq crisis differed significantly from its closest allies, Britain and Israel. It is clear that this is a by-product of both perception and interests. The United States clearly assessed the crisis in terms of its Cold War with the Soviet Union, whereas both Britain and Israel saw events in terms of their regional rivalries with Egypt, and seemed to be driven by residual anger over the Suez Crisis and a desire to check Nasser's rising influence in the region. Because both opposed America's flirtation with Nasser, the Eisenhower administration opted to cut both off from details of their internal deliberations at an early stage. This clearly disputes Blackwell's argument that Britain and the United States held a "common perception" of the communist threat to Iraq during this period.[162]

The Eisenhower administration's fear of communism in Iraq peaked in the spring of 1959 following the crushing of the nationalists after the Mosul rising. The Eisenhower administration was again split on how to respond. Like before, Eisenhower wanted to work with Nasser, but Allen Dulles was uncertain that this would work, and the State Department worried that Nasser's actions could push Qasim further toward the Soviets. This uncertainty led the NSC to establish the SCI to assess America's options and prevent a communist takeover. However, it was evident that the SCI was just as split over how to act as the NSC was, with the State Department preferring a cautious approach, while CIA and the JCS wanted to take aggressive action. Even so, the SCI devised a wide range of options, including covert and military action, which "horrified" the US ambassador to Iraq, John Jernegan. He eventually persuaded the administration to instead press Nasser into modifying his propaganda campaign against Iraq to focus not on Qasim but the communists, and to continue engaging in contingency planning for the possibility of a communist takeover. The cautious approach won out and proved successful in the long term, especially after the ICP contributed to a coup attempt and massacre at Kirkuk in July, which led Qasim to move against it. With the communist threat apparently checked by 1960, Iraq endured a period of relative stability, leading US officials to conclude that the crisis was over.

It is clear from the evidence presented here that America's decisions and actions throughout 1958–60 were driven by its perception of the Soviet Union's influence inside Iraq.[163] As the Soviets appeared to gain influence over the Qasim regime, the United States took clear steps to counter it, as dictated by its established containment strategy. From late 1958 Washington clearly viewed Baghdad as part of

its Cold War competition with Moscow and was determined to block any further Soviet advances. These steps, which were aimed at changing the political outlook of Iraq, especially vis-à-vis the Cold War, constitute a superpower intervention. It has also shown that Britain and the United States did not share a "common perception" of the communist threat and that claims that America was involved in the Ba'th Party's assassination attempt on Qasim in October 1959 cannot be substantiated from the primary evidence.[164]

2

Kennedy and the Qasim Regime: January 1961–February 1963

The coming to power of John F. Kennedy's administration occurred during a period of great transition in terms of both American and Soviet policies toward the Cold War, especially in the Third World. When Kennedy came to office he brought with him a group of foreign policymakers who placed great emphasis on the value of academia. In part, this was driven by Kennedy's appointment of a well-known economics professor, Walt Rostow, briefly as his deputy national security advisor and then as the head of the State Department's Policy Planning Council. The previous year, Rostow had impressed Kennedy with his book, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, which introduced a theoretical model for development now known as the modernization theory.[1] As Westad points out, this theory posited that the fight against communism in the Third World should focus on tackling problems like hunger and social dislocation, improving education and health care, and promoting social reform and democracy, to show that "development intervention was an alternative to military intervention."[2] The central idea was that an emphasis on economic development assistance, whether the recipients be US allies or not, provided the best means of stabilizing the area and the best defense against the Soviet threat.[3]

In assessing the Kennedy administration's policies toward Iraq during its first two years, what becomes clear is that the United States initially applied Rostow's development model wholeheartedly to Iraq, opting to promote policies aimed at improving relations over taking overtly hostile actions. However, this would eventually have to be abandoned in response to Iraq's increasing instability over 1961–62 and especially after the overthrow of the Abd al-Karim Qasim regime in February 1963, an action that would turn Iraq once again into a Cold War battleground.

The Global Cold War

Right around the time that Kennedy came to power the Soviet Union's policies toward the Third World were also undergoing a major shift. According to Golan,

prior to Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet policy toward the Third World was premised on a bipolar—for us or against us—view of the world and was designed to weaken the power of the West, particularly Britain, and "lay the ground world for what he perceived as the inevitable battle between the Soviet Union and its wartime allies." However, with Stalin's death and the rise of Nikita Khrushchev to power, the Soviet Union reevaluated this approach and abandoned Stalin's tactics in favor of the policy known as "peaceful coexistence," which, while not disputing the existence of a geopolitical competition between the capitalist West and the socialist East, believed that East–West contest should be "less provocative, less doctrinaire, and more pragmatic." In turn, the new Soviet government began to see nonalignment or neutrality in the Cold War as a rejection of the West, and therefore as an outcome that was in Moscow's interests in its zero-sum contest with Washington.[4] To this end, in the early 1960s, the Soviets began championing national liberation movements throughout the Third World, and the Middle East was no exception. This, in turn, would lead to a series of superpower interventions in Iraq that would destabilize the country and transform it into a Cold War battleground.

The shift in Soviet policy became apparent in late 1960 (just before Kennedy took office), when Khrushchev gave a speech at the UN General Assembly that laid out his newfound support for national liberation movements in the Third World. Khrushchev argued that colonialism had directly undermined the industrial development of the Third World and that these movements were a by-product of the skewed orientation of the global economy, which benefited the industrial powers at the expense of the underdeveloped Third World.[5] The Soviet Union then introduced a resolution to the United Nation General Assembly calling for the immediate independence of all remaining colonies, which was passed in December 1960.[6] A few weeks later, in January 1961, Khrushchev elaborated on his views in a private meeting with Soviet officials. He argued that supporting wars of national liberation was in the Soviet Union's interests, citing Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba as prime examples where it should provide assistance.[7] Despite Khrushchev's desire for a policy of peaceful coexistence, the shift in Soviet policy toward supporting national liberation movements set the stage for further conflict with the United States. This contest would culminate in the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation, until calmer heads eventually prevailed.

It is in this context that the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq during the second half of the Qasim regime must be placed. What is clear is that Kennedy's policies toward Iraq were a by-product of both the shift in US policy toward modernization theory and the need to challenge the Soviet Union's newfound desire to support national liberation movements. As a State Department analysis observed, the Kennedy administration "hoped that by playing a major role [in the region], largely in economic aid, [the US] could counteract Soviet influence and keep the Middle East countries friendly toward the [US] or at least neutral."[8]

Despite a brief period of stability that prevailed in 1960, throughout 1961–62, Iraq became embroiled in a series of major crises, which eventually culminated

in Qasim's overthrow by the Ba'th Party in February 1963. However, an examination of the available record reveals that unlike other contemporary Cold War battlegrounds—like Berlin, Vietnam, or Cuba—during the 1961–62 period, the Kennedy administration did not initially view Iraq as a significant Cold War contest. This led to a number of poor decisions, like the premature disestablishment of the SCI, the failure to allocate adequate resources to assess the ongoing situation, and the downplaying of a series of indicators that suggested that Qasim's actions actually posed a threat to vital US interests in the region. Of these, the disestablishment of the SCI was the most costly error of judgment and it would take three successive crises in 1961—the Kuwait Crisis in June, the outbreak of the Kurdish War in September, and the expropriation of the IPC's concessionary holding in December—and Iraq downgrading diplomatic relations with the United States unilaterally in June 1962 before senior Kennedy administration officials realized that Iraq required much more attention than it was actually receiving. At this point, the White House accepted the State Department's warnings retroactively and adopted an aggressive multi-prong response, which included both diplomatic pressure and covert action. These interventions only contributed to the further destabilization of Iraq and helped pave the way for Qasim's eventual overthrow.

The Three Crises

On January 23, 1961, Phillip Halla, the NSC staff member who served as the SCI's secretary, sent James Lay, the NSC's executive secretary, a memo outlining the debate surrounding the question of whether to disestablish the SCI or not. Key arguments for disestablishment were that no meeting had been held since March 1960, Iraq appeared to have stabilized, and the communist threat was no longer as menacing as Cuba, Laos, or Vietnam, and therefore, did not necessitate a special committee. However, the SCI's principal members held mixed views. While the Department of Defense (DOD) had no firm opinion, the State Department and CIA favored continuing the committee because it had allowed US officials to monitor events in a troublesome country. Another reason for the SCI's continuation, according to one CIA official, was that it provided a forum where ideas could be advanced with a better chance of acceptance than in bilateral talks with the State Department alone. Furthermore, because of Iraq's ongoing instability, the CIA felt that it was important to have an interagency mechanism in place to respond rapidly in the event of renewed crisis. Finally, just because the communist threat had subsided, the CIA was not yet convinced it was gone altogether. Halla then noted that a recent SNIE had concluded that Qasim still faced threats from both pro-Nasser Arab nationalists and the military, which meant that a successful coup could once again provide communist elements in Iraq an opportunity to seize power. Despite these valid arguments, the committee was doomed when Kennedy's national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, indicated that he did not see the relevance of keeping the committee in existence. Within days of Kennedy's presidential inauguration the White House disestablished the SCI.[9] This was a clear mistake that would undermine America's policy toward Iraq.

The first indication that the disestablishment of the SCI was a mistake occurred on June 25, 1961, when Qasim revived Iraq's long-standing claim to Kuwait, declaring that it was "an indivisible part of Iraq" and mobilizing troops along the border. The catalyst for this seemingly irrational action was that a few days earlier, on June 19, Britain had granted Kuwait independence and had begun withdrawing its military forces. There was nothing new about Iraq's claim to Kuwait. The State Department officials at the time noted that Qasim was "advancing an old Iraqi claim, but one that has not in the past received much support from other Arab states and has had no recognition from the world at large."[10] To the British, Qasim's move smarted. They had backed Qasim during his contest with Nasser by exposing the Rashid Ali plot in late 1958, a move that had clearly blown back on them. America's interests in Kuwait were not nearly as significant as Britain's. For instance, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) was owned equally by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC)—later renamed British Petroleum—and the US-owned Gulf Oil Company. Given the British government's 50 percent stake in the AIOC, this meant that it also held a 25 percent stake in the KOC. According to Ashton, about 40 percent of Britain's oil supplies came from Kuwait, and in return, the Emir had invested nearly £300 million in the British economy.[11] This was not an insignificant investment. Furthermore, as Fain points out, by 1961, Britain's postwar economic viability was dependent on not just the importation of cheap Kuwaiti oil but foreign exchange earnings generated from the KOC's continued profitability.[12]

The US response to the Kuwait Crisis was "low-key" by comparison to Britain's.[13] As Fain observed, the Kennedy administration was hesitant about "identification with British action in Kuwait" because it could jeopardize the image "of a progressive anti-colonial power trying to work productively with Arab nationalism."[14] During a NSC meeting on June 29, Kennedy approved giving "full political and logistic support, if required, to the United Kingdom in connection with certain actions it is taking to forestall any Iraq attempt to take over Kuwait by force." In a message sent to the British, Secretary of State Dean Rusk indicated that the United States was "hopeful that given time to work political forces among the Arabs will dissuade Qasim from committing himself to an unfortunate course of action with unpredictable consequences."[15] In other words, the Kennedy administration was hoping to work with Nasser to resolve the crisis. To prevent an Iraqi incursion, Britain sent 5,000 troops to Kuwait on July 1, in what was known as *Operation Vantage*, and Kennedy dispatched a US Navy task force toward Bahrain, only to recall it when the situation stabilized following the British intervention.[16] Diplomatically, the United States preferred to take the matter to the UN, believing that a multilateral framework would allow the Arab states to support efforts to counter Qasim without feeling coerced.[17] The British agreed and took the matter to the Security Council on July 1 but the resolution was vetoed by the Soviet Union, a move that alarmed policymakers in Washington.[18]

The crisis was not fully resolved until October when the British forces withdrew and were replaced by a 4,000-strong Arab League force.[19] In addition, a former CIA official claims that Qasim was paid a $50–60 million bribe in exchange

for allowing Britain to withdraw.[20] Where this money came from is unknown, though Robert Komer, a senior NSC staff member and Kennedy's advisor on Middle Eastern affairs, and Ambassador Jernegan had concluded in December 1961, "Kuwait's independence can only be assured if [the] Ruler uses his fantastic oil revenues to buy support from other Arab leaders, particularly Nasser and Jordanians." In other words, Kuwait would need to buy its continued safety.[21] The Kennedy administration's preference to defer to Britain on regional matters, like the Kuwait Crisis, underscores the low priority the Gulf region was for the United States.

Just as the Kuwait crisis was unfolding in the south of Iraq, a second crisis was brewing in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. After returning from exile in 1958, Qasim had promised Mulla Mustafa Barzani that he would implement Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq. However, by 1961, the government had taken no steps toward implementing this program, prompting Barzani to leave Baghdad earlier in the year to return to his family's stronghold in the north. Before long, age-old rivalries and blood feuds led to skirmishes with rival tribes. On April 13, the US Intelligence Board warned Allen Dulles—who Kennedy maintained in his position as the CIA director until November 1961—"the laxity of the Qasim regime had permitted long-standing tribal feuds to rise to the surface, and that the chances of rioting in the towns and some intertribal fighting on a modest scale were better than even." This warning went unheeded and, as the CIA later acknowledged, was far "too optimistic."[22]

Throughout the summer of 1961, tensions in Kurdistan escalated and by late June, one US official described northern Iraq as, "bordering on Ottoman Empire anarchy."[23] Starting in mid-July, Barzani returned to the north and began to settle old scores with neighboring tribes, which had usurped Barzani territory while he had been in exile in the Soviet Union.[24] Despite the escalation of violence, the Iraqi government remained passive.[25] Due to the regime's inaction, in mid-August, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)—a leftist, nationalist political party founded in Mahabad, Iran, in 1946—sent Qasim a "sharply worded" letter demanding the removal of "unfriendly Arab officials" and government troops from the region; the transfer of Kurdish officials back to the north; that Kurdish be used as the official language in the Kurdish areas; political freedom; and the reinstatement of Kurdish newspapers.[26] As a CIA official, who was stationed in the region at the time, later recalled, this declaration marked the point when war between Iraq and the Kurds was inevitable.[27]

Throughout August, US officials in Iran and Iraq warned the State Department that a rebellion was about to break out in Iraqi Kurdistan and could destabilize the entire region. Few in Washington took any notice. On August 5, the US Consulate in Tabriz warned that Iran and Turkey had begun arming Barzani's rivals and were encouraging them to attack.[28] When this occurred, it was Barzani who emerged victorious, making him the dominant military power in the north.[29] Within days, the US Embassy in Baghdad reported that senior Iraqi officials were pondering whether an "effective deterrent" would be to bomb Kurdish villages.[30] On August 31, US officials in Baghdad sent Washington a detailed report warning that some Kurds were planning actions aimed at provoking a military

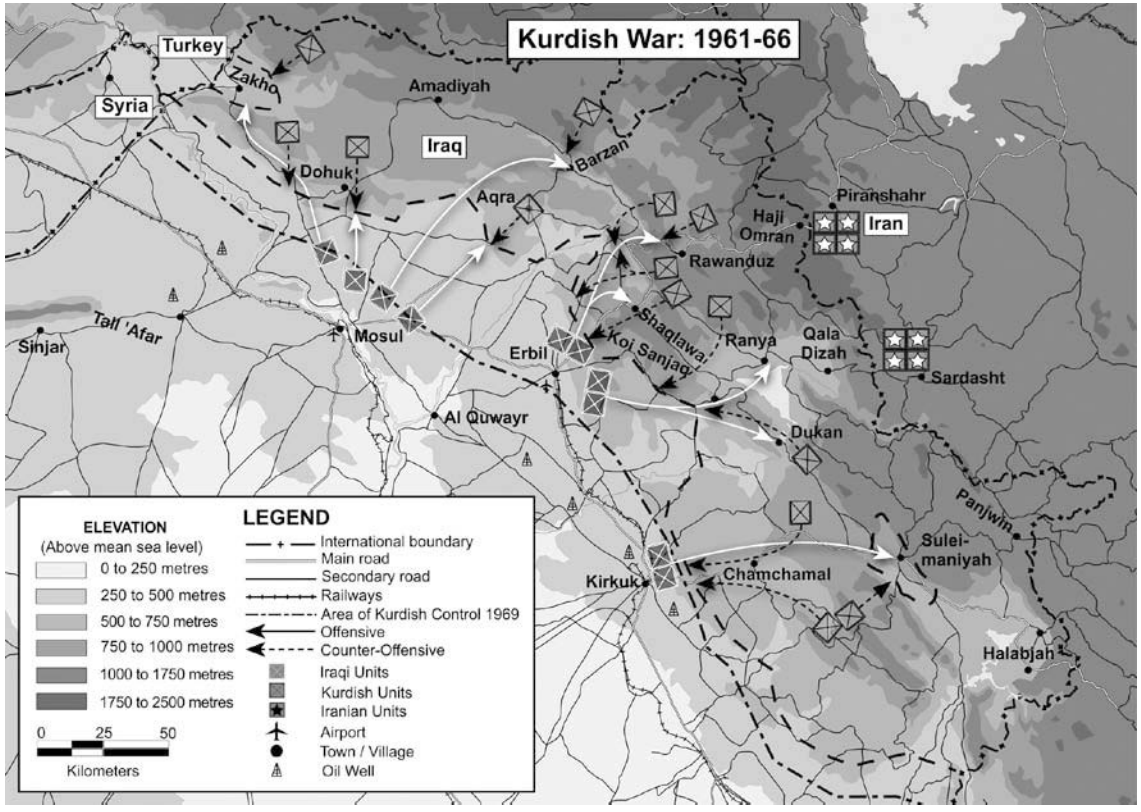
response from the Iraqi regime, which could then be used to justify warfare in self-defense and to internationalize their plight.[31]

At the start of September 1961, US officials in Tabriz reported a group of Kurds, who were not affiliated with Barzani, had seized control of a key road leading to the Iranian boarder. This development presented the Iraqi regime with two options: (1) granting the Kurds autonomy or (2) dealing with them by force.[32] Despite the range of reports filtering in to Washington throughout August and early September, US policymakers continued to ignore these warnings. Frustrated, a CIA official stationed in Tabriz, who had sent CIA headquarters a warning about an imminent insurrection in northern Iraq, made some inquiries when he heard nothing back. He learned that his warning had not been disseminated to senior officials because "analysts in Washington thought it improbable that a band of ill-armed tribesmen could challenge a modern army."[33] Unsatisfied with this conclusion, he pressed senior CIA officials to circulate a staff memorandum on September 13, but by then the insurrection had already begun.[34]

On September 10, a group of non-Barzani Kurds ambushed and massacred an Iraqi army column.[35] Fighting was so intense that the IAF was called in to save the beleaguered troops.[36] Another ambush occurred 2 days later, killing 23,[37] and when faced with the loss of the north, Qasim ordered the mobilization of ground and air forces. On September 14, the IAF commenced the systematic bombing of the north, targeting Kurdish villages.[38] Up to this point, Barzani had managed to stay out of the conflict, but this changed on September 19 when Qasim ordered the bombing of Barzani.[39] In response, Barzani joined the fight, bringing with him his in-depth knowledge of guerrilla warfare and a cadre of Soviet-trained, seasoned warriors.[40]

Just as the revolt began, the Kennedy administration was preoccupied with events elsewhere, in Europe. The Soviets had just sparked the Berlin Crisis with the construction of the Berlin Wall. At that time, officials in Washington had little reason to suspect that the outbreak of the Kurdish War and the Berlin Crisis were connected, when in fact they were. According to Vladislav Zubok, the Kurdish uprising, while indigenous, fit with a Soviet strategy devised in July 1961 that was aimed at distracting the United States and its allies from its maneuvering in Berlin. In an article published in 1994, Zubok cites a memo from KGB chief Alexander Shelepin to Premier Khrushchev on July 29, 1961, which recommended creating crises "in various areas of the world which would favor dispersion of attention and forces by the USA and their satellites, and would tie them down during the settlement of the question of a German peace treaty and West Berlin."[41]

After listing the options for causing trouble in the rest of the world, Shelepin turned to the Middle East. He proposed a plan aimed at causing "uncertainty in government circles of the USA, England, Turkey, and Iran about the stability of their positions in the Middle and Near East" by reviving the KGB's old connections to Barzani, and activating the nationalist movements within the Kurdish populations of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey with the aim of creating "an independent Kurdistan that would include the provinces of aforementioned countries." Just as in 1946, Shelepin believed that a push for an independent Kurdistan would



MAP 2.1 Kurdish War: 1961–66.[42]

"evoke serious concern among Western powers and first of all in England regarding [its access to] oil in Iraq and Iran, and also in the [US] regarding its military bases in Turkey." It would also create difficulties for Qasim, "who [had] begun to conduct a pro-Western policy, especially in recent time," a clear reference to his crackdown on Iraq's communists in 1960. To this end, Shelepin proposed providing Barzani with both arms and money and encouraging him to revolt.[43] While this account fits with the narrative that followed, the Soviet scheme failed to anticipate that the Kennedy administration was not interested in Iraq or its Kurdish population, nor did it realize that Barzani neither trusted the Soviets nor intended to act as their agent.

Nevertheless, throughout the fall of 1961, both the Qasim regime and the Kurds tried to portray the conflict in Cold War terms. For instance, at a press conference on September 23, Qasim sought to implicate the United States in the revolt, describing the Kurds of being "American stooges," while exonerating the Soviet Union of any wrongdoing.[44] Meanwhile, in early October, a group of Kurds approached the US Embassy in Baghdad seeking assistance in fighting the regime. This was the first instance of such a request—many more would happen over the course of the 14-year war. During the meeting, the Kurds argued that the United States had a moral obligation to help the Kurds since it "supports causes of liberty and justice" and suggested that an independent Kurdistan would be a "bulwark against the Soviet Union." To this, the embassy officer, James Atkins, discouraged the Kurds from revolting and said that as a matter of policy the United States could not involve itself in Iraq's internal affairs, a policy that would be applied to the Kurdish War until 1972.[45] Nevertheless, these two examples show how at an early stage both Qasim and the Kurds sought—unsuccessfully—to portray the conflict in Cold War terms to win external support for their position.

The annual fighting season in Kurdistan always ended with the onset of winter. The harsh wintery conditions high up in the Zagros Mountains made them unsuited for conventional warfare, but ideal for the guerrilla, alpine warfare operations, of which the Kurds were masters. So when Iraq's offensive ground to a halt in the autumn, the Kurds began to extract their revenge.[46] By late November, Barzani had cut off the remaining Iraqi forces, inflicted heavy losses, and captured the equipment of at least two Iraqi regiments.[47] Fighting continued into 1962, and by the end of March, Barzani was in firm control of all of Iraqi Kurdistan, though he held off taking major cities, such as Suleimaniya, Erbil, or Mosul, out of fear of government retaliation against civilians.[48]

Throughout this period, a clear US policy toward the conflict was absent. While Hahn explains that the Kennedy administration's muted response to the Kurdish War stemmed from a "desire to maintain sound relations with Baghdad,"[49] the reality was that the United States did not view Iraq or the Kurdish War as relevant in terms of the Cold War, particularly at a time when crises in Berlin, Cuba, Vietnam, or even Kuwait were a greater priority.

The third, and perhaps most significant crisis from an American perspective, occurred in December 1961, when the Iraqi regime passed Public Law 80, which restricted the IPC's concessionary area (i.e., the area in which the company

could pump oil) to areas where oil was actually being produced. In effect, Iraq expropriated 99.5 percent of the IPC's concession.[50] The catalyst for Iraq's aggressive action related to the Kuwaiti question. On November 30, Egypt sponsored a Security Council resolution requesting Kuwait's admittance to the UN as a member state. At that time, Iraq warned that it would downgrade diplomatic relations with any state recognizing Kuwait. Few took the threat seriously, including the United States, which had already established relations. At the UN, the United States supported Egypt's resolution, but it came to nothing when the Soviets vetoed it, an act US officials believed was designed to gain favor with Baghdad.[51] Because of Western support for the Kuwait resolution at the UN, the Iraqi regime passed Public Law 80 as a retaliatory measure. This law essentially resolved an ongoing dispute Iraq had had with the ICP after talks had broken down in mid-October. Since then, the regime had been threatening "legal action" and Kuwait's bid at the UN gave a perfect reason to act.[52]

Unsurprisingly, US officials were alarmed by Iraq's expropriation of the IPC concessionary area and the Soviet veto at the UN, since both moves suggested a degree of coordination. This prompted the assistant secretary of state for NEA, Phillips Talbot, to send Under Secretary of State George Ball a memo calling attention to the situation on December 18. While noting that Iraq had been drifting away from the Soviets since early 1960, Talbot suggested that this trend had reversed and "a new phase" in the Soviet-Iraqi relations "may have been opened." He warned, "Iraq has moved toward the Soviet Bloc in the conduct of Iraqi political and economic affairs and in its propaganda position." Another troubling sign was that the Iraqi regime had "taken several steps" to strengthen the communists' internal position, which led Talbot to conclude, "the situation in Iraq…appears to be returning to something like the post-revolutionary period in 1958 and 1959, during which there was great alarm that Iraq was going communist." Even so, Talbot was convinced that maintaining a policy of engagement with the regime was vital and US oil firms, which held a considerable stake in the company,[53] could "retaliate against and place other pressures on Iraq." To this, Talbot warned:

> [The US] must resist firmly all efforts to force us to undertake intervention of any type in the internal affairs of Iraq unless and until it is clear that the domestic communists stand to gain control of Iraq in absence of such intervention.[54]

This was because, "short of direct military action, whether by US forces alone or in conjunction with others or by Iraq's neighbors to the West (Turkey, Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia), [the US lacked] effective means of achieving a reversal in Iraqi policy." In short, Talbot's memo represented a clear warning to his superiors that they needed to start paying attention to the situation in Iraq.[55]

A few days later, Jernegan cabled the State Department to express his concern about the lack of interest in Washington over Iraq. At this point, Qasim was still rattling sabers over Kuwait, had become embroiled in a civil war with the Kurds, and his recent move against the ICP was a direct threat to US economic interests. Taken together, this all revealed the limits of British power in

the region. Jernegan was especially concerned about Kuwait, where the Soviet Union's veto of Kuwait's admission to the UN had prompted Nasser to threaten to withdraw his forces from the Arab League peacekeeping force. As a result, Jernegan warned, the United States was "in grave danger [of] being drawn into costly and politically disastrous situation over Kuwait." Moreover, he feared, the "thought of British troops fighting Arabs on Arab soil with moral and political (if not military) support of US particularly disturbs me" and would be a "politically retrograde step" that would undermine the Arab League's responsibility to protect Kuwait. In short, Jernegan felt that American support for British actions in Kuwait was bound to have considerable blowback on US interests in the region, as evidenced by Iraq's nationalization of the IPC concessionary holding. He believed that Nasser was the key to solving this problem, but this would come at a cost. To this end, he argued that the ruler of Kuwait must "be made to realize that nothing less than major and continuing [financial] contribution to [the development of] other Arab states (particularly oil have-nots such as Jordan and UAR) will in long run save Kuwait from total absorption by one of its neighbors." Jernegan's conclusion was blunt: "The West can no longer afford present policy of reliance on British military protection, which seems to be most attractive one to greedy, short-sighted Shaikhs. Under circumstances it behooves us to seize initiative while time (now very short) remains."[56]

On December 29, Komer brought Jernegan's analysis to Bundy's attention, describing it as "dead right" and asking that he pass it on to President Kennedy. He felt that the Iraqi situation in Iraq was steadily deteriorating and warned of "other potentially serious problems [looming] on the horizon." There was widespread consensus that Qasim was isolated, amid rumors of a nationalist coup. Should this happen, Komer felt that the United States faced a problem of how to approach a new regime, recommending the United States be "forthcoming in effort to counteract Soviet influence and get Iraq back on more neutral keel." On the IPC concessionary nationalization, Komer worried that a complete cessation of oil production—a move the IPC was seriously considering—"would have violent repercussions and might lead [Qasim] to grab Kuwait or throw himself into Russian arms." Neither outcome was in America's interests. If Qasim were to seize Kuwait, for instance, he would have a "stranglehold" on Middle Eastern oil production, which would only benefit the Soviets. Traditionally, Komer added, "our tendency has been to sit back and regard IPC, Kuwait and even Iraq as UK baby"; however, the American financial stake in both the IPC and the KOC changes things. Given this, Komer believed and agreed with Jernegan's assessment that Nasser still held the key to resolving these problems. Nasser had no love for Qasim and had backed numerous plots against him in the past. At the same time, Komer added that Nasser also "stands to lose if Kuwaiti oil disappears into Iraqi's maw instead of his coffers." In light of this, Komer asked Bundy to raise the issue with President Kennedy and help stir the State Department out of its usual "wait and see" policy toward Iraq.[57]

It is clear that Bundy agreed with Komer's recommendations. On December 30, he asked the White House Situation Room to pass Jernegan's cable on to President Kennedy at his residence in Palm Beach. Attached to the cable was a note from

Bundy, which read: "Jernegan's message seems persuasive to Komer and me, and with your approval I would like to press State [Department] for action in this direction, using your interest as a stick. I would add that [the department] should of course lay out a plan for action in cooperation with British if possible, but our own interests, oil and other, are very directly involved."[58] This was significant, because it underscored the importance of America's oil interests in Iraq and Kuwait, but it would take another two months before something actually came of this.[59]

The Kennedy administration's approach to the three crises of 1961 underscores an abandonment of the engagement element of the Eisenhower administration's "wait and see" policy. At a time when the Kennedy administration was taking a hard line on Soviet subversion elsewhere, its low-key response to the Kuwait Crisis, the Kurdish War, and the IPC's nationalization seems a bit perplexing. There are three plausible explanations for this. First, at the time of the Iraqi crises, the Kennedy administration was intensely focused on what it perceived as the more important Cold War contests in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. Second, the Kennedy administration clearly viewed Iraq as part of the British sphere of influence and was therefore hesitant about involving itself more closely. Finally, by the time Iraq had again become relevant in terms of the Cold War, the Kennedy administration was already in the process of developing an interagency group focusing on problems just of this kind, known as the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency or CI). However, the lack of interest in Washington was affecting America's economic interests in Iraq and Kuwait, prompting Jernegan to send a sharply worded cable to Washington, aimed at convincing the White House to abandon its "wait and see" policy and consider taking direct action against Iraq. A shift in US policy toward Iraq was long overdue.

From Disinterest to Engagement

From early 1962 onward, the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq shifted away from the Eisenhower administration's "wait and see" policy to one of engagement and covert action. This was driven by two factors. First, recognition among senior Kennedy administration officials of the need to adopt a more aggressive policy to counter Soviet moves in Europe and the Third World (i.e., Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East). Second, Iraq's expropriation of the IPC's concessionary holding convinced the Kennedy administration that the Qasim regime posed a direct threat to US economic interests. These conclusions led to the adoption of a dual-track approach (i.e., overt and covert) to Iraq, where the State Department reassessed its policy toward Iraq, focusing on engagement, fostering friendly relations, and keeping open the possibility of improving relations with the troublesome regime, while the CIA sought Qasim's overthrow and his replacement with a regime more friendly to US interests. This argument challenges Hahn's assertion that the Kennedy administration "[resisted] any temptation to intervene covertly against Qasim."[60]

It was not until early 1962 that the White House began to recognize Iraq's significance in terms of American economic interests and the Cold War. For

instance, despite the flurry of activity surrounding the IPC's expropriation at the end of 1961, this issue was all but forgotten until mid-February 1962 when Komer asked Talbot to bring him up to speed on Iraq. Given that no new developments had happened inside Iraq since December, the request seemed a bit abrupt. Regardless, Talbot forwarded his memo from December to the White House on February 15, though nothing substantive came of it.[61]

In April 1962, after months of review, the Department of State issued new policy guidelines for Iraq. America's interests consisted of preserving Iraq's position outside the Soviet bloc; continuing the availability of Iraq's oil to noncommunist consumers; and maintaining correct relations with the Iraqi government. In the short term, the United States wanted to (1) expand private and commercial ties with Iraq, including the provision of competent design and construction contractors, and become a purchaser of Iraqi exports; (2) serve as Iraq's primary source of technical, cultural, and social principles and techniques; and (3) convince Iraq to help "protect friendly nations from covert or overt aggression from external sources without impingements on national sovereignty." In the long term, the United States wished to see a "progressive government devoting itself to peaceful domestic and regional development and relations, mindful of, and helpful in, achieving the basic Western aims in international affairs."[62]

To achieve these objectives, the State Department outlined political, psychological, economic, and military lines of action. Politically, the United States had to convince Iraq that its policy was based on friendship and mutual interests and was capable of helping to improve Iraq's economic and social development under conditions that would maintain its sovereignty. The United States also needed to encourage Iraq to seek a mutually acceptable solution to its border dispute with Iran over the Shatt al-Arab waterway—an issue that would be a major source of friction in Iran-Iraq relations. On the question of Kuwait, the United States would maintain its policy of recognition and encourage Arab states to "make clear to Iraq the risks of any aggression aimed at seizing Kuwait's territory." Psychologically, the United States needed to take steps to restore Iraq's confidence in America by increasing personal contacts, cultural activities (English-language and exchange programs), and expanding the USIS library in Baghdad. Economically, the United States would respond favorably to any Iraqi requests for Western assistance, with an emphasis on promoting "economic growth and the welfare of the populace and not toward the security of the regime." Finally, on military measures, the United States should consider, "on its merits, each request by Iraq for the purchase of military equipment, including spare parts and replacement items" and respond "affirmatively when possible if the Iraqis request or exhibit serious interest in expanded training of Iraqi military personnel in the [US]." In sum, the new policy was focused on improving relations, convincing Iraq that the United States was not hostile to its interests, expanding cultural contacts to develop a basis for mutual understanding, and providing military assistance should Iraq wish to do so. Through these cautious steps, the State Department believed that US interests in Iraq would be maintained, while leaving open the possibility for improvement if desired.[63]

But just as the State Department was issuing its guidelines, the Kennedy administration was pivoting toward a second track in its approach toward Iraq: covert action. The CIA's attention focused on the two elements: the Ba'th Party and Iraq's military. While US officials believed that the Ba'th was anticommunist and anti-imperialist, it was not necessarily opposed to the West.[64] The CIA first developed an interest in the Ba'th Party around 1961. According to James Critchfield, a former chief of the CIA's Near East Division:

> In 1961 and 1962, [the CIA] increased [its] interest in the Ba'th—not to actively support it—but politically and intellectually, we found the Ba'ath interesting. We found it particularly active in Iraq. Our analysis of the Ba'ath was that it was comparatively moderate at that time, and that the [US] could easily adjust to and support its policies. So we watched the Ba'ath's long, slow preparation to take control. They planned to do it several times, and postponed it.[65]

Henry Rositzke, a 25-year veteran of the CIA's Directorate of Operation, supports this claim. In his memoir, he claimed that the CIA had developed assets within the Ba'th Party during the early 1960s:

> CIA sources were in a perfect position to follow each step of Ba'ath preparations for the Iraqi coup, which focused on making contacts with military and civilian leaders in Baghdad. The CIA's major source, in an ideal catbird seat, reported the exact time of the coup and provided a list of the new cabinet members.[66]

A third CIA official, Jack O'Connell, the CIA station chief in Amman from 1963 to 1971, claimed that the CIA had penetrated the Iraqi wing of the Ba'th Party in the early 1960s,[67] indicating that he was the case officer of a source close to the Iraqi Ba'th.[68] Therefore, by at least 1961, the CIA was interested in the Ba'th Party and had cultivated at least one high-level asset providing it with intelligence in its plans.

The CIA also targeted Iraq's military for intelligence on its Soviet-made weapons systems and to find a suitable replacement for Qasim. In the early 1960s, the CIA managed to penetrate a top-secret Iraqi-Soviet surface-to-air missile project, which offered valuable insight into the Soviet Union's ballistic missile program.[69] According to a CIA operations officer stationed in Iran during the early 1960s, in the spring of 1962, the White House ordered the CIA to commence planning for Qasim's overthrow. The agency entrusted Archie Roosevelt, Jr., with the operation.[70] Roger Morris, a former NSC staffer from the Johnson and Nixon administrations, confirmed Roosevelt's role in the operation. In an article, Morris claimed to have heard CIA officers speak openly about their ties to the Iraqi Ba'th Party.[71] While the CIA was interested in the Ba'th Party, the military was in fact its primary focus.[72]

Given the State Department's new policy guidelines and the testimony of a wide range of CIA officials, it is clear that in the spring of 1962 the United States was employing a dual-track policy toward Iraq, consisting of both diplomatic engagement and covert action.

Reassessing Iraq

In early May 1962, US officials became concerned that the situation in Iraq was destabilizing rapidly and began to contingency plan for Qasim's eventual overthrow. While there is no question the NEA was monitoring Iraq closely, the numerous warnings sent up the line did not appear to be receiving the necessary attention. As a consequence, the Kennedy administration was caught completely off guard in June when Iraq expelled the US ambassador and downgraded its relations, though not severing diplomatic ties altogether.

On May 3, the NEA circulated a report concluding that there had "never been a period" since the 1958 coup that Qasim's "overthrow has not been plotted by dissident elements." At this point, the NEA observed, Qasim was "disliked, hated and privately ridiculed by almost all sections of the Iraqi public, including apparently, growing segments of the Army." The NEA identified five contingencies. First, should Qasim be overthrown by nationalists judged to be in control of the country with support from the public, the United States should consider prompt recognition. Second, should the Ba'th Party seize power, the United States would delay recognition until it was satisfied that it was in control of the country. Third, should the Kurds withhold support for a nationalist or Ba'thist government and demand autonomy within Iraq, the United States should recognize the new government on the basis of the same criteria to avoid any appearance of support for Kurdish claims. Fourth, should a protracted internal conflict between communist and noncommunist elements occur, the United States should consider covert support to anticommunist elements in consultation with the British, while avoiding intervention by the United States or any other Western power, including Turkey and Iran. The NEA also recognized the need to keep Nasser apprised of any moves. Finally, if communists seized power, the United States had to determine "how best to channel or encourage what would in all probability be a reaction of deep alarm by Iraq's neighbors." This would include taking the matter to the UN. This report underscores how serious the NEA's concerns were, and yet remarkably, this report, like previous warnings on Iraq, took nearly two months to reach the White House and, like before, it was only in response to a direct request for information.[73]

The situation took a precarious turn toward the end of May when the United States learned that Iran was reconsidering its policy toward the Kurds, who were still fighting the Iraqi army. This led the State Department to warn its embassy in Tehran on May 24 of "indications that important elements in the Government of Iran . . . may be considering a change in basic Iranian policy from the past and present line of half-hearted opposition to the Kurdish rebellion to one of covert cooperation with the rebels." It ordered the embassy to "approach the Iranian Government at any appropriate level (including the Foreign Office, SAVAK, or the military) and convey informally" that the United States was "unable to visualize any possible Iranian interests to be served by taking sides in a dispute between [the] Government [of] Iraq and Iraqi Kurds." While recognizing Iran's "almost uncontrollable . . . impulse to join the winning side of any conflict," the State Department believed "interference on either side . . . portends more of danger

than of advantage to the basic interests of Iran or the US." Helping the Kurds, the department felt, would only arouse unnecessary antagonism with Iraq, might be considered unwelcome by both belligerents, and was not in Iran's interests, given its sizeable Kurdish minority. The department concluded:

> Under the circumstances, it would appear that a policy of strict neutrality and watchful waiting would be more advantageous to Iran than would a commitment, overt or covert, to interference. A policy of calculated inaction would have the positive advantage of leaving Iran a maximum freedom of maneuver in a rapidly changing situation.[74]

Two days later, the embassy reported that it had raised the matter with the foreign ministry, which "was in complete agreement" with the US position. Later, Iran's shah—or king—Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, told the British that Iran's "Kurdish policy [had] been re-assessed and non-intervention re-affirmed," an indication that he had accepted US advice.[75]

This development raises a number of important questions about both Iranian and US policies. What brought about Iran's sudden interest in the Kurds? Why, after years of viewing Barzani as a threat and supporting anti-Barzani forces,[76] did the Shah suddenly decide to change his mind? Equally so, in light of the deteriorating situation in Iraq and the NEA's concern that Qasim's regime was in danger, why did the Kennedy administration respond so negatively to the idea of Iran supporting the Kurds? Viewed from Iran, helping the Kurds was a useful means of destabilizing Iraq, a country that had historically been its only local challenger for regional hegemony. But viewed from Washington, the Kurds maintained links with Moscow—albeit tenuous—and held nationalist ambitions that threatened Iran and Turkey, two of America's closest regional allies. Therefore, the United States believed that any support for the Kurds, even from an ally like Iran, would advance Moscow's regional designs and was therefore anathema to American interests.

Just as Iran was considering helping the Kurds, a crisis occurred in US-Iraqi relations. On June 2, Iraq's Foreign Minister Hashim Jawad called on the US Embassy to inform Ambassador Jernegan that Iraq was recalling its ambassador from Washington and that he was required to leave.[77] The catalyst for the decision was Kennedy's acceptance of the new Kuwaiti ambassador's credentials the previous day, an act that the Iraqis had long warned the US government would lead to the severing of relations.[78] There is no question that despite Iraq's numerous warnings, the downgrading of diplomatic relations caught the Kennedy administration completely by surprise. In a letter to Kennedy explaining the break, Komer stressed his embarrassment.

> My face is exceedingly red over failing to let you know that receiving the Kuwait Ambassador would trigger the recall of the Iraqi Ambassador and Jernegan from Baghdad… [We] took the basic risk sometime ago when we, along with the UK and other Arab states, recognized Kuwait's independence. Your staff was fully in accord with this decision. I can only say that next time the White House signs off on something, we'll make sure that the President knows about it too.[79]

In the aftermath of the downgrade, Komer set about correcting the mistake. After a quick review, he sent the State Department a memo on June 4 outlining three concerns about Iraq: (1) Iraq was slowly but progressively swinging toward the Soviet Union; (2) Qasim's popularity was at an all-time low; and (3) "his overthrow [was] sooner or later inevitable, with unpredictable results." Komer once again questioned the State Department's "wait and see" policy, but acknowledged that there were few diplomatic alternatives. He then requested a review of the US policy toward Iraq, focusing on how the United States could best react to an abrupt change in power, and ways to counter Iraq's accelerated shift toward the Soviets.[80]

These two memos were indicative of the lack of attention Iraq had received at the highest levels of the US government, which contrasted sharply to the close scrutiny Iraq had received under Eisenhower. Furthermore, Komer's call for a review underscored the significant knowledge gap between the White House and State Department. In fact, the NEA had just completed a review of its Iraq policy only two months earlier, focusing specifically on the very aspects that Komer wanted to be reviewed. Understandably, the downgrade of relations finally caught the White House's attention and led to increased scrutiny of its Iraq policy.

On June 20, William Brubeck, the State Department's executive secretary, sent Bundy a memo outlining its Iraq policy along with a series of recent studies, which suggested that the situation was not as bad as it seemed. Brubeck explained that Iraq's hostile approach to the West appeared to be "deliberately designed to frighten the West by appearing to tack progressively closer to the Soviet Bloc." However, he felt that Qasim would be able to continue its brinkmanship without losing control of the country to the ICP, concluding that anti-Qasim nationalist pressures would become strong enough to "force a change [that] will most likely produce another strongly nationalistic government but one with a more balanced foreign policy." Given this, the United States "should continue to adhere to our policy of maintaining, insofar as possible and under the handicaps imposed upon us, normal relations with the Iraqi government." On the question of a review, Brubeck attached the department's recent policy review and contingency plans for a post-Qasim Iraq and explained its belief that they were satisfactory.[81]

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

From Inaction to Action

The period between the downgrade of diplomatic relations in June 1962 through to the Ba'thist coup in February 1963 was a transition period for the US policy

toward Iraq. Following the downgrade, Qasim grew unstable as his regime was threatened by widespread plotting from numerous groups, eventually resulting in his overthrow. While the downgrade was troubling from an American perspective, it was to be expected given Iraq's warnings. Significantly, during this time, the ongoing Kurdish War took on increasing relevance in terms of US policy toward Iraq. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Iran had decided that the Kurds were a useful tool to destabilize Iraq and tie down its military—a clear boon to Israel. Second, because of the hostile US-Iraqi relations, US diplomats began considering unfriendly actions aimed at undermining the regime, which included sending Western journalists into Iraqi Kurdistan. Although the depth of official involvement in this remains uncertain, during the summer of 1962, a number of intrepid journalists, including *New York Times'* columnist Dana Adams Schmidt, visited Kurdistan and learned firsthand about the yearlong Kurdish War, which had gone virtually unnoticed in the West. However, as front-page exposés on the Kurds began to appear in newspapers in the fall of 1962, the Kennedy administration was forced to acknowledge the revolt and articulate a policy toward it. Furthermore, these articles had the additional benefit of helping to dispel the common perception among US officials that Barzani was a communist by portraying him as a freedom fighter, actually seeking to *prevent* a communist takeover in Iraq. For the Kurds, these articles were a public relations coup.

Not long after the downgrade, British diplomats informed the US Embassy in Baghdad that a "group of officers" planned to overthrow Qasim and install a nationalist, anticommunist regime. These officers sought assurances of quick recognition and the opening of military supply lines, which would allow the army to cut its ties with the Soviets. However, they were not the only ones; the embassy also reported widespread plotting against the regime from: (1) pro-Hashemite tribal sheikhs, old regime politicians, and army officers favoring close Jordan-Iraq ties; (2) high-ranking officers, who feared Qasim's close relationship with the Soviets; (3) anticommunist groups seeking to remove Qasim and reestablish closer ties with the British and West.[82] Given this, it was unsurprising that a group of Iraqi officers were plotting against Qasim. Then, in mid-July 1962, the CIA's source in the Ba'th Party reported that a coup was scheduled for the next day, though it was cancelled abruptly at the last moment.[83]

Three days later, Rodger Davies, the American deputy chief of mission in Baghdad, met with the British ambassador, Sir Roger Allen, to discuss the situation. Like the CIA, British intelligence had also cultivated sources within the Ba'th. For instance, Sir Roger revealed specific details of the aborted Ba'thist coup, stating that anti-Qasim officers had planned to assassinate Qasim during his recent trip to Karbala and seize Baghdad with armored and air units; unfortunately, he did not explain why it had been called off. The situation was discouraging, Sir Roger complained, and there was little more that the United States or the United Kingdom could do besides maintaining "correct" relations. Davies was not so sure and said that he was tempted to "explore jointly possibilities of developing some leverage to be used to counter pressures against us." Along this line, he suggested that they encourage news reports of "terror attacks against

Kurdish villages in the North" covertly, in order "to further denigrate Qassim's image abroad," and raised the possibility of a boycott of Iraqi oil. To this, Allen said that it might be worthwhile taking an inventory of what resources both parties had available to put pressure on Qasim. One problem, he said, was that officials in London felt that there was no alternative to Qasim in Iraq, but he was trying to sell the idea of his removal to "certain circles in the Foreign Office."[84] Although details of London's and Washington's deliberations are not yet available, the fact that the *New York Times* dispatched its Beirut bureau chief, Dana Adams Schmidt, to Iraqi Kurdistan in late July hardly seems coincidental.

On July 21, the embassy in Baghdad drafted a lengthy analysis on the status of the Kurdish War. After almost a year of fighting, the embassy believed that the revolt was a genuine nationalist movement, "free from foreign domination." This was important because it dispelled the notion that the Kurds were operating as Soviet puppets. Despite Kurdish talk of "autonomy," the embassy believed Barzani's end-goal was "unification and independence of Kurdistan," though he would likely "settle for much less." The report makes clear that the embassy was baffled by the regime's response to the revolt, describing Qasim as both "dilatory and baffling." His only hope was that his scorched earth policies would starve the Kurds into submission during the winter, but given the budding rapprochement between the Shah and Barzani, this seemed unlikely.[85]

In late July, Iranian Prime Minister Asadollah Alam told the US ambassador to Iran, Julius Holmes, that the Shah was again reconsidering his policy toward the Kurds. According to Holmes:

> [Alam] said that up to the present Iran had adopted a hands off policy only taking necessary steps to protect the Iran-Iraq border by the deployment of forces last summer when there was some possibility that Barzani wards might spill over into Iran.[86]

He said that Barzani had approached the Shah on a number of occasions to seek assistance against Iraq and made grand promises of incorporating Iraqi Kurdistan into Iran in return. While the Shah had rejected the offers, elements of Iran's military believed that helping the Kurds might be a viable means of undermining Qasim, whom they saw as a Soviet puppet. This argument struck a chord with the Shah, who was again considering "more positive position with regard to Iraqi Kurds."[87]

Alam's approach alarmed US policymakers and set off a flurry of consultations with US embassies in Tehran, Ankara, and London. In Tehran, American diplomats opposed the shift, arguing that the United States should encourage an "enlightened Iranian policy" toward the Kurds. Officials in Baghdad felt that Tehran's suggestion was "fully consistent" with its views and agreed that the Kurdish problem "cannot be solved by military means alone."[88] In assessing the responses from US diplomats in Turkey and Iran, the State Department was troubled by the lack of harmony between the two and instructed its ambassadors to urge them both to better coordinate their policies on the Kurdish issue.[89] In consultations with the British on August 14, Foreign Office officials indicated

that they had adopted a "hands-off" policy toward the Kurds and continued to reject all requests for assistance.[90] This suggests that there was general agreement among America's allies that Iran should avoid helping the Kurds.

Meanwhile, in early August, the US Embassy in Baghdad learned that Qasim had called his Defense Council into session to draw up plans for a major offensive against the Kurds, and had transferred the "bulk of the First Division" to the north.[91] When the offensive opened on August 17, Barzani initiated a sabotage campaign targeting crucial Iraqi infrastructure, like degassing stations and oil and gas pipelines.[92] A major escalation in the war, US officials in Baghdad believed that the revolt had turned into a "full-fledged storm-cloud for Qasim." Popular frustration against Qasim and his "pampered" generals was growing and their inability to crush the Kurds led to questioning of their high salaries, subsidized housing, and the purchase of expensive Soviet military equipment.[93] According to a CIA official, it was in this point that the CIA made "limited progress" convincing "influential Iraqis to consider the possibility of an overthrow."[94]

Starting on September 10 the *New York Times* began publishing Dana Adams Schmidt's three-part, award-winning series on the Kurdish War. The articles portrayed Barzani as a freedom fighter desperately seeking American assistance to protect his people from a brutal war imposed on them by a Soviet-backed military dictator. These articles were hardly objective. Schmidt set about dispelling Barzani's moniker, "The Red Mullah," arguing that he was not a communist but rather a Kurdish nationalist, seeking to establish Iraq as the West's "strongest ally in the Middle East." Barzani told Schmidt, "we could be useful to the [US]. As the Communist party serves the interests of the Soviet Union, we could serve the [US]." He accused the Kennedy administration of indifference and warned that without US assistance he would have no choice but to turn to the Soviets to protect his people. The Kurds, Barzani argued, could be an indispensable ally in the Cold War. "Look at our strategic location on the flank of any possible Soviet advance into the Middle East through the Caucasus and remember that, whether as guerrillas or as regulars, we are the best soldiers in the Middle East."[95] However, Schmidt left out a significant detail from his articles. In a confidential meeting with US officials in Beirut, he indicated that Soviet officials had offered Barzani arms on three occasions in exchange for extending his control beyond Iraqi territory, "so as to be contiguous with [the] USSR." Schmidt said that Barzani had so far refused these requests, but might be tempted should the situation deteriorate further.[96]

The Kennedy administration was not pleased with Schmidt's articles and took immediate steps to distance itself from the Kurds. The articles had generated considerable sympathy for the Kurds among the American public and led to pressure on the Kennedy administration to make known its stance. On September 11, the State Department issued its first public position on the Kurdish War, indicating that the United States saw the Kurdish War as an "internal matter" that should be resolved internally; it did not support the Kurds "in any way" and hoped for a peaceful solution.[97] This would be the US policy toward the revolt from this point onward. Nevertheless, if the articles had been part of Davies's scheme, it seemed to have backfired. The Qasim regime seized upon the articles as "proof" of US

support for the Kurds and led to a series of rhetorical tirades.[98] For instance, on September 30, Qasim warned of America's "criminal activities" to divide the Iraqi people. Faced with these allegations, the US Embassy in Baghdad requested that the department reiterate its policy position on the revolt, but there is no indication the United States took any action.[99]

On September 20, a Kurdish representative approached the US Embassy in Baghdad and made a strong plea for US support against Qasim. While the United States refused politely, the conversation provided considerable intelligence on Kurdish relations with other regional actors. For instance, the Kurds reported that Barzani maintained "close and friendly" relations with the Shah, who allowed goods to flow freely across the border; received a small monthly stipend from the Soviets of a thousand Iraqi dinars (approximately $2,800 in 1962); and maintained regular contact with the Egyptians, who were "friendly but unhelpful." Efforts at obtaining assistance from Kuwait were similarly fruitless. Conversely, the Israelis had shown an interest in helping, but Barzani had refused because he feared "Israel might purposely reveal [this] information and [the] 'movement' would be harmed throughout Arab countries." The Kurdish plea, when coupled with Schmidt's articles, suggests that Barzani had begun a diplomatic offensive aimed at building international support for their cause.[100]

Throughout October, the Kurdish War went very poorly for the Qasim regime, which lashed out and began targeting vulnerable Kurdish civilians. On the night of October 10–11, the Kurds attacked an oil installation, killing and capturing several people and in late October carried out an additional attack on IPC facilities, including a refinery and a pipeline leading toward Baghdad. Frustrated, the regime retaliated against Kurdish civilians. For instance, in mid-November, US officials in Baghdad received reports of women and children being used as human shields,[101] systematic bombing and pillaging of Kurdish villages, and that the regime had "deliberately [removed] food and clothing from Kurdistan in [an] attempt to starve [the] Kurds into submission."[102] But instead of breaking the Kurds, the atrocities served to unify them against the government, leading the embassy to conclude, "almost all Kurds in the cities as well as the mountains support the revolt."[103]

The regime's inability to defeat the Kurds led it to use the United States as a scapegoat for its problems, but the Kennedy administration was divided over how to respond to these outbursts. For instance, when Qasim accused the United States of supporting the Kurds on November 21,[104] the State Department's initial guidance was to authorize the embassy to send a note of protest and seek a personal meeting with Qasim to dispel the claims.[105] However, two days later, it backtracked, arguing that any response would dignify Qasim's attacks, but it was too late.[106] The new US Chargé d'Affairs in Baghdad, Roy Melbourne, had already arranged a meeting with Foreign Minister Jawad where he agreed to schedule a meeting with Qasim for early December, leading the department to recommend that he reiterate the nonintervention policy, tell Qasim that the United States was "mystified" about his hostile attitude, and to warn him about false intelligence alleging US hostility. Melbourne also wanted to emphasize America's desire for friendly relations, despite differences over Kuwait.[107] This meeting would never take place.

At the end of 1962, the Kurds inflicted a series of major defeats, leaving the Iraqi army's morale at an all-time low.[108] It seems that Qasim's micromanagement of the war and distrust of his commanders had created widespread resentment. For instance, commanders in the field were not given a free hand, restrictions had been placed on ammunition for troops, and the regime's insistence that there was no war meant that troops had been denied combat pay.[109] Inevitably, these actions provided conspiratorial groups, such as the Ba'th Party, opportunities to build support for a coup among the military's ranks.

Meanwhile, in early 1963, the Ba'th Party and the Kurds reached a secret agreement to work together to overthrow the Qasim regime. The Ba'th knew that if they were to ever seize power they needed to secure the support of the military, which was anxious to end the war, and only the Kurds could deliver on the military's wish. At the same time, Barzani and his people needed a respite in the spring months so that they could replant crops devastated by Qasim's scorched earth tactics. This convergence of interests led to secret talks in early January, where the Ba'th Party, in return for Kurdish cooperation in overthrowing Qasim, agreed to concede the Kurds a large degree of autonomy.[110] With the Kurds neutralized and the army's morale now at an all-time low, the stage was set for a Ba'thist coup.

On January 22, the US Embassy in Baghdad concluded that Qasim was "weaker in all sectors than at any time since [the] Shawwaf Revolt in 1959." Domestic discontent was widespread and "rising to the point where [Iraq's] armed forces might not [be able to] effectively intervene to save [Qasim]." Because of Qasim's attitude toward the United States, the embassy felt that any "successor regime would…be an improvement from [the] standpoint [of] US and Western interests." The embassy also complained once again about the Kennedy administration's refusal to respond to Qasim's anti-American rhetoric: "US silence in the face of attacks from Qasim can now begin [to] affect adversely US prestige here and in [the] Arab area." The net result was to "discourage rather than give hope to [the] bulk of Iraqis who [were] fed up with Qasim but [felt] individually helpless before [the] power he wields through [the] control of [the] security apparatus." In light of this, Melbourne proposed that the White House adopt "a new diplomatic style and tone in its dealings with the Qasim regime" and "give subtle but unmistakable public indications that [it believes] Qasim [is] having internal difficulties and distorting facts." He also suggested that these statements be broadcast widely "in order to penetrate local censorship."[111] However, once again, Washington ignored Melbourne's message, leading him to take matters into his own hands and lodge a complaint with Jawad directly.[112] When word of Melbourne's actions reached the State Department on January 19, it was passed immediately to Bundy, who informed President Kennedy.[113]

Melbourne's initiative was significant for two reasons. First, it underscored just how frustrated the embassy was with Washington's dithering on Iraq. Second, this was the first time since the downgrading of relations in June 1962 that the subject of Iraq had crossed President Kennedy's desk. However, despite word of his approach making its way to the highest levels of the US government, nothing was done. On February 2, Melbourne repeated his complaint to the State

Department about the complete lack of guidance on this matter, pointing out that Qasim had lashed out at the United States once again. "Qasim's latest outburst against us…reinforces [the] policy conclusions and recommendations" of the previous analysis, but since Qasim continued to attack the United States the official "silence" from Washington was not a "desirable alternative." Worse yet, it was becoming an embarrassment. For instance, a "usually cautious" British official questioned the silence by asking, "don't you ever deny these things?" This led Melbourne to conclude, the "point [had] been reached where continued silence [was] simply incompatible with national dignity and damaging [their] local and regional interests."[114]

Melbourne's final plea caught the administration's attention. On February 5, Secretary Rusk cabled Baghdad to advise that the department was "considering carefully whether on balance US interests would be served [at] this particular juncture by abandoning [its] policy of avoiding public reaction to Qasim's charges while objecting through normal diplomatic channels." The rationale for this stemmed from the Kennedy administration's desire to maintain a US presence in Iraq because the CIA was at the time engaged in "significant intelligence collecting operations."[115] According to a memo sent to Bundy on February 7, Iraq had become "one of the more useful spots for acquiring technical information on Soviet military and industrial equipment and on Soviet methods of operations in nonaligned areas."[116] On February 5, the State Department sent Iraq's embassy in Washington a strong note of protest, demanding Iraq provide proof for the basis of Qasim's allegations.[117] Apparently, when Qasim learned of the note, he interpreted that the United States note "as [a] military threat,"[118] which reaffirmed the department's policy of "not [seeking] to engage in a public exchange with [Qasim]."[119] Given his excessive response, the department felt that this approach maximized its room to maneuver, while not jeopardizing the CIA's operations. Unfortunately, this entire debate was irrelevant. The next day, the Ba'th Party seized power in a bloody coup, forever changing the face of Iraq's revolution.

Conclusion

The disestablishment of the Special Committee on Iraq at the start of the Kennedy administration was a clear mistake. While stable during 1960, throughout President Kennedy's first year in office, Iraq experienced numerous crises, all of which justified greater scrutiny. The debate surrounding the SCI's disestablishment made clear that both CIA and the State Department had concerns about Iraq and wanted to continue monitoring its progress. The 1961 Kuwait Crisis alone should have raised enough concern in the White House to validate the SCI's reestablishment. Nevertheless, the Kennedy administration's low-key response to the Kuwait Crisis reflected its belief that Iraq and the Gulf were British problems and so Washington focused its energy on containing Moscow's aggressive moves in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America.

The outbreak of the Kurdish War in September 1961 also reflects this reality. While it has been suggested that the United States instigated the revolt to

undermine the Qasim regime,[120] evidence shows the opposite. The Shelepin memo suggests that the Soviets had hoped to use Iraq's Kurdish minority to distract the United States and its allies from the Berlin Crisis by threatening America's regional allies, Iran and Turkey, both of which had large Kurdish minorities. In reality, the origins of the revolt were largely indigenous, relating mostly to Qasim's failed land reforms and his divide-and-rule tactics.[121] Reflecting America's relative disinterest in the region, during the weeks prior to the revolt, mid-level US officials in Baghdad and Tehran had warned their superiors in Washington that the revolt could allow the Soviets to bypass the US containment shield and establish an independent Kurdish republic. Given the Shelepin memo, it seems these warnings were valid, yet the Kennedy administration still did nothing, underscoring its deferral of responsibility to the British.

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

Starting in early 1962, the Kurdish question took on greater importance due to Iran's sudden interest in supporting them against Baghdad. While the Kennedy administration sought to dissuade the Shah from helping Barzani, its efforts were in vain. Even after the downgrade, the United States continued to advise Iran against assisting the Kurds, though it seems likely that British and American diplomats in Baghdad had conspired to send Western journalists into Iraqi Kurdistan to interview Barzani. While the evidence is circumstantial, Dana Adams Schmidt's trip to Kurdistan in July and August and his subsequent articles in the *New York Times* seemed to be a by-product of this scheme. However, while Schmidt's articles may have been beneficial in dispelling the view that Barzani was a communist, it also forced the Kennedy administration to acknowledge the revolt and issue a policy statement. This, in turn, gave Qasim the proof that he needed to accuse the United States of conspiring to destabilize Iraq and he

initiated an aggressive anti-American campaign. Once again, there was a deep disconnect between US diplomats in Baghdad and officials in Washington over how to respond to Qasim's rhetoric, with the embassy advocating engagement, while the White House maintained official silence out of fear of Iraq severing relations altogether, which could jeopardize the CIA's intelligence gathering. Understandably, the Kennedy administration prioritized obtaining intelligence over countering Qasim's rhetoric, much to the embassy's frustration.

In the end, the Kennedy administration's low-key approach toward Iraq during 1961–62 was clearly driven by its belief that Iraq no longer faced a communist threat, and its belief that regional matters were best left to the British. After all, the Kennedy administration had much more pressing Cold War challenges during this time in Berlin, Cuba, and Vietnam, and so dealing with the Qasim regime hardly took precedence.

3

Kennedy and the First Ba'thist Regime: February–November 1963

Just after midnight (Baghdad time) on February 8, a coalition of the Ba'th Party and military launched a coup that overthrew Abd al-Karim Qasim. By noon the next day, the US military attaché in Baghdad reported that the rebels had "finally seized control" of the city, predicting "conditions [could] be chaotic for some time" as the Ba'th unleashed its militia to "even old scores with the Communists."[1] The CIA's prediction was much more direct: "a blood bath is likely."[2] By the evening of February 9, word had spread around the city to turn on the television at 7 p.m. for an announcement. According to Laurent Morin, a foreign service officer stationed in Baghdad from 1960 to 1964, on the evening of the coup, Qasim and his lieutenants were executed live on television.[3]

It has been suggested that the CIA "masterminded" the Ba'thist coup,[4] but other sources, like Peter Hahn, have observed that no declassified US documents support this claim.[5] To resolve this debate, a number of factors need to be considered. First, the CIA later identified a multitude of possible triggers for the coup: Qasim's efforts to crush the Ba'th Party; his pro-communist policies; the failed 20-month-old military campaign against the Kurds; his bitter feud with Egyptian President Nasser; and Iraq's loss of face internationally, especially among the Arabs, due to his "insane antics" over Kuwait.[6] Second, US documents show significant confusion over which of the many groups plotting against the regime had actually struck first; and only later did it emerge that a coalition of the Ba'th Party and military was responsible.[7] Also, it appears that unlike in July 1962, when the CIA's source in the Ba'th had warned the United States about an impending coup (see chapter 2), no one in the Ba'th had alerted the United States to the plot in February 1963. Finally, while it has been established that the CIA was actively plotting against Qasim in 1962, a former CIA officer, who claims to have been involved in these plans, denied any involvement in the Ba'th Party's actions. He explained, "when Qassem was assassinated in early February 1963, I was still engaged in contacting people who could play a role in a coup attempt against [him]." As a result, whatever "progress we had made [in recent months]

went for naught when [he] was assassinated."[8] At the same time, it seems unlikely that the Kennedy administration would take an unpredictable, risky action, like overthrowing Qasim, at a time when Iraq had become an important source of intelligence on Soviet operations. Barring the release of new information, the balance of evidence suggests that while the United States was actively plotting the overthrow of the Qasim regime, it did not appear to be directly involved in the February 1963 coup.

Nevertheless, by the time the Ba'th Party seized power in Iraq, the Cold War had undergone a major shift. In October 1962, Washington and Moscow had squared off over the Cuban Missile Crisis, nearly leading to a nuclear disaster. While this crisis occurred thousands of miles away from Iraq and the Middle East, the Ba'thist coup in February 1963 only exacerbated the already high degree of tension and geopolitical competition between the two superpowers. Given the zero-sum nature of the Cold War, the overthrow of Abd al-Karim Qasim's pro-Soviet regime, its replacement with the Ba'th Party, which unleashed a subsequent campaign against Iraq's communists, all suggested that the Middle Eastern Cold War calculus had been altered in America's favor. However, Moscow was not willing to sit idly by and allow Iraq to return to the Western camp. Throughout the duration of the short-lived First Ba'thist regime, the Soviet Union waged a political, diplomatic, and covert war against Iraq, seeking to overthrow the new regime and return the IPC to a position of influence once again. Moscow's intervention would force the Kennedy administration to also intervene and become drawn into Iraq's chaotic internal politics, especially after the renewal of the Kurdish War in June 1963 and widespread human rights abuses. Despite horrific atrocities inside Iraq and a crisis of conscience, Cold War considerations forced the White House to back the Ba'thist regime to the hilt, a decision that has since led to considerable criticism.

The following examines the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq during the Ba'th Party's nine months in power following its successful overthrow of the Qasim regime on February 8, 1963. In a period when America's Middle Eastern containment strategy had faced considerable setbacks—for example, the Suez Crisis in 1956, Iraq's revolution and the subsequent collapse of the Baghdad Pact in 1958, and the Kuwait Crisis in 1961—the Ba'thist coup in early 1963 was a much-needed victory for the West. The subsequent outbreak of the Kurdish War in June 1963 further increased Iraq's importance in terms of the Cold War. With the United States backing the Ba'thist regime and the Soviet Union giving the Kurds diplomatic and moral support, US officials were convinced by mid-1963 that Iraq had become a "Cold War battleground."[9] The following reveals the extent to which the United States intervened in Iraq during the nine months the Ba'th Party was in power in 1963, the consequences of which still reverberate today.

Assessing the Coup

Even though the Ba'thist coup on February 8, 1963, came as a surprise to the Kennedy administration, it was not altogether unwelcome. Kennedy's top Middle

East advisor, Robert Komer, made this clear in his message to the president that day, but there was also uncertainty about who would emerge after the inevitable power struggle within the new regime. Nevertheless, Komer believed that the new regime "[would] be preferable to Qasim's" and that "relations between the US and Iraq [would] be considerably improved." Iraq's dramatic rejection of the Soviet Union was, as Komer famously observed, "almost certainly a net gain" for the United States in the Cold War in the Middle East.[10] He was right.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, US-Iraqi relations warmed considerably. A key reason for this was that the Ba'th Party was aggressively anticommunist. Within hours of seizing power the Ba'th Party's militia, known as the National Guard, began going house-to-house, rounding up hundreds—if not thousands—of suspected communists and their sympathizers. According to the US Embassy in Baghdad, on February 12, "reliable sources" indicated that 2,400 communists had been rounded up and were under detention. The embassy also reported as many as a thousand people had been killed in the four days since the coup.[11] By February 20, the embassy reported that 14,000 people were in custody, 10,000 of them believed to be communists.[12] Many of these people perished, though claims vary on the exact number, with Douglas Little indicating "hundreds," Charles Tripp and Galia Golan suggesting up to 3,000, and Hannah Batutu putting the number between 1,500 and 5,000.[13]

It is widely believed that the CIA provided the Ba'th Party with "lists of suspected Communists and other leftists" that were used to identify and murder "untold numbers of Iraq's educated elite."[14] The original source of this allegation was King Hussein of Jordan, who told an interviewer in the early 1960s:

> I know for a certainty that what happened in Iraq on 8 February had the support of American Intelligence . . . Do you know that . . . on 8 February a secret radio beamed to Iraq was supplying the men who pulled the coup with names and addresses of the Communists there so that they could be arrested and executed?[15]

While much of the historiography has focused on whether the United States provided the Ba'th with lists, few have latched on to Batatu's explanation that the Ba'th had "ample opportunity to gather such particulars in 1958–59, when the Communists came wholly into the open."[16] This explanation actually makes perfect sense and is supported by documents that suggest the Ba'th Party had created its own lists during 1958–59. For instance, an INR analysis from February 15 stated, "[Communist] party members [are being] rounded up on the basis of lists prepared by the now-dominant Ba'th Party."[17] A separate INR analysis from February 21 pointed out that during the 1958–59 period, the communists had "exposed virtually all its assets" whom the Ba'th had "carefully spotted and listed."[18] Therefore, the existence of lists is not in dispute, though it is questionable that the Ba'th would ever have needed the CIA's help to figure out who their enemies really were.

Upon coming to power, the Ba'th Party immediately reorganized the Iraqi government into a new set of power structures. It formed the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC), consisting of 12 Ba'thists and 4 Arab

nationalist officers, and granted it with supreme legislative power. Heading the government was Qasim's former deputy, Abd al-Salim Arif, who was named the president, and General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr was appointed the prime minister. Arif's role was believed to be largely ceremonial, as he was not one of the original conspirators. On the other hand, al-Bakr was a leading member of the Ba'th Party and could guarantee the support from Iraq's military. However, the most powerful member of the Iraqi leadership was Ali Salih al-Sa'di, whose roles as deputy prime minister, minister of the interior, and secretary of the Regional (Iraq) Ba'th Party, gave him control over the militant National Guard. It was under al-Sa'di's direction that the National Guard targeted the regime's opponents, especially communists, leading to the massacres of 1963.[19]

The United States was fixated on what was taking place inside Iraq. On February 13, William Brubeck, the State Department's executive secretary, sent Kennedy's national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, a memo outlining the steps the United States had taken in the days since the coup, including instructions provided to US diplomats in Baghdad. The consensus was that relations with Iraq were set to improve, but the United States still needed to be cautious about how it approached the new regime, warning that "any indication of interference in Iraqi internal affairs must be avoided" and all US personnel needed to "avoid creating the impression that [it] sired the regime or [was] trying to father it." After outlining programs being considered, like new arms and economic assistance policies, Brubeck indicated that the department was prepared to offer counterinsurgency and policy training to Iraq, but only if the Kurdish problem was resolved first. He concluded that even though the "new regime [appeared] to be a vast improvement over Qasim, [they could not] consider that it [would] be pro-American or that it [would] be free from internal pressures of an extremist nature. It [remained] to be seen how cohesive it [remained], and how responsibly it [acted]." This warning would prove prophetic, as it would be only a matter of months before the regime imploded.[20]

In terms of the Cold War, US officials viewed the Ba'thist coup as a major setback for the Soviet Union's Middle Eastern policy. With the new Iraqi regime determined to crush the ICP, the Soviets had lost a major foothold in the region.[21] As the INR point out, "all the available evidence [indicated] that the Soviets [had] suffered a setback in Iraq and in their general Middle Eastern policies as a result of the Iraqi coup."[22] However, this sense of optimism was not unanimous. By 1963, Iraq had become completely reliant upon the Soviet Union for military assistance, training, and hardware. As a result, US officials worried that Moscow would use its military-supply relationship with Baghdad as leverage, because both sides had much to lose from a complete disengagement.[23] However, according to Golan, the escalating Sino-Soviet split inhibited the Soviets from mounting a robust challenge to the Ba'th Party's violence against the ICP.[24] This fortunate set of circumstances worked to America's advantage.

Given the likelihood of an Iraqi shift in the Cold War, President Kennedy sent Secretary of State Dean Rusk a note on February 18 asking what the United States was doing to pull Iraq back into the Western orbit. In particular, Kennedy wanted to know the status of the Soviet-Iraqi arms relationship and whether the

United States could potentially meet Iraq's needs, asking, "if the Russians cut off their aid [to Iraq], are we planning to make any offers to them?"[25] Four days later, Rusk responded to Kennedy:

> We seek quiet friendship with Iraq, avoiding efforts to press favors on the new regime but standing ready to be helpful where we can without materially increasing the current aid level … We have privately assured the new regime that we won't interfere in its internal affairs.[26]

Going further, Rusk explained that he had instructed the US Chargé d'Affairs in Baghdad, Roy Melbourne, to assure senior Iraqi officials of America's friendship; to expound the administration's impartiality in regional matters, particularly with regard to Nasser; and to spell out America's global, Cold War policies and concerns.[27] On the question of arms, Rusk advised caution on Iraq because it was still likely to continue obtaining arms from the Soviet Bloc.[28] However, should Iraq turn to America for arms, Rusk argued, the United States should "limit the categories and quantities" of what could be made available, since a major arms package would complicate matters with other regional states, particularly Israel. He also said that the State Department wanted to send a new ambassador to Iraq as soon as possible. In short, State wanted to once again revert to its traditional "wait and see" policy toward Iraq, at least for the time being.[29]

In late February, two NEA officials, Robert Strong and Andrew Kilgore, drafted interim policy guidelines for Iraq. Distributed on March 2, the NEA believed that the new regime would "emphasize pan-Arabism in the context of Iraqi national interests, and [would] be neutralist, reformist, and socialist (Scandinavian type)." Even so, while the United States could "live with" the new Iraqi regime, it identified four significant challenges: the Kurdish War, the IPC conflict, constitutional development, and economic progress. In each of these instances, the United States would urge Iraq to make reasonable concessions, especially the dangerous Kurdish question (discussed in greater detail subsequently). On the IPC, the United States would continue to consult with the UK, encourage US shareholders to be flexible, and "express pleasure" at any Iraqi initiatives on unsettled issues. The United States would also press the Iraqi regime to move toward constitutional reform and the establishment of a legislative democracy. Similarly, it would promote economic development and "demonstrate willingness to assist Iraq in feasible ways without materially increasing the aid level." On regional relations, the United States would encourage friendly Iraqi relations with Turkey and Iran, in particular, and would not oppose federation with Egypt, Syria, or Kuwait, so long as the decision was not coerced. Finally, on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States needed to maintain its "stance of even-handed impartiality between Israel and the Arab countries."[30]

The Kennedy administration's response to the Ba'thist coup suggested that it was pleased with the outcome. US officials clearly believed that the replacement of the pro-Soviet Qasim regime with the Ba'th Party had altered the Cold War calculus in America's favor. After years of setbacks in the region, the Ba'thist coup was a much-needed American victory in the Cold War. Even so, with an

anticommunist regime back in power in Baghdad, the policy adopted thereafter suggested the need to secure it against Soviet efforts to unseat it.

The Soviets and the Kurds

Soon after the coup, US officials became concerned about how the Ba'thist regime was approaching the Kurdish question. Officially, the United States viewed the Kurdish problem as "strictly an internal Iraqi matter in which there is no role for the [US] either directly or indirectly" and American diplomats were advised to "limit themselves to expressions of hope that [Iraq] and the Kurds will be able to come promptly to a mutually satisfactory agreement."[31] However, the United States soon found itself in a difficult position after the Soviets initiated clandestine radio broadcasts calling on the Kurds to join the communists in resisting the new regime and backing Kurdish demands for "complete regional autonomy and a large share of the income from oil that [was] produced in Kurdish territory."[32] To the Americans, the central conundrum was that a "failure to find a political solution to the Kurdish problem would benefit only the Soviets and the Iraqi communists,"[33] but the Ba'thist regime seemed determined to take a hard line. While American diplomats sympathized with the Kurds' nationalist aspirations, the Soviet's move meant that the Kennedy administration had to increase its support for the Iraqi regime.

The Kurdish question was also tied to another important issue: Arab unity. Upon seizing power, the Ba'th indicated that it wished to bring Iraq into a union with either Egypt or Syria, or both. The regime's selection of Abd al-Salim Arif, who had a long-supported unification with Egypt, as Iraq's new president suggested that the Ba'th was seeking to placate pro-Nasser, Arab nationalist elements in the military. But the Kurdish question would be a major obstacle to unification. On February 22, Iraq sent a delegation to Cairo for talks with Nasser on the prospect of bringing Iraq into union with Egypt and Syria. Accompanying the delegation to Cairo were two Kurds, who met with Nasser in private. The Kurds argued that if Iraq were to join two predominantly ethnic Arab states, Egypt's vast Arab population would dilute Iraq's large Kurdish demography, which constituted approximately 20 percent. Given this, the Kurds said that they needed guarantees of autonomy within Iraq or even full independence, to which Nasser "gave his full backing to Kurdish demands . . . and hoped that [a] rapid agreement could be reached." Nasser was, however, privately pessimistic about whether the Ba'thist regime could achieve this—an assessment that would prove accurate.[34]

By early March, US officials became concerned that the regime's initial efforts at resolving tensions with the Kurds were failing. While Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, had taken steps to show good faith, like releasing around 1,500 Arab prisoners, the government never followed through with its promises to release Kurdish prisoners, lift the economic blockade, and accept the principle of Kurdish autonomy within a unified Iraq. This prompted the Kurds to approach the US Embassy in Baghdad to ask the Kennedy administration to urge the regime to settle the Kurdish question peacefully.[35] When the word of the

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

> Some of our spies are beginning to get quite worried about [the] risk that [the] Kurdish problem [might] flair up to bedevil [the] new Iraqi regime. It's hard to tell whether talks in Baghdad are going well or badly, but there are many—Turks, Iranians, Nasser, and above all Soviets—who might see a stake in egging Kurds on.[36]

In particular, Komer reported that the Shah wanted to use the Kurds to undermine the Iraqi regime, which he believed was "too cozy with Nasser," whom he distrusted. Komer indicated that State had warned him to "keep [his] hands off" Iraq but acknowledged that the Shah was unlikely to "take [its] advice." Significantly, Komer had directed the CIA to prepare contingency plans for a renewed Kurdish War and asked that Bundy support these measures at the next Special Group (CI) meeting, held in a few days' time. Komer recommended that the United States engage in preventative diplomacy to stave off a renewed conflict, which he felt would threaten the regime's survival. In addition, he recommended that the embassy in Baghdad raise these concerns with the regime.[37] While the details of the Special Group (CI)'s discussion remain classified, Komer's memo suggests that the United States was only concerned with the Kurdish issue insofar as it threatened the Ba'thist regime's survival.[38]

On March 3, Melbourne met with Iraq's foreign minister Talib Shabib to raise the Kennedy administration's concerns about the Kurds. Shabib indicated that his government was "prepared to concede" cultural autonomy to the Kurds, but was unwilling to go any further. Should fighting resume, Shabib said, the regime planned to "conduct [a] campaign on different lines from Qasim," suggesting that it would co-opt anti-Barzani Kurds and Arab tribes from the north to turn the Kurds' guerrilla tactics against them. Melbourne said that he was skeptical a military solution was possible, pointing out that Kurdish "guerrillas were led by competent, former army officers fully trained in tactics." The cavalier nature of Shabib's comments reinforced Melbourne's concern of a resumption of hostilities, leading him to warn Washington that war was "likely to erupt at any time."[39]

Melbourne's warning immediately caught the CIA's attention. On March 5, Ray Cline, the head of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, sent Bundy a memo warning of the dangers of the renewed Kurdish War. He argued, "[the] emergence of an anti-Communist regime in Baghdad [had] removed the main inhibition on Soviet support of Kurdish dissidence, and this problem may have important implications beyond the borders of Iraq." He identified a number of important conclusions: (1) should fighting resume, the new regime would be no more effective at defeating the Kurds than Qasim; (2) despite his long exile in the Soviet Union, Barzani was not a communist but would accept Soviet support if scorned by the West; (3) due to Iran and Turkey's large Kurdish minorities, both were concerned about the spread of Kurdish nationalism across their borders, especially if Barzani adopted a pro-Soviet attitude; and (4) Barzani's military success had made him overconfident, which explained why he was demanding a greater

degree of autonomy than the regime was prepared to concede. Cline concluded that if the regime did not make viable concessions to the Kurds immediately, a resumption of fighting was inevitable.[40]

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

Arms Sales to Iraq?

In April 1963, a major shift occurred in US-Iraqi relations, prompted by Iraq's request to purchase American arms. According to Melbourne, the Qasim regime had previously ordered a dozen helicopters from the Soviet Union, but the "present Soviet attitude on [the] Kurdish question" had led Iraq to conclude that it "had no expectation of obtaining them." Playing a Cold War card, in early March, Shabib inquired whether the United States had "comparable helicopters available for sale to Iraq within reasonable time limits for delivery."[41] This was coupled with an inquiry from Iraqi diplomats in Washington, who approached the State Department about purchasing 40 light tanks and 12 tank transporters.[42] Understandably, Iraq's request was confirmation that it had indeed switched camps in the Cold War; however, this also underscored growing concerns that the Ba'th was preparing to renew the Kurdish War.

Iraq's request prompted an interagency review of America's arms policy. There was a clear consensus within the US government that this was a positive development in terms of both US-Iraqi relations and the Cold War, but the heightened possibility of a renewal of the Kurdish War complicated matters. The JCS was very optimistic about Iraq's request for arms, circulating a position paper on March 9 that argued that the new, anticommunist regime in Baghdad provided "opportunities favorable to the Free World, particularly the [US], to increase its influence in the area" and recommended that US policy should focus on "solidifying the position of the new Government of Iraq, strengthening its anticommunist posture and its confidence to deal with communist threats or blandishments, and fostering favorable relations between Iraq and the US allies in the area." Significantly, the JCS believed that arms sales could help shift Iraq's military-supply relationship away from the Soviets and toward Western suppliers and recommended that any military assistance be assessed on a case-by-case basis and be balanced against America's other commitments in the region (i.e., Egypt, Israel, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom).[43] The State Department agreed with these recommendations and sent a more detailed draft of the proposal to the US Embassy in Baghdad. On the question of the helicopter sales, the department did not raise objections and identified two models the embassy could propose, but the tank sales were much more problematic due to concerns that Iraq would use them against either the Kurds or Israel. This created a conundrum. Refusing the sale could affect US-Iraqi relations adversely and potentially force Iraq to turn back to the Soviets for arms; so the department

asked the embassy to consider these problems and offer its recommendations.[44] At the end of March, Komer sent Bundy a memo, where he observed that State was willing to sell both the helicopters and tanks, but had reservations. He asked, "are we being sufficiently imaginative to hit this target of opportunity?"[45] Clearly, Iraq's request had elicited an enthusiastic response from US policymakers, although it also heightened the chances of a renewal of the Kurdish War.

On April 2, after weeks of discussion, Hal Saunders, a Middle East analyst on the NSC staff, informed Bundy that State had agreed to sell 12 helicopters to Iraq for $4–15 million. Saunders recommended taking a cautious approach toward Iraq, warning that the United States should be "as helpful as possible [to Iraq] without getting into an unwarranted big new aid program." He noted that Iraq's requests were vague and that they had not responded to the administration's initial proposal. Nevertheless, he saw "no serious problem in selling light tanks, small arms and [ammunition], [communication] equipment, or even transport aircraft if requested."[46] With this endorsement, the United States agreed "in principle" to sell the tanks to Iraq, a decision the US Embassy in Baghdad conveyed to Iraq's foreign ministry on April 12. From the guidance provided to the embassy, it is clear that the NSC had dismissed the argument that Iraq posed a military threat to Israel, Turkey, and Iran. The Kennedy administration argued that the tanks fulfilled "legitimate Iraqi defensive and internal security needs," presented the West to Iraq as a viable alternative to the Soviet Union for arms, and suggested that Iraq lacked—and would not in the foreseeable future obtain—the logistical capability to threaten Turkey or Iran.[47] However, just because the United States agreed to sell these weapons to Iraq did not mean that the deal was guaranteed.

Nevertheless, the Kennedy administration's decision to approve the sale of these weapons to Iraq was clearly driven by Cold War considerations. There were reasons for opposing the sale—like the potential threat Iraq posed to Israel, Iran, and Turkey, as well as the Kurds—and yet the Kennedy administration's desire to draw Iraq away from the Soviets won out. Therefore, the force driving the US policy toward Ba'thist Iraq had little to do with regional considerations but was rather concerned about America's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the threat it posed to the region.

Throughout April and May, the Kennedy administration's desire to wean Iraq away from the Soviets through arms sales led to heightened concern about a resumption of the Kurdish War. This led the United States to press its regional allies, Turkey and Iran, not to interfere in the conflict should fighting resume, while urging the Iraqi regime to seek a negotiated settlement with the Kurds. As Saunders argued, "[Iraq's] interests [would] be better served if the government [could] control the Kurds than if the Kurdish rebellion [was] successful enough to invite Soviet or Iranian meddling."[48] Indeed, US officials were rightly concerned that a renewal of the Kurdish War would be an obstacle to the arms sale and threaten the survivability of the Ba'thist regime, which would only benefit the Soviets. As a result, the Kennedy administration felt obliged to take steps to stave off a new war.

On April 2, the State Department cabled its embassies in Ankara and Tehran to raise the Kurdish question with both governments. The cable argued that a

renewal of the Kurdish War was not in the interests of either state, could only benefit communists or pro-Nasser forces, and increased the possibility of "parallel uprisings" in Turkey and Iran, which the Soviets would be eager to exploit. The department believed that Iranian, Turkish, and American interests "would be best served by [an] equitable solution [to the] Kurdish problem . . . in [the] context of [the] previously-agreed local government [autonomy] formula." However, should fighting resume the United States felt obliged to warn Iran and Turkey to "stay out of what could become a political and military morass for a foreign state." While the Turks had consistently stayed out of Iraq affairs, the State Department was concerned about Iranian meddling, since Tehran might be "tempted [to] support [the] Kurdish rebels in [an] effort [to] divert hostile Kurdish action from its own territory." This temptation, the department argued, would be "short-sighted and inimical to Iran's overall security interests."[49]

In early May, the United States began to detect further preparations for war, leading the department to instruct its diplomats in Baghdad to convey to the regime America's "serious apprehensions at [the] trend of events" and urge it to present the Kurds with "serious counter-proposals . . . [to] lay [the] groundwork for real negotiations." The embassy was also instructed to say that while the United States saw the conflict as a strictly internal matter, "in the spirit of full frankness and cordiality . . . we have no alternative but to urge avoidance . . . of violence from which only [Iraq's] sworn enemies, the Communists, could profit."[50] This message was conveyed to Shabib on May 4, who said that his government was in the process of preparing a counter-proposal. Melbourne, however, remained unconvinced.[51]

On May 22, Melbourne managed to secure a meeting with Iraq's new prime minister, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, a Ba'thist military officer who had played a major role in the February coup. The meeting was significant because it was the first instance in which a US official had met al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein's uncle, who would later go on to lead Iraq during the second Ba'thist regime from 1968 until his nephew deposed him 1979. Nevertheless, during the meeting, Melbourne urged al-Bakr to negotiate in good faith with the Kurds, but it was clear that the regime showed no interest in doing so. Al-Bakr took a hard line, dismissing Barzani's proposals as "so outlandish that [he] really could not use them as a basis for discussion." To Melbourne, al-Bakr's position was just as rigid as the Kurds', saying that the best that he could offer them was "administrative decentralization" but not "political autonomy." Digging in, al-Bakr said that he "could not permit this Kurdish challenge to Iraqi sovereignty to continue [for] much longer." Seeing an opening for subtle diplomacy, Melbourne told al-Bakr that Kurdish representatives had told embassy officers that their proposals were "fully negotiable" and formed the basis for negotiations. From here, Melbourne explained, both sides could give and take until an agreeable compromise could be made. However, this argument had no effect, with al-Bakr offering "no assurance or indication that [the Iraqi government] would . . . resort to force against [the] Kurds."[52] Despite al-Bakr's ambiguity, his hardline stance on negotiations suggested that a renewal of the Kurdish War was likely.

Melbourne's conversation with al-Bakr prompted the INR to circulate a memo on May 27 highlighting the bureau's concern about a resumption of the war. The report differentiated between the regime, which it blamed for the impasse, and the military, which was "not anxious to renew the fighting" and appeared frustrated with the Ba'th Party's interference in military matters. For instance, the Ba'th had rejected the army's plan of operations that called for the use of the "least possible force" and replaced it with, what the INR described as, a "plan of *virtual extermination*." The INR believed that a renewal of fighting would rapidly take on Cold War dimensions, since it would weaken the anticommunist regime and could lead Moscow to offer the Kurds financial aid and clandestine arms—though this would be challenging given the physical difficulties of infiltrating arms into northern Iraq via Turkey or Iran. However, the INR emphasized, the Kurdish leadership viewed Moscow with "suspicion and bitterness" and would only accept Soviet arms as a last resort. The INR recommended a negotiated settlement, mediated by an impartial, non-Arab, Muslim mediator, like the International Red Crescent. However, should fighting break out, the United States would be caught in a difficult position of having to balance its desire for a peaceful settlement and its need to support the Iraqi regime.[53]

In early June 1963, the tension between the regime and the Kurds broke into the open. By this point, Iraq had amassed nearly two-thirds of its army—roughly 45,000 troops—in Kurdistan.[54] On June 10, the regime arrested members of the Kurds' negotiating delegation;[55] declared martial law throughout the north; and issued an ultimatum for the Kurds to lay down their arms within 24 hours and declare allegiance to the government or "suffer [the] consequences."[56] Melbourne immediately cabled Washington to warn that war was inevitable and that the regime had deluded itself into thinking that it would score an easy victory.[57]

In the period prior to the renewal of the Kurdish War on June 10, it is clear that the Kennedy administration had taken active steps to stave off hostilities, including consulting with and urging restraint on the Ba'thist regime. Fearing the worst, the United States also urged its allies, Turkey and Iran, to avoid involvement should war resume. Despite American concerns, the Iraqi regime appeared determined to crush the Kurds militarily.

The Kurdish War

When the Iraqi government attacked the Kurds in June 1963, the Kennedy administration's concern that the war would become a vehicle for Soviet subversion proved accurate. As soon as the war reopened, the Soviet Union went on a diplomatic offensive, condemning the Ba'thist regime, supporting the Kurdish demands for autonomy, and urging one of its satellites—Outer Mongolia—to level charges of genocide against the Iraqi regime at the UN. For its part, the United States tried to maintain the middle ground, urging the Ba'th to seek a negotiated settlement with the Kurds, while also offering limited degree of diplomatic support and military assistance. However, as Soviet support for the Kurds increased, the Kennedy administration was forced to increase its support for

Iraq. With both superpowers intervening on behalf of the two belligerants in this conflict, the Kurdish War was transformed from a localized civil war into a new front in the Cold War.

On June 15, an official Soviet news agency, TASS, accused the Ba'thist regime of "Hitlerite" treachery and using "fascist SS detachments" to commit genocide. The statement asserted that Iraq's Kurdish policy was in direct violation of the UN charter and should be a matter of concern to all nations. This was followed up on June 20, when another official Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, repeated the charges but included a threat to suspend Soviet aid to Iraq. These two articles were the opening salvo of an intensive Soviet diplomatic and propaganda campaign against Iraq and resulted in the Iraqi-Kurdish conflict take on relevance in the Cold War.[58]

For US officials, the problem with this charge was that there was an element of truth to them. Within days of the reopening of the war, US officials in Baghdad received numerous reports of Iraqi atrocities against the Kurds. For instance, on June 19, the embassy cabled Washington to report massacres against civilians trying to flee buildings that had been set on fire by Iraqi troops, and the use of women and children as human shields.[59] Faced with these ghastly accounts, on June 20, Bundy convened the Special Group (CI), a senior interagency group charged with the administration's counterinsurgency efforts. Although accounts of the meeting remain classified, details can be deduced from alternative sources. For instance, Komer sent Bundy a memo on June 19 recommending that he take "a strong line" at the meeting and outlining some key points to address. The memo also said that President Kennedy had taken a personal interest in the conflict and had asked to what extent American assistance to Iraq had been motivated by the Soviets coming out in support of the Kurds, "ergo, we should support the Iraqis." This logic suggests that Kennedy saw the Kurdish question specifically in Cold War terms, which Komer said made "good sense on many counts." However, officials at the State Department opposed this analysis, particularly the head of the NEA, Phillips Talbot, who, Komer and the CIA felt, was "too waffly."[60] Komer also raised the problem of the Shah's assistance to the Kurds, arguing "[it did not] do much good for [the US] to help arm [the] Iraqis and for [the] Turks to close the border if [the] Iranians [were] simultaneously peddling stuff to [the] Kurds. So [an] essential part of any policy must be to beat up the Shah on this score."[61] Another memo, sent to Kennedy on June 21, suggested that the group decided to increase military and economic assistance to Iraq.[62] A third memo, sent by Brubeck to Bundy, suggested that this included increasing funds from $800,000 to a million for a participant training program for Iraqi officials, technicians, and educators in their fields of specialization in America; the implementation of a Title IV program for food assistance; $10,000 in flood assistance; and the sale of 40 light tanks, 12 tanks transporters, 500 heavy trucks, and 15 large helicopters, though details of these sales were under negotiation.[63] Clearly, the Soviet Union's support for the Kurds had led the Kennedy administration to approve a wide range of assistance for Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Soviet-Iraqi split over the Kurds provided the United States with a unique opportunity to obtain intelligence on Soviet military hardware

(SOV-MAT) that Iraq had received under Qasim.[64] On June 27, an official identified only as "TAP"—believed to be Thomas A. Parrott, a high-level CIA official on assignment to the White House at the time[65]—drafted a cryptic, top-secret memo to an undisclosed individual stating:

> At Iraqi request, the proposal for the big item of equipment has been suspended indefinitely. This is because they are worried about the security implications for themselves at this particular time. Hopefully the air delivery will go off the first week of July. This includes tank batteries, rockets, revolvers, ammunition, and the special item.[66]

This can be interpreted in two ways: either the Iraqis were concerned about the United States providing them with a "big item" or the opposite, that is, they were concerned about the security implications of providing the United States with SOV-MAT, which, if discovered, could lead to Soviet aggression. However, the latter seems more likely. A cable sent from the new US ambassador to Iraq, Robert Strong, to the State Department confirms that a US intelligence operation designed to acquire SOV-MAT existed. In the cable, Strong said that the Iraqi government was unlikely to deliver the SOV-MAT if there was a real risk that the Soviets could learn of it, adding that the Iraqis seemed determined to extract a high price. Given this, he advised that the United States "exert every precaution to avoid showing overeagerness," to use "extreme care to avoid jeopardizing our larger interests," and recommended that he be put in charge of coordinating the operation to avoid duplication and prevent misunderstandings.[67] These exchanges make clear that the United States was trying to capitalize on Baghdad's frustration with Moscow to obtain intelligence on Soviet military technology in order to establish benchmarks on its technological advancement. Despite Iraq's reticence, the US-Iraqi relationship suddenly was becoming more important in the eyes of US policymakers.

By the end of June, evidence was mounting of Soviet interference in Iraq. US officials had concluded that the Soviet Union had "abandoned any pretense of non-interference in Iraqi internal affairs" and was intent to "make Iraq [an] open Cold War battleground."[68] Beyond its pro-Kurdish propaganda and a small monthly stipend for Barzani, the CIA also learned that the Soviets had suspended military shipments to Iraq at the end of May.[69] As the situation escalated, Melbourne felt compelled to warn Washington:

> If [the] Soviet Union can help in [the] overthrow [of the government], even for another Nationalist based regime, it [is] hoping for some subsequent environment wherein it can gain tolerance for local Communists and rebuild its influence.[70]

With the Soviets escalating tension, Melbourne believed that the United States could secure lasting influence in Baghdad through the establishment of an arms-supply relationship. To achieve this, he recommended that the embassy increase its contacts with the officer corps and offer to provide services and hardware that would not upset the Middle East power balance.[71]

The Soviet Union's diplomatic offensive against Iraq peaked in early July when it convinced its ally, Outer Mongolia, to submit an item to the agenda for the upcoming General Assembly charging the Iraqi government with conducting a genocidal war against the Kurds.[72] While the Mongolian claim caused quite a stir, this was just the beginning. On July 9, Moscow issued a statement accusing Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)—the Baghdad Pact's successor organization—of undertaking "joint measures" against the Kurds. According to the CIA, this statement was "designed to refute Baghdad's claim that the Kurdish problem is strictly an internal affair and to establish a basis for an appeal for UN or other international action in the matter." In short, the Soviets were trying to internationalize the Kurdish War and draw it deeper into the Cold War. The next day, the Soviet delegation at the UN announced that it was considering taking the matter to the Security Council.[73] Then, going further, the Soviets proposed inscribing charges of genocide against Iraq at the UN's Economic-Social (ECOSOC) committee.[74] Finally, on July 11, the Soviets sent a letter to the Security Council president calling attention to the "serious situation resulting from events in northern Iraq and from interference of states in military operations undertaken against [the] Kurdish people by Iraqi authorities."[75] For the first time, the plight of the Kurds had made its way to the highest level of international diplomacy, but unfortunately, the United States was not on their side.

The genocide charge presented the Kennedy administration with a difficult problem. The fact was that an ethnically Arab government was engaging in a ruthless military campaign against a distinct ethnic minority, targeting civilians, and committing atrocities with some regularity. By definition, Iraq was committing genocide.[76] The problem, however, was that the United States and its Western allies were hesitant to support the Soviet position.[77] The Kennedy administration saw the genocide charge as a Soviet maneuver aimed at punishing the Ba'th for its repression against the communists:

> [The] Mongolian genocide charge at United Nations presents [a] difficult problem for [the] USG. We very rarely oppose inscription of items, even when we [are] against [its] substance…However, in view of [the] special circumstances surrounding [the] Kurdish issue, including tendentious nature of [the] wording of [the] item and [the] fact that it represents a Soviet effort to penalize a country for adopting a less sympathetic policy toward [the] Soviet Bloc, Department is considering opposing inscription.[78]

This was pure Cold War politics. When faced with an aggressive Soviet diplomatic offensive, the United States was compelled to back the Iraqi regime, even though it was committing atrocities against the Kurds.

It seems that Moscow's diplomatic maneuvers at the UN were only part of its strategy for Iraq. In the early hours of July 3, pro-Soviet elements inside Iraq launched a coup, seizing Camp Rashid, an important military base just to the southeast of Baghdad. Fortunately, according to a US military attaché based in Baghdad, Iraqi security forces "acted swiftly and evidently according to [a] well

planned system" and foiled the attempt.[79] The CIA was convinced that the Soviets were behind the plot. According to an intelligence summary from July 13:

> Iraqi security forces have arrested two more members of a Soviet bloc intelligence net in Baghdad. Their confessions have provided direct evidence that the net was organized and directed by [redacted] and have implicated local Soviets with . . . staging the 3 July 1963 coup attempt.[80]

Another CIA report suggested that the coup was part of a wider Soviet strategy aimed at regaining control of Iraq:

> There is strong evidence to suggest [Soviet] bloc involvement in the 3 July uprising at Camp Rashid, and it is likely that the USSR will work both through propaganda media and covertly to bring about the overthrow of the Ba'th in Iraq, calculating that any successor regime would be more favorable to Communist interests.[81]

The foiled Camp Rashid coup made clear that the Soviet Union viewed Iraq as a geopolitical prize important enough to take the risk of covert action to regain control. Iraq had once again become a Cold War battleground.

Just prior to the coup, the new US ambassador to Iraq, Robert Strong, arrived in Baghdad and arranged with the foreign ministry an opportunity to present his diplomatic credentials to Prime Minister al-Bakr in early July.[82] When the two met on July 7, the importance of the Cold War was apparent. Al-Bakr explained that if Iraq was to avoid communist control it needed external support. He described Iraq's confrontation with the communists as an "American battle" and explained that he wanted "cordial relations" with the United States, but emphasized his desire to adopt a nonaligned foreign policy. Strong said that the United States wanted Iraq to remain independent, accepted a nonaligned Iraqi foreign policy, and was deeply interested in Iraq's efforts to combat communism. He urged the regime to continue to create conditions that would help reduce communism's appeal and said that Iraq was welcome to unite with any other state as long as it was done voluntarily. At no point were the Kurdish War or the impending arms deal raised.[83]

The Soviet Union's aggressive tactics against Iraq convinced the Kennedy administration to expand its support for the new regime. On July 10, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Sloan sent Komer a memo outlining the types of military assistance the Pentagon could provide to Iraq. A few weeks earlier, the DOD had sent a survey team to Iraq to assess its military needs and identify areas where the United States could potentially help. It concluded that, in addition to the helicopters, M-41 light tanks, tank transporters, and trucks already on the table, Iraq was interested in purchasing 6 S-61R Sikorsky helicopters, 10 C-119 troop carrier aircraft, 12 advanced jet trainers, 2 squadrons (36 in total) of F-104 or F-100 fighter aircraft, and a complete set of early-warning radars. As grant aid, the team recommended repairing five F-86 aircraft and three US-made 8" Howitzers from the monarchy period, the latter of which would require training teams and at least 5,000 rounds of ammunition. In total, this

arms package would cost approximately $55 million.[84] Once again, the United States was expanding its support for Iraq in response to Soviet provocations.

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

The First Back Channel

In mid-July 1963, US policy toward Iraq and the Kurdish War shifted in response to the State Department's concerns about the Ba'thist regime's survival, its engaging in acts that appeared to be genocide, and the lack of influence the United States had over the Kurds. With the war spiraling out of control and the Soviets seeking to overthrow the Ba'thist regime, the Kennedy administration adopted a proactive policy that sought to bring about a ceasefire in the Kurdish War and stability back to Iraq.

On July 12, James Spain of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff drafted a memo arguing that Iraq was headed toward a showdown with the Soviet Union and the Kurds. With hostility between Baghdad and Moscow escalating, Spain was concerned the regime's survival might depend on stronger American support than "envisaged in the limits of [the] present policy." Problematically, Iraq's "extreme policy" toward the Kurds now resembled an act of genocide. Spain wrote:

> [The] policy of the nationalist Arabs who dominate the Baghdad government does in fact come close to genocide. According to a senior Iraqi army officer it consists of: taking only such Kurdish prisoners as may supply information and then shooting them, ultimately reducing the adult male Kurdish population to one-tenth of what it now is, letting the women and children fend for themselves, and repopulating the area with Arabs.[85]

This made it difficult for the United States to build diplomatic support to block Soviet efforts in international forums, like the UN. Another problem was that America's contact with the Kurds was limited, which meant that the United States had forfeited an opportunity to try to influence their attitudes. Up to this point, the United States had never actually tried to cultivate influence with the Kurds. This was a mistake, Spain argued, because "future US actions and initiatives [in

Iraq] may have to go beyond the bounds of [their] previous 'stand by' policy." He proposed three policy alternatives:

> (A) Development of a vigorous coordinated effort to encourage . . . a transition to greater reliance on Western sources of supply for Iraq's foreign trade and development needs;
> (B) A US commitment . . . to support Iraq against Communist threats and pressures in the political and security fields; and
> (C) A frank representation . . . that while, unlike the Soviets, we will not support the Kurds against it, we do disapprove of its unduly repressive policy toward them and cannot bring to bear the full power of our . . . support as long as this policy continues; in addition, we are aware that . . . their military action against the Kurds [had] not [succeeded] as claimed.[86]

He made two additional suggestions worth consideration: (1) the United States needed to establish "secret or semi-official contact" with Barzani to obtain better information on his activities, intentions, and whether the United States can exert influence on him; and (2) the United States could promote third-party "good offices" to help reach a negotiated settlement with the regime.[87] Spain's proposals would have a considerable impact on the US policy toward Iraq and the Kurdish problem and lead to a US initiative aimed at bringing about a ceasefire in the conflict.

On July 18, the State Department sent out policy guidelines for Iraq to all its posts in the region reflecting Spain's analysis. The department was convinced the Kurdish War had stalemated and the conditions for a mediated settlement were ideal. While the United States would continue to regard the Kurdish problem as an "internal Iraqi question," it was also sympathetic to the Kurds' legitimate claims. However, the United States had a "strong stake" in the Ba'thist regime's survival because it was more likely to advance American interests than any likely successor regime. Given this dichotomy, the guidelines called for encouraging the regime to grant Kurds cultural autonomy and local administration; offering assistance for the reconstruction, development, and modernization of the Kurdish region; providing Iraq with food and work relief projects; and urging the regime of the "wisdom of moderation" when dealing with Kurdish civilians. On the question of the genocide charge at the UN, the department was inclined to step back and encourage its Arab allies oppose it. Taken together, the United States had decided to pressure the Iraqi regime into settling the Kurdish question peacefully, while avoiding being dragged into the conflict.[88]

As if by fate, that same day, Cyrus Habibi, a former local employee of the US consulate in Tabriz, who had close contacts with the Iraqi Kurds, delivered a letter from Barzani to the consulate that asked President Kennedy to help mediate a ceasefire.[89] The administration's response to Barzani's proposal highlighted the impact of Spain's recommendations. The new US ambassador to Iran, Julius Holmes, recommended that the US consul in Tabriz reiterate the nonintervention policy,[90] but the State Department had different ideas. It forwarded Barzani's letter to the White House in early August, indicating that it wanted to go a step further

and tell Habibi that the message had been forwarded to the department and that the consul was responding on behalf of the US government. This acknowledgment would thereby "demonstrate, if only symbolically, [America's] concern for and interest in the Kurds." The NSC staff agreed, with Komer scrawling in the margins of the document: "Approve."[91] The new instructions were forwarded on to Tehran on August 7 and raised with Barzani's intermediary on August 12,[92] demonstrating that a subtle shift was taking place regarding the Kurds.

However, on August 15, the White House adopted a "favorable" arms policy toward Iraq, and final approval was given for an extensive arms package. The new arms policy consisted of responding favorably to Iraqi requests falling within the approved US arms policy and are available from US sources; deliveries should be made as rapidly as possible; any equipment furnished had to be on a cash basis; credit terms could be arranged but only if it would not have an adverse impact on Iraq's economy; and consultations should be undertaken with US allies to encourage the adoption of similar arms policies.[93]

The shift in US policy caught Barzani's attention, leading to the opening of a new channel to the US government. According to Carleton Coon, the US consul in Tabriz, on August 16, a prominent Kurd approached the consulate and asked the United States to "take [a] leading role in getting negotiations started and particularly in bringing about [a] truce or cease-fire."[94] Unlike Barzani's earlier letter to Kennedy, this was the first time that the Kurds had asked the United States to assume a direct role in mediating a ceasefire, prompting the department to cable Baghdad to ascertain its views on the matter, while asking Tehran to await further guidance.[95] The embassy in Baghdad responded positively on August 20, arguing that a Barzani-initiated ceasefire held promise since it would allow the regime to sell it to its people as a victory and let it save face. There was, however, a chance that the regime would interpret the proposal as a sign of weakness or a clever ploy to undermine its credibility. Even so, the embassy felt it was worthwhile for the United States to act as a messenger between Barzani and Baghdad but advised against a direct mediating role. Significantly, the embassy urged the department to act immediately, since the Iraqi army stood little chance of holding out against the Kurds during the oncoming winter.[96] Another reason for urgency was fear that word of the American contacts with Barzani could be leaked before a decision about how to respond had been reached. The basis of this stemmed from the Cold War considerations; the entire approach could have been a Soviet plot aimed at driving a wedge between the United States and Iraq.[97]

These concerns were addressed in a cable to Baghdad, Tehran, and London on August 23. The department recommended that Baghdad "promptly and unilaterally inform [the] Iraqi Government in confidence that Barzani claims to desire [a] cease fire" and its willingness to transmit a response. US officials in Tehran were also advised to inform the Iranians of Barzani's approach on a strictly confidential basis; endorsed Baghdad's recommendation that the United States "act alone as messenger rather than in concert with Iran"; and ordered Coon to inform Barzani's intermediary that the Iraqi government would be told of the request for negotiations. He was also to "stress" that America's role was simply

to act as a messenger, an intermediary. Finally, the department believed that the British needed to be informed of the approach.[98]

When Strong informed Prime Minister al-Bakr of Barzani's proposal and the State Department's willingness to pass a response on August 25, the Iraqi leader "expressed astonishment" at America's involvement and questioned why Barzani had not sent the message through the Soviets, who appeared to be his ally. Strong emphasized that he was only passing along information and was not dealing with the substance of the Kurdish problem.[99] When Holmes told Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Aram of the approach on August 26, he reported back to Washington that the conversation "was inconclusive and produced nothing worth reporting."[100] The next day, Coon reported that the message to Barzani had been passed to the intermediary.[101]

On September 12, Benjamin Read, the State Department's new executive secretary, sent Bundy a memo detailing Barzani's letters to President Kennedy, the debate over the administration's response, and the approach taken in Tabriz. After reviewing the documents, Komer recommended that Bundy inform the president on this matter, if only to better prepare him for the upcoming General Assembly, in the "off chance someone may ask [him] if he's heard from [the] Kurds." Komer emphasized the political sensitivity of this issue, pointing out that the Iraqis had proven to be highly sensitive about the impending arrival of a Kurdish delegation to New York for the General Assembly meeting and had tried unsuccessfully to lobby the United States to bar the Kurds' entry.[102]

In mid-September, it became clear that the Iraqi regime had no interest in using the US channel to the Kurds, leading Strong to advise the department to "avoid any further action with either Barzani or [the] Iraqi government unless one or both of them shows initiative."[103] Unexpectedly, the American decision to abandon the Barzani channel led the Iranians to try to revive it. On September 16, Major General Hassan Pakravan (the head of Iran's National Intelligence and Security Organization [SAVAK]) met with Holmes to discuss the Kurdish War. Apparently, a few days earlier, the Shah had met with Barzani, who complained about the collapse of the ceasefire effort. Pakravan said that the Shah wanted the United States to understand five things about Barzani: (1) he was not a communist; (2) he recognized that an independent Kurdistan would be "sheer foolishness"; (3) he was pushing for only a minimal degree of autonomy; (4) he wanted to stop fighting and return to the negotiating table; and (5) Barzani needed external guarantees that his people would not be "delivered to the tender mercies of the Baghdad government." The Shah felt that these were reasonable points and wanted the Kennedy administration to pressure the Iraqi regime to end the fighting. However, the Shah was also "perplexed as to what to do next" and wanted to know where the United States stood. Holmes told the Shah that the United States agreed that a ceasefire was the best option and expressed his hope that the United States and Iran could work together to achieve this. Unfortunately, achieving this was problematic because while the present regime in Baghdad was the best the United States could hope for, the Ba'th showed a "general lack of enthusiasm" toward America's earlier effort to achieve a ceasefire.[104] Pakvaran's approach underscored Iran's role in supporting the Kurds, as this was the first

instance where the Shah had conducted diplomacy on Barzani's behalf. For the next decade, US officials would resist Iranian pressure to help the Kurds, but the Shah's open identification with the Kurds dispelled the notion that Barzani was pro-communist and beholden to the Soviets.

By mid-September, the Soviet diplomatic offensive against Iraq at the UN had clearly fizzled out. Due to opposition from the Arab states, the Soviet Union ordered the Outer Mongolia delegation to drop the Kurdish genocide question from the United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) agenda on September 16. It is open to speculation why the Soviets allowed the item to be removed. One explanation, according to the *New York Times*, was the Mongolians had found insufficient support to inscribe the item.[105] The State Department offered an alternative explanation, indicating that the Soviets had ordered Mongolia to retract the item as a gesture of goodwill toward the Iraqi regime, which it hoped would pave the way for political rapprochement.[106] Either way, the removal of the genocide charge provided the Ba'thist regime with a much-needed political victory.

While at the UNGA, on October 1, Secretary Rusk met with Foreign Minister Shabib and Iraq's ambassador to the UN, Adnan Pachachi. During the talks, Rusk expressed overall satisfaction with the state of US-Iraqi relations, and emphasized that the United States had no ambitions in Iraq and only wanted the "maintenance and advancement of [its] independence, prosperity and security." Shabib raised the question of whether the United States would provide Title IV food aid to Iraq, which that year had been hit hard by a drought, describing the American response to his request as "far from enthusiastic." There was a reason for this, Rusk explained. The United States had been trying to avoid embarrassing Iraq with "an over-eager and aggressive American attitude." Turning to the Kurdish question, Rusk asked about the prospects for a peaceful settlement. Shabib said that Barzani was essentially defeated, the war was "practically over," and "military operations should be completed" before the onset of winter. Knowing this was untrue, Rusk pressed further, asking if he meant that the two parties would reach a "political peace as distinct from an end to the fighting." This prompted a hardline response, with Shabib saying, "development and decentralization" in Kurdistan "[could] only be accomplished after the armed threat [was] ended." It was clear from this conversation that the regime was still convinced that the use of force was the only solution to the Kurdish problem.[107]

After months of heavy fighting, by October, it was evident that both the Iraqis and Kurds were short on supplies. On the Iraqi side, the Soviet embargo had deprived it of ordinance lost during the fighting, prompting the Ba'th Party to send a delegation to Cairo in early October to persuade Egypt to supply it with enough Soviet-made arms and ammunition to allow the war to continue, though details about Nasser's response remain unavailable.[108] There were also reports that Syria had sent about 5,000 troops to Iraq to help fight the Kurds.[109] Meanwhile, the CIA learned that Iran had arranged the transportation to the Kurds of several shipments of bazookas, small arms,[110] and a radio transmitter all purchased in Europe.[111] Despite Shabib's assertion to Rusk that the Kurds were nearly defeated, Iraq's efforts to resupply its arms stock and introduction of Syrian troops clearly

suggested otherwise. To be sure, the Kurds' acquisition of weapons from Europe also demonstrates that the war was set to escalate further.

By the fall of 1963, the US approach to Iraq had shifted away from its "wait and see" policy toward that of engagement. This was due to American concerns that the Ba'thist regime's deteriorating relations with the Soviets and its ineffective war with the Kurds posed a threat to its survival. From a US perspective, the only solution was a negotiated peace. However, just as the shift in thinking was taking place in Washington, Barzani provided the United States with an opportunity to help bring about a ceasefire, while at the same time establishing a direct line of communication with the Kurdish leadership. Unfortunately, Baghdad's less-than-enthusiastic response led to the initiative's collapse. It was at this point that Iran's role in the Kurdish War became much more overt, particularly its hand in facilitating the US-Kurdish opening and in securing Kurdish access to arms. This would, in turn, reinforce the perception among US officials that Barzani was an opportunist, who was willing to accept support for any quarter so long as it helped advance his strategic goals.

The Collapse of the Ba'th Party

In the fall of 1963, a power struggle emerged within the Iraqi regime over the question of Arab unification. The struggle pitted the moderate, military wing of the party led by al-Bakr and President Abd al-Salim Arif (who was not actually a Ba'thist) against the extremist, civilian wing, embodied by Ali Salih al-Sa'di, an influential former premier and interior minister. As Tripp describes him, "al-Sa'di was the most…powerful member of the three at the time, although his authority did not go uncontested." The source of al-Sa'di's influence came from his position as head of the Ba'th regional command, which was the most powerful position in the Iraqi wing of the party. However, it was his role as head of the militant National Guard that concerned Iraq's military the most. Earlier, the military had tried and failed to have the National Guard dissolved, but in early September, when al-Sa'di declared his support for Marxism, his opponents opted to take matters into their own hands.[112] According to the US Embassy in Baghdad, the plan was for al-Bakr and Arif, with the help of the military, to remove al-Sa'di and the Ba'th from the machinery of power, seize control of the government, settle the Kurdish problem, and resume unity talks with Cairo, which had collapsed earlier that year. The embassy believed that this would come in the form of a cabinet reshuffle that would remove hardline Ba'thist officials from power, see al-Sa'di arrested and sent abroad as an ambassador, and have the military neutralize the National Guard.[113] While this was what would eventually happen, unforeseen circumstances delayed the plan's implementation until mid-November.

However, on October 7, al-Sa'di outflanked his opponents in the military when the Ba'th Party announced a cabinet shuffle, which replaced a number of non-Ba'th ministers with Ba'thist stalwarts. For instance, two moderate ministers, Interior Minister Hazim Jawad and Foreign Minister Talib Shabib, were dropped

from the Ba'th National Command, the party's main governing body.[114] The US Embassy in Baghdad described this move as the "Ba'thization" of the cabinet.[115] Going further, al-Sa'di also put forward a resolution aimed at strengthening the National Guard. Taken together, the Ba'thization of the cabinet and the strengthening of the National Guard helped al-Sa'di consolidate power, while weakening the moderates in both the government and military. Unsurprisingly, these moves convinced those involved in the al-Bakr-Arif plot that they had to take matters into their own hands.[116]

Despite this, throughout October, the Syrian and Iraqi wings of the Ba'th Party were moving forward with plans to unify the two countries—Syria had undergone a similar Ba'thist coup on March 8, 1963, a month after the Iraqi coup. On October 8, Arif announced the unification of Iraq and Syria's armed forces and the formation of a joint military council, made up of three representatives from each state. The Egyptians had declined joining the union.[117] Throughout the rest of October, the Ba'th Party held its Sixth National Congress in Damascus to work out a framework for full unification.[118] According to the *New York Times*, the congress decided that a plebiscite on union would be held in both countries within two months, and a new country, called the Arab Democratic People's Republic, would be formed, with Baghdad as the new capital.[119]

At the start of November, the struggle between the moderate and radical wings of the Ba'th Party burst into the open. On November 1, the commander of the National Guard, Mundhir al-Wandawi, was dismissed from his post but he refused to step down, underscoring the weakness of the state and encouraging the military to finally overthrow the Ba'th.[120] However, before they could act, another more moderate group—led by Jawad and Shabib—moved first. On November 11, a meeting of the Ba'th Regional (Iraq) Command was convened in Baghdad. At the meeting, Jawad and Shabib ambushed al-Sa'di and his supporters by accusing them of taking "unauthorized actions contrary to the policies of the government and the party." The congress voted to uphold the charges and al-Sa'di and his cohorts were escorted to a waiting plane and flown into exile in Spain. In a matter of hours, the extremist wing of the Ba'th appeared to have been eliminated from power. However, as word of al-Sa'di's ousting spread, the National Guard took to the streets occupying key positions as sporadic skirmishes broke out throughout the city. At the same time, the Ba'th National Command, which oversees the party in both countries, dispatched a delegation to Baghdad led by Michel Aflaq, the Ba'th Party's founding father and political ideologue.[121] The situation in Iraq was spiraling out of control.

The move against al-Sa'di caught the US Embassy in Baghdad completely off guard. While the embassy had known of plotting against al-Sa'di since September, on the morning of the coup, it sent an assessment to Washington that concluded, "[the] regime probably has some time, perhaps [a] year or two, before it is really challenged."[122] Even the next day, the embassy was uncertain about what had happened: "several sources indicate that Saadi… [was] exiled sometime during [the] day rather than last night."[123] In short, neither the embassy nor the State Department knew what was happening in Baghdad and it was not until the morning of November 13 that the White House Situation Room informed

President Kennedy that a coup might have taken place. Unfortunately, the United States was "unable to determine [its] extent" because the reports coming out of Baghdad were "sketchy."[124] Even by November 15, the White House was having difficulty ascertaining what was taking place in Iraq. That day, Komer sent a memo to Bundy explaining that it was difficult to keep the Oval office apprised of what had been happening because the situation was "still too confused for confident assessment."[125]

Meanwhile, events in Baghdad had escalated on November 13 when the National Guard held demonstrations in downtown Baghdad demanding Jawad's dismissal. Soon thereafter, it attacked and occupied a police station in a main square, as well as two other locations. Then another mob formed and tried to occupy a key radio station, but a loyal tank battalion forced them to disperse. Events took a turn for the worse shortly after 9 a.m. when an Iraqi Air Force jet flown by al-Wandawi strafed the Presidential Palace with both rockets and machine-gun fire, and managed to drop a bomb in the same room as President Arif, who escaped uninjured. Eventually, loyalist aircraft were able to force Wandawi's plane down, but he escaped to Syria.[126] With the excesses of the extremist elements of the Ba'th and National Guard evident, al-Bakr then ordered the army to occupy all strategic points in Baghdad, imposed a curfew, and dispersed all traffic from the streets.[127] Significantly, when al-Bakr ordered the National Guards' 23-year-old commander to return his paramilitary forces to its barracks, he refused, which only infuriated members of Iraq's military further.[128] Later that evening, al-Bakr called a meeting of the Regional (Iraq) Command to assess the situation before the arrival of Aflaq and the National Command. According to the CIA, al-Bakr decided that Jawad and Shabib would also have to go into exile, but when Aflaq arrived after they had left and learned of this decision he was furious that he had not been consulted.[129]

For the next few days, the situation in Iraq continued to escalate and eventually forced the military to take action. On November 15, the National Command announced that it would assume control of Iraq while the Regional (Iraq) Command resolved its internal squabbles. Syria's apparent usurpation of power proved to be too much for proud Iraqi nationalists in the military. Throughout November 16 and 17, senior members of the regime, including Arif, al-Bakr, and General Saleh Mehdi Ammash, a high-ranking Ba'thist military officer, called in the senior commanders of the military and devised a plan of action to oust not only the Syrians, but the National Guard as well.[130] On the morning of November 18, President Arif ordered the military to crush the Ba'th and the National Guard.[131] By early morning, the National Guard was ordered to return to its barracks and give up its arms or else it would be crushed by force.[132] Military personnel supported the coup overwhelmingly and by noon Arif was in full control of the country. The Ba'thist regime was finished, at least for now.

A few days later on November 21, officials at the White House decided that because Arif still remained the head of state in Iraq, the United States did not need to consider extending diplomatic recognition to the new regime.[133] The next day, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, bringing his presidency to an abrupt end.

Conclusion

Between February and November 1963, Iraq was a Cold War battleground, leading to both American and Soviet interventions. Without question, the Ba'thist coup in February 1963 coup was "a net gain" for America in its Cold War contest with the Soviet Union.[134] After all, the pro-Soviet Qasim regime had been replaced by an anticommunist, Arab nationalist one, which was engaged in a brutal campaign against Iraq's communists. Pleased with the results, the Kennedy administration sought to cultivate friendly relations with Iraq through military, economic, and social assistance in order to gradually bring it more aligned with American policies. However, despite assertions that the CIA was behind the coup and later provided death squads with lists of communists, there exists enough evidence to raise questions about whether this happened.

The overall objective of the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq was to achieve internal stability and prevent the Soviet Union from regaining influence. However, Moscow's intervention in support of the Kurds and the regime's determination to crush them militarily undermined these objectives. Fearing the regime's survival, throughout the spring of 1963, the Kennedy administration pressed the Ba'th Party to make reasonable concessions to the Kurds without much success. At the same time, Iraq's request in April 1963 to purchase American arms put the Kennedy administration in a difficult position. While the White House wanted the Ba'th Party to resolve the Kurdish War peacefully, it agreed "in principle" to sell Iraq arms out of Cold War considerations. It believed that the deal could draw Iraq further away from the Soviets and build Western influence in Baghdad. However, when the Kurdish War resumed in June 1963, it took on Cold War dimensions rapidly. While the Soviet Union ceased military shipments to Iraq, supported Kurdish demands for autonomy, and accused the regime of committing genocide, the White House approved a $55 million arms deal for Iraq, turned a blind eye to Iraq's numerous atrocities, and urged its Arab allies to rally diplomatic support against the genocide charge at the UN. In both cases, the superpowers intervened in Iraq's internal affairs in order to promote their differing ideological agendas.

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

The United States was again caught off guard when the Ba'thist regime imploded in November 1963. While the United States was aware of the regime's internal rivalries and divisions over the question of unification with Syria, the ousting of al-Sa'di came as a surprise. As pitched battles erupted in the streets

and the Syrian Ba'th sought to seize control of Iraq, all the Kennedy administration could do was monitor events as the Iraqi military, led by President Abd al-Salim Arif, ousted the Ba'th Party, neutralized the National Guard, and took control of the country. Because US officials were confused about what was happening in Baghdad, they had no way to influence events.

In the end, the Kennedy administration's policy toward the Ba'thist regime and the Kurdish War can best be explained by its belief that Iraq was a Cold War battleground. Whenever the Soviet Union increased its support for the Kurds, the United States responded by backing the Iraqi regime further; and Washington even tried to rob Moscow of its "Kurdish Card" by trying to bring about a ceasefire. This clearly underscores Iraq's importance in the wider struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union over control of the Middle East, a fact that has been neglected in the broader historiography of the Cold War in the Middle East.

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Johnson and the Arab Nationalists: November 1963–June 1967

At the time of John F. Kennedy's assassination, the US foreign policy establishment was busy assessing the implications of the Arab nationalist military coup in Iraq that had overthrown the Ba'th Party just four days earlier. Despite the devastating blow Kennedy's assassination had on the US foreign policy establishment in Washington, the transition of power to Lyndon Baines Johnson went smoothly, largely because he kept on many of Kennedy's key foreign policy advisers, namely, McGeorge Bundy as a national security adviser (until 1966), Robert McNamara as the secretary of defense (until 1968), and Dean Rusk as the secretary of state. Throughout Johnson's presidency, the shadow of the war in Vietnam loomed, even as he tried to implement a series of wide-reaching domestic reforms in major areas like civil rights, social security, and the health care.[1] This would have a profound impact on his administration's policies toward Iraq.

In the period leading up to the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967, the superpowers drifted toward opposite poles of power in the Middle East, with the Soviet Union reconciling with Egypt, while the United States was improving its relationship with Iraq. The overthrow of Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime in February 1963, the Ba'th Party's decimation of Iraq's communists while in power, and Moscow's overt support for the Kurds in 1963, all suggested that the Soviet Union had lost its primary source of influence in the region. As a result, the Kremlin refocused its efforts to improve relations with Egypt's charismatic president, Gamal Abd al-Nasser, who's military was bogged down in the Yemeni Civil War and in desperate need of both advisers and weapons.[2] Understandably, Nasser's growing reliance on the Soviets for assistance in Yemen contributed, in turn, to a steady deterioration of his relationship with America.[3]

Meanwhile, under Johnson, US-Iraqi relations underwent a gradual improvement during the Arab nationalist presidencies of Abd al-Salim Arif (until his untimely death in April 1966) and his brother Abd ar-Rahman Arif (who was overthrown by the Ba'th Party in July 1968). Arif was not new to Iraq's political scene;

he had played a key role in the 1958 revolution and was the president during the previous Ba'th regime. With strong support from the military, Arif reestablished friendly relations with Nasser, adopted an Arab nationalist in ideological outlook, and seemed likely to maintain its anticommunist domestic policies. At the same time, Iraq's foreign policy appeared more balanced than the Ba'th Party's, leading to friendly relations with both the Eastern and Western blocs in the Cold War—a policy known as positive neutrality.[4] Due to Iraq's change in outlook, the Johnson administration decided to shift America's policies away from Kennedy's open support for Ba'th Party, back toward its traditional "wait and see" policy that sought to build friendly relations and counter Soviet influence.[5] This relatively mild approach toward Iraq created tension with three of its closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel, who were all giving the Kurds military and economic support to destabilize the pro-Nasser Arif regimes. However, Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds backfired, when the Kurds defeated the Iraqi army in the Battle of Mount Handren in May 1966, just a month after Abd al-Salim Arif died in a plane crash. Afterward, the Iraqi government issued a declaration promising the Kurds a significant measure of autonomy, bringing the war to an uneasy truce. With the Kurdish problem settled, the United States and Iraq were able to improve relations, culminating in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the Oval office in January and a private meeting in June between President Johnson and Iraq's new foreign minister, Adnan Pachachi. Unfortunately, any progress US-Iraqi relations had achieved under Abd ar-Rahman Arif was lost with the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967, prompting Iraq to break diplomatic relations with America. This period was one of the rare instances between 1958 and 1975 where neither the United States nor the Soviet Union intervened directly in Iraq's internal affairs.

Assessing Arif

Immediately following President Kennedy's assassination, the US foreign policy establishment was forced to review its policies to bring President Johnson's new team up to speed. On November 23, 1963, Phillips Talbot, the assistant secretary of state for the NEA, sent Secretary of State Dean Rusk a memo summarizing the status of the region. On Iraq, Talbot said it was "too early to be sure" how the coup would affect US interests, but "the new regime… [seemed] to have established itself as an Iraqi nationalist-cum-moderate Ba'thist government relying heavily on the power of the Army."[6] In early December, Robert Strong, the US ambassador to Iraq, sent Robert Komer, Johnson's top Middle East advisor, a personal letter outlining the steps the embassy had taken since the coup and his assessment of Iraq's foreign policy. Strong described Arif to Komer as pro-union, moderate, anticommunist, said that he had a strong backing from Iraq's military, which was crucial to maintaining stability, and reminded him of Arif's close relationship with Egypt's president Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Unfortunately, the situation was still uncertain because there were too many unknown factors to allow US officials to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, Strong was convinced

that if the regime could maintain its anticommunist posture, the United States would be able to find areas of common ground.[7]

Despite Iraq's anticommunist domestic stance, the Johnson administration remained concerned about the new regime's stance in the Cold War. On December 9, the INR circulated a research memo assessing the future of Soviet-Iraqi relations. It concluded that while the Soviets and Iraqi communists had conspired to overthrow the Ba'thist regime, "neither played a detectable role in the coup . . . thereby demonstrating their inability to influence developments in the Arab world." The Soviets had been cautious in approaching the new regime and had taken time to assess Arif's stability and political orientation. Given this, the INR believed that Moscow would continue to press for a Kurdish settlement, seek to undermine the remaining Ba'thists in the regime, and encourage the formation of a National Front government with the Kurds and communists through offers of increased military and economic assistance. However, because the new regime was unlikely to make concessions toward the Kurds or align itself with the communists, the INR concluded, "Soviet forbearance may be short-lived."[8]

Given the positive assessments coming from diplomats on the ground in Baghdad, senior officials in Washington, and the INR, by early 1964, the Johnson administration had reached the conclusion that Iraq had finally formed a government capable of stabilizing the country and lead it on a path toward development.

Meanwhile, Arif, having learned lessons from both Qasim and the Ba'th, took steps to immediately consolidate power. This occurred in two phases. First, on January 5, Arif removed Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr from his new post as vice president and sent him into exile as an ambassador. This was significant because al-Bakr had been one of the few influential holdovers from the previous Ba'thist regime; so his removal cut the Ba'th Party off from the levers of power.[9] Next, Arif turned to the Kurdish problem and offered the Kurdish leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, concessions on the recognition of Kurdish national rights within a unified Iraq, the release of prisoners, the reinstatement of government administration, the lifting of the economic blockade against Kurdistan, and rehabilitation of the north's economy. These assurances were formalized in a ceasefire announcement on February 10, 1964.[10] While clearly a positive step, the agreement was divisive within the Kurdish ranks, as two senior KDP officials, Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed, denounced the agreement for failing to provide self-administration. This divide would eventually split the party into two competing factions.[11]

The United States viewed the coming to power of the Arif regime as a positive development, largely because of its anticommunist outlook, its support from Iraq's military, and potential to achieve internal stability. Furthermore, the removal of al-Bakr, the sidelining of the Ba'th Party, and the truce with Barzani showed that Arif was capable of restoring stability to Iraq, while raising the likelihood of Iraq's unification with Egypt. However, the prospect of Nasser taking control of Iraq and establishing Egyptian influence in the Gulf region caused concern among America's closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel.

Disputes among Friends

For the second half of 1964, America's policies toward Iraq were at direct odds with Britain, Iran, and Israel. While the differences with Iran and Israel were superficial and mostly related to the Kurdish problem and Nasser's growing influence in Baghdad, America's differences with Britain—much like those in the Yemen conflict—reflected a breakdown in the so-called Anglo-American "Special Relationship." The break was so apparent by October 1964 that Strong felt compelled to write "informal" letters to both Talbot and Komer, warning them of the duplicitous nature of British policy.[12]

The interests of all three parties coalesced around two central points: a mutual hatred for Nasser, who now held considerable influence in Baghdad as the two countries made moves toward unity and the use of the Kurds as a useful coercive tool to overthrow the Arif regime, destabilize it to the point that Nasser would lose interest in unity, or tie down Iraq's military inside the country, which would prevent it from being used to threaten British or Iranian interests in the Gulf or in a war against Israel. The United States was not blind to the danger Nasser's potential domination of Iraq and the Gulf posed to its interests, but the Johnson administration was convinced that the Arif regime was the best possible government for Iraq. This suggests that, during 1964–65, the Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq reflected a realistic assessment in terms of the Cold War, while its closest allies viewed Iraq specifically in terms of their own regional interests.

At some point in August 1964, a British official—likely the MI6 (Military Intelligence – Section 6) station chief—approached the CIA station chief at the US Embassy in Baghdad. According to a memo detailing the encounter, the British official was "seeking on a personal basis to enlist US support in a campaign against Nasser and [Egyptian]-Iraqi unity." Britain's Conservative government, led by Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home, faced a general election in mid-October, and had decided that it "could not live with Nasser and must do something about him, and…could not stand [Egyptian]-Iraqi unity because of their interests in the Gulf." To prevent this, the official revealed, the British "intended to work with Iran against Nasser and the [Arif] regime." The memo indicated that a similar approach had been made to US officials in Washington, though details are not available. The station chief gave "a strong negative answer" to the British proposal, arguing that it was a "wrong" approach and that neither the British nor the Iranians had the assets to execute this operation successfully.[13] Furthermore, in August, the US officials in Baghdad learned that the British Embassy's first secretary, Stephen Egerton, had met with a group of Kurds and urged them to renew the military conflict with Baghdad, take a "strong anti-Nasser line," and promised British support through Iran.[14] Finally, Egerton took a similar line with a pro-Barzani Kurd named Shaqat Aqrawi during a meeting held at the Baghdad home of a US official, Jim Atkins, though Egerton's promises of British aid were not raised.[15] Taken together, these incidents suggest that US officials were opposed to British efforts to use the Kurds to destabilize the Arif regime in August 1964.

Given the scale of British plotting at this point, it is not surprising that Iraqi security forces foiled a plot in early September aimed at returning the Ba'th Party

to power. Although there is no direct evidence implicating them, Britain's connection to the Ba'th Party has been established as far as the June 1962 coup plot against Qasim. Nevertheless, Iraqi news reports connected former Ba'thist premier Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr to the plot.[16] Regardless of who was behind it, the plot allowed Arif to order a crackdown on the Ba'th Party, leading to the arrest of over a thousand people. At the same time, Nasser's fortunes in Iraq increased when he dispatched Egyptian troops to Baghdad to help bolster the regime. As a reward, Arif appointed Nasserist elements to his cabinet. The failed Ba'thist coup allowed Arif to strengthen his grip on power and raise Iraqi-Egyptian relations to a new high. It would also lead to increased pressure on both Arif and Nasser for unification, but, as Tripp pointed out, both held private reservations.[17]

The rise in Nasser's fortunes following the failed coup in Iraq was viewed by London, Tehran, and Tel Aviv as a highly negative development and led to increased pressure on the Kurds to resume fighting. Consequently, in October, Barzani defied the regime openly by establishing a 43-member legislature, a revolutionary council to direct the war, and an executive committee with 11 members that Barzani would chair.[18] In addition, he sent Arif a public letter on October 11 accusing the government of failing to implement the conditions of the February ceasefire. Refusing to acknowledge Barzani's demands, Arif insisted that the Kurds withdraw the Kurdish military—known as the Peshmerga or "those who seek death"—from major roads, cease military activities, return captured weapons to the army, and permit the central government to administer the region. The regime's uncompromising response to Barzani's letter perplexed US officials in Baghdad, who argued that it was because of a false sense of security after a year without war. Apparently, as one American analyst noted, Iraq's generals had forgotten how calamitous their previous efforts at using military force against the Kurds had been.[19]

Not long after the foiled coup, American and British officials met in Washington in order to realign their regional policies. Representing the United States was Rodger Davies, the director of the NEA, and on the British side was John Killick, the British Embassy to Washington's counselor. Davies opened the meeting by pointing out that both sides had the same overall objectives in the Near East: they wished to prevent Nasser from imposing himself on the area or the development of an Egyptian-dominated Arab solidarity movement. The point of departure, however, was on the methods needed to attain these objectives. Davies admitted "some courses of action proposed by London [had] caused concern [in Washington] since they could only lead to a confrontation with [Egypt] and Arab nationalism in situations where it [was] doubtful that the West had the capabilities to come out on top." On Iraq, Killick said that his government feared increasing instability because the Arif regime lacked the means to implement the socialized state it was seeking. Turning to the Cold War, Davies pointed to a recent intelligence estimate on Soviet objectives in the region that concluded that Cairo would always have more influence than Moscow in the Arab world and that any losses to its position would not effect its overall interests. Davies believed that forcing a confrontation with Nasser over the Arab world would inevitably threaten Western interests and lead to establishment of a "true Communist puppet state" in the area, which would be a problem of a "much greater magnitude."

He suggested that the best track to proceed would be to improve their capability to influence trends in Egypt through an increase in assistance. Davies emphasized that while the United States recognized that Nasser aspired to dominate the Arab world, he did not have the capability to do so and would likely be opposed by other Arab states. Given this, the United States felt that it should avoid involving itself in inter-Arab disputes. To this, Killick said that his government agreed with the American assessment of the situation, but noted that Middle Eastern issues had generated a "great deal of emotionalism" in London in the lead-up to the election. That said, he felt it best that both countries delay confrontation over their policies in the Middle East until after the American and British general elections that autumn. Frustrated, the meeting ended with Davies observing that the purpose of these talks was not to just kick the can down the road.[20] In the end, this conversation, while seeking to reconcile the two side's differences, ended up emphasizing the gulf between them. The fact was that Britain saw matters in terms of its own regional interests and its confrontation with Nasser, while the United States perceived events in terms of its confrontation with the Soviets.

By mid-October, it was clear that whatever progress might have resulted from the Washington talks had been for naught. At this point, Strong, who had been present during the talks, sent Talbot and Komer letters that questioned the integrity of the British policy. While noting that British Embassy officials had been "busily reassuring" the embassy of their agreement with the US policy, Strong was not convinced of their honesty. For instance, in his October 15 letter to Talbot, he concluded that British "games [were still] going on."[21] Two days later, he wrote to Komer to say that he "deeply doubted" the British Embassy's sincerity about how "in tune" Anglo-American policies toward Iraq were, because there were "too many indicators otherwise." Strong said Britain was engaged in a "fully covert" program, possibly in concert with Iran and Israel. He compared Britain's approach to similar actions in Yemen, where "one policy [was] being followed on the surface and the other through the clandestine mechanism."[22] In a separate document, Strong raised concerns about British-Iranian collusion with respect to the Kurds. After recounting British embassy's efforts to seek US assistance, he pointed out that the head of Iranian intelligence, Major General Hassan Pakravan, had been in London for two weeks in August to meet with British officials. Although he had no information of the purpose of this visit, Strong felt it was noteworthy.[23] It is important to recall that Pakravan had been central to an Iranian approach to the United States on behalf of the Shah and the Kurds after the collapse of the Kennedy administration's efforts to bring about a Kurdish-Ba'thist ceasefire in August 1963 (see Chapter 3). These documents all suggest that US officials were convinced that the British were working with Iran to use the Kurds to increase pressure on the Iraqi regime, tie it down militarily, and disrupt efforts at unification with Egypt.

The Bigger Picture

In the autumn of 1964, the landscape of the Cold War underwent a profound shift. On October 14, the Soviet leadership removed Premier Nikita Khrushchev

from power.[24] As John Lewis Gaddis describe the coup, Khrushchev was "accused of rudeness, distraction, arrogance, incompetence, nepotism, megalomania, depression, unpredictability, and growing old."[25] Leonid Brezhnev soon emerged as the new Soviet leader and ruled over a system of collective leadership. The new leadership was determined to improve its strategic position vis-à-vis the United States and began accelerating its nuclear weapons program.[26] However, the Kremlin was also inclined to continue Khrushchev's efforts at improving relations with the United States, a process that would eventually lead to détente—an easing of tensions—in the 1970s.[27]

The second major event was President Johnson's election to his first full term in office on November 3, 1964. Having previously secured the presidency by way of Kennedy's assassination, Johnson felt he had been given a mandate to implement his Great Society reforms, which aimed at eliminating racial inequality in America, tackling the problem of poverty, and improving education and health care for all Americans.[28] However, Johnson's progressive program was soon overshadowed by the war in Vietnam, which escalated sharply following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, where North Vietnamese forces allegedly fired on a US naval vessel. Five days later Congress passed a resolution authorizing the use of force against the North Vietnamese army. This dramatic escalation of the American role in Vietnam would eventually sap the very resources Johnson needed to reform America.[29]

The coming to power of Leonid Brezhnev in the Soviet Union, Johnson securing his own presidency, and the escalation of the Vietnam War would all have a major impact on the formulation of the US policy toward both Iraq and the Middle East.

The Israeli Connection

In the autumn of 1964, Israeli officials developed an interest in establishing contacts with the Iraq's Kurdish rebels. In the early 1960s, Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, had conceived a strategy known as the "peripheral doctrine," which was premised on the improbability of achieving peace with the surrounding Arab states. According to Trita Parsi, Ben-Gurion wanted Israel "to build alliances with the non-Arab states of the periphery—primarily Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia—as well as with non-Arab minorities such as the Kurds and the Lebanese Christians."[30] Thus, in contrast to America's nonintervention policy, from the mid-1960s onward, both Iran and Israel would play a major role in supporting and training the Iraqi Kurds.

The first indications US officials got of Israel's involvement with the Kurds came in October 1964, when Strong raised the issue with Talbot. He wrote:

> Israel plays an important role in Iran and is known to be supporting the Iraqi Kurds. Britain shares with Israel and the Shah a deep antipathy for Nasser…It requires little imagination to conceive that, given the depth of [British] hostility to Nasser and the importance of the Gulf to the UK, the British may well engage in

> covert cooperation with Iran and Israel against a Nasserist dominated Iraqi regime as well as against Nasser elsewhere.[31]

According to Eliezer Tsafrir, the head of Mossad's operations inside Iraq during the 1960s, Israel's relationship with the Kurds began in 1964, when one of Barzani's representatives in Paris, Amir Badr-Khan Kamuran, approached the Israeli Embassy and made an appeal for help. Seduced by the prospect of having a strategic ally inside Iraq, Barzani's request was immediately forwarded on to Tel-Aviv and made its way to Ben-Gurion, who directed Mossad officials to cultivate this relationship. Soon thereafter, the Israelis invited Badr-Khan to visit Israel, where the Kurds and Israelis agreed to a de facto alliance. In an arrangement that has endured to this day the Israelis traded its considerable military experience, advanced weaponry, training, and intelligence tactics in exchange for the Kurds maintaining a near-constant state of revolt inside Iraq to tie down its military, and rendering it incapable of being used in a wider Arab war against Israel.[32]

The growing international involvement in the Kurdish question was not lost in the Iraqi regime. For instance, on December 10, when Secretary Rusk met with the new Iraqi foreign minister, Naji Talib, at the annual UNGA meeting, he complained that "unidentified forces" were assisting the Kurds, whom he described as "poor people." He wondered where they were "getting money from to buy staple foods, arms, and equipment," asking, "who [were] these mysterious forces [and] what [did] they want[?]" Rusk assured Talib that the United States was "not directly or indirectly supporting the Kurdish movement" and had "no other interest in Iraq affairs" other than maintaining its independence, integrity, and prosperity. Rusk then agreed to Talib's request that he look into who was helping the Kurds and what their motivations were.[33]

A few days later, Barzani representatives informed the US Embassy in Baghdad that the Shah had been urging them to resume fighting and had asked them to participate in a plot to overthrow the Arif regime.[34] When word of this reached Washington, the State Department refused to be involved in "any scheme to overthrow [the] Iraq government." It felt there was "good reason to believe [Iraq was] already privy to Iranian subversive activity." Moreover, the plot was "bound to be uncovered sooner or later" and when that happened, the "Kurds would have exposed themselves as willing collaborators with Iranian intrigue against [the] government [of] Iraq thus earning deepened Arab suspicion and resentment of Kurdish ambitions." Finally, even if the plot succeeded, there was no guarantee that the next regime would be more sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations.[35] Once again, the Johnson administration's reaction to this plot reflected a clear break from its allies over the question of Iraq.

By the start of 1965, it was clear that Britain, Iran, and Israel were pressing the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War with Baghdad. However, just as tensions mounted, Barzani confounded US officials in Baghdad when he sent the regime a letter in mid-January 1965 that admitted that his previous demands had "been excessive" and then presented a "minimum" offer for autonomy, dropping all his previous demands with the exception of maintaining his 2,000- to 3,000-men Peshmerga force. Aware of the level of pressure on the Kurds to resume

the war, US diplomats described Barzani's letter as "one of the most startling development[s] of the entire revolt." There was no evidence to suggest that Barzani was weak, since he had held out against the government's vicious assaults for years. This led the embassy to suspect that the letter was part of a psychological campaign to goad the regime attacking first, which would give Barzani a moral victory. Intended or not, US officials reported, this was precisely the outcome that occurred, as the regime once again began to prepare for war.[36]

As the situation deteriorated, Nasser became concerned that a renewal of the Kurdish War would threaten his strong position in Iraq and disrupt his plans for unification. In October 1964, he informed Arif that unification would be contingent on settling the Kurdish problem through political and not military means.[37] When this did not work, Nasser sent Barzani a letter in February urging him to surrender, but that seemed unlikely. By April, a resumption of the war appeared inevitable. According to O'Ballance, on April 3, Iraqi prime minister Tahir Yahya informed Nasser that the regime was about to launch an offensive, who responded with a furious tirade. He warned Yahya that Iraq was doomed to fail and urged him to give diplomacy another chance. Nasser's warning fell on deaf ears; on April 5, the Iraqi regime launched a three-prong offensive against the Kurds using 40,000 troops.[38]

The renewal of the Kurdish War put the United States in a difficult position. On the one hand, the overriding objective of the US policy toward Iraq was to maintain friendly relations with the Arif regime and to prevent Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty. However, the war's renewal guaranteed that two of America's closest regional allies, Iran and Israel, would increase their support for the Kurds. Eventually, the Iraqis urged the United States to convince Iran to cease its support for the Kurds, but America's entreaties fell on deaf ears. As long as Arif maintained close relations with Nasser, the Shah had no interest in abandoning his "Kurdish card," unless Iraq was willing to make territorial concessions over the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which was highly unlikely.[39]

Just after the renewal of the Kurdish War, Secretary Rusk traveled to Tehran for a CENTO meeting. On April 7, he met with the Shah and discussed the situation in Iraq. The Shah was candor in admitting to helping the Kurds against Iraq, describing them as "a trump card" that he would not relinquish as long as Arif remained in league with Nasser. While he denied encouraging the Kurds to resume hostilities with Baghdad, he made it clear that he saw no problem in abandoning them if "a national government [was] established in Baghdad."[40] This statement is very significant because it foreshadowed precisely the Shah's abandonment of the Kurds in March 1975, almost a decade later.[41]

By the end of April, Iraq's growing frustration with Iranian interference in the Kurdish War was evident when Talib cornered Ambassador Strong at a reception in Baghdad and accused Iran of supporting the Kurds for the first time. He was convinced that the Kurdish campaign's failure was due to Iran's support for the Kurds. He told Strong that he had learned that "several loads of unidentified equipment" had been "transported onto Iraqi soil in jeeps without license plates" from Iran, and asked if the United States could try to convince the Shah to change his hostile policy toward Iraq. Talib then asked if the Kurds had been

discussed at the CENTO meeting just held in Tehran. Strong denied that it had been a topic of discussion, reminded him of Turkey's cooperation with Iraq on the Kurdish question and Pakistan's efforts to mediate an Iran-Iraq rapprochement, and argued that aiding the Kurds was not in CENTO's interests. He also reiterated America's nonintervention policy and said that he would report the conversation to Washington. In his request for guidance on the matter sent on April 30, Strong complained that he had "about run out of arguments on Kurds-Iran-Iraq triangle" and that it seemed "useless any longer [to] try [to] pretend [that] Iran [was] not helping [the] Kurds." The department responded on May 4, stating, "it was unlikely that further arguments could erase the Foreign Minister's suspicions, but US officials should continue to reiterate the US policy line." With respect to the CENTO meeting, the department advised Strong to "tell Talib that Secretary Rusk had not brought any new element into his discussion of Iranian security with the Shah."[42]

In May 1965, an experienced Israeli intelligence operative, David Kimche, traveled secretly to Kurdistan via Iran to meet directly with Barzani. According to Parsi, the purpose of the meeting was to "check if the situation [permitted] a permanent presence of Mossad operatives [in Iraq]." Kimche was apparently impressed by his visit to Kurdistan and believed that an operation to help the Kurds fight Baghdad was crucial to Israeli security. The only obstacle was that Israel needed either Iranian acquiescence or involvement in the operation.[43] Fortunately, this was no great challenge because the Shah already saw this as an opportunity to expand his strategic alliance with Israel. According to Uri Lubrani, who served as an adviser to Ben-Gurion in the 1960s and later as the head of the Israeli mission to Iran:

> From the Shah's perspective, Iran's alliance with Israel would serve as a strategic decoy to divert Arab attention and resource away from Iran. The Shah believed that his Israeli connection would provide a deterrence to Arab regimes [particularly Iraq] because it would create the impression that if an Arab state were to attack Iran, Israel would take advantage of this pretext to strike Iraq's western flank.[44]

Given the Shah's desire to strengthen his relationship with the Israelis and his own existing program to support the Kurds, Iran approved Israel's request but insisted that any operation be coordinated with SAVAK.[45] Another Israeli intelligence officer, Eliezer Tsafrir, confirmed this account in an interview and described the extent of Israel's support for the Kurds, which included exchanging information with the Kurds on common interests (i.e., intelligence on Iraq); supplying them arms, ammunition, and technicians; offering courses in military training, which were conducted in Kurdistan, Israel, and Iran; and helping the Kurds with political lobbying in the United States and Europe.[46]

The impact of Israel's involvement was immediately apparent to US officials in Baghdad. For instance, toward the end of May, the embassy noticed a marked improvement in the Kurds' military tactics. Although in the past the Kurds had shown "little aptitude for guerrilla warfare" and had only been victorious due to the "gross incompetence" of Iraq's military, since the February 1964 ceasefire,

the Kurds had improved tactically. Unlike before, they now "refused to defend flat areas, [had] let the government move into the mountains albeit at the cost of some casualties, [had] attacked army supply lines and [were] now apparently attacking bivouac areas." This led the embassy to the conclusion, "it now [seemed] clear… that the Kurds [were] getting some assistance, possibly even training, from Israel."[47]

In early August, Iraqi officials summoned J. Wesley Adams, the US Chargé d'Affairs in Baghdad, to the foreign ministry to ask "in the strongest terms" that the United States urge Iran to cease arming the Kurds. In his report to Washington, Adams indicated, "Iraq now has fairly accurate information [on the] nature and extent [of] Iranian assistance." This, in turn, put the United States in a very difficult position because Iraq's "request for support [in] efforts [to] halt [the] flow of arms from Iran to dissident Iraqi Kurds [could not] reasonably be refused."[48] The State Department responded on August 11 by advising the US Embassy in Tehran to inform the Iranian government of Iraq's request and to express America's "concern over pressures by Iraqis arising out of Iranian assistance to Kurds."[49] When this was done on August 13, Iranian foreign minister Abbas Aram appeared "distressed that the [US] had become involved in the matter" and insisted that "Iran was not aiding the Kurds," arguing instead that Iraq was "following a studied policy of annoying Iran."[50] Aram's denial, of course, was in direct contradiction of what the Shah had told Rusk just a few months earlier at the CENTO meeting, not to mention a large body of evidence suggesting otherwise. Even so, the fact that the United States raised this matter with the Iranian government shows that the Johnson administration shared Iraq's concern about the Kurdish problem and the interference of its allies.

The year between August 1964 and August 1965 is indicative of the sharp contrast between the policies of the US government and that of its close regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. While the White House wanted to maintain friendly relations with the Arif regime, it was willing to overlook its relationship with Nasser, whose popular, pan-Arabist ideology was believed to be a potential ideological bulwark against communism. In short, the Johnson administration's interest in the Arif regime stemmed from its desire to keep Iraq out of the Soviet camp. However, America's allies viewed the Arif regime and its relationship with Nasser in a much different light. Britain's loathing of Nasser and long-standing strategic interests in the Gulf trumped Cold War considerations when assessing its national interests in Iraq. For similar reasons, the Shah had his own imperial designs for the Gulf and wanted to limit Nasser's influence in Iraq and the region. He also saw the Kurds as a useful means of coercing Iraq into territorial concessions he had long coveted. The Israelis, however, saw Iraq in terms of the wider Arab-Israeli struggle, believing that support for the Kurds would tie down Iraq's army inside its borders, and thereby limit its effectiveness and ability to participate in a major Arab-Israel war. For these reasons, the policies of Britain, Iran, and Israel were all at odds with that of the United States with respect to Iraq and the Kurdish War. At the same time, the renewal of the Kurdish War put the United States in a difficult position. While the Johnson administration wished to maintain friendly relations with Iraq, America's allies Iran and Israel

had escalated their support for the Kurds. Consequently, it could not reasonably reject Iraq's requests to urge Iran to cease its support for the Kurds. But with two American allies, Iran and Israel, now backing the Kurds against Iraq, the Kurdish War had clearly transitioned from being a Cold War conflict to a regional one.

A Move toward Peace

The Johnson administration's friendly attitude toward Iraq was reinforced in June 1965, when the Arif regime sought to settle its long-standing dispute with the Iraqi Petroleum Company. Since Arif seized power in November 1963, the new regime had been divided over the direction they wanted their country to take. On the one side, the Nasserists wanted Iraq to unite with Egypt immediately, but on the other side there were those who supported the idea of Arab nationalism, but were weary of Iraq falling under Nasser's domination.[51] Given these differences, the IPC deal struck at the core of this debate. In the proposed deal, Arif sought to reverse Qasim's nationalization of the IPC concessionary holding in December 1959 by allowing the IPC to regain access to much of its original concession and the control of production quotas. In exchange, the Iraqi government would receive a massive increase in its oil revenues, which were needed to finance Arif's socialist policies and development plans.[52] When the deal was announced in July 1965, the Nasserists decried it as a betrayal of Iraq's national interests and then six pro-Nasser cabinet members resigned in protest. With little support from his government or the Iraqi people, Arif was forced to back down on the IPC deal.[53]

A few weeks later, Arif moved to placate hardliners in the military by appointing the commander of the Air Force, Arif Abd ar-Razzak, as both prime minister and minister of defense. A known Nasserist, Razzak had been highly critical of Arif's slow progress on both unification with Egypt and the implementation of socialism. However, Arif sought to balance Razzak's hardline brand of Arab nationalism through the appointment of a Western-oriented lawyer and academic, who had virtually no links to any political party or the military, Abd ar-Rahman al-Bazzaz, to the posts of deputy prime minister, foreign minister, and minister of oil.[54] However, before the new regime could become settled, a bizarre spectacle unfolded in Baghdad. In early September, while Arif and Bazzaz were away at an Arab League summit in Morocco, Razzak and a group of Arab nationalists in the military tried to seize power. Fortunately for Arif, the commander of the Republican Guard, General Slaibi, who was one of the president's closest friends and a blood relative, uncovered the plot and forced Razzak and his coconspirators to flee the country.[55] The failed nationalist coup also finally gave Arif a reason to break with the Nasserist elements in Iraq and assert his own personal rule, something he had been longing for since seizing power in 1963.[56] As a first step, Arif asked Bazzaz to form a new government, bringing a civilian to power for the first time since the 1958 revolution.

The Johnson administration viewed the coming to power of civilian leadership in Iraq as a positive development. When Bazzaz arrived in New York for the

General Assembly in October 1965, he met with not just Secretary Rusk but also Vice President Hubert Humphrey.[57] Both meetings underscore the importance of the Kurdish question to US-Iraqi relations, particularly Iran's ongoing support for Barzani. In his meeting with Rusk, Bazzaz said that he wanted the Iranians to understand they "were creating future trouble for themselves by continuing clandestine assistance to the Iraqi-Kurdish insurgents." He then repeated previous Iraqi requests for the United States to urge the Shah to consider the "inadvisability of his policy." While stressing that he was not asking the United States "to intervene in the internal affairs of Iran," Bazzaz said that he wanted to ensure that arms supplied by the United States to Iran would not be then smuggled into Iraqi Kurdistan. He cited America's relationship with Iran vis-à-vis CENTO "as giving [them] a legitimate right to make such a request."[58] These meetings were important for three reasons: (1) they showed that Bazzaz viewed solving the Kurdish question as a chief priority; (2) this was the highest level of contact between US and Iraqi officials since the 1958 revolution; and (3) they underscored the Johnson administration's interest in improving US-Iraqi relations.

By the end of 1965, Iran's support for the Kurds had become quite overt. In November, the United States learned that Iranian forces had assisted the Kurds in a hit-and-run attack against Iraqi positions near the border. On December 7, according to the US Embassy in Tehran, "Iraqi irregulars shot up some Iranians on the Iranian side of the border," leading Iran to mobilize its forces along the border. Tensions escalated further on December 21, when Iraqi MiG jets attacked an Iranian border post. At the end of December, Iraqi forces launched a surprise offensive against a Kurdish stronghold, capturing it with only light resistance.[59] After regrouping, the Kurds counterattacked with the help of Iranian forces, who provided artillery support that forced the Iraqi commandos to withdraw. As Kenneth Pollack observed, Iraq's unsuccessful winter offensive revealed the vulnerability of the Kurds' supply lines to Iran and convinced the Iraqi army that sealing the Iranian border was crucial to defeating the Kurds.[60]

Meanwhile, as the fighting raged in the north, Iran informed Iraq that it was "prepared to discuss pending difficulties, including the Shatt-al-Arab [waterway]," which led US officials in Tehran to conclude that Iran was trying to exploit the Kurdish War "to force Iraq to negotiate over another long-standing issue between the two countries." The Shah's scheme was not lost on Bazzaz, who sought to defuse the crisis by admitting to Iraq's border violations and inviting Iran's new prime minister, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, to come to Baghdad to discuss the matter. However, just as tensions were easing, hardliners in the Iraqi government scuttled the proposal by demanding that Iran cease its aid to the Kurds before any talks could happen.[61]

On January 20, 1966, the Shah met with the new US ambassador to Iran, Armin Meyer, to discuss the situation. Remarkably, the Shah hinted to Meyer that his long-term strategy was to "exploit tension with Iraq to force [the] solution of [the] Shatt [al-Arab] issue," but he was prepared to "wait a few more years," since this "question [had a] history of many decades." The Shah said that time was on his side, especially with the development of Kharg Island in the northern Gulf, which would eventually handle up to 90 percent of Iran's oil exports.[62] This,

in turn, would reduce Iraq's income from the waterway, at which point, the Shah believed that Iraq "[would] come to Iran in hope of sharing [the financial] burden [of maintaining the waterway], and dividing [the] Shatt between them." On the Kurds, the Shah explained that he had no intention of antagonizing his own Kurdish population by colluding with Iraq against Barzani, which he saw as an internal Iraqi problem that could not be solved by "butchering" them.[63] The fact that the Shah linked these two problems together for the first time is significant because it foreshadowed what would happen a decade later under nearly identical circumstances.

In early March, Barzani's liaison to SAVAK, Shamsuddin Mofti, approached the US Embassy in Tehran with a letter addressed to the White House. As usual, the letter appealed to the United States to intervene on behalf of the Kurdish people by preventing Iraq's acquisition of arms, supporting the Kurdish people, and using its influence in Baghdad to help resolve the Kurdish problem peacefully. In the forwarding letter, the embassy recommended that it reiterate the nonintervention policy and urge the Kurds to seek accommodation with the regime through peaceful negotiations. The department approved this approach.[64]

Notably, as the spring fighting season approached, Bazzaz sought to stave off war by reaching out to Barzani at the eleventh hour—indicating that he had been drafting a decentralization law, was prepared to engage in economic and social projects in the north, and would recognize the Kurdish national identity in cultural spheres. Unfortunately, his efforts were in vain. According to the US Embassy in Baghdad, both Arif and Iraq's defense minister, General Abd al-Aziz al-Uqaili, were determined to go ahead with an offensive, albeit while still engaging the Kurds in secret talks.[65] By late March it was clear that the talks had broken down, with Uqaili denying reports of talks and insisting, "military operations [would] continue until the [Kurds were] defeated."[66]

However, on the evening of April 13, tragedy struck when a plane carrying Abd al-Salim Arif and a group of close advisers crashed while flying to Basra, killing all on board.[67] When word of Arif's death reached the United States on April 14, the White House sent the Iraqi government a letter conveying President Johnson's "sincerest condolences."[68] Meanwhile, on April 17, after a few days of internal debate, President Arif's brother, General Abd ar-Rahman Arif, emerged unexpectedly as Iraq's new president—apparently as a compromise among the regime's vying factions.[69] Upon coming to office, Abd ar-Rahman Arif took steps to consolidate his position, replacing Uqaili with a moderate as the defense minister, while keeping Bazzaz on as the prime minister, despite his problems with the military, who continued to press for war.[70] Even so, the generals won the debate and launched its fourth offensive against the Kurds on May 2, using 40,000 troops against Barzani's small force of 3,500 Peshmerga.[71]

The 1966 campaign was significant because of the role Israeli Special Forces played in defeating the Iraqi army. After opening the battle, government forces pushed their way through the Rawanduz Gorge and captured part of two large mountains, Mount Handren and Mount Zozik, which were to the north of an important road running to Barzani's headquarters near the Iranian border.[72] According to Zuri Sagy, an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) military officer who was

sent to Kurdistan to advise Barzani, the IDF had been training Peshmerga at bases inside Iran for many months prior to the outbreak of war. In an interview, Sagy explained that Iraq's forces had made a crucial error during the 1966 campaign when they set up a camp in the valley below the two mountains—Mount Soren to the south and Mount Handren to the north—on the evening of May 10, and leaving the surrounding heights undefended. Upon learning this, Sagy convinced Barzani to attack. In the early hours of May 11, Sagy ordered a group of Peshmerga holding the front line to retreat tactically, leaving open a gap in the lines. Thinking that they had secured a major breakthrough, the Iraqis pushed hundreds of troops through the gap and fell right into Sagy's trap. Like earlier that night, the Iraqis again failed to secure the heights above, where unknown to them, hundreds of Kurds laid in wait. Before long, Sagy and the Kurds fell upon several battalions from the heights above, leading to a bloodbath.[73] After just two days of fighting, the Kurds killed between 1,400 and 2,000 Iraqi soldiers and captured hundreds more.[74] Barzani's crushing defeat of the Iraqi army during the Battle of Mount Handren underscored the ineffectiveness of the use of force, discredited the hardline elements in the regime, and finally gave Bazzaz a mandate to negotiate a lasting peace with Barzani, who immediately agreed to talks.[75]

After a few weeks of negotiations, Bazzaz announced a Twelve Point Plan for peace with the Kurds on June 29. The agreement included:

1. Recognition of Kurdish national rights;
2. Administrative decentralization to give effect to these rights;
3. Recognition of Kurdish as an official language;
4. Kurdish representation in Parliament;
5. Kurdish share of official positions;
6. Scholarships for Kurds and a Baghdad University branch in the North;
7. Kurdish local government officials;
8. Kurdish political organizations;
9. Amnesty for Kurds;
10. Return of Kurdish guerrillas to previous posts and maintenance by some in an approved organization (i.e., Peshmerga);
11. Relief and economic assistance; [and]
12. Resettlement of Kurds and others in their traditional locales.[76]

After five years of failed offensives, countless deaths, and enormous expense, an Iraqi government was finally prepared to meet the Kurds' demands.

While the deal was a major breakthrough, it was not without its detractors. As Tripp observed, many Iraqi military officers feared that Bazzaz would use the peace deal as justification to slash their budget and reign in their lavish perks.[77] Consequently, on June 30, Arif Abd ar-Razzak and a group of prominent Nasserists, having failed once already, tried again to seize power in a coup.[78] Once again, forces loyal to the president had infiltrated the plot and caught the coup's leaders "redhanded."[79] From this point onward, the pro-Nasser factions in Iraq were finished.

The Johnson administration was pleased with both the Bazzaz peace plan and the successful thwarting of the coup. It issued a public statement on July 8 congratulating both Arif and Bazzaz.[80] Throughout July, Bazzaz took steps to implement the terms of the agreement by approving a massive rehabilitation program, lifting the economic blockade, releasing hundreds of Kurdish prisoners, removing Arab tribes from former Kurdish lands, and passing a general amnesty law.[81] However, in the background, the military continued to press for Bazzaz's dismissal. Arif eventually conceded on August 6 and appointed as prime minister a compromise candidate, General Naji Talib, which brought about an end Iraq's brief experimentation with civilian government.[82] On the Kurdish question, even though the new government suspended talks with Barzani, an uneasy peace somehow managed to endure throughout much of the remainder of Johnson's presidency.

The Johnson administration viewed the coming to power of civilians in Iraq as a positive step. While seeking friendly relations with Iraq, the United States found its policy of urging a peaceful settlement on the Kurdish question become more closely aligned with the Soviet Union than with its allies, Iran and Israel. When the Kurdish War renewed in the winter of 1965–66, Iranian and Israeli involvement became much more pronounced, culminating in Israel's decisive role in defeating the Iraqi army at the Battle of Mount Handren, which forced the Iraqi government to sue for peace. In short, Hahn's explanation that US diplomats had encouraged Arif and Barzani to agree to the 1966 ceasefire does not match the available record.[83]

The Baghdad Spring

The year between the June 1966 peace plan and the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967 saw a remarkable improvement in US-Iraqi relations. Upon Arif coming to office, the US Embassy in Baghdad noticed a marked improvement in US-Iraqi relations. This was because the new Iraqi president was privately well disposed to the United States. For instance, prior to his brother's death, Arif had become personal friends with the US ambassador and upon becoming president he confided in Strong that he preferred to discuss matters "as friend to friend rather than President to Ambassador." However, despite Arif's personal disposition toward the United States, he had to be cautious due to Iraq's anti-Western political environment.[84] Nevertheless, between April and December 1966, the Johnson administration observed a steady succession of friendly gestures from the Arif regime, albeit mostly in private. The White House felt compelled to respond positively.[85]

The high mark of US-Iraqi relations occurred in January 1967, when President Johnson met with five Iraqi generals at the White House. Before agreeing to the meeting, Secretary Rusk sent the president a memo requesting that he approve the meeting on the basis that Iraq was "entering a critical decision period" about what direction its future would take. There was evidence that Arif was the leader of the "forces of moderation" by charting an "Iraq-first" policy. Because of this,

Rusk felt that receiving the generals would "stiffen" Arif's morale and strengthen "the cordial ties already established by past messages exchanged between [him] and President Arif through diplomatic channels."[86]Johnson's national security adviser, Walt Rostow, who took over from McGeorge Bundy in April 1966, agreed that the Iraqi proposal, while "rather unusual," warranted "serious consideration." Building on Rusk's argument, Rostow reminded Johnson that the objective of the US policy toward the Middle East was "to encourage governments like [Arif's] to stand on their own—and not get sucked into the more radical Arab nationalist movements that cause [them] (and Israel) so much trouble." He said that the NSC staff had even considered inviting Arif to Washington on a state visit a few months earlier, but eventually rejected the idea because of his tenuous grip on power. Nevertheless, the fact that Arif was sending a delegation to Washington suggested that the Iraqi leader was "reaching out" to the United States and wished to "strengthen his relationship" with the president. Taken together, Rostow felt, all of this was "unexpectedly encouraging."[87]

The White House agreed and President Johnson met with the five generals and Iraq's ambassador to Washington, Nasir Hani, on January 25, where he presented the generals with a gift and a personal message for Arif conveying his "desire to build an ever closer relationship between [the] two governments."[88]

It is clear from this series of exchanges between mid-1966 and June 1967 that the Johnson administration had established a friendly relationship with Arif, who was viewed as an anticommunist, Iraqi nationalist, and one of the few forces of moderation within his country. Unfortunately, Arif was also weak politically and beholden to the more hardliner tendencies of Iraq's powerful military. This was most evident in his removal of the most successful Iraqi premier of modern times, Abd ar-Rahman al-Bazzaz. Despite these challenges, the White House had managed to cultivate an unprecedented degree of friendliness in the US-Iraq relationship. Unfortunately, whatever progress in US-Iraqi relations might have been made was cut short when Israel launched its preemptive war against Egypt, seizing the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights in June 1967. Outraged by the Johnson administration's support for Israel, Arif was forced to sever diplomatic relations with the United States.

Prelude to War

In the period prior to the outbreak of the Six Day War fought in June 1967 between Israel and the frontline Arab states—Egypt, Syria, and Jordan—the Arif regime played a key diplomatic role in trying to prevent conflict. Contextually, the war's origins stemmed from a coup in Syria in February 1966, which brought to power an "extremist" faction of the Ba'th Party. The new Syrian regime's hostile anti-Israeli rhetoric escalated tensions along the Golan Heights, leading to major clashes near the Sea of Galilee in August 1966. In November, Syria signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt, raising the possibility of joint military action against Israel. In the meantime, Palestinian guerrillas continued to launch low-intensity incursions into Israel from the Jordanian-occupied West Bank,

prompting the Israelis to launch a major retaliatory strike against Palestinian militants in the West Bank village of Samu on November 13. With Egypt and Syria aligned militarily and the Palestinians launching regular incursions for the West Bank, the situation had reached a boiled pitch by the end of 1966.[89]

Throughout the first half of 1967, tensions between the Arab states and Israel escalated further. During this time, Nasser's prestige had taken a major hit, as his fellow Arabs criticized Egypt's involvement in the Yemen Civil War. Having preached the slogan "Arab unity" since the late 1950s, Nasser's deployment of up to 70,000 troops to Yemen during the 1960s to fight other Arabs was not lost on his allies, who had become deeply critical of Egypt's hypocritical policies.[90] As his reputation deteriorated, Nasser took a series of escalating measures designed to show his commitment to the Arab cause. For instance, in response to false intelligence indicating an Israeli attack on Syria, he deployed Egyptian forces to the Sinai Peninsula on May 16 and then asked for the UN peacekeeping force to be withdrawn. Three days later, he ordered Egyptian troops to take up former UN positions at Sharm el-Sheikh and announced a blockade against Israeli shipping through the nearby Strait of Tiran on May 22. To the Israelis, this was an act of war.[91] Therefore, by the end of May 1967, a situation had been created where the slightest miscalculation or provocation could descend rapidly into war.

As tensions between Israel and the Arab states mounted during May 1967, Iraq's foreign minister, Adnan Pachachi, sought to defuse the crisis. On May 31, Walt Rostow sent the president a memo outlining Secretary Rusk's recommendation that he meet with Pachachi to discuss the escalating Middle Eastern crisis. In his memo, Rostow described Pachachi as a "responsible" diplomat, who could be a good channel to the other Arab states. He said that a personal meeting would be "healthy," because it could help dispel the view that the United States was "completely committed to Israel" and perhaps salvage American interests in the Arab world by conveying an impression of goodwill. For these reasons, Rostow asked Johnson to "give serious consideration" to seeing Pachachi personally.[92] President Johnson agreed.[93]

The next day, June 1, Pachachi had a whirlwind tour of high-level meetings with US officials, starting first with the US ambassador to the UN, Arthur Goldberg; then with the under secretary of state, Eugene Rostow; then with Secretary Rusk; and finally a personal meeting with President Johnson in the Oval Office later that evening. Although no record of the conversation is available, the president's briefing memo gives insight into the US position in the escalating crisis. According to the memo, the president was to emphasize America's desire to avoid hostilities and achieve a resolution of the crisis, ideally mediated by the UN secretary general, whom the United States fully supported. Johnson was also to express his interest in maintaining friendly relations with Arab states, point out the mutual danger all sides could suffer if a peaceful solution could not be attained, and indicate that the United States had urged restrain upon Israel, while emphasizing its belief that Egypt had to allow free passage of all vessels from all nations, including Israel, through the strait. Finally, Johnson was to emphasize the US policy of supporting the territorial integrity and political independence of all Middle East countries.[94]

Unfortunately for Pachachi, in the early morning hours of June 5, the Israeli Air Force launched a preemptive attack on Egypt's air force, destroying the vast majority of its fleet in a matter of hours. Later that same day, Israeli bombers took out the Syrian and Jordanian air forces, giving it undisputed control of the sky. At this point, Israeli ground forces routed the Egyptian military, flooded into the Sinai peninsula, and seized control of the east bank of the Suez canal. Egypt agreed to a ceasefire on June 9. Meanwhile, Israel defeated Jordanian forces and captured Jerusalem and the West Bank, and then turned its full attention on seizing the Golan Heights from Syria. Within just six days, Israel had thoroughly defeated the frontline Arab states and nearly tripled the territory it possessed.[95]

There is no question that in the period prior to the Six Day War the United States and Iraq had undergone an unprecedented period of growth in their relationship. The regular, friendly exchanges between Johnson and Arif, the warm welcome given to the Iraqi generals, and the personal meeting between the president and Pachachi, all make clear that both sides were interested in improving relations. However, the outbreak of the Six Day War would destroy any chance of further improvement and eventually dealt the Arif regime a crippling blow. The region would never be the same again.

Conclusion

Throughout the first four years of Johnson's presidency, the US policy toward Iraq had been at direct odds with its closest allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. The reason for this stemmed from the differing perceptions each of these states had of Iraq. When Johnson was thrust into the presidency, military officers in Iraq, led by Abd al-Salim Arif, had just seized power in response to the violent conflict within the ruling Ba'th Party, which raised the possibility of a Syrian takeover. Although Britain, Israel, and Iran all saw the new Arif regime as too cozy with Nasser, whom each despised for their own reasons, the United States was content with Arif's friendly relationship with Nasser, so long as Iraq maintained a neutralist stance in the Cold War and was committed to anticommunist policies domestically.

The question of an Arab union was another point of departure between the United States and its allies. Since the Eisenhower administration, the United States had supported Arab unity, as long as it remained anticommunist and was not brought about by coercion. However, the British opposed unification out of distrust of Nasser's intentions and a need to protect its considerable economic and military interests in the Gulf. The situation was only further complicated by Britain and Egypt's ongoing proxy war in Yemen. Iran's motivation for opposing unification was similar to Britain's; the Shah did not trust Nasser and was concerned about him establishing a base of influence in the Gulf, where he had his own regional ambitions. Furthermore, Iraq, with its considerable oil wealth, was the only regional state that could potentially challenge Iran's long-term, hegemonic objectives. Therefore, the Shah wanted to keep Iraq disunited, unstable, and weak. Finally, Israel also wanted to prevent Nasser from controlling Iraq and

its considerable oil wealth, and to keep it weak and divided so as to limit its participation in an Arab-Israeli war. As the Six Day War made clear, this was a massive success. Nevertheless, for these disparate reasons, all three parties reached the conclusion that providing military and economic aid to the Kurds and urging them to renew the Kurdish War would weaken the Iraqi state and make it an unattractive partner for Nasser. This contrasted with America's nonintervention policy and its passive support for Arab unification. As a consequence, from the start of 1964 through to June 1966, American policy was at clear odds with Britain, Iran, and Israel.

In the year between Abd al-Salim Arif's death in April 1966 and the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967, US-Iraqi relations saw a rapid improvement. This was fostered by the coming to power of the moderate, pro-Western regime of Abd ar-Rahman Arif, the Kurd's defeat of the Iraqi army at Mount Handren, and the Bazzaz government's subsequent peace plan. This relationship culminated in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the White House in January 1967 and a private meeting between President Johnson and Iraqi foreign minister Adnan Pachachi just days before the outbreak of the Six Day War. Unfortunately, the war destroyed whatever progress may have been achieved during this period, especially when the Iraqi government severed diplomatic relations with the United States. This meant that at a time when moderate Iraqis, like Arif and Pachachi, needed American support the most, the United States had virtually no means of providing assistance. This tragic set of circumstances would have a profound impact on the direction of Iraq's future.

5

Johnson and the British Withdrawal from the Gulf: June 1967–January 1969

Walking down the halls of the cavernous Iraqi ministry of foreign affairs, Enoch S. Duncan must have known that his conversation with Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi would not go well. It was one in the morning on June 7, 1967. Just hours earlier, Israeli forces had launched a preemptive attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan—a war that lasted just six days and left the Arab world in chaos. The war was incredibly costly for the frontline Arab states, with each military being decimated on the field and surrendering territory to the attacking Israeli forces. As the US Chargé d'Affairs in Baghdad at the time, Duncan had been left in charge of the US Embassy while Ambassador Robert Strong was away on leave. The timing could not have been worse. When Duncan met Pachachi, an amiable fellow who spoke fluent English, he was informed that Iraq had broken relations with the United States for its "alleged air and other aid to Israel" and that he and the embassy staff had a "reasonable period" of five days to wind up affairs, collect their belongings, and leave the country, presumably to Iran—America's closest regional ally.[1] A convoy of US diplomatic personnel left Iraq on June 10 and no American officials would reside in Baghdad again until September 1972.[2]

During the last two years of Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, the United States appeared to be jumping from crisis to crisis. The outbreak of the Six Day War, the Arab oil boycott, and the closure of the Suez Canal all upended the global economy, affecting Britain and Western Europe the worst. As an economic crisis wreaked havoc in Europe, the escalating war in Vietnam—particularly after the Tet Offensive in January 1968—demanded President Johnson's undivided attention. As one scholar observed, "In one fell swoop Johnson's claims that the situation [in Vietnam] was under control and that victory was in sight were refuted."[3] Eventually, the Vietnam War would lead to President Johnson's decision not to seek reelection. This did not, however, mean that Johnson's job was over.

In January 1968, just as the White House was completing a review of its Near Eastern policies,[4] the British government stunned its American ally by

announcing that it would withdraw its military forces from "East of Suez" by the end of 1971, including from the Gulf.[5] As many scholars have shown, Britain's announcement created a power vacuum that the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the Iraqis backed by their Soviet patron wished to fill.[6] However, because the United States was bogged down in Vietnam, it was incapable of filling the power vacuum that the British left behind. This left the Johnson administration with few viable options, particularly because it was not prepared to give the Shah carte blanche to dominate the region. As a result, the Johnson administration opted to build up both Iran and Saudi Arabia as "twin pillars" of the region, a policy specifically designed to prevent the Soviet Union from filling the impending power vacuum. Given this, it is again clear that America's decision-making process was reactive and driven by the need to contain Soviet influence in both Iraq and the region.

Break in Relations

When the Six Day War began on June 5, the Iraqi government was incapable of assisting the frontline Arab states in their fight with Israel for three reasons: (1) Israel's rapid defeat of Jordan—where Iraq's Third Armored Division was stationed—meant that the battle was already over by the time Iraq could muster its forces; (2) the Iraqi army's morale was already at an all-time low after being defeated at Mount Handren in May 1966; and (3) the Iraqi government worried that Barzani would launch an offensive if it diverted its military forces away from Kurdistan to engage Israel.[7] This fear was completely grounded. According to an INR report, in the days leading up to the war, "an Israeli agent . . . [had] visited Mullah Mustafa [Barzani] to arrange, if possible, some Kurdish [military] action to tie down the Iraqi army," but the Kurds declined.[8] This would not be the last time the Israelis would try to play this card. Nevertheless, the speed of Israel's victory of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in June 1967 and the threat of a Kurdish offensive meant that Iraq's contribution to the Six Day War was modest, mostly limited to air operations. As Pollack pointed out, on June 5, two Iraqi TU-16 bombers tried to bomb Israel but ended up dumping their payload on empty farmland, though Iraq's Hawker hunters gave the IDF "a very tough time."[9]

Iraq's response to US support for Israel was quite aggressive. On June 7, the Iraqi foreign ministry informed the US Embassy in Baghdad that Iraq had broken relations with the United States due to its support for Israel in the war.[10] According to Grant McClanahan, the third-ranking US diplomat stationed in Baghdad, the embassy first evacuated the dependents and nonessential staff, which was "a bit frightening to everybody." It was clear to McClanahan that the Iraqis "wanted us out in a hurry, apparently wanting it to be a resounding diplomatic rejection." Meanwhile, on the streets outside the embassy, demonstrations broke out, with one group of protesters climbing over the walls and breaking the windows on the front of the building.[11] Beyond the breaking of relations and protests, the Iraqis refused the United States over flight permission, implemented a boycott of US goods, and announced that it would suspend all oil shipments to America.[12]

Before leaving Baghdad on June 10, Duncan was faced with two major tasks.[13] First, he had to warn Washington that the moderates around Arif, who at first seemed to be "in the saddle," had been eclipsed by "extremists," who had forced the government to make concessions in the name of "national unity," like appointing as prime minister, Tahir Yahya, a military hardliner, and ordering the release of Arif Abd al-Razzaq, who had tried to overthrow Arif during his brief stint as prime minister in 1966.[14] The Iraqi regime's inability to participate in the Six Day War led to a wave of disillusionment among the military leadership.[15] In short, the war had allowed radicals to hijack the more moderate Arif regime, leading to a series of rash decisions, like breaking off of relations with the United States, which destroyed whatever progress the United States and Iraq had achieved in the previous year.

The second task Duncan faced was to find a country to represent America's interests in Iraq. On the morning American diplomats were set to leave Baghdad, a flurry of activity took place as he tried to find a friendly nation that could act as America's representative in Iraq. Following the break, Duncan had first approached the Turkish embassy to see if it would represent America's interests, but by June 10, he had not yet heard back and time was running out. At 8:30 a.m., Duncan cabled the State Department again to propose having the Belgians act as a temporary replacement. Before awaiting instructions, he met with the Belgian ambassador, Marcel Dupret, who agreed to accept the provision surrender of the embassy and to represent US interests, so long as the Iraqi government approved. Another 30 minutes later, Duncan asked the State Department to inform the Belgian government that Dupret had agreed to take on this role and asked for instructions to be passed on to the Belgian foreign ministry. At 11:20 a.m., Duncan cabled the department to indicate that Iraq had agreed to allow Belgium represent US interests on a temporary basis and that he had handed over the keys to the embassy to Dupret.[16]

In the years that followed, the United States and Iraq needed to find a way to formally manage the interests of both countries. Both sides agreed to start slowly by establishing foreign-manned "Interests Sections" in each other's capitals. For the United States, the Belgians continued to stay on and represent US interests in Iraq, and eventually moved its entire diplomatic mission to the former US embassy grounds, while the Indians agreed to represent Iraqi interests in Washington. Initially, the State Department wanted to send several officers to Baghdad, but the Iraqis objected to the numbers, preferring only a single junior officer and an administrative assistant. This was untenable and so the State Department decided against sending a representative altogether, preferring instead to work through the Belgians, who had inherited the embassy's staff of local employees.[17] From this point until the deployment of a mid-level US diplomat to Baghdad in early 1972, contacts between American and Iraqi officials were rare and focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict.[18]

A more profound consequence of the Six Day War was the implementation of an oil boycott against states supporting Israel, like the United States, and the closing of the Suez Canal, which cut Europe off from its colonial and economic interests in Asia. On June 6, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia announced that they would

embargo shipments of oil produced by Western firms. The implications of this were much more severe for Western Europe and Japan than for the United States. At that time, the United States produced more oil domestically than it consumed; so the oil boycott only had a limited impact on the American economy. The situation for Western Europe was much more dire. On June 7, a CIA report indicated that a prolonged oil embargo could produce a "severe economic depression,"[19] particularly in Britain, which relied on trade through the now-closed Suez Canal. As Fain noted, "The closure of the Suez Canal disrupted Middle Eastern shipping, curtailed British invisible exports, and cost Britain some $200 million in the first six months, a sum equal to 20 percent of its total reserves." Making matters worse, "The shipping cost of transporting oil to Britain quadrupled as oil had to be sent from the Gulf around the Cape of Good Hope." As a result, Britain's economy suffered a £90 million (or a roughly $250 million) trade deficit in 1967.[20] Although unclear at that time, Britain's economic crisis would have a profound impact on long-term US strategy toward the Gulf, because the reality was that Britain could no longer afford its vast empire.

Following the war, it was clear that America's policies toward the broader Middle East were in disarray. Iraq was not the only one to break relations with the United States; over the course of the Six Day War, Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen all severed diplomatic relations with the United States due to its support for Israel in the war. To get ahead of the crisis, the Johnson administration asked Julius Holmes, the former ambassador to Iran from 1961 to 1965, to lead an interagency review of America's Middle East policies to set out the direction of America's Middle Eastern policy for the next five years.

On July 17, Holmes's interagency committee circulated its study of US policy to the highest levels of the US government. After laying out America's interests in the region, like preventing the Soviet Union for gaining influence, maintaining access to oil, supporting regional allies (Israel, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.), preserving American investments, and encouraging economic development, the report framed the region in Cold War terms. Holmes concluded that the Soviets were better positioned to exploit the aftermath of the Six Day War than the United States, due to the wave of anti-Western "imperialism" spreading throughout the region. By exploiting tensions between the Arabs and Israel, the Soviets were making significant inroads into the region. As the report observed, "The Soviets use Arab hatred of Israel to advance their interests and the Arabs use the Soviet presence and assistance to further their objective. The result is a situation which is damaging and dangerous for [US] interests." To scale back Soviet influence, Holmes recommended that the United States needed to (1) safeguard the southern flank of Europe by diversifying the region's access to resources; (2) strengthen the "blocking power" of the Northern Tier (Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan); (3) rebuild its relations with the Arab states, particularly "moderate states" like Egypt; (4) supply arms "pragmatically and flexibly to promote US national interests"; and (5) limit its public association with the Israelis, because supporting Israel was "at variance with other US interests in the Near East." Finally, the report recommended that the United States improve its military capacity in the area, calling for the creation of a "Red Sea-Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf military force" (often referred

to as the Middle East Force) that could be available in the event of an emergency. Taken together, the interagency committee felt that these measures would better position the United States to counter Soviet influence and regain the confidence of its regional allies.[21] Unfortunately, these measures were not implemented,[22] largely because other US officials disagreed with Holmes as to the extent of the Soviet threat to the region. For instance, as Assistant Secretary Lucius Battle later observed, the problem with the Holmes report was that it viewed the region only in terms of the Cold War, while overestimating the Soviet Union's capability to gain influence in the Middle East.[23]

In early September, the INR warned Secretary Rusk that the Kurds were "growing restive" and threatened to renew their insurgency. The problem was that the Arif regime had become so focused on Israel and the region that it had failed to deliver on its promises to the Kurds. For instance, when the regime had cut its oil sales to the West, it needlessly robbed itself of revenue that could have been used to implement the terms of the 1966 agreement, resulting in the reconstruction plans for the Kurdish region being put on hold. Hughes also worried that the Iranians and Israelis would urge Barzani to resume hostilities, but felt that both sides were not yet ready for a showdown at this point.[24]

By the start of 1968, it had become clear to senior American officials that the United States did "not have a comprehensive Middle East policy," but rather "a patchwork of reactions to crises." While US officials had noted by late 1966 that the US policy needed a thorough rethinking, the constant barrage of crises had prevented the formulation and implementation of a new policy. Certainly, Holmes's study offered a glimpse as to the policy options available to the United States, but no formal decisions had been made. As a result, all of 1967 had "slipped by without [any] real accomplishment." To this end, James Critchfield, the CIA's Near Eastern Chief, circulated a paper on January 4 that argued that the primary policy objective for the Near East in 1968 was to "preserve the peace while supporting the development of regional solidarity, stability, and independence free from any dominant great power influence." The problem, however, was the difficulty that the United States faced in limiting Soviet (and now Chinese) influence, while "simultaneously keeping the intra-regional conflicts below the threshold of conventional warfare." During meetings of the Interdepartmental Regional Group (IRG) held on January 5–6, 1968, Battle decided that the Holmes study needed to be updated to present the "minimum . . . effort required to protect US interests without attempting to pre-judge what was specifically feasible in terms of politics and resources" and to put forward recommendations about how to deal with the "growing problem of dwindling American resources for conducting foreign policy in the Middle East."[25]

The British Withdrawal from the Gulf

Just as the Johnson administration was beginning to rethink its policies toward the Near East, the British, America's longtime partner in maintaining both Western interests and a military presence in the region, enraged US policymakers when

they indicated in early January 1968 that they planned to withdraw their forces "East of Suez"—including the Gulf region—by the end of 1971. While the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf had been debated internally for years,[26] the primary catalysts for the decision were the Arab oil embargo and the closing of the Suez Canal following the war. In doing so, European commerce was no longer able to bypass the three-week journey around the Horn of Africa, driving up shipping costs for oil and goods. By November, the British government was forced to devaluate the Sterling and currency speculation was rife thereafter.[27] As David McCourt observed, "by 1968…it was clearly no longer in Britain's interests to expend such effort—material and financial—in an area where its immediate security was not endangered."[28] In other words, the British Empire was lying on its deathbed at a time when the United States was incapable of taking over its role.

The first indications that Britain had decided to withdraw its forces East of Suez by mid-1972 came on January 4, 1968. The next day, the State Department ordered its embassy in London to get to the bottom of this rumor, and the secretary of state, Dean Rusk, sent a personal note to the British foreign secretary, George Brown, stressing the importance of maintaining the British position in the region. Despite the Johnson administration's lobbying to convince the British government to delay announcing its decision, London never budged. In one notable encounter just prior to the British announcement, Rusk gave Brown, what the State Department's administrative history described as an "eloquent presentation" on why it should not announce the decision, but this was hardly the case.[29] When Brown traveled to Washington to meet with Rusk on January 11, he knew he was in trouble. Rusk stressed the importance the United States attached to the British presence in the region and its concerns about the Soviet Union seeking to fill the power vacuum the withdrawal would create. At the same time, he understood the incredible financial strains Britain faced at the time. Normally, the United States would have offered to subsidize the cost of maintaining British forces in the region, but Rusk said that Congress had "sharply curtailed" its own resources in response to Vietnam. The problem was that a "total withdrawal" of Britain's forces from the region was an "irreversible decision." Instead, Rusk indicated the American preference for the gradual reduction of Britain's forces over time or at the very least for the British to avoid announcing the decision publicly.[30] When the foreign secretary said that the decision had already been made and could not be reversed, Rusk lashed out at Brown, "for God's sake, act like Britain," while noting "acrid aroma of [a] fait accompli."[31] A few days later, on January 16, Brown stood up before the House of Commons and announced Britain's decision to withdraw its military forces from East of Suez.[32] The British announcement set in motion a wide-ranging review of the US regional policy to determine how to approach the new geopolitical reality of the Gulf.

To make matters worse, on January 30, just two weeks after the British announced their decision to withdraw their forces from "East of Suez," the Vietcong caught US forces in Vietnam completely off guard when it launched the Tet Offensive. As the White House hunkered down to respond to the Vietnamese crisis, the State Department was tasked with rethinking the US policy toward the Middle East once again. Previous efforts to formulate a new policy had not

anticipated Britain's sudden decision to withdraw from the region. The central problem was how to maintain a regional balance of power. One idea was to form a regional alliance, consisting of Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the southern Gulf Sheikhdoms—what would later become Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow first suggested this as a potential option during an interview on Voice of America on January 19. Unexpectedly, there was quite a backlash to Rostow's suggestion, as regional states condemned the idea as a form of American imperialism. However, according to the State Department's Administration History, Rostow's comment had in fact been "designed to make clear that the [US] had no intention of organizing new defense arrangements for the Persian Gulf."[33]

When the IRG met again on February 1 to devise new policy guidelines to handle the British withdrawal, it concluded that, while the Soviets intended to increase its influence in the Gulf region, it was not advisable for the United States to try to "replace" the British presence. Instead, the IRG recommended that the US policy be designed to encourage (1) the British to maintain as much of their present special role in the Gulf for as long as possible; (2) the Saudis and Iranians to settle their outstanding territorial dispute over the median line of the Gulf; and (3) greater political and economic cooperation among the Gulf states, while (4) avoiding an undue military buildup of the Gulf states.[34] However, as pragmatic as these recommendations were, the CIA was "skeptical" about the ability of the local rulers to "cooperate effectively."[35]

To implement this new policy, the United States needed to work with Britain to find a suitable substitute to maintain the regional balance of power, while keeping the Soviets out. On February 12, American and British officials met in Washington to discuss the plans for the Gulf. During the meeting, the Americans stressed their "hope that a British political presence and ties with the Gulf States would remain" and indicated the administration's desire to participate in planning. The next day, the British forwarded their withdrawal plans.[36] A particular concern for both sides was what role the Iranians would play. Traditionally, the British policy in the Gulf had been designed to prevent Iran and Saudi Arabia from dominating their smaller and weaker Arab neighbors, while also deterring any other great power, like the Soviets, from entering the Gulf.[37] However, with Britain no longer able to play the balancing role, both sides were concerned that the Shah would try to assert his dominance over the region, which was bound to upset the conservative Arab monarchs in the Gulf. In particular, the Shah was certain to press the British on Iran's claim to Bahrain and to seek the annexation of three small islands, Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, which lie near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. According to Alvandi, even before the British formally announced their planned withdrawal, the Shah told the British ambassador to Iran, Goronwy Roberts, that he considered the islands strategically vital to Iran's security interests and that if an agreement could not be reached, "he was willing to unilaterally deploy troops on these Islands."[38] The Shah's bravado concerned the White House to such an extent that, in early February, President Johnson wrote to the Shah, urging him to seek broad cooperation in the Gulf, while pointing out that any "failure on this score might invite other powers to

assert themselves in ways detrimental to indigenous shaping of the future of the Gulf." Johnson also warned the Shah that his continued hardline stance would only "inflame Arab opinion, causing the Arabs to look to the Soviets for assistance."[39]

At the end of March, American and British officials met again to discuss the security of the Gulf. During the talks, the British emphasized their interest in "retaining a considerable role on the Arab side of the Gulf after 1971," but had grown pessimistic about an early resolution to Iran's territorial claims. There were, however, indications that the British were considering a more flexible approach on this matter, which the Americans encouraged because they believed that resolving these issues would help pave the way for a more accommodating, indigenous solution to the security situation in the Gulf following the withdrawal.[40] In essence, what the Americans had in mind was what would eventually become the twin pillar policy, whereby the maintenance of Gulf security would rest on two pillars, Iran and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the United States also favored the unification of the smaller Gulf sheikhdoms into a single state. By building up the two largest Gulf powers, the United States believed that it could avoid the logistical and financial difficulties of policing the Gulf itself.[41]

Meanwhile, the Israelis and Iranians were not blind to the radicalization of Iraq and decided to reactivate their Kurdish connection. According to Tsafrir, with SAVAK's blessing, the Kurdish leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, and his trusted confidant, Dr. Mahmoud Othman, traveled surreptitiously to Israel in the spring of 1968 via an Israeli Air Force plane (which had just delivered weapons to the Kurds) to meet with high-level Israeli officials, including Israel's president, prime minister, and the ministers of defense and foreign affairs, among many others. While most of the meetings were ceremonial in nature, Barzani's talks with Mossad focused on how Israel could strengthen their relationship and the scale of its support. The Kurdish leader was also taken on a trip to the Sinai to see personally the scale of Israel's victory over the Arabs. Israel's generosity, courtesy, and the level of support impressed Barzani.[42]

Almost immediately after the trip, Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, a longtime sympathizer to the Kurdish cause, asked the White House to meet with one of Barzani's emissaries, Shawfiq Qazzaz. The task fell to Harold Saunders, a CIA analyst and Middle East expert, who had replaced Robert Komer on the NSC staff.[43] When Qazzaz met with Saunders on March 12, he complained that the regime had not fulfilled the promises made in 1966 and humanitarian aid was only reaching pro-government Kurds. Saunders pointed out that there was little the United States could legally do and suggested that he contact the Red Cross directly.[44] The next day, Saunders drafted a memo to the president's special assistant that pointed out that since Iraq severed relations with the United States, "the [Kurdish] problem [was not] so ticklish," though "for the moment, [their] hands [were] tied unless [the White House wanted] to begin clandestine aid to the Kurds, and [they had not] so far seen much to be gained from that." To this end, he advocated sticking "to [their] general approach until there [seemed] good reason to change it."[45] Quite clearly, a shift in US thinking toward the Kurds had occurred, though it was facilitated by Israel and Iran's hidden hand.

Within weeks of the British announcement, American fears about Soviet encroachment in the region were realized when Moscow moved to shore up its influence inside Iraq. On April 2, the United States learned that Soviets had just signed a major oil deal with Iraq, which included technical assistance in both oil exploration and marketing. While US officials recognized that the deal did not give the Soviets leverage over the Iraqi regime, it was still perceived as a "real danger" to US interests in Iraq.[46] Another move occurred in late April, when Iraq announced that Soviet naval vessels planned to visit Iraqi ports. On May 11, three Soviet vessels entered the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, in what US defense officials described as a "Show the Flag" operation. This was the first time a Russian naval vessel had entered the Gulf since 1903.[47] While some US officials viewed these developments with concern, the CIA was more sanguine, concluding that Moscow still did not have any influence on the Iraqi regime's policy decisions.[48] At the same time, other US officials did not see this as a direct threat: "The Soviet Union of today simply has too many problems at home, with China, with the states of Eastern Europe, and with the communist parties outside the Soviet Union, to be dangerously aggressive in the overt manner of the past." Nevertheless, the entry of Soviet vessels into the Gulf underscored the fact that the British announcement was viewed by both the Soviets and the Gulf states as "tantamount to withdrawal."[49]

In the end, the British announcement dealt a tremendous blow to America's Cold War strategy at perhaps the worst possible time. From this point onward, the Johnson administration sought to establish a regional security arrangement focusing on bolstering Iran and Saudi Arabia, which became known as the twin pillar policy. The Johnson administration believed that by building up the two largest pro-Western powers in the Gulf it could avoid the logistical and financial difficulties of policing the region. This policy remained in place until Richard Nixon modified it in the early 1970s by putting more emphasis on shoring up Iran as opposed to Saudi Arabia.[50]

The Return of the Ba'th Party

The Six Day War had a profound impact on Iraq's political stability. In late May 1968, the CIA raised concerns about the continued survival of the Arif regime. The CIA report, suitably titled "The Stagnant Revolution," described the Arif regime as "ineffective and fumbling" and confirmed that radical elements in the military had shoved aside moderates. The analysis stated, "the balance of forces is such that no group feels power enough to take decisive steps; the result is a situation in which many important political and economic matters are simply ignored," like the implementation of the Kurdish peace agreement. While neither the Kurds nor the regime wanted to resume the Kurdish War, the CIA felt that there was plenty of room for "miscalculation" and noted an increase in plotting against the regime, particularly by the Ba'th Party and Arab nationalist groups. Taken together, the deadlock between the competing factions and the increased plotting against the regime led the CIA to fear for the regime's survival.[51]

Hoping to help stave off a coup, in June 1968, the State Department asked the Belgians to pass word on to the Arif regime that the United States was willing to resume diplomatic relations if: (1) Iraq would have to agree to compensate the United States for damages to its embassy and consulates; (2) the United States regained unimpeded access to its properties in Iraq; and (3) the Iraqi boycott of US goods and services and the overflight ban were lifted. The Belgians agreed to pass these points to Iraq, but commented that the Iraqis would likely find the lifting of the boycott unacceptable.[52] There is no record of how the Iraqis responded to this information.

On July 10, the IRG met once again to discuss the formulation of the US policy toward the Gulf region. Chaired again by Assistant Secretary Battle, members of the IRG expressed concern about the recent Soviet "Show the Flag" operation, which they felt foreshadowed Moscow's intention to expand its naval presence in the Gulf in the years ahead. The group reached a number of key conclusions. Notably, the IRG felt that it was not in America's interests to "replace" the British presence in the Gulf and that the US policy should be designed to encourage the Gulf states to cooperate among themselves. Much of the discussion, however, focused on the status of the Middle East Force, based out of Bahrain. In particular, the IRG was pleased with the Department of Defense's recent decision to construct a US military facility on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, which would improve US communications, operate an 8,000-foot runway, and store vital oil supplies. Moreover, the IRG believed that Diego Garcia could serve as a backup site, should the Bahraini's no longer agree to house the Middle East Force following the British withdrawal. Along these lines, the IRG agreed that the Middle East Force should be expanded modestly to project the American presence in the region.[53]

A week later, on July 19, Battle circulated the IRG's recommendations for America's new Middle East policy. Like the Holmes report from July 1967, the IRG recognized that the United States would continue to play an active role in the region, despite the major setback following the Six Day War. However, the new policy acknowledged that while the United States would be required to compete with the Soviets for influence, local actors would largely determine the nature of this competition. Therefore, the United States needed to adopt a flexible policy aimed at (1) opposing the Soviets in the region, while trying to convince Moscow of the need for cooperation to avert dangers to both superpowers; (2) maintaining necessary commitments and interests, while taking into account local aspirations for independence; (3) avoiding over-involvement in local politics and disputes peripheral to America's primary interests, while seeking to control those conflicts to avoid a wider war; and (4) finding a sound policy for dealing with the Arab-Israeli impasse. At the same time, the policy proposal was realistic enough to recognize that the region would not stabilize anytime soon, and so it proposed building up the Middle East Force to improve America's ability to respond in the event of an emergency.[54]

However, just as the IRG was putting the final touches on its policy proposal, America's fears about the stability of the Arif regime were realized. In the predawn hours of July 17, the Ba'th Party, working with radical elements of the

military, overthrew the Arif regime in a bloodless coup. After seizing control of the government, the Ba'th Party placed Arif on a plane bound for London; he was the first Iraqi president to leave office with his life.[55] It was evident from the outset that the White House was apprehensive about how radical the new regime would be, with US officials certain that it would be "more difficult than their predecessors."[56]

The new regime initially consisted of a triumvirate of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr as the prime minister, Abd ar-Rahman al-Dawud as the defence minister, and Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayif as the interior minister. However, as Tripp pointed out, this would not last long, since neither the Ba'thist nor non-Ba'thist elements of the regime wanted to share power. Having learned hard lessons in 1963, al-Bakr moved swiftly to consolidate his power. On July 30, while al-Dawud was visiting Jordan, al-Bakr ordered an armored brigade to seize all of the strategic buildings in Baghdad, arrest al-Nayif, and sent him into exile.[57] Following the second coup, Iraq's new supreme ruling body, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), dismissed al-Nayif's cabinet and named al-Bakr president and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.[58] In doing so, the Ba'th Party had managed to finally seize power for a second time, a grip they would not relinquish until the United States invaded in March 2003.

The Ba'th Party's seizure of power at the end of July 1968 was followed by a period of intense insecurity, as the regime moved quickly to improve its relations with the Soviet Union, while blaming all of its domestic shortcomings on Israeli subversion. For instance, on August 2, Iraq's new foreign minister, Abdul Karim Sheikhli, announced that Iraq would work to strengthen its relations "with the socialist camp, particularly the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic." This, however, did not come as a complete surprise to US officials in light of the large-scale military and economic agreements the previous regime had just signed with the Soviets. Nevertheless, the speed at which Baghdad sought to improve relations with Moscow provided a first glimpse at a strategic alliance that would soon emerge.[59]

By late November, not long after Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon defeated his two rivals, Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace, in the US general election, the US Embassy in Beirut drafted a report on the first 100 days of the Ba'thist regime in Iraq. The report makes clear that the Ba'th Party had submitted to Soviet pressure and released a large number of left wing and communist political prisoners; however, "there [was] no indication that Marxists and communists [had] been given any major role in the regime." In short, the regime appeared willing to accept Soviet arms and would accommodate their wishes as long as it did not involve sharing power with anyone, including the communists.[60]

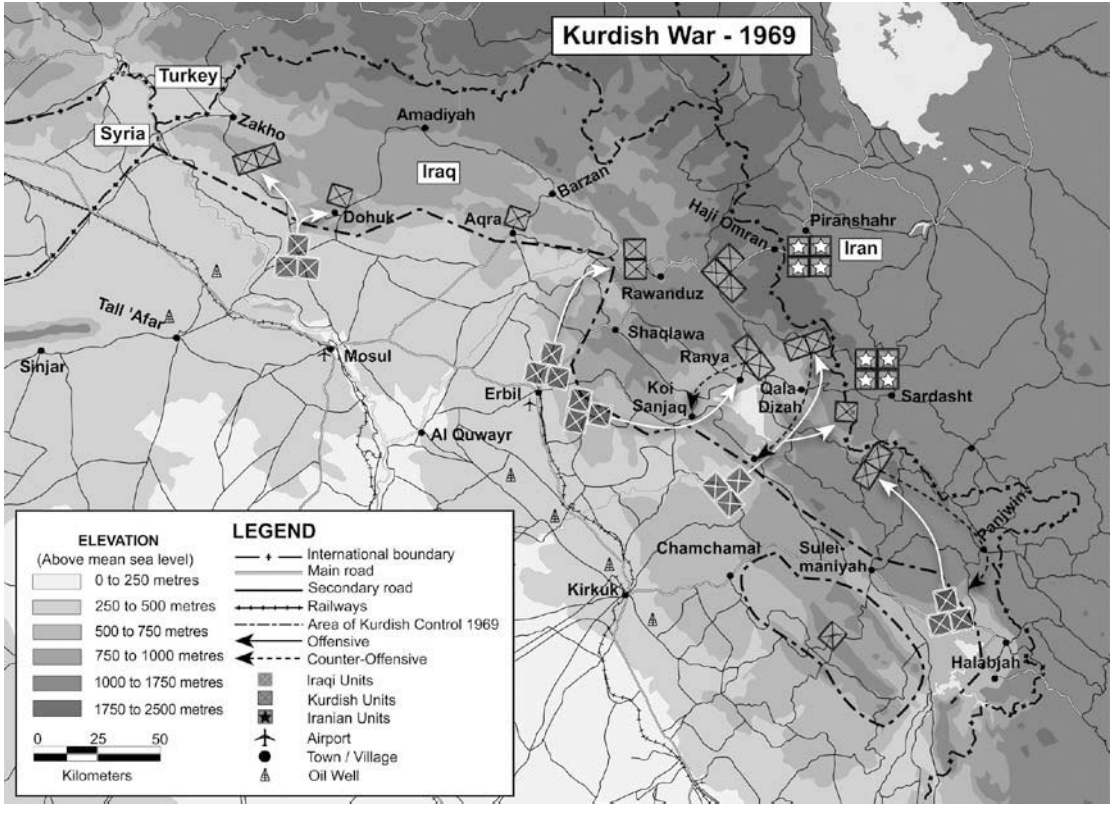
Then, in early December, Iraq made international headlines when its forces stationed in Jordan shelled Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley, prompting a fierce retaliation by the Israeli Air Force, which left a number of Iraqi soldiers dead. According to an INR report, "Iraq: Internal Stresses and the Search for the Bogeyman," the attack had little to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict and everything to do with the regime's insecurity. In the seven months since the Ba'th

Party had seized power, it had alienated "virtually every significant political and ethnic group in Iraq" through "inept leadership, factionalism, duplicity, and repression." The regime was engaged in a "classic ploy of psychological mobilization against an external threat," namely Israel and the United States (Iran was quickly soon added to the list).[61] This view was supported by a speech President al-Bakr gave the day after the battle, claiming, "while Iraq was facing the enemy on the Arab-Israel front, a fifth column of agents of Israel and the US was striking from behind."[62]

On December 14, the regime announced that it had broken up "an Israeli spy network" seeking to "bring about a change in the Iraqi regime."[63] Based on two confessions, Iraq claimed that an Israeli spy network had been gathering information on the Iraqi military and conducting sabotage training for Jewish youths. While US officials acknowledged that Israel likely had "covert assets in Iraq," they were skeptical that the Israelis would recruit Iraqi Jews who, "with their movements restricted and under constant surveillance, would make poor recruits for any Israeli espionage or sabotage net." The second claim lumped together all of the regime's enemies into a single conspiracy with the objective of obtaining military and political intelligence on Iraq, while also seeking the regime's overthrow, establishing peace with Israel, and forming a US-backed government with both Arabs and Kurds.[64] Although US officials acknowledged that this would be an ideal outcome, the real purpose appeared designed to stoke nationalist fervor against Israel by targeting local Iraqi Jews. In total, the regime arrested 86 people and of the 21 who were put on trial immediately, 9 were Jews. Upon learning of the arrests, the State Department sought to intervene through the Indian Embassy in Washington but to no avail.[65]

In the meantime, the Ba'th Party escalated tensions with Barzani by lending support to Jalal Talabani's "progressive" Kurdish movement as part of "a rather crude divide-and-rule campaign designed to undermine Barzani, who reacted strongly to the regime's duplicity." When fighting broke out between the two Kurdish factions in late November, Barzani emerged victorious, inflicting considerable losses on Talabani's followers, despite indirect support from the Iraqi army.[66] In the aftermath, the RCC ordered an offensive against Barzani's forces. The campaign was launched on January 3 and modeled on the disastrous 1966 campaign, which, as Pollack observed, had been strategically sound but poorly executed.[67] After three weeks of fighting, severe winter weather forced the offensive to a halt.[68] Similarly, the Shah increased his support for Barzani, while simultaneously pressing Iraq on the question of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.[69]

In short, just as Johnson was departing the White House, the situation in Iraq had reached a point of acute crisis. On the one hand, the Ba'th Party had rounded up a number of Iraqi Jews and was putting them on show trials in a vain effort to obtain support from both the Arab and Iraqi streets, while antagonizing Israel and raising the likelihood of retaliatory strikes against Iraq's forces in Jordan. Of course, this would play right into the Iraqi regime's hand, by proving that Iraq was a frontline Arab state and establishing its anti-Israeli bona fides. Given this, the Johnson administration urged the Israelis to back off.[70] In the meantime, the Iranians heightened their military pressure on Iraq via the Kurds, while at the



MAP 5.1 Kurdish War: 1969.[71]

same time pressing Iraq for concessions on the Shatt al-Arab. While the Johnson administration was not overtly supportive of Iran's aid to the Kurds, the incoming administration would eventually take a much different view. In the end, Iraq's actions during the final weeks of the Johnson administration would have a profound impact on how his successor, Richard Nixon, would approach Iraq in terms of the wider Cold War, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Kurdish War.

Conclusion

Whatever progress the Johnson administration had achieved with Iraq prior to the outbreak of the Six Day War had been destroyed when the Arif regime severed diplomatic relations with the United States. This had a tremendous impact on America's ability to monitor events taking place inside Iraq, and complicated its response to Britain's planned withdrawal from the region by the end of 1971. Understandably, American officials were concerned that Britain's withdrawal would upset the regional balance of power and provide the Soviet Union with an avenue to increase its influence in the region. Bogged down in Vietnam, the US military was incapable of filling this void, but neither the Johnson administration nor the British were prepared to give the Shah carte blanche to dominate the region. This led to Johnson's decision to build up both Iran and Saudi Arabia as the twin pillars of the region to prevent the Soviet Union from filling the power vacuum. In all instances, the force driving America's decision-making process was the need to contain Soviet influence in both Iraq and the region. Given America's international commitments at the time, this policy was a logical response to the conundrum the British announcement created.

The return of the Ba'th Party to power in July 1968 posed significant new challenges to the US policy. Although the Kennedy administration had welcomed the Ba'th Party in 1963, the Johnson administration quickly viewed it as a potential challenge to its regional interests. After all, the Ba'th had overthrown a moderate, anticommunist regime and soon adopted militant policies toward Israel and the Kurds, and then tacked toward the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance. These activities convinced the Johnson administration that the Ba'th Party was becoming a vehicle for Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty, but this would be a problem that his successor, Richard Nixon, would have to deal with.

6

Nixon and the Second Ba'thist Regime: January 1969–July 1972

When Richard M. Nixon came to office in January 1969, he vowed to radically transform the way the United States conducted its foreign relations. To achieve this, Nixon found an intellectual soul mate in Henry Kissinger, a Harvard-educated professor of history and international relations, whom he named as his national security adviser. While Nixon and Kissinger had very different personalities, they shared the same basic assumptions about the conduction of foreign policy. A ruthless and cunning career politician, Nixon had always been willing to use any means available to achieve his objectives, characteristics that would eventually lead to his own demise. Nixon was a reclusive intellect, who did not like people, and was suspicious of all those who surrounded him. However, despite his personal shortcomings, Nixon had a highly sophisticated understanding of international affairs. He considered himself a realist and made decisions on the basis of a cold calculation of how to maximize America's national interests, even if this was at the expense of friends or allies. Kissinger, on the other hand, could not have been more different. Born in Germany to a Jewish family in 1923, Kissinger was a highly intellectual, gregarious socialite, who basked in the public limelight. However, he was also a staunch realist, who approached the foreign policy in a brutal, Machiavellian way, whereby practical and material considerations always trumped ideological notions, morals, or ethical premises.[1] Privately, these two disliked each other. Nixon once commented, "I don't trust Henry [Kissinger], but I can use him." Likewise, Kissinger called Nixon an "egomaniac" who was "obsessed [with] the fear that he was not receiving adequate credit" for foreign policy decisions.[2] These differences, however, did not prevent them from developing a successful working relationship, which helped guide the United States to a series of major foreign policy triumphs. This was because neither Nixon nor Kissinger would allow anything to stand in their way in achieving their objectives.

Nixon's presidency saw a dramatic shift in the Cold War away from the confrontation and competition of the 1960s toward an era of engagement, diplomacy, and an easing of tensions between the two superpowers, known as détente.

During Nixon's first term in office, the White House had greater political priorities in terms of the Cold War, like the escalating war in Vietnam, the Middle East peace process, the opening up to China, and the challenge of achieving détente with the Soviets. This would impact America's policies toward the Third World. As Westad observed:

> Nixon viewed the Third World first and foremost as a source of disorder in international relations, which only counted to the superpowers if its internal squabbles were made use of by one superpower to threaten the key interests of the other, especially with regard to access to raw materials [like oil].[3]

During Nixon's first term in office, the White House showed little interest in dealing with the Third World, which included the Gulf region.[4] As a telling example, the first meeting of the NSC's Interdepartmental Group for the Near East region did not take place until June 5, 1970, over a year after the Nixon administration came to office. It lasted for barely 20 minutes and failed to discuss a single military issue. According to Fain, this underscored the "low priority" Nixon and Kissinger "attached to Persian Gulf issues,"[5] and was reflective of the Nixon administration's decision to "farm out" much of the decision making on regional matters to the State Department between 1969 and 1971.[6] The decoupling of regional issues like this was enshrined in the Nixon Doctrine, which was announced in Guam in July 1969. In his speech, Nixon called on the US government to assist its regional allies in taking over the responsibility of defending themselves.[7] This would prove to be a major boon for the Shah of Iran, who appeared eager to fill this role.[8]

Throughout 1970–71, the White House ignored Iranian and Israeli warnings that Iraq had become a Soviet "stalking-horse" and a major source of subversion in the Gulf.[9] This was because the State Department knew that there was little evidence to substantiate these claims. For instance, between 1968 and 1970, the Ba'th Party had murdered at least 35 communists, which had elicited sharp warnings from Moscow.[10] At the same time, President Nixon was not a novice on the question of Iraq. As Eisenhower's vice president, he had played a key role in devising America's response to Iraq's revolution in 1958–59. Understandably, this experience would have impacted Nixon's understanding of Iraq's place in the Cold War, especially when Iraq improved relations with the Soviet Union in late 1971—just as the British departed the Gulf—and then signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972. This move caught the White House's attention, but the timing was problematic; Nixon had just come back from China and Kissinger was busy setting the stage for a major diplomatic breakthrough at the Moscow Summit that was held in late May.[11] This did not, however, mean that the Nixon administration would allow the Soviet move in Iraq go unchecked. On August 1, 1972, Nixon approved a risky covert operation to intervene in Iraq by providing the Kurds with military and financial assistance. This intervention would impact not just the course of the Kurdish War but also the trajectory of Iraqi history, as it inadvertently helped pave the way for Saddam Hussein's rise to power.

The Problem of Iraq

Within days of President Nixon entering the White House, Iraq thrust itself into the headlines. On January 26, 1969, the *New York Times* reported that an Iraqi court had sentenced 16 people to death, 10 of whom were Jews, as part of an alleged Israeli spy conspiracy exposed the previous month. There was little the White House could actually do to stave off the executions; by the time word of the Iraqi verdict reached America, the accused were already dead.[12] The State Department later confirmed that only 9 Jews had been hanged.[13] US officials were convinced that the Iraqis were purposely trying to force Israel to retaliate against Iraqi forces stationed in Jordan, which could spark another Middle Eastern war.[14] Recognizing the delicacy of the situation, the Nixon administration was forced to urge restraint on Israel.[15] Prior to the killings, the Nixon administration had tried to press Iraq into staying the execution by working through its allies who maintained good relations with Iraq, such as France, Spain, and India. Unfortunately, the Ba'th Party responded, "in no uncertain terms, to stay out of [its] domestic affairs." As a last measure, the United States approached the UN secretary general, U Thant, to intervene, but his efforts also failed. There was nothing more that could be done.[16]

The White House condemned Iraq's actions publicly, with the new secretary of state, William P. Rogers, describing the executions as "repugnant to the conscience of the world."[17] Viewing the killings as "a matter of deep concern," the White House took the matter to the UN, instructing the American delegate, Charles Yost, to raise the issue with the Security Council. While acknowledging Iraq's sovereign right to administer justice to its citizens, Yost told the council that the execution and trials scarcely conformed to the "accepted standards of respect for human rights and human dignity," and appeared to be "designed to arouse emotions and to intensify the very explosive atmosphere of suspicion and hostility in the Middle East.[18] Iraq's execution of the 9 Jews in January 1969 set the stage for the Nixon administration's attitude toward Iraq.

Despite the fact that this was the first foreign policy crisis the Nixon administration faced in office, it was not serious enough to convince the White House to take Iraq or the Gulf region seriously. The Nixon administration clearly preferred to defer matters like Iraq to the State Department or regional allies.[19] In particular, the White House was happy to have the president's old friend, the Shah of Iran, deal with the Iraqi problem. As a result, Iran took a series of hostile measures against Iraq, like urging the Kurds to resume fighting, manufacturing a crisis along the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and sponsoring a coup aimed at overthrowing the Ba'thist regime in January 1970. Although none of these measures managed to unseat the Ba'th Party, Iran was successful in preoccupying the Iraqi regime politically and militarily in the crucial period leading up to Britain's departure from the region at the end of 1971.

Crisis on the Shatt al-Arab

Throughout 1969, the Shah sought to capitalize on Iraq's internal and external weaknesses to force it to make territorial concessions along the Shatt al-Arab

waterway. A little background is necessary. In 1937, Iraq was given legal sovereignty over the waterway, except for the approaches to two key Iranian ports, Khorramshahr and Abadan.[20] However, the Shah viewed the loss of the waterway as a personal embarrassment and had tried to wrest partial sovereignty over the waterway using coercive measures since the early 1960s. However, the Shatt crisis goes beyond a simple territorial dispute—the Shah used the crisis to convince the Nixon administration of his importance in terms of America's regional strategy. As Alvandi points out, the Shah saw the crisis as "a harbinger of the role Iran could play under the Nixon Doctrine."[21] By manufacturing a crisis with Iraq, the Shah wanted to show that Iran was capable of punishing the Iraqi regime for executing the Jews, while simultaneously seeking long-coveted territorial concessions. His actions would find appreciative audiences in both Washington and Tel Aviv.

The Shah's opening move against Iraq began on March 1, when he ordered the Kurds to attack the IPC's installations around Kirkuk and Mosul. According to Asadollah Alam, the Shah's minister of court and close confidant, the Shah believed that an attack on the pipelines would reveal Iraq's poor security and undermine its credibility with the oil companies, who, he hoped, would then switch their production targets to Iran.[22] The bombing caused $5 million in damage and reduced Iraq's oil pumping capacity by 70 percent for about 10 days,[23] but it also set off a new round of fighting between the Kurds and the Iraqi army that ended in April, when the army withdrew from the mountains.[24]

Throughout March and April, the Shah managed to divert Iraq's attention away from the war with the Kurds in the north by manufacturing a crisis along the Shatt al-Arab in the south. In early March, Iraq issued a demand that all Iranian vessels entering the waterway fly the Iraqi flag, as the waterway was its sovereign territory.[25] When Iraq threatened to use force to ensure its sovereignty over the waterway, the Shah escalated tensions further by abrogating the 1937 border treaty unilaterally and putting its military on red alert. When Alam and the head of SAVAK, General Nemattollah Nassiri, learned about the crisis, they were outraged. That night, Alam wrote in his journal: "[Minister of Foreign Affairs Ardeshir] Zahedi has made a complete cock-up and landed us on a war footing with Iraq…I had no idea of how far our relations had deteriorated and the magnitude of this latest crisis comes as an appalling shock." When he raised the matter with the Shah, he asked, "Is this really an appropriate moment for us to resort to force, in the midst of vital negotiations with oil companies and just as we are approaching an understanding with the Arabs of the Gulf?" The Shah was indifferent to Alam's concerns, who wrote in his diary, "It makes my blood boil…Never underestimate your opponents; even if the Iraqis avoid a war, they can still paralyze our economy by denying us use of the Shatt al-Arab."[26] This incident underscores the Shah's autocratic and arbitrary style of conducting Iran's foreign policy.

The Shatt al-Arab crisis was important because the Shah tied the waterway to the Kurdish War, much as he had in 1966. This was a very calculated move. The Shah knew that Iraqis would have to respond to the abrogation of the treaty, lest they look weak. He also knew that the majority of Iraq's forces—60,000

troops—were deployed against the Kurds in the north, while another three brigades were stationed in Jordan. This left the regime with two options: back off from the Kurds in the north or withdraw its forces from Jordan—neither of which were politically feasible.[27] Having cornered the Iraqis, the Shah passed word to Baghdad that he was willing to "break off supplies to the Kurds in return for concessions in the Shatt." When the Iraqi regime rejected the proposal, the Shah encouraged the Kurds to reopen hostilities in the north and escalated tensions along the Shatt further.[28] By linking both events, the Shah sent the Ba'th Party a clear message that Iran would be the dominant regional power once the British departed, and if Iraq ever wanted relief from the Kurds, it would have to give him what he wanted. Eventually, Iraq took the matter to the Security Council, where the two would continue to joust rhetorically until the matter was dropped in June.[29]

While the Nixon administration was happy to have Iran punish Iraq for its transgressions, the Soviets were not pleased about the Shatt al-Arab crisis. As Golan points out, Iraq's dispute with Iran "was not entirely welcomed by the Soviets, for they were improving their relations with the Shah [at the time] and preferred not to alienate him. Thus Moscow took a neutral position in the dispute hoping mainly to forestall the outbreak of war, which might have the added negative effect of alarming the British into postponing their withdrawal."[30]

Having failed to coerce concessions from Iraq militarily, in the second half of 1969, the Shah resorted to covert action to try to overthrow the Ba'thist regime. As with previous efforts, he brought together a broad collection of collaborators, including the Kurds. In mid-June, Barzani asked his Washington representative, Shawfiq Qazzaz, to visit the State Department to ask for US assistance. As with previous representations, US officials politely refused, but accepted a letter from Barzani to Secretary Rogers. The officials also expressed sympathy for the Kurds' plight, said that it had been a useful exchange, and indicated that the department "would be pleased to talk to [Qazzaz] again at any time."[31] The first interaction between American officials and the Kurds under the Nixon administration represented an improvement from the Johnson administration, which had been sensitive about Kurdish contacts.

However, Edmund Ghareeb has claimed that two US military officers had liaised with the Kurds in August 1969 and had offered them military assistance. Ghareeb indicated that the Kurds had reached a secret agreement with the United States, whereby the CIA would assist the Kurds so long as they overthrew the Ba'thist regime, severed off ties to the ICP, and rejected all offers of Soviet support.[32] The problem with Ghareeb's claim is that it does not align with the established record. By this point, the White House had "farmed out" regional policy to the State Department, which had consistently been opposed to providing American support to the Kurds. Nothing in the available record—or even the Nixon administration's subsequent actions—suggests that the United States had shifted its attitude toward the Kurds. A former CIA official, who was in charge of "denied area operations"—essentially Iraq and Syria—in 1969, has denied any US involvement with the Kurds prior to 1972.[33] For these reasons, Ghareeb's claim must be viewed with caution.

As tensions eased in the south, Iraq launched a major three-prong offensive against the Kurds in the north in late August, renewing the Kurdish War.[34] At the outset, Iraq sought to implicate Iran, claiming "thirty Persian soldiers had been killed and fourteen others captured by the Iraqi Army while trying to re-cross the frontier back to [Iran], in an area where the border was controlled by Kurdish rebels." Iran denied any involvement, suggesting instead that "certain elements" of Iran's population, which had been "the object of almost daily bombing and napalm attacks by Iraqi forces engaged against [Barzani's] troops, may have been driven to participate in the fight without the Persian Government's knowledge."[35] Fighting would continue until October when Iraqi forces halted with the onset of winter.[36]

Meanwhile, US officials caught wind of an Iranian plot to overthrow the Ba'thist regime in mid-October. On October 15, Talcott Seelye, the Iraq desk officer at the State Department, met with an Iraqi businessman, Loutfi Obeidi, who had returned from a trip to the region. According to Obeidi, a coalition of Iraqi exiles, Kurds, and Iranians was plotting to overthrow the regime. He claimed that the Shah had offered the conspirators "Iran's full support," though he complained about "how poorly the Iranians had handled the operation." When Obeidi asked if the United States was willing to support the plot, Seelye emphatically replied in the negative.[37] On December 8, another Iraqi exile, Sa'ad Jabr, discussed the plot with US officials at the embassy in Beirut. Jabr predicted that his "group" would establish a government in northern Iraq in the subsequent six weeks and foment rebellion in the south. He asked for American assistance in pressing the IPC to withhold payments to the Iraqi government and providing medicine, food, and clothing. Embassy officials said that the United States could not make these commitments and was unwilling to involve itself in the conspiracy.[38] When the State Department learned of these meetings, it concurred with the inadvisability of providing aid, but asked the embassy in Beirut to inform Jabr that the United States "would be prepared to consider prompt resumption of diplomatic relations and would certainly be disposed to cooperate within the limits of existing legislation and [their] overall policy" if the "new government [proved] to be moderate and friendly." This response suggests that while the United States was not willing to involve itself in plotting against the regime, but, if a friendly regime came to power, it would consider assistance.[39]

The March Accord

Thanks to Iran's aggressive posture over the Shatt al-Arab, its continuous plotting against Iraq, and its backing of the Kurds in the war—which had cost nearly 30 percent of Iraq's total budget for 1969—the Ba'th Party had concluded in late 1969 that in order to survive it had to rob the Shah of his "Kurdish Card" and reach an accommodation with Barzani.[40] In early December, President al-Bakr sent Faud Aref, a Kurd and former minister, to Kurdistan to present Barzani with an offer of regional autonomy. In response, Barzani "insisted that any agreement reached with the Government must be registered with the UN to ensure

implementation."[41] When the government refused, Barzani broke off negotiations on December 21. This prompted President al-Bakr to sent his deputy, Saddam Hussein—who, in his dual roles as vice chairman of the RCC of Iraq and assistant secretary general of the Ba'th Party, was the strongest personality in the regime—to the north to speak directly with Barzani. For the next month, Saddam and Dr. Othman hammered out the details of an agreement.[42]

Upon learning of these talks, the Shah was furious and escalated his plotting against the Iraqi regime. According to a British diplomat, the Shah's "immediate aim in mounting [a] coup [in Iraq] at this time was to forestall [an] agreement [with the Kurds]." After all, a deal would undercut the Shah's efforts to win control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. However, unknown to the Iranians, Iraqi security forces had infiltrated the plot and had "complete recordings of most of the meetings and interviews that took place."[43] Scheduled for the night of January 20–21, the conspirators fell right into the Iraqi trap. The next day, the regime announced that it had foiled the plot and broadcast the secret recordings, leading one diplomat to observe that the Ba'th Party had "caught the Iranians with their pants well below their knees."[44] The next morning, Iran's ambassador and four other diplomats were expelled from Iraq and by January 23 at least 33 conspirators had been executed.[45] With this, Iran's year-long effort to overthrow the Ba'th regime ended in failure. The Iranian plot gave the Ba'thist regime further impetus to solve the Kurdish question. On January 24, the regime announced that it would implement all aspects of the 1966 Bazzaz declaration; declared a general amnesty; and invited a Kurdish delegation to Baghdad.[46]

The Iranians and Israelis were determined to prevent a Kurdish-Iraqi agreement. In early March, SAVAK officials contacted Barzani and asked him to send an envoy to Tehran for discussions. On March 4, Mulla Mustafa's son, Idris Barzani, arrived in Tehran to meet with Iranian and Israeli representatives. According to the CIA, the "Israelis pushed hard for resumption of hostilities in Northern Iraq" and promised the Kurds anti-aircraft weapons, light artillery, armored cars, armored personnel carriers, and even tanks, but only if they could capture "at least two Iraqi tanks." On March 6, Idris met with the head of SAVAK, General Nassiri, to discuss Iran's concern over Barzani's negotiations with the Iraqi regime and plans for further aid. Nassiri said, "Iran was fully behind the Israeli plan to renew the fighting in Northern Iraq" and Barzani should "carefully note what the Israelis were suggesting." Going further, he said that Iran and Israel would increase their financial assistance to the Kurds to more than $3 million a month. Taken together, these two approaches confirm that Iran and Israel were worried about losing their "Kurdish Card" and were willing to promise anything to prevent an agreement with Baghdad. When the CIA reported these talks to the White House, it was the first time the Kurdish question had been raised with the Nixon administration.[47]

Just as Idris was visiting Tehran, Saddam traveled north to Kurdistan and concluded an agreement with Barzani. According to McDowell, Saddam gave Barzani some blank pieces of paper and told him to write out his demands. Barzani jotted several points on the paper, handed it back over to Saddam, who agreed on the spot.[48] In the agreement (also known as the March Accord), the

regime agreed to recognize the binational character of Iraq; reaffirm Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights; provide economic rehabilitation and development of the devastated regions of Kurdistan; and, most importantly, allow for the establishment of a self-governing region of Kurdistan.[49] After signing the agreement, Saddam returned to Baghdad on March 11 and announced over the radio that he had achieved a "total and final" solution to the Kurdish problem in Iraq. The agreement was hailed internationally as a major step toward the national reconciliation between the Arab and Kurdish populations of Iraq, but there was great uncertainty about whether the Ba'th Party would actually follow through with its promises.[50]

It was clear from the outset that the Nixon administration was not optimistic about the peace settlement's chances for success. On March 12, the new US ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur, cabled Washington to offer his assessment of the agreement, indicating that the Shah felt that his worst fears of Soviet influence on Iraq had come true with the formation of an autonomous Iraqi-Kurdish province. When the State Department responded on March 14, it observed that while the agreement looked "more binding than anything developed heretofore," it left critical questions unanswered, like the degree of autonomy the Kurds would enjoy. The department did not think that the agreement would hold "for any substantial length of time" and doubted that the Ba'thist regime was secure enough to give it a free hand to interfere in the Gulf or pose threats elsewhere. After all, the agreement had not diminished the Kurdish threat, which meant that it would not take long for "serious if not fatal flaws" to emerge.[51]

During Nixon's first year in office, Iraq was the center of a number of crises, but still never really featured much in terms of US foreign policy. Once the killing of the Iraqi Jews in January 1969 faded from memory, Iraq ceased to generate high-level interest. This did not mean that the State Department was ignoring the deteriorating Iran-Iraq tension, but rather that the White House showed disinterest in dealing with Third World problems. With the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in July—which was designed to offload the burden of defending America's allies in the Cold War—and Iran's success at keeping Iraq in a state of perpetual crisis, the Nixon administration was content to let the Shah play his games so long as he did not interfere with more important policy objectives (i.e., détente and de-escalating the Vietnam War). Furthermore, because the Nixon administration did not perceive Iraq as significant in terms of either the Cold War or the Arab-Israeli conflict, it did not require significant attention from the highest levels of the US government.

The Accord Unravels

In terms of the Cold War, the period between the announcement of the 1970 March Accord and the spring of 1972 was quite confusing for the Americans. On the one hand, the Kurdish agreement freed the Ba'thist regime to unleash a wave of terror against the communists, while on the other, by the time the British withdrew from the region in late 1971, Iraq had rekindled its relationship with

Moscow, ceased its campaign against the communists, and tried to assassinate Barzani.

Throughout this period, both Iran and Israel pressed the Nixon administration to reconsider its position on the Kurds by overstating the Soviet threat to the region at a time when Britain was withdrawing from the region, but the White House remained disinterested. On March 12, Iranian prime minister Hoveyda told MacArthur that the agreement was part of a Soviet conspiracy, would release about 20,000 Iraqi troops for deployment to the Gulf or against Israel, increased Iraqi resources and capability for subversion in the region, and showed that the Ba'thist regime was "very much under the influence of the Soviets because of its dependence on Soviet military and other aid for survival." He argued that the agreement was the opening stage of a Soviet plot to transform Iraqi Kurdistan into an autonomous state, which would then seek unification with the Soviet Union. Should this happen, Hoveyda warned, the Soviets would leapfrog past the Turkish-Iranian containment barrier and directly penetrate the Middle East. Finally, Hoveyda said that he was worried that the Soviets would "begin to play on strong national sentiment of [the] Kurdish people to stir up Turkish and Iranian Kurds in subversive activities holding out bait of an enlarged independent Kurdish state." For these reasons, he urged the United States to increase its support for the Iranian armed forces so that it had the "minimum necessary deterrent strength" prior to the British withdrawal from the Gulf in December 1971. MacArthur agreed with the necessity of building up Iran's military strength in the face of Britain's impending withdrawal and saw the importance of a strong, stable Iran capable of making a major contribution to the peace and stability in the Gulf. Hoveyda's presentation made clear that Iran saw itself as the natural heir to the British and that it intended to reinforce this view with US officials following the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine. While the request fit with America's "twin pillar" policy for the region, Iran seemed to be amplifying the Soviet threat in order to advance its own interests in the Gulf.[52]

The Iranians were not alone in trying to convince the Nixon administration that the March Accord was part of a Soviet plot. On April 10, the director general of Israel's foreign ministry, Gideon Rafael, told Secretary Rogers that the Iraqis had been "extremely reluctant" to seek peace with the Kurds, but the Soviets had insisted "they wanted peace in proximity of USSR's borders." According to Rafael, Moscow had promised Baghdad further arms assistance, cooperation on oil matters, and "support for [a] bigger Iraqi role in Persian Gulf affairs," in exchange for peace with the Kurds.[53] Clearly, the Iranians and Israelis were depicting the agreement as a Soviet plot to convince the Nixon administration of the Gulf's importance prior to the British withdrawal.

The State Department did not accept this analysis.[54] When the department described the Rogers–Rafael talks to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, it observed, "we realize Israelis have good sources on Kurdish matters but believe Rafael has exaggerated [the] Soviet role in [the] recent . . . agreement."[55] Certainly, the State Department was concerned about Soviet penetration into the region, but it did not believe that the agreement was part of a sophisticated strategy. "We agree [the] Soviets have been encouraging Iraqi/Kurdish settlement but it [is] less clear

what effect this actually had in bringing about [the] current settlement." It noted that the Soviet position on the Kurds had waffled over time, but was largely "subordinated to other… policy considerations in the area." Concluding, the department wrote, "it seems unlikely that the Soviets would want to risk damaging their carefully nurtured relations with Iran and Turkey" by embarking on a plan to create a "Kurdish corridor" along its border.[56]

Another US official, Lee Dinsmore—a former Iraqi desk officer in the 1960s and now the US consul to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia—was amused by Iran crying "Soviets!" and depicting the Kurdish agreement as a Soviet plot. Dinsmore wrote that the Shah's frustration over the settlement was ironic, because it was the Shah who had first encouraged Barzani to sustain military pressure on Iraq, while preparing to sell the Kurds out if the Iraqis conceded the Shatt al-Arab, and it was Iran's brinkmanship with Iraq that had pushed the Ba'th Party to seek accommodation with the Kurds. Therefore, "if [the] Soviet Union [was] happy over [the] direction [the] Kurdish situation [was] taking in Iraq, it may have [America's] friends to thank. It [was] doubtful [the] Kurds could have held out over [the] last ten years had they not had Iran's help."[57]

Bolstering the American thesis, throughout much of 1970–71, relations between Baghdad and Moscow underwent a deep chill. This was because the Ba'th Party, having now settled the Kurdish problem, was determined to eliminate any alternative source of power inside Iraq, which meant that the ICP was a threat.[58] On March 23, the Ba'th Party's security forces recommenced its campaign against the communists and, over the next few weeks, rounded up communists and targeted the ICP's leadership with assassinations.[59] From an American perspective, Iraq's repression of the communists was a positive development, but the absence of diplomatic relations made it impossible for the Nixon administration to improve relations as the Kennedy administration had in 1963.

By August, the decline in Soviet-Iraqi relations was apparent when Saddam Hussein visited Moscow from August 4 to 12 to seek deferment on the vast debt Iraq had accumulated under the previous regimes from the purchase of weapons, and to obtain additional economic and military aid. Although little was known about the discussions, US officials in Moscow believed that Saddam had received a "chilly" reception. A joint communiqué suggested that the Soviets had not made any new commitments to Iraq, stating that both sides had "exchanged views" on the Middle East. This, according to the embassy, was the "standard Soviet communiqué language for lack of any agreement."[60]

On August 24, the CIA sent Kissinger an intelligence summary that confirmed the deterioration of Soviet-Iraqi relations. According to the memo, a Soviet military attaché based in Iraq had confided to a deep-cover CIA officer in July that the Soviet ambassador was frustrated with the Ba'thist regime's failure to pay for major weapons purchases. This source also indicated that the Soviets were frustrated about Iraq's refusal to form a national unity government—or National Front—with the ICP and KDP. The memo cited reports of Iraqi security forces monitoring the movements of Soviet officials closely and instances where they were stopped and harassed at checkpoints.[61] Furthermore, Golan reports that the Kremlin had grown concerned about Iraq's decision to exchange ambassadors

with China,[62] its primary communist rival following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s and a border war between March and September 1969.[63] These reports, of course, undermined Iranian and Israeli claims that the March agreement was part of a Soviet strategy to dominate the Gulf, while revealing Moscow's frustration with Baghdad's policies.

There were also indicators that the CIA was growing interested in Iraq at this time. For instance, while Saddam was in Moscow, the CIA learned that Barzani was strengthening his forces in anticipation of a confrontation with the regime and had begun to offer a safe haven to communists now fleeing Baghdad.[64] On August 22, Iraqi security forces disrupted a nationalist coup and a few days later Iraqi Shia dissidents informed the CIA of further plots against the regime.[65]

The CIA's interest in Iraq coincided with a growing crisis in Jordan, where tension between King Hussein and the Palestinian Fedayeen escalated into a civil war in September. Since the Six Day War, Jordanian authorities had tried repeatedly to bring the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) under its control with no success.[66] After a showdown between the Jordanian army and the PLO was averted in June 1970, the situation escalated sharply in late July following Jordan and Egypt's acceptance of Secretary Rogers' peace plan, which sought to bring about a ceasefire in the ongoing War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel.[67]

As the likelihood of a confrontation increased in early September following the hijacking and dramatic destruction of three planes by the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP),[68] American officials became concerned that Iraq's 25,000 troops stationed in Jordan since 1967 could intervene on the PLO's behalf.[69] However, when King Hussein unleashed the Jordanian military against the Palestinians on September 17, the Iraqis, led by Defense Minister Hardan al-Tikriti, failed to respond. According to Jack O'Connell, the CIA's station chief in Amman at the time, the reason for this was that an Iraqi defector named General Abud Hassan (who was a close friend and former roommate of Saddam Hussein), had tricked Iraqi officials into believing that the United States had planned to intervene in the conflict on Jordan's behalf by leaking to them falsified NATO war plans. Fearing the capture of Iraq's forces should the United States intervene, Tikriti ordered his troops to positions near the Iraqi border, thereby cutting them off from operations taking place near Amman.[70] Through this grand deception, the Jordanians removed the Iraqi threat during the September crisis.[71]

Meanwhile, the Arab world was shaken to its core on September 28, when Gamal Abd al-Nasser died suddenly from a heart attack, just hours after concluding an Arab League conference in Cairo aimed at resolving the Jordanian crisis.[72] Nasser's death would have a profound impact on the Cold War in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the inter-Arab rivalry, known as the Arab Cold War. To the United States, the coming to power of Anwar al-Sadat, who was perceived as weak and nicknamed "Nasser's poodle," was discomforting. After entering the Egyptian military academy in 1936, Sadat met Nasser and the other "Free officers" who seized control of Egypt in 1952. Described as an "intense, impulsive and deeply religious man, who is a bitter foe of Israel and one

of the most outspoken critics of the [United States],"[73] there was no way to determine that Sadat would transform Egypt from a pro-Soviet client into a steadfast American ally and go on to achieve peace with Israel in 1979.[74]

Meanwhile, Iraq's embarrassing actions during the Jordanian Civil War proved to be a catalyst for Saddam Hussein's consolidation of power. Following the crisis, the PLO's chairman, Yasir Arafat, sent President al-Bakr a message, saying, "History will not forgive those who failed [to] support [the] fedayeen being massacred by [the] Jordanian army." This led the RCC, at Saddam's request, to dismiss Tikriti from his civilian and military positions on October 5.[75] With the powerful defense minister's removal, there were no more obstacles to prevent Saddam from consolidating power.

It took the State Department five weeks to learn of Saddam's consolidation of power. Upon learning this, it cabled its embassy in Brussels to seek a current assessment on the Iraqi situation.[76] It found that the Belgian Embassy in Baghdad had been derelict in its reporting of political developments. For instance, when the US Embassy in Brussels responded to the department's request, it complained that the Belgian foreign office was "unable to provide [an] in depth assessment of current Iraqi situation." US officials were unimpressed with Belgium's political reporting on Iraq, describing it as "short on facts and long on conjecture" and complained that, "as substitute [for] their assessment [the Foreign Office only] offered…copies [of the] last two dispatches from Belgian Embassy Baghdad. From [which they] culled [their] observations."[77] This cable suggests that US officials, who were not experts in Middle Eastern—let alone Iraqi—affairs, had to come up with their own assessment of what was going on in Iraq because the Belgian government, which was charged with representing US interests, was incapable of doing so effectively. Clearly, there was a problem.[78]

In early December, tensions between the regime and the Kurds escalated following an assassination attempt on Mulla Mustafa's son and heir apparent, Idris, whose car was opened fire on while driving in Baghdad.[79] According to a Reuters' correspondent who happened to interview Barzani a few days after the attack, the Kurds were convinced that the regime was behind the plot and could not be trusted to implement the terms of the March Accord.[80] Credible evidence later surfaced that the Soviets had played a role in the attack, though the extent of their involvement remained uncertain.[81] Nevertheless, Moscow's implication in the plot suggested that it had turned against the Kurds and was looking to improve relations with the Ba'th Party in spite of its repressive campaign against the communists.

The assassination attempt convinced Barzani to renew his alliance with Iran and Israel. On March 15, 1971, SAVAK officials informed White House officials that the Shah had resumed his support for the Kurds and asked them to reconsider their nonintervention policy. Once again, the Iranians framed their request in Cold War terms, warning, "if the present trend [toward the Soviet bloc] continued, Iraq would assume a status similar to that of the East European satellites." SAVAK then asked the United States to support Barzani to "forestall" the formation of a "preponderantly communist" National Front government and said that any assistance could be channeled secretly through a third party—likely

Jordan[82]—"with only al-Barzani being aware." This clearly suggests that SAVAK was portraying the Kurdish conflict as a front in the Cold War in order to convince the United States to become involved.[83] Unfortunately, there are no details available about how the White House responded to the SAVAK request, though subsequent actions suggest that the United States did not alter its policy, at least not yet.

A few weeks later, in early April, Talcott Seelye raised the question of whether the United States should send diplomatic personnel to Baghdad with assistant secretary for the Near East, Joseph Sisco. According to a memo, Seelye was frustrated with the Belgian administration of the US Interests Section (USINT) in Baghdad, complaining that it had "not received the close administrative supervision which it might otherwise have had if Americans had been assigned there." As a glaring example, the section's senior accountant had just been caught embezzling $106,000, leading Seelye to conclude, "if American officers had been in Baghdad this embezzlement might not have occurred." But more practically, Seelye felt that having diplomats in Baghdad would allow the United States to "follow a little more closely and authoritatively developments in Iraq [since] the Belgians, with little background or experience in the area, [had] not been able to provide us with much in the way of political and economic reporting."[84] Unfortunately, just as the United States was contemplating sending diplomats to Baghdad, the Iraqi regime announced on May 15 that it would expropriate the US Embassy in central Baghdad. After a week of tension, Iraqi security forces surrounded the embassy on May 23 and demanded the Belgian ambassador, Marcel Van Kerchove, hand over the keys. Certainly, the seizing of the embassy grounds hardened the Nixon administration's attitude toward the Iraqi regime, but in the end there was little that could be done beyond issuing a strong note of protest.[85] This also meant that sending US diplomats to Baghdad was postponed.[86]

On July 8, Zayid Othman,[87] a senior KDP official and one of Barzani's diplomatic emissaries, approached the US Embassy in Beirut to seek American financial assistance. Othman revealed that both Jordan and Saudi Arabia were helping the Kurds, indicating that any American financial support could be transferred "via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Iran." Othman explained that King Faisal of Saudi Arabia had "endorsed the idea of an Iraqi revolt in principle," but wanted more information before proceeding further. Similarly, he said King Hussein had shown interest in using the Kurds to tie down Iraq since the September 1970 crisis. Finally, on Iran, Othman acknowledged the receipt of aid, but complained about the Shah's "heavy-handed control over Kurdish activities." He also said that Barzani wanted to establish secret relations with the United States, suggesting that the CIA could send a representative to his headquarters in Haji Omran, near the Iranian border, or Barzani or one of his representatives could visit Washington personally for consultations. American officials thanked Othman for his presentation and stressed the continuation of America's nonintervention policy, but said that they would report the conversation to Washington.[88]

In late 1971, Soviet-Iraqi relations underwent a major thaw. The main reason for this, however, stemmed not so much from Iraq, but from Egypt, where Sadat had proven to be much more troublesome to the Soviets than anyone had

anticipated. In February, Sadat launched a peace initiative with Israel. He said that Egypt would be willing to enter into a peace "agreement" with Israel that included an end to belligerency—though not a peace "treaty," which would obligate diplomatic relations—and the reopening of the Suez Canal to international shipping, though subject to practical security arrangements. Egypt would also respect Israel's independence and right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders, and accept the principle of noninterference in its domestic affairs. Demilitarized zones would be established and Egypt would accept the stationing of UN peacekeepers in Sharm el-Sheikh.[89] However, Egypt would be ready to enter into the peace agreement with Israel only after Israel committed to withdrawing from occupied Egyptian territory to the former international boundary between Egypt and Palestine under the British Mandate. This was a major sticking point. Israel welcomed Sadat's willingness to negotiate and his consideration of a peace agreement but bluntly opposed withdrawing to the pre–June 5, 1967, borders, which it did not feel were defensible. The Israelis sought negotiations without prior conditions, but from Egypt's perspective, the refusal to countenance the possibility of withdrawal constituted an unacceptable precondition. As a result, diplomacy stalled and Sadat began to weigh the possibility of renewed conflict.[90] At the same time, in May 1971, Sadat launched his "Corrective Revolution," which purged the government, political establishment, and military of ardent Nasserists, and established himself in firm control,[91] and signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. While on the surface this might suggest a deepening of Egyptian-Soviet ties, the opposite turned out to be true. According to Golan, the treaty was actually "a Soviet effort to salvage something from a faltering relationship."[92]

As Moscow's relations with Cairo continued to deteriorate, it began to look at Baghdad as an alternative regional partner, particularly because the impending British withdrawal made the Gulf an attractive area to expand its influence. By September 1971, it had become clear that the Soviets had mended their relationship with Iraq, a process that culminated in the signing of a secret arms deal that brought the total of Soviet military aid to Iraq to above the $750 million level.[93] According to a CIA analysis, the deal included $250 million worth of antiaircraft guns, antitank rockets, armored personnel carriers, and several fighter aircraft.[94] This confirmed Iranian and Israeli warnings of a Soviet strategy to build up Iraq as a replacement for the departing British. Unfortunately, word of the Soviet deal did not reach Washington until January 1972 and by then British forces had already left the region.[95]

As part of the Soviet-Iraqi arms deal, the Ba'th agreed to end its campaign against the communists and form a National Front government with the ICP and KDP. When Barzani refused to cooperate, the Iraqis and Soviets decided to eliminate him altogether. On September 29, Saddam sent a delegation of nine religious figures to Haji Omran to meet with Barzani and mediate a truce. Unknown to the delegation, Iraqi security forces had provided two of the delegates with audio recorders rigged with explosives and told them to record Barzani's response. According to a Belgian diplomat, who had visited with Barzani, about 15 minutes into the meeting, one of the guests pressed the record button and detonated an explosion, killing most in

the room except the bomb's intended target. Under normal circumstances, Barzani would have been killed, but at the time the bomb exploded, a servant happened to be bent over to serve him tea, which "saved him from death."[96]

In the aftermath, the regime attempted to distance itself from the plot, but its efforts failed; Barzani was convinced that the Ba'th Party was the culprit.[97] As a result, both the Kurds and Iranians put forward a concerted effort to convince the United States to abandon its nonintervention policy. For instance, in November, Habib Muhammad Karim, the KDP's secretary general, approached the US Embassy in Beirut to seek support to oust the Ba'th, but this request was refused politely, with embassy officers arguing that it would "serve no purpose" and could "engender false hopes and future misunderstandings."[98] Then, in late November, SAVAK officials again contacted the CIA again to warn of Soviet efforts to convince the Kurds to join a National Front, arguing, "this government would include communists, [Nasserists] and Kurds subservient to the Ba'th . . . and would represent a situation antithetical to both Iranian and US interests." SAVAK gave a window of "three or four months" to convince the Kurds to reject the front, but Iran needed US help, because Barzani did not trust the Shah.[99] However, as Kissinger noted in his memoir, the Kurds had a blind faith in America and believed that US involvement would "inhibit [Iran] from abandoning the Kurds—a judgment which . . . proved too optimistic."[100] Beyond the SAVAK approach, around this time, the Shah also appealed to President Nixon directly, though it was also met with a polite refusal.[101]

Meanwhile, tensions between Iraq and Iran escalated in the Gulf just days before the British were set to withdraw. On November 30, Iran deployed troops to three strategically situated islands in the Gulf: Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs.[102] The Iraqi regime was outraged by Iran's "invasion" and severed relations with both Iran and Britain, accusing the latter of complicity to Iran's actions.[103] The Iraqis also retaliated by expelling 60,000 Iranian citizens from Iraq throughout December. Although the issue was bilateral between Iran and the newly formed UAE, which claimed the islands, Baghdad's harsh reaction clearly escalated ongoing tensions between the two states.[104]

It was in this context that Moscow took the provocative step of sending its defense minister, Marshall Andrei Grechko, to Baghdad in December to finalize the September arms deal.[105] The Iranians tried to portray Grechko's visit to US officials as confirmation of Moscow's intentions toward the Gulf, while warning that a friendship treaty, not unlike the ones Moscow had previously signed with Cairo in May and New Delhi in August, was in the works with Iraq. Again the United States was dismissive, arguing that it did not have any intelligence to support this claim:

> [While] we can understand Iranian concern in face of new Soviet-Iraqi arms deal (basically because of Iraqi recklessness and ambitions in [the] Gulf), we do not think [the] Soviets have increased military aid to Iraq as part of aggressive policy in [the] Gulf aimed at Iran.

Instead, the department believed that Grechko's visit and the arms deal were intended to placate Baghdad, not threaten Tehran.[106] Nevertheless, the lack of

accurate information from Iraq convinced the State Department to approve sending a mid-level foreign service officer to Baghdad on January 28, 1972.[107]

Meanwhile, in mid-February, Saddam led another delegation to Moscow, where he negotiated a framework for an agreement that traded an Iraqi promise to form a National Front government in exchange for access to Soviet military hardware, cooperation in defense matters, economic assistance for its oil industry, and delaying Iraq's outstanding balance of payments.[108] However, because the Soviets viewed Kurdish participation in the National Front as a prerequisite for stability, they continued to press the Kurds to join the Ba'th Party in a new government. For instance, on February 28, Moscow sent a high-level delegation to Barzani's headquarters in Kurdistan to urge Barzani to join the National Front in exchange for the establishment of a Soviet liaison that would protect him and ensure Ba'thist cooperation. According to the NSC staff, Kurdish participation in the coalition would have "considerable geopolitical significance" by freeing Iraq's forces "for military-political action" in the Gulf and against Israel. Worse, it meant that communists would once again have influence in Iraq.[109] It seems as though Iraq was becoming relevant in the Cold War once again.

Going Red (Again)?

The prospect of Iraq enshrining its relationship with the Soviet Union in a friendship treaty alarmed America's regional allies. Before long, the Nixon administration was bombarded with secret approaches from allies trying to convince it to reconsider its nonintervention policy toward the Kurds; yet, the White House continued to be resistant to the idea. While the Nixon administration was sympathetic to its allies' concerns, its overriding priority at this point was opening to China and achieving détente with the Soviet Union. As a result, when the Soviet Union signed its friendship treaty with Iraq in April 1972, the Nixon administration barely acknowledged the deal. This suggested that wider Cold War considerations had trumped regional concerns, at least in the near term.

Throughout March, Kurdish and Iranian officials sought to convince the United States to change its nonintervention policy. First, a "reliable Agency source" reported that Barzani was under pressure from the Soviets to reach an accommodation with the Ba'th Party and would "have to acquiesce unless he [received] help." The source also said that Barzani was sending an emissary to Washington to persuade the United States to reconsider its policy.[110] When US officials met with the emissary, he asked for ongoing political discussions, financial assistance, a radio station, and that the CIA cooperate with Kurdish intelligence.[111] On March 6, SAVAK officials approached the CIA to plead for US assistance to the Kurds, citing "Soviet pressures on al-Barzani and the imminence of a Soviet-Iraqi treaty" as justification for a joint CIA–SAVAK operation to overthrow the Ba'thist regime.

> The SAVAK official…wished to know if the [US] would be prepared to provide financial and military support for the attempt and assist in drawing together Iraqi

> exiles who would comprise the nucleus of a separatist government initially harbored by al-Barzani.[112]

Significantly, unlike past approaches, details of these démarches were passed to Kissinger, suggesting that US policymakers were beginning to recognize the importance of the Kurdish question to America's Cold War strategy.[113]

The Kurdish-SAVAK démarches in early March prompted an interagency review of America's nonintervention policy. At the outset, the State Department opposed any operation that could jeopardize future opportunities for rapprochement with Iraq or the sending of US diplomats to Baghdad. The department identified several reasons why the United States should not support Barzani: (1) it was unlikely that a Kurdish-led government in Baghdad could succeed; (2) there was uncertainty whether the Kurds had "cut the umbilical cord with Moscow"; (3) a support operation would be difficult to conceal; and (4) it increased the likelihood of a Kurdish state, which would represent "further fragmentation in an already fragmented area." However, if the operation was discovered, America's Arab allies would be outraged and use this as further evidence of US support for non-Arab states (Iran and Israel) against the Arabs.[114] Other US officials were opposed to supporting the Kurds as well. For instance, Andrew Killgore, an official from the NEA, warned that helping the Kurds could upset the dispatch of US diplomats to Baghdad,[115] while the US ambassador to Iran, Joseph Farland, argued that supporting the Kurds generated far too much risk compared to the limited benefit gained.[116] Clearly, the State Department was firmly opposed to a US operation to help the Kurds.

The CIA also raised concerns, pointing out that the odds of the Kurds overthrowing the Ba'thist regime were slim, while warning that American involvement in this plot could be "regarded by the Soviets as a move directed against them." Finally, the agency questioned the need for US involvement, arguing that any assistance Barzani needed was "within the capability of Iran or Israel to provide." In fact, the only reason the CIA could identify for US involvement was that both Iran and Israel "want to involve [us]," but this was not enough to justify a risky operation.[117] Facing widespread opposition to the Kurdish-SAVAK proposal, the Nixon administration decided to maintain its nonintervention policy.[118]

At the end of March, the White House received two additional requests to reconsider its policy toward the Kurds. The first occurred on March 28 when King Hussein met with President Nixon in the Oval Office, during which time he asked him directly to reconsider his position on the Kurds.[119] The second occurred that same day when UN Assistant Secretary-General Ismat Kittani, an Iraqi Kurd, contacted the US ambassador to the UN, George H.W. Bush, to ask if he would meet with Zayid Othman (not to be confused with Dr. Othman), who was going to be in New York. The next day, after obtaining approval from Washington, Bush met with Kittani, who, after stressing that his call had nothing to do with his role in the UN, asked that Secretary Rogers or Kissinger meet with Othman.[120] When Bush passed word of his meeting to Washington and requested guidance, the department said that it had "no objection to [Othman] being seen by USUN working levels and [intended] to follow [the] same procedure…when [he] arrives

in Washington."[121] Taken together, King Hussein and Kittani's approaches helped set in motion a subtle shift in American thinking toward the Kurds.

On April 3, when Othman met with the State Department's Iraq Desk officer, Thomas Scotes, in Washington, he expressed concern about Saddam's recent trip to Moscow and growing Soviet pressure on Barzani to join the National Front. He explained, "the Soviets' aim through their support of a national front stratagem [was] to establish and consolidate further their position in Iraq, particularly at a time when their position in Egypt and Syria [seemed] to be unpredictable." Furthermore, the "Soviets intended to use Iraq for subversion not only in the Gulf but against Iran and Turkey as well" and "only the US [could], by supporting Barzani either directly or indirectly, stem the Soviet tide in Iraq." Othman warned that this was America's "last opportunity to thwart Soviet designs in Iraq" or else all "will have been lost."[122]

When Killgore reported Scotes's conversation with Assistant Secretary Sisco on April 5, it was clear that Othman's talk had an impact on his perception of Iraq. After listing the NEA's standard reasons for not wanting to help the Kurds, Killgore wrote:

> Despite the [negative] initial reaction, we have discussed this matter with [Atherton] who agrees that it would be useful if we had an informal review of the Kurdish situation with [excised] of CIA before making any final decision regarding the [Othman] appeal. CIA has also been getting through independent sources the same information and similar appeals. Such a review would be in line with your thoughts expressed to Tom Scotes… that we continue to update our assessments and *not be guided solely by conventional wisdom* concerning such matters.

Killgore then recommended that Sisco brief Secretary Rogers on the approach and pass along a letter from Barzani that Othman had provided.[123] Quite clearly, a shift in thinking with respect to the Kurds was occurring in early April 1972. Significantly, this occurred just as the Iraqis and Soviets were formalizing their relationship in a treaty.

In early April, Soviet prime minister Alexei Kosygin traveled to Iraq and signed a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with Iraqi president Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr on April 9. While the treaty's wording was purposely vague, the CIA believed that it would be specific in application. The CIA saw articles 8–10 as particularly significant:

> Article 8: In case of emergence of conditions that threaten violation of the peace, the two signatories will immediately hold contacts in order to coordinate their stands to eliminate the danger and restore the peace.
>
> Article 9: In the interest of security of the two countries, the two signatories will continue to develop cooperation for consolidating the defense capability of each other.
>
> Article 10: Each of the two signatories declares that it will not enter into pacts, or take part in any international groupings or any actions or measures aimed at the other signatory. Each of the two signatories also pledge not to allow the use of its territory in undertaking any action that would result in a military harm to the other.[124]

The CIA believed that article 8 implied Soviet support for the Iraqi regime in the event of internal or external disturbances—a clear reference to the Kurds—while article 9 alluded to the establishment of a Soviet naval base at Iraq's only Gulf port, Umm Qasr—similar to the long-standing US naval base in Bahrain—and could provide Soviet access to Iraqi airfields and air transit rights. In both instances, the Soviet Union's strategic position vis-à-vis the Gulf would improve significantly. Finally, the CIA felt, article 10 placed Iraq on the Soviet side in the event of a war.[125] In each instance, the treaty represented a major symbolic and psychological victory for the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Remarkably, the treaty did not outwardly perturb the Nixon administration, with the NSC staff describing it as "nothing surprising or sudden but rather a culmination of existing relationships."[126] This rather mild assessment was not reflective of US concerns about Iraq but rather the White House's other priorities. By April 1972, Nixon's détente strategy was unfolding after his surprise visit to Beijing in February, which, in turn, paved the way for his summit with Brezhnev in Moscow in May.[127] In fact, just 10 days after the friendship treaty was signed, Kissinger had arrived in Moscow for preliminary talks on the Moscow Summit, which led to the signing of two groundbreaking agreements: the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT-I).[128] Therefore, the Nixon administration's subdued response to the Soviet-Iraq treaty appears to have been a calculated move designed to avoid harming the success of its Cold War initiatives at the Moscow Summit.[129] This did not, however, mean that Nixon and Kissinger were resigned to do nothing.

The Secret Decision

In the summer of 1972, the US policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. Having achieved diplomatic success at the Moscow Summit, President Nixon and Kissinger flew to Tehran on May 30 for a two-day visit with the Shah. After securing a measure of détente with the Soviets, the time had finally come for Nixon to address the issue of Iraq. For years, the Shah had made known his concerns about Baghdad's relationship with Moscow. With the British gone from the region in December 1971, the Shah had escalated his rhetoric about Iraq's growing challenge to his powerful position in the Gulf. The Soviet-Iraqi treaty, of course, gave him considerable leverage in Washington to help make his case.[130] For months, the Shah had warned the United States about the formation of a Soviet-backed National Front government in Iraq, which would include both communists and Kurds, arguing that it would invite the Soviets further into the region, stabilize Iraq, and free up its military to challenge his position in the Gulf.[131] While the White House was not as alarmed about Soviet plans for Iraq, the decisions Nixon made following his Tehran visit clearly suggest that he wanted to help allay the Shah's fears.

The Shah greeted President Nixon and his entourage at Mehrabad Airport at 4 p.m. with an elaborate arrival ceremony, involving a full honor guard. After a brief tour of the city, Nixon and his gregarious national security adviser met

privately with the Shah for about an hour.[132] During the conversation, Nixon told the Shah that the reason for his visit was "because we considered it symbolic of our strong support for our friends. We would not let down our friends." The Shah expressed his agreement with America's strategy, but stressed the Middle East's importance to US allies in Western Europe and Asia, whose economies were dependent on the importation of Middle Eastern oil.[133] He also raised the issue of Iraq, complaining that the Soviet-Iraqi treaty had given the Iraqis access to more advanced weaponry than was presently available to Iran and reiterating his concern about the potential formation of a National Front. The Shah was upset about the potential loss of his "Kurdish Card," warning that the Kurds could become an asset to the communists, "instead of being a thorn in [Iraq's] side." When Kissinger asked what could be done, the Shah said that Turkey needed strengthening and that "Iran can help with the Kurds."[134] This was the only documented reference to the Kurds during the two-day visit.

The glossy public image of Nixon's visit with the Shah in late May 1972 stands in stark contrast to the reality in the streets of Tehran. During Nixon's visit, a Marxist terrorist group, the Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), had set off a series of bombs throughout the city.[135] On the morning of Nixon's second day in Tehran, all hell broke loose. According to Alam, at about 6:30 a.m., a bomb went off not far from the palace.[136] As it turned out, an American Air Force brigadier general, Harold Price, was the target of the explosion. According to George Cave (a CIA operations officer, who served two tours in Iran in 1958–63 and then 1973–76 and was later involved in the infamous "Mission to Tehran" in 1985), members of the MEK had posed as road workers along Price's regular route and had buried an improvised explosive device under the road. That morning, when Price was driving to work, an MEK operative spotted him and detonated the bomb, destroying the vehicle and crippling Price for life.[137] A few hours later, another blast rocked the capital, near the tomb of the Shah's father, Reza Shah Pahlavi, where Nixon had been scheduled for a wreath-laying ceremony just 45 minutes later. The ceremony was nearly canceled due to security concerns, but Alam convinced Nixon that it was safe and the ceremony went off without incident.[138]

The public face of Nixon's trip to Tehran disguised the significant decisions that were made as a result of his meetings with the Shah, all of which would have considerable long-term consequences on the region. In a meeting on May 31, Nixon told the Shah that the United States would "not let down [its] friends" and agreed to furnish Iran with modern weaponry, including F-14s and F-15s, to balance the Soviet Union's recent commitment to provide Iraq with the ultramodern Mig-23 jets.[139] This order, often referred to as the "blank check," was later translated into the United States providing Iran with "all available sophisticated weapons short of the atomic bomb."[140] According to Kissinger, the Pentagon had misinterpreted this decision and gave Iran unfettered access to all nonnuclear US weaponry, leading to massive arms sales.[141] Nevertheless, through this order, it was clear that Nixon intended that Iran play a major role in the region under the pretext of the Nixon Doctrine and was a marked departure from the Johnson administration's twin pillar policy. According to Harold Saunders, a former CIA official and senior Middle East expert on the NSC staff since the early 1960s,

Nixon and Kissinger told the Shah that they would publicly remain committed to the twin pillar policy, but privately Kissinger told the Shah that the United States had no intention to fill British shoes in the region. In other words, the United States planned to rely on the Shah to maintain stability in the Gulf.[142]

The second decision concerned Iraq and the Kurds. It is widely believed that Nixon agreed to assist the Kurds in their fight against the Iraqi regime while in Tehran, with even Kissinger acknowledging this.[143] However, there is actually no official record of Nixon ever mentioning the Kurds, let alone agreeing to a covert operation to support them. According to Alam, it was Kissinger—not Nixon—who was concerned that "the Russians [had] gone too far in their relations with Iraq" and felt that "something would have to be done to stop the rot."[144] In his memoir, Kissinger suggests that the Shah had asked Nixon to reconsider the long-standing noninterference policy toward the Kurds, arguing, "without American support, the existing Kurdish uprising against the Baghdad government would collapse." Nixon apparently agreed, adding, "American participation in some form was needed to maintain the morale of such key allies as Iran and Jordan, disparate as their motives were, and as a contribution to the regional balance of power."[145] However, the two memorandums of conversation from this trip barely mention the Kurds, with only Kissinger raising the topic and the Shah saying he could "help with the Kurds." Nixon never mentioned the Kurds once.[146] Despite numerous sources—including Kissinger—claiming that the president had agreed to support the Kurds while in Tehran, the absence of an official record raises questions about this claim's accuracy.

A more plausible explanation for Nixon's eventual decision was that in the summer of 1972 Iraq's importance in terms of the Cold War increased abruptly. On June 1, the day after Nixon and Kissinger left Tehran, Iraq's long-standing dispute with the IPC boiled over when the Ba'thist regime announced its complete nationalization. After the Ba'th Party had come to power in 1968, it had signed a deal with the Soviets to develop the oil-rich North Rumaila oilfields. After Iraq began exporting oil from the oilfields to the Soviet Union in April 1972,[147] the IPC retaliated by cutting production in the northern oilfields and limiting Baghdad's royalty payments. In mid-May, the Ba'th Party threatened the IPC with confiscatory legislation if it did not increase production. The IPC agreed on May 31 but insisted on compensation for the loss of North Rumaila. Outraged by this demand, the Ba'th decided that a dramatic move was needed and nationalized the company the next day. The IPC's nationalization had serious implications for America's economic interests, since American firms held a 23.75 percent stake in the company.[148] This move also destroyed any doubts within the Nixon administration that Iraq was fast becoming a Soviet satellite. As Randal observed, "[the] IPC nationalization was yet another reason for Iran . . . and the [US] to justify [the Kurdish intervention], for each had reason to fear the repercussions of this first Soviet penetration of a major oil producer in the Middle East."[149]

In the aftermath of the IPC's nationalization, Saunders sent Kissinger a memo that analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of helping the Kurds. He identified three main arguments in support of a Kurdish intervention (a fourth reason

remains classified): (1) by encouraging or supporting the Kurds to be a force of instability within Iraq, the United States could thwart Soviet efforts to promote the formation of a National Front government; (2) US assistance to the Kurds could help tie down Iraqi forces and keep the regime focused on internal problems so that it could not threaten Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, or the Gulf States; and (3) the Kurds could help facilitate US contacts with Iraqi military officers, who might seek the regime's overthrow. Balancing this, Saunders identified four opposing arguments: (1) the United States would be committing itself to a major guerrilla effort and "[if] the battle turned against the Kurds, [they] would have neither the assets nor the interest to provide decisive support"; (2) Saudi Arabia and Iran had the financial resources to assist the Kurds; (3) it made more sense for the United States to encourage a regional solution, rather than involve itself directly; and (4) in the context of the Moscow Summit and Soviet efforts to bring about a National Front in Iraq, if a US operation was discovered, it could have negative consequences on détente.[150] Given this, the Nixon administration decided that it needed a more sophisticated understanding of the situation before it could proceed with an operation.

On June 5, the Shah sent Kissinger a message proposing a meeting with Idris Barzani and Dr. Othman to discuss ways in which the United States could help the Kurds. Afterward, the message added, the Shah "expected" Kissinger to share his views on the matter. In a memo to Kissinger seeking approval for the meeting, the NSC staff raised objections about involving him personally because that would indicate the president's endorsement, "at least by implication." Instead, they suggested having Saunders, the Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, or Kissinger's deputy, General Alexander Haig, Jr., meet with the Kurds, even though the majority view "in town" (i.e., Washington, DC) was against any involvement.[151] Despite the State Department and CIA's opposition to an operation, on June 23, Saunders told Haig that there was "a certain attraction" to preventing the Soviets from helping the Ba'th Party consolidate its rule by assisting the Kurds. Kissinger agreed and green lighted the meeting.[152]

Kissinger also dispatched to Tehran a former US treasury secretary, John Connally, to inform the Shah of the decision.[153] According to Ambassador Farland, when Connally arrived in Tehran, he asked for a private meeting with the Shah, a request that Farland recalled "smelled of something" and insisted on attending the meeting, which "amounted to absolutely nothing." Afterward, Connally confided that he had intended to ask the Shah something "very inappropriate." When Farland cabled the White House to ask for advice, Kissinger told him to drop the matter, which confirmed his suspicion that something crooked was going on.[154]

On June 30, Helms, Richard Kennedy, and an unnamed CIA official met with Idris and Dr. Othman in the director's office in Langley, VA. The Kurds said that Barzani wanted political, financial, and military assistance to defend himself from the Soviets and Iraqis and make Kurdistan a "positive element" in advancing US interests and those of its allies. Helms thanked the Kurds for coming and said that Kissinger had authorized him to express America's sympathy for their movement and assure them of his "readiness to consider their

requests for assistance," but cautioned them on the need for secrecy and pointing out that equipment would be channeled through third parties, like Iran, Israel, or Jordan.[155] At a second meeting, the Kurds described three escalating platforms of support: defensive, offensive, and revolutionary. The first involved a small increase in assistance aimed at preserving the status quo, while allowing the Kurds to resist the regime's political, economic, and military pressure indefinitely. The second called for increasing the Kurds financial and military capabilities so that they could tie down the Ba'thist regime so that it could not pose a military or subversive threat to its neighbors and Western interests. The final option required the United States to use Kurdistan as a "secure base" from which it could "promote the overthrow of the Ba'thi regime in cooperation with other anti-regime Iraqis."[156]

Following the meeting, CIA officials expressed uncertainty about the prospects of a Kurdish intervention. In a memo detailing the talks, they said that the Kurds had some "unrealistic ideas about military actions and the kinds of equipment…they could use." For instance, they wanted to expand the Peshmerga to 60,000 men, which overlooked the "staggering" logistics this would require. They also talked of obtaining tanks and proposed engaging the Iraqi army in conventional warfare. The CIA advised the Kurds against this, urging them to avoid conventional warfare and stick to the mountains where they could "engage in aggressive guerrilla tactics, hitting the Iraqis in many places and keeping them off balance." The CIA officials were frank in identifying the problems with a Kurdish intervention: (1) there was a "definite possibility" that the Soviets would be involved militarily in Iraq should fighting resume; (2) Turkey remained "acutely sensitive" to Kurdish nationalism and would be upset if it learned of US support for Barzani; (3) there were "deep factional cleavages rooted in tribal, political, and social conflicts [that divided] the Kurds into competing and mutually hostile groups"; (4) Barzani was quite old and did not have a clear successor; and (5) an operation could disrupt the State Department's plans to send diplomats to Baghdad. However, the Soviet and Iraqi threat to Western interests was enough to justify a limited assistance program. Once again, the Cold War was a decisive factor in the US decision to support the Kurds.[157]

Meanwhile, the Cold War's regional balance of power underwent a major shift on July 18, when Sadat requested the withdrawal of 15,000 Soviet military personnel from Egypt. This move, according to Kissinger, shattered the Middle East's Cold War balance of power.[158] Although there is debate over whether Soviet forces had been expelled or withdrawn from Egypt,[159] there were additional signs that Sadat had shifted toward the United States. For instance, in July, Sadat opened up a back channel to Kissinger through his national security adviser, Hafiz Isma'il.[160] Given the zero-sum nature of the Cold War, the Nixon administration chalked up Moscow's "loss" of Egypt and the opening of the back channel to Egypt as a clear American victory.[161]

Sadat's actions had a major impact on Iraq's geopolitical value in the Cold War. Kissinger believed that Iraq's importance in terms of Moscow's Middle Eastern strategy would be enhanced, because Egypt's actions had provided the Kremlin with further incentive to strengthen its relationship with the Ba'thist regime.[162]

Since the Six Day War, the Soviets had been focused on building up both Egypt and Syria militarily against Israel, whereas Iraq had been given secondary consideration. However, the British withdrawal from the Gulf, Sadat securing power in Egypt, Moscow's blossoming relations with India, and the coming to power of pro-Soviet regimes in South Yemen and Somalia, all heralded an era of heightened Cold War competition in the Indian Ocean and Gulf regions.[163]

This apparent shift in Soviet interests away from the Mediterranean impacted the Nixon administration's decision to aid the Kurds. For instance, on July 28, Haig sent Kissinger a memo suggesting, "a case could be made that [supporting the Kurds] is more important than ever due to recent events in Egypt which will probably result in more intense Soviet efforts in Iraq."[164] This suggests that the Soviet-Iraq treaty led the United States to initially consider aid to the Kurds, but it was the Soviet departure from Egypt and its perceived impact on the Cold War regional calculus that ensured Nixon's approval of the Kurdish intervention.

On July 28, Haig forwarded the CIA's proposal for a Kurdish intervention to Kissinger along with an action memo seeking his approval.[165] The CIA estimated that it would take $18 million to maintain the Kurds in an essentially defensive position, with Iran willing to pay for half, while the remaining $6 million would come from "other sources," likely from Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Helms proposed providing Barzani with a monthly subsidy of $250,000 ($3 million annually) and $2 million worth of ordinance through CIA channels.[166] Initial priority would be given to weapons and ammunition that the Kurds already had, while secondary consideration would "be given to anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, including land mines and rockets, with emphasis on portability."[167] All of the ordinance supplied would be either non-attributable, foreign manufactured arms or US manufactured weapons normally stocked by Iraq or Iran, except for artillery, antiaircraft, and antitank weapons.[168] Procedurally, Haig said that the administration should present the operation to an interagency committee, known as the 40 Committee, for consideration before approval, though this is not legally required. However, due to the operation's extreme sensitivity, Haig proposed two options: (1) bypass the 40 Committee and inform Nixon directly, and then deal solely with the Office of Management and Budget and Helms or (2) avoid any paper trail and inform 40 Committee principals at State, DOD, CIA, and the JCS, that the president had approved the operation.[169] Haig recommended the latter of these two options and Kissinger approved, scribbling in the margins, "get it done next week by handing my memo to principals." On August 1, Kissinger sent a one-page memo indicating that Nixon had approved the covert operation to assist the Kurds to the principals.[170]

Later, Nixon administration officials came under fire from Congress for "circumventing" the 40 Committee, with a House congressional investigation report—often referred to as the *Pike Report*—describing this decision as a "highly unusual security precaution" motivated by a desire to keep the State Department in the dark.[171] The *Pike Report*'s use of the word "circumvent" suggests that the White House was required to inform the 40 Committee of this operation. However, according to a separate Senate study of covert action, known as the *Church Report*, "Not all covert activities are approved by the 40 Committee.

Projects not deemed politically risky or involving large sums of money can be approved within the CIA. By CIA statistics, only about one-fourth of all covert action projects are considered by the 40 Committee."[172] There is little question that the White House purposely cut the State Department out of the loop on the Kurdish intervention. Given its known opposition to the proposed operation, the Nixon administration was concerned that involving State could lead to damaging leaks. This was an era of political activism, even from within the government. Just one year prior to this decision, Daniel Ellsberg, a RAND Corporation analyst with top-secret clearance, leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*.[173] Concerned about the control of information, the White House believed a logical solution was to avoid going through the 40 Committee's review process and limit the knowledge of the operation to a select group of officials. This would, however, have considerable implications on the US policy toward Iraq.

Conclusion

During the period between Nixon's inauguration in January 1969 and approval of an operation to arm Iraq's Kurdish minority in August 1972, America's policy toward Iraq reveals a great deal about how his White House approached the Cold War in the Middle East, the Gulf region, and Iraq, in particular. During President Nixon's first term in office, the US policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. At the start of his term, Nixon was more inclined to "farm out" a regional policy to both the State Department and America's regional allies, like Iran, under the Nixon Doctrine. With the impending British withdrawal from the region at the end of 1971, the Shah sought to convince the Nixon administration of his value as an ally. Following Iraq's killing of nine Jews in January 1969, the Shah provoked the 1969 Shatt crisis, urged the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War, and tried to overthrow the Iraqi regime in January 1970. Through these actions, the Shah sent a clear message to the Ba'th Party that its actions would not be tolerated, while at the same time showing that Iran was a capable successor to Britain as the "regional policeman." However, Iran's actions during 1969–70 also convinced the Ba'thist regime to settle its Kurdish problem and led to the March Accord in 1970, which outraged the Shah.

Once again, America's views about Iraq often differed from its regional allies, Iran and Israel. During the period between the March Accord and the British withdrawal in December 1971, Iran and Israel tried to convince the United States that the March Accord was a Soviet plot designed to gain influence over Iraq, but the Nixon administration dismissed these warnings as manipulative and pointed to evidence of a deep chill in Soviet-Iraqi relations. It was only when Iraq pivoted back toward the Soviet Union in November 1971—just a few weeks before the British withdrawal—that US officials began to reconsider Iraq's role in the Cold War, but even then the Nixon administration remained hesitant.

The major turning point was the signing of the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972, which aligned Iraq with the Soviet Union in the Cold War and provided the Soviets with a naval base on the Gulf. To America's

regional allies, the treaty confirmed long-standing suspicions about Moscow's intentions, while at the same time underscoring the CIA's poor intelligence on Iraq. While the United States was concerned about the treaty, the timing was problematic, since it came just as the Nixon administration was finalizing its preparations for the Moscow Summit with Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev in late May. However, once Nixon had secured détente with the Soviets, he was no longer constrained in his dealings with Iraq, eventually leading to a CIA operation to support the Kurds. Clearly, between 1969 and 1972, the US policy toward Iraq had undergone a major shift.

There is disagreement among scholars about why the Nixon administration agreed to support the Kurds during Nixon's visit to Iran in May 1972. Some argue that the decision was based on American concerns about Iraq, while others believe that the Shah overinflated the Soviet influence in Iraq to advance his own interests in the Gulf. Oddly enough, none has noted that there is no official record of Nixon actually agreeing to support the Kurds during his visit to Tehran. The record does, however, show that Kissinger had shown concern about the Soviet-Iraqi relationship and agreed with the Shah that something needed to be done. In fact, the only official record of Nixon agreeing to the Kurdish intervention was Kissinger's August 1 memorandum to the 40 Committee's principals.

While Nixon eventually approved the Kurdish intervention, the decision was based on four factors: (1) concerns about the rapid improvement in Soviet-Iraqi relations, especially after the departure of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972; (2) a desire to build up the Shah of Iran as a regional power in the wake of Britain's withdrawal from the region in late 1971 to prevent Soviet encroachment on the region; (3) US concerns about Iraq's nationalization of the IPC in June 1972; and (4) a recognition that the Kurds could be a useful coercive tool to undermine the pro-Soviet Ba'thist regime. Quite clearly, in each of these instances, the Cold War was the common denominator. Therefore, Nixon's decision to support the Kurds was not based on a naive acceptance of the Shah's manipulations, but rather a realist analysis of a sequence of events suggesting that Iraq was becoming a Soviet satellite.

7

Nixon and the Kurdish Intervention: August 1972–October 1973

Between President Nixon's approval of the Kurdish intervention in August 1972 and the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the US policy toward Iraq proceeded along two separate, conflicting tracks. On the one side, Nixon's approval of the Kurdish intervention meant that the CIA was busy funneling money and arms to the Kurds, while the State Department was sending US diplomats to Baghdad charged with setting up an interests section and seeking to improve relations with the ruling Ba'th Party. At the same time, Nixon's massive electoral victory in the 1972 election led to important changes in the US foreign policy establishment. Frustrated, Nixon swept out the top leadership and replaced them with individuals whom he felt were more responsive to him.[1] The most significant change was that Nixon fired Richard Helms, who was then banished to Iran as the new US ambassador. It turns out that Helms was perfect for the role. He came from the highest level of the US government, had close connections with Kissinger, was an experienced intelligence officer, and an old friend of the Shah, having attended the same college as him as a teenager in Switzerland.[2] Due to his very senior position in the US government, Nixon asked Helms to operate as a "super ambassador," charged with coordinating the US policy across the region.[3] Although Helms's new job was technically with the State Department, his personal connections to both Kissinger and the Shah meant that he was able to keep the State Department out of the decision-making process on the question of Iraq and limit its knowledge of the Kurdish intervention, which he had helped set up in the first place. In light of the dual tracks of the US policy toward Iraq at the time and the differing perspectives of American diplomats in Baghdad and Tehran, conflict between the State Department's policy of cultivating friendly relations and the White House's policy of undermining the Ba'thist regime was inevitable.

The approval of the Kurdish intervention in 1972 was the start of period of extended superpower intervention in Iraq that would last until 1975. On the one hand, the Soviet Union rapidly increased its financial and military assistance

to the Ba'th Party in order to help consolidate a regime that it deemed friendly to its interests. On the other hand, the CIA operation to finance and arm the Kurds is a perfect example of a superpower intervention; the United States was actively encouraging a rebellion in order to bring about a change in Iraqi policy and advance its own interests.

A Dual-Track Policy

During the autumn of 1972, the Nixon administration adopted a two-track policy toward Iraq. In July 1972, just before Nixon approved the Kurdish intervention, the State Department announced that it was sending Arthur Lowrie to Baghdad to run the US interests section (USINT).[4] In the following months, Lowrie consulted with all major parties interested in Iraq, including American oil companies, banks, and associations, and he consulted with diplomats in London, Brussels, Paris, and Beirut to gain further perspective. Lowrie's job was simple: he was to observe and report on events in Iraq, offer advice on how to best advance US interests in Iraq and the region, and seek to cultivate friendly relations with the regime.[5] He arrived in Baghdad in early September, took official control of the USINT on October 1, and would stay until August 1975.[6] With the White House running an operation to arm the Kurds and State Department intent on improving relations with Iraq, it is clear that the two branches of the US foreign policy establishment were working toward cross purposes.

From July 31 to August 2, the Shah met with King Hussein at his Caspian Sea palace to discuss US involvement in the Kurdish intervention. According to Kissinger, both monarchs welcomed American aid and laid down "ground rules for the common effort." They all agreed that Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, had to avoid any "dramatic moves that might trigger an all-out Iraqi assault, such as declaring a separate Kurdish state." They also agreed that the emphasis of their support had to be on "strengthening Kurdish defensive capabilities to preserve the greatest measure of autonomy." This fit with US perceptions on the matter.[7]

It was clear by August that the Soviets were concerned about Barzani's refusal to join the National Front. In late August, the United States learned that a member of the Soviet Politburo, Mikhail Suslov, had traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan to urge Barzani to join the government. According to Kissinger, US officials attached great importance to Suslov's visit because he had apparently told Barzani that since the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Egypt, Moscow now viewed its relations with Baghdad as very important. This, of course, confirmed US assessments of Iraq's importance in the Cold War, prompting Kissinger to conclude, "the stakes were obviously being raised."[8]

On October 5, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo summarizing a CIA report from Director Helms on the status of the Kurdish intervention. The economic situation in Iraq was deteriorating, because the Iraqi regime was short on funds due to the boycott of its oil on the international market following its nationalization of the IPC in June 1972.[9] Kissinger told Nixon that the Soviets were "extremely concerned" about

Barzani's "independent course" and his refusal to join the National Front, along with the Ba'th Party and the communists. However, the CIA's military and financial pipeline to the Kurds was fully operational and the first shipments were delivered "without a hitch." On top of that, Kissinger reported, "more money and arms [were] in the pipeline, not only from Agency stocks but also [excised] captured Fedayeen ordnance," a likely reference to Jordan. Kissinger also reported that Barzani had received his first two monthly cash payments and as well as a planeload of arms and ammunition, which included 500 Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, 500 Soviet submachine guns, and 200,000 rounds of ammunition. Finally, by the end of October, Iran had received an additional 222,000 pounds of arms and ammunition from CIA stocks for onward shipment to the Kurds. With this, the CIA believed that the Kurds could tie down two-thirds of Iraq's army and deprive it of "a secure base from which to launch sabotage and assassination teams against Iran."[10]

Starting in October 1972, Lowrie began advocating the readoption of a "wait and see" policy. On October 21, he sent David Korn, the State Department's regional director, a letter outlining the direction he felt the US policy toward Iraq should take. Logically, Iraq's "geographic location, its role as a major oil producer, and its political vulnerability" made it "of considerable interests to [the US]." However, America's relationship with the Shah, its support for the IPC, and the Ba'th Party's belief that the United States sought to overthrow it in January 1970, were obstacles to rapprochement. Given this, he recommended that the United States "disabuse…this erroneous impression," while seeking out opportunities to improve relations openly. This would only raise Iraqi suspicion. However, should the regime make friendly gestures, the United States needed to "respond handsomely…as quickly as possible, regardless of the importance."[11]

A few weeks later, Lowrie sent the department a "tentative assessment" of the situation in Iraq that identified three domestic issues that dominated the regime's attention: the ongoing conflict with the IPC, which had cut oil sales by half; the rebellious Kurds in the north; and the regime's inability to form a National Front. Internationally, Iraq appeared to be emerging from its self-imposed isolation, improving relations with Algeria and Sudan, and seeking rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. While the Soviet Union remained Iraq's closest ally, the regime had begun courting France openly. It offered special treatment to the French member of the IPC consortium and secured a major bilateral oil agreement that ensured that France bought a quarter of Iraq's production.[12] However, Lowrie warned, the United States should not be "lulled into complacency" about Soviet influence in Iraq. After all, geographically, Iraq was the closest Arab state to the Soviet Union.[13] A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq from December reached the same conclusion, but warned that Iran's ongoing rivalry with Iraq—as evidenced by the Shatt al-Arab dispute, Iran's backing of the Kurds, and the growing competition for influence in the Gulf—raised the possibility of an arms race, with Iraq turning to the Soviet Union and Iran to America. Fortunately, the CIA added, Iraq had "a healthy respect" for Iran's military superiority and was "likely to refrain from escalating incidents" in the near term.[14]

By the end of 1972, the dispatch of US diplomats to Baghdad was beginning to pay off. Thanks to Lowrie's observations, the United States was clearly

developing a more sophisticated understanding of the forces at play inside Iraq, including the cultivation of Franco-Iraqi relations, which could be used to the West's advantage. This relationship would eventually help balance Iraq's reliance on the Soviets for arms, a trend that would continue well into the 1980s. While Lowrie's deployment to Baghdad provided the State Department with an incredible asset, his unvarnished analyses would have little impact on Kissinger's belief that Iraq was becoming Moscow's "principal . . . ally in the area."[15]

Iraq's Internal Power Struggle

In the year between Nixon's stunning electoral victory in the November 1972 general election and the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, US-Iraqi relations underwent a remarkable thaw. The improvement in relations was, in fact, a by-product of an internal power struggle within the Ba'thist regime. According to a CIA analysis of the regime, the Ba'th Party was divided into military and civilian wings, with President al-Bakr leading the so-called military or extremist wing of the party, while Saddam, who was the deputy chairman of the ruling RCC, was viewed as the head of the party's "civilian" or "pragmatic" wing. Within the Iraqi government, the CIA saw "no basic policy differences," but "varying degrees of emphasis among individuals and groups jockeying for position." For a number of reasons, this period saw the rise of the party's civilian wing over the military. For instance, by 1973, al-Bakr's health had deteriorated and the CIA was uncertain about how vigorously he could exercise the powers of his office. At the same time, the CIA viewed Saddam as the regime's "strong man," describing him as "a shrewd, ruthless operator adept at keeping his opponents off balance."[16] Saddam was also viewed as a pragmatist, which was evident over the course of 1973, when he sought to rid the regime of troublesome issues, like the IPC dispute, and sought to balance its relations between the Soviets and the West, whereas the military wing was determined to project Iraqi strength into the Gulf, as evidenced by the discovery of a secret arms shipment to Baluchi separatists in Iran via Pakistan and Iraq's bombardment of Kuwait in March 1973. Eventually, the civilian wing ousted its opponents in the military following an attempted coup in June, which led to a rapid improvement in US-Iraqi relations. Despite this, the White House continued to ignore Lowrie's astute analyses of Iraq's efforts to open up to the West and ordered an increase in US aid to the Kurds.

During the spring of 1973, three incidents occurred that suggested that a major power struggle was underway over the nature of the Ba'thist regime. In early February 1973, a large quantity of Soviet-made arms were discovered in the Chancery of the Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, and in the residence of an Iraqi diplomatic officer. The arms, it turns out, had been smuggled into Pakistan using an Iraqi diplomatic pouch and appeared to be destined for Iranian Baluchistan, a troubled, separatist region in the southeast of Iran, which bordered Pakistan. According to a cable from the USINT, the Iraqi regime meant the weapons to act "as countermeasure to long-standing Iranian military assistance to Kurds." Understandably, Pakistan responded by declaring Iraq's ambassador

persona non grata and recalled its ambassador from Baghdad. In the end, this incident indicated the extent to which the Iraqi regime was willing to go to gain leverage in its ongoing power struggle with Iran.[17]

Next, on February 28, Iraq surprised US foreign policymakers when it settled its dispute with the IPC by presenting the company with a generous offer. According to the *New York Times*, the company agreed to pay about $360 million to settle its debts with Iraq and as compensation for the nationalization accepted 15 million tons of oil, worth roughly $300 million. The IPC also received $70 million as repayment of previous loans.[18] In settling the IPC dispute, Iraq removed the main legal obstacle preventing American companies from bidding for Iraqi commercial contracts.[19] This, in turn, would lead to "a steady improvement in the economic and commercial relations between Iraq and the [US]" in the months after the decision, a trend that would continue even after the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war.[20]

Finally, the struggle between the so-called "pragmatist" and "extremist" elements of the Iraqi regime broke into the open on March 20, when the Iraqi army attacked a Kuwaiti border post to the east of Umm Qasr, Iraq's only port on the Gulf, and announced its claim to two Kuwaiti islands, Warbah and Bubiyan. This was the first major military provocation between Kuwait and Iraq since the crisis of 1961. Worse, the United States learned that the "highest levels" of the regime had planned the incident.[21] As Nadav Safran observed, had Iraq occupied these islands successfully, it "would not only enhance greatly the strategic position of [Umm Qasr] but perhaps even bring Iraqi troops within striking distance of Saudi Arabia's oil region."[22] According to an INR analysis on the crisis, the Iraqis were convinced that their only major port at Basra, located some 60 miles upstream from the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, was vulnerable to Iran. For years, the Iraqis had been building up the port of Umm Qasr as their major naval facility, which they saw as the only practical alternative to Basra. Unfortunately, Umm Qasr lies just north of Kuwait on an estuary and any vessels entering this estuary must pass Warbah and Bubiyan and close to the Kuwaiti mainland. For these reasons, "extremists" in the Iraqi military were convinced that both islands and the adjacent mainland must be under Iraq's control.[23]

The Nixon administration's response to Iraq's attack on Kuwait was tepid, with the State Department indicating on March 20 that it was "watching the situation closely," while advising US officials to avoid public statements because it could "complicate [the] problem for [Kuwait]."[24] With the British gone from the region, Kuwait turned to the United States for assistance against Iraq. The Nixon administration, however, was hesitant about introducing US forces into a regional conflict, preferring instead to operate through its regional allies. As a result, it advised Kuwait to approach Iran, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia for assistance.[25] In the end, Saudi Arabia sent 15,000 troops to Kuwait on March 29 to help protect it from further Iraqi encroachment.[26]

Iraq's unprovoked attack on Kuwait had a negative impact on its relations with the Soviets. On March 22, Saddam was summoned to Moscow to explain both the IPC settlement and Iraq's attack on Kuwait. US officials in Moscow believed that the Soviets were furious about Iraq's "ill timed and unhelpful" attack because it

could potentially disrupt Moscow's relations with Kuwait and Iran in the wake of the British withdrawal. Worse yet, on the day of the attack, the Soviet premier, Alexei Kosygin, had been in Tehran to sign a major commercial agreement with the Shah, making Iraq's move all the more embarrassing.[27]

While America's diplomatic options to respond to Iraq's unprovoked aggression against Kuwait were limited, its covert options were not. On March 29, Kissinger sent President Nixon an update on the Kurdish intervention. He explained that more than 1,000 tons of non-attributable arms, medicines, and blankets had been supplied, along with its monthly stipend of $250,000 to help maintain Barzani's 25,000-men force. Thanks to American, Iranian, and Israeli support Barzani was now stronger than at any other time during the course of the Kurdish War. According to Kissinger:

> His strength facilitates his rejection of Iraqi and Soviet blandishments and threats; provides the Shah with a strong buffer force against Iraqi-directed infiltration teams of saboteurs and terrorists; and worries the Baghdad regime, forcing it to deploy almost two-thirds of its ground forces in the north, reducing its capability for offensive adventures.[28]

In the end, he recommended that President Nixon approve increasing Barzani's funding from $3 million to around $5 million annually.[29] Correspondingly, the Shah agreed to increase his funding for the Kurds to $30 million and began to help them with logistics and long-range artillery support. Nixon approved Kissinger's request that day, and it was presented to the 40 Committee the next morning. According to a note, Ratliff hand-carried the minute of the meeting to the 40 Committee principals, who then read the document and initialed their approval.[30]

Meanwhile, on March 27, Lowrie sent the State Department an assessment of the US policy toward Iraq. By this point, it was clear that a power struggle was underway between "extremist elements" controlling the party and security organs and a group of pragmatic, "constructive realistic elements," which he called the "other Iraq." Confronting or condemning Iraq's aggressive actions, Lowrie argued, would be "morally confronting," have "little chance of bringing about change for [the] better," and "would probably strengthen [the] extremists since it would confirm their view of US as chief enemy." Instead, Lowrie proposed supporting the "pragmatists" by seizing "every opportunity that may strengthen constructive elements," establishing "direct official ties" wherever possible, encouraging private links, and responding favorably to any requests from the "other Iraq" elements. In short, Lowrie urged that the United States needed to "pursue a highly flexible policy that [attempted] to deal with both Iraqs."[31]

The State Department agreed with Lowrie's analysis but the US Embassy in Tehran did not.[32] On April 10, Richard Helms, now the new US ambassador to Iran, cabled Washington to argue against the analysis. Helms said that while he sympathized with Lowrie's "commendable attempt…to advance ideas for handling the dilemma presented to USG by [the] current regime in Baghdad," he saw them as "unremittingly extremist and relentlessly hostile to American interests." He concluded:

> [We] are frankly skeptical that in practice we could help the moderates without building up our extremist enemies, and we fear that our friends in the area would not take kindly to what appeared to them to be American courting of [a] thoroughly irresponsible regime.[33]

Helms warned that the Shah could misinterpret efforts to bolster the "other Iraq" and "be calculatingly accepted by Baghdad and then pointed to, both internally and externally, as a sign that the USG is not really very upset by recent incidents along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border." Despite Helms's valid points, the department never rescinded its original approval of Lowrie's approach.[34]

On April 10, Lowrie sent the State Department a cable outlining the status of Soviet-Iraqi relations on the one-year anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Despite ongoing efforts to convey a "warm comrades-in-arms relationship," Lowrie felt that relations were slowly deteriorating. For instance, to the Iraqis, Lowrie wrote, "Russia is assuming more role of valued supporter, but not close confidante and certainly not leader of joint alliance." He also noticed that talk of Iraq joining Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), which was the Eastern Bloc's multilateral economic trading organization, had ceased altogether. More importantly, Lowrie described the celebration of first anniversary of the Soviet-Iraqi treaty as "lackluster, particularly in comparison to joint celebrations of last December."[35]

Toward the end of April, Tehran played host to the NEA chiefs of mission meeting, which was aimed at coordinating the US policy across the region. Even before the conference it was clear that there was tension between Lowrie and Helms. Recognizing this, Korn sought to smooth things over in a letter he sent to Lowrie in early April. Throughout the conference, Lowrie tried to explain a number of key points: (1) Iraq was not a major player in the Arab-Israeli conflict; (2) why the Ba'th regime felt threatened by Tehran; (3) the nationalist nature of the regime; (4) its fear and hostility toward the domestic communists; and (5) how some of Iraq's recent actions demonstrate its independence from the Soviet Union, like the attack on Kuwait.[36] Afterward, Lowrie had a private conversation with Helms and Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco, where he raised the idea of promoting an Iran-Iraq rapprochement. Lowrie pointed to conversations he had had with ambassadors from France, Algeria, and Turkey, all of whom believed that Iraq was interested in some sort of rapprochement with Iran and, in particular, did not want the Soviets to play a role. Lowrie felt that any American role would "have to be completely in the background, but at the right moment perhaps we could have some influence on the Shah," who, he felt, was reluctant because having an unruly neighbor, like Iraq, not only made him look good but also helped him justify building up Iran's military forces.[37]

It seems as though Lowrie's efforts to win over Helms were not appreciated. A few weeks later, Helms sent a back-channel message to Richard Kennedy at the White House to complain about Lowrie's efforts to advocate disassociating the United States from the Kurds at "any and all occasions." This concerned Helms, who was charged with running the Kurdish intervention, because he knew that some in the State Department shared this view. Given this, he was worried that

US officials "might make some public utterance" along these lines, which would upset the Kurds.[38]

In mid-May, Lowrie learned that the Turks had initiated an effort to bring about an Iran-Iraq rapprochement. A few weeks earlier, the Turks had arranged for the Iraqi and Iranian foreign ministers to meet secretly in Geneva. The talks focused on Iran's support for the Kurds and the status of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. According to Lowrie, it was "generally agreed that major issue to be resolved is Shatt al-Arab and Iran's unilateral abrogation of 1937 treaty." However, the Ba'th could not accept Iran's abrogation as a fait accompli because it would mean surrendering Iraqi territory. When word of this reached Washington, the State Department informed the White House immediately.[39] Later, the US Embassy in Tehran confirmed this information.[40] According to US officials, a second round of secret talks took place again in Geneva in late May, but went nowhere. Apparently, Iran sought a new treaty recognizing the de facto situation along the waterway, which the Iraqis could not accept.[41] Even so, US officials welcomed the Geneva talks as a step forward in improving Iran-Iraq relations.[42] In Baghdad, Lowrie once again raised the question of whether the United States should press Iran into meeting Iraq's "legitimate demands," since "a loosing of ties, particularly military ties, with [the] USSR and further enhancement of Iraq's independence" was in America's interests.[43]

As Iraq continued its efforts to improve relations with the West, on May 21, Korn raised with Sisco the matter of outstanding military sales to Iraq. Apparently, when Iraq broke relations with the United States in June 1967, it had ordered approximately $2.5 million worth of weapons, but the break in relations and America's subsequent embargo on arms shipments to the Middle East meant that these sales had gone unfulfilled. Since then, the Iraqi Interests Section at the Indian Embassy in Washington had periodically raised this matter with the State Department, but the seizing of the US embassy grounds in 1971 guaranteed that it would not get a response. However, Korn argued, the recent shift in US policy toward encouraging an improvement in US-Iraqi relations raised the question of whether the United States should acknowledge a recent Iraqi inquiry about the status of the weapons. Sisco agreed.[44]

On June 2, two Soviet diplomats traveled to Kurdistan to press Barzani into joining the National Front. Once again, the Soviet efforts were fruitless, with Barzani pointing to the Ba'th Party's "Arabization" program, its failure to establish borders for the Kurdish region, the lack of Kurdish participation in government, and the numerous assassination attempts against him and his family, as evidence of the regime's bad faith. In response, the Soviets warned Barzani of becoming too reliant on the Shah and informed him of the secret Geneva talks. Concerned, Barzani traveled to Tehran to seek the Shah's advice.[45] According to Helms's account of the talks to Kissinger, the Shah brush aside Barzani's concerns about an Iran-Iraq rapprochement and suggested that he insist the regime hold free general elections as a precondition to his joining the coalition, arguing that this would placate the Soviets and make the Ba'th adopt an intransigent position because it could never hold elections without being swept from power.[46]

Meanwhile, on June 7–8, Jim Hoagland, a Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter for the *Washington Post*, traveled incognito to Kurdistan to interview Barzani. During their conversation, Barzani told Hoagland that he intended to maintain peace until March 1974, when the terms of the March Accord were to be implemented. However, should the government not keep its word, he was prepared to attack.[47] Barzani also requested US support against Baghdad,[48] offering the United States access to the Kirkuk oilfields in return for sending troops to protect his people from the "wolves" in Baghdad.[49] Unsurprisingly, Barzani's public call for American support provoked an aggressive response from Baghdad, with the Iraqi army attacking the Kurds in late June, leaving 18 killed. Iranian officials attributed the violence to Hoagland's article, pointing out that Baghdad had "decided on a degree of violence to demonstrate its displeasure [with] Barzani."[50] As it turns out, Barzani's request for US assistance was subterfuge. On July 6, Helms and the CIA station chief, Arthur Callahan, met secretly with Idris Barzani and Dr. Othman, whom he had both met in Washington, a year earlier. According to Helms's report of the conversation to Kissinger, Dr. Othman said that he "hoped that we had not been annoyed at General Barzani's interview with Jim Hoagland . . . The General's appeals for American aid [was] intended to provide cover for the fact they were already receiving such aid secretly and indirectly." The interview was also designed to reinforce America's plausible deniability for the operation and so "unwitting Kurdish representatives would continue to petition [US] embassies and newsmen for American support of Kurdish aspirations." This reveals the sophistication of Barzani's intelligence capabilities. Helms told the Kurds that he "understood this, and [was] not upset by it. I complimented [the Kurds] on the degree of secrecy which they had maintained and stressed in strongest terms that any breach in this security would make it impossible for us to continue our assistance."[51]

In late June, the Shah ordered Alam to raise with Helms a series of intelligence reports that indicated Iraq was about to receive four Tupolev TU-22 "Blinder" supersonic aircraft, equipped with missiles that had a range of up to 100 miles. Alam said that the missiles concerned the Shah the most because they could hit important targets in Iran without ever approaching the border. However, in Helms's report to Kissinger, he said he was not convinced by the Shah's assessment and found it difficult to judge whether the Shah was worried about such an eventuality, really believed it, or was bolstering his case for increased armaments. In all likelihood, Helms concluded, "It [was] probably a bit of all three."[52] Lowrie shared Helms's skepticism and confirmed that Italy and France had received similar reports. Not missing a chance to criticize the Shah, Lowrie added:

> If Iran resists Iraqi overtures for détente, continues to give military assistance to [the] Kurds, maintains [an] uncompromising position on [the] Shatt al-Arab, and intensifies [its] anti-Iraqi propaganda, [the] Ba'th regime will continue to strike out against Iran through subversion and propaganda and continue to rely on [the] USSR for arms and protection.[53]

He recommended that the Shah meet Iraq "halfway or—as [the] stronger power—slightly more than halfway to test Iraqi seriousness about détente." The problem

was that the Shah's support for the Kurds had made them obstinate to Iraqi efforts at reaching a compromise, but this would stop if Iran ceased its support.[54]

On June 21, the US Embassy in Beirut notified the department that Masoud Barzani and Dr. Othman had asked whether they could meet with high-level US officials during their upcoming visit to the United States and wanted to know how to respond. When the department replied the next day, it said that the US policy was not to encourage Kurdish hopes for American assistance, and ordered that only the country director would be allowed to meet with the Kurdish leaders.[55] On July 1, Lowrie wrote a detailed analysis that urged the United States to disassociate itself from Kurdish requests for "military assistance and avoid receiving Kurdish envoys, even for sympathetic hearings." He argued that the Ba'th Party, while being distasteful, was offering the Kurds the best possible deal that they could get and as long as "Barzani receives assistance from Iran and can hope for U.S. assistance, he is unlikely to compromise with [the Ba'th]." Lowrie concluded, "For better or worse, it is hard to escape [the] conclusion that [the] future of [the] Iraqi Kurds lies with their integration into [an] Iraqi state, albeit with as much autonomy as they can obtain."[56] From these analyses, it is clear that US officials in Washington, Baghdad, and Tehran all saw matters in a different light.

Meanwhile, on June 30, the power struggle between the regime's "pragmatist" and "extremist" elements broke into the open when Nazim Kazzar, the head of Iraq's security forces, tried to seize power in a failed coup. According to Tripp, the coup was a watershed in the regime's history because it allowed Saddam to dispose of any potential rivals and order the execution of over 30 senior officials, including the head of the Military Bureau of the Ba'th, and the arrest and torture of many more.[57] Saddam then formed a National Front government with the ICP on July 6, which excluded the Kurds.[58] However, Saddam was no fool; he knew that the West would panic over the inclusion of communists in the government, and so he met with Western journalists in early July and told them point blank: "Iraq would welcome moves by the US and Britain that could lead to [a] normalization of relations."[59] Saddam's interview alarmed Barzani, who feared that it could lead to an improvement in US-Iraqi relations and the end of US support. In July, he sent Shawfiq Qazzaz to Washington, where he visited the State Department and met with Edward Djerejian, the country officer for Iraq. When Qazzaz inquired about the state of US-Iraqi relations, Djerejian replied that relations had improved, pointing to the IPC settlement and Saddam's apparent interest in improving relations. Worried, Qazzaz said that Barzani was "watching very closely the status of US/Iraqi relations in order to know what he can expect or not expect from the US in terms of support."[60]

This unexpectedly welcome move led Lowrie to recommend that President Nixon send President al-Bakr a "presidential message" on occasion of Iraq's revolution's anniversary.[61] However, the State Department was cautious. On July 9, it advised Lowrie that it was "too early to determine exactly what changes and political orientation, if any, Iraqi regime [would] adopt" following the failed coup. Furthermore, "it would be inopportune for USG to take any immediate initiatives which could be misinterpreted by one or another faction of the [Ba'th Party]." While the department also recognized the progress Iraq had made on economic,

commercial, and cultural levels, it advised Lowrie to "remain as aloof as possible" and to emphasize America's interest in improving relations, including the possibility of resuming diplomatic relations.[62] On July 15, Lowrie sent the department his assessment on the impact that the attempted coup had on Iraq's politics. It was clear that the Ba'th Party was undergoing a major purge. Since the attempt, the regime had sentenced Abdul-Khaliq al-Sammarie, a popular Ba'thist, to life imprisonment and then executed Mohammed Fadhel. Both had been members of the Ba'th Party's regional leadership and were responsible for its control over the army. This outcome, Lowrie concluded, ensured that President al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein held unchallenged leadership in Iraq.[63] In the end, Saddam's consolidation of power following the Kazzer coup and his sudden willingness to improve ties with the United States signaled that the "pragmatist" faction had emerged victorious in the regime's power struggle. Unfortunately, America's intervention on behalf of the Kurds would prevent the Nixon administration from capitalizing on this opportunity to improve relations with the Ba'th Party.

Consulting with the Shah

Despite Iraq's efforts to improve relations with the United States and the West, in the summer of 1973, the Shah made a state visit to Washington, where he consulted with the White House on the Kurdish intervention. Prior to heading to the United States, Helms met with the Shah and King Hussein at the Caspian Sea on July 5. According to Helms, King Hussein warned of an impending Arab military operation against Israel with the objective of retaking the Golan Heights, which "could occur at any time from now on." Hussein said that he had a "copy of [the] actual military plan which [had] been coordinated with [the] Egyptians." This was a significant revelation, particularly since Helms reported it to Kissinger directly, and proves that US officials knew of the impending war at least three months prior to the October War. Worse yet, it shows that Kissinger had ignored the warning. Months later, after the war, Helms jotted a handwritten note on the document claiming, "I'll bet [Kissinger] and others wish they had paid attention to this." This makes clear that US officials were aware of Egypt's intent to attack Israel in the lead-up to the October War, yet chose to do nothing.[64]

The meeting in the Caspian was also meant to prepare the Shah for his upcoming state visit to Washington. On July 23, Helms arrived in Washington and met with Kissinger to discuss the Shah's trip, which included an important discussion on the Kurdish intervention. The conversation reveals a great deal about Kissinger's intentions. Helms told Kissinger that the Kurds had put forward some new ideas about how to deal with Iraq, suggesting that Saunders, Kennedy, and the CIA "work out a program on how much money to give them." He indicated that all of the arms had been delivered safely and that operational security was intact, but was hesitant about providing the Kurds with an offensive capability. After all, Helms said, "The Kurds cannot win against all of those Soviet weapons." At this point, Kissinger laid out where the Kurds fit in his strategy for countering Soviet influence in the Middle East: "We want to be sure that the Soviets consider

the Middle East too expensive an area to play around in." He wanted to send the Soviets a message that getting involved in the Middle East would be expensive.

> I want [the Soviets] to recall that they were run out of Egypt and that Iraq turned out to be a bottomless pit. I want them to tell anyone who comes with a recommendation for renewed activity in the Middle East to go away… We just want them in a frame of mind where they judge that the costs for activity in the Middle East seem excessive. We also want the Arabs in the area to feel that they cannot get a free ride by linking up with the Soviet Union. We want the Kurds to have enough strength to be an open wound in Iraq.[65]

Clearly, Kissinger and Helms saw the Kurds as playing a key role in their regional Cold War strategy.

Over the course of the next three days, the Shah would meet not only with President Nixon twice, but several times with Kissinger in private, where Iraq and the Kurds was a frequent topic of discussion. During the first meeting held in the Oval Office on July 24, the Shah gave President Nixon and Kissinger a tour d'horizon on Iran's role in the region for about two hours. With respect to Iraq, he told Nixon that America's support for the Kurds was very "helpful," particularly the psychological value of having the great America behind them.[66] Later that evening, the Shah and his ambassador to the United States, Ardeshir Zahedi, met privately with Kissinger, Helms, and Saunders, where they discussed the Kurdish intervention. Kissinger told the Shah that the United States planned to do whatever could be done to help the Kurds and welcomed any recommendations. The Shah said that the Kurds had weapons but needed help with organization, suggesting that he was helping them set up a department of health. To this, Kissinger said that Nixon agreed with the objective of the operation, but they only had a limited understanding of what needed to be done. In the meantime, he had advised the CIA to work out a program as to what the Kurds would need and hoped that the Shah could offer some assistance. At this point, the Shah raised the possibility of the Kurds working with other Iraqis to establish a national government in northern Iraq. Kissinger said that the president wanted to "make a major effort" to help the Kurds and asked, "Is this coordinated with your people or is it strictly an American operation?" At this point, Helms indicated that the US side of the operation was "fully coordinated and worked out through the Iranian intelligence service." On the question of the Kurds joining the National Front, the Shah said that the Kurds will "not to come to terms with Iraqi Government," to which Kissinger asked, "Can we keep them from coming to terms?" In response, the Shah said that they could; however, the Soviets were "putting heavy pressure on the Kurds to come to terms with the government and to join the government." Fortunately, Barzani had promised not to do anything without the Shah's approval and would not seek independence, which would terrify the Turks. In the end, the Shah felt, the Kurds were "a trump card that we do not want to let go." To this, Kissinger told the Shah in unequivocal terms, "The President agrees."[67]

On July 27, the Shah met with Kissinger and Helms again to discuss what could be done to help the Kurds. The Shah felt that both the United States and Iran could

offer "a little more direct support." The Ba'th Party's efforts to entice the Kurds into joining the National Front, while seeking to break out of its isolation suggested that it was weak. He would continue to advise Barzani not to join the coalition and had asked him to no longer accept Soviet of Ba'thist representatives. However, by asking this, the Shah felt that they would need to give him more money. The Americans agreed, with Kissinger saying, "You can count on it in principle."[68]

The conversations that took place over the course of the Shah's visit to Washington made clear a number of points: (1) the Soviets had increased their pressure on Barzani to join a National Front government with the Ba'th Party or the communists; (2) the Shah had convinced Barzani not to join this coalition; (3) both President Nixon and the Shah showed strong support for the continuation of the Kurdish intervention; and (4) all sides agreed that they would need to increase their support for the Kurds.

Following the Shah's departure on July 31, Kennedy met with Saunders and the acting CIA director, Vernon Waller, to discuss the question of more support for the Kurds. During the conversation, Waller proposed doubling the present aid to the Kurds and to increase their defensive—but not offensive—capabilities. Along these lines, he said that the CIA was preparing a paper offering potential options and recommendations.[69] A few days later, on August 3, Kissinger and Helms met to debrief on the Shah's trip. Helms appeared upbeat about the discussions on the Kurds, commenting that the program was "on circuit." When Kissinger asked whether the Kurds needed more weapons or additional economic aid, Helms said that he would wait to see the results of CIA's study.[70]

The CIA's analysis of the options for the Kurds was sent to Kissinger on August 7. The memo underscored the CIA's concern about the Kurds' mounting offensive operations against Baghdad. In the memo, the new CIA director, William Colby, wrote: "We do not wish to encourage Barzani to abandon his present defensive posture. If his forces were to launch offensive operations, Barzani would be embarking upon an extremely risky course of action from his own point of view." Colby was concerned that any further American support for the Kurds ran the risk of exposing America's involvement. However, he felt that the White House was obliged to respond to the Shah's request to consider increasing support. Along these lines, he laid out four options: (1) to maintain the program as it currently stood, with no increase in support, while stockpiling weapons in the event of war; (2) to provide a one-time payment to help the Kurds meet their needs for additional medical services, educational facilities, and other social services; (3) to increase the US subsidy by 50 percent, to approximately $375,000 per month; and (4) to double the current level of support to $500,000 per month. Of these options, Colby preferred the second, arguing, "This would not affect a continuation of our subsidy at the current level, yet it would be responsive to both the Shah and the Kurds." Colby also addressed an issue that had arisen with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which manages the White House's budget. The OMB had not released funds to the CIA for the purchase of ordnance for the Kurds, which would be used if fighting broke out. Colby asked Kissinger to intervene on his behalf with OMB to release the funds. Another problem was that since the start of the Kurdish intervention the cost of

purchasing Iraq's currency (the dinar) had gone up; so the $3 million the White House had originally allotted to subsidize Barzani was no longer sufficient to cover the subsidy. Colby asked Kissinger to increase the overall funds available for the operation to cover the increased cost of maintaining the operation at the current level.[71]

On August 16, Kissinger sent the CIA's analysis to Helms, who had just returned to Tehran. In his cable, Kissinger indicated that the White House was inclined to maintain the current subsidy, while stockpiling weapons in the event of a renewed war, but was also interested in Helms's and the Shah's views on the matter. When Helms responded the next day, he recommended increasing the cash subsidy by 50 percent and the CIA to begin stockpiling arms for contingency supply. In doing so, he felt that "the increase of our subsidy in response to the Shah's recommendation is symbolic of our support for the Shah and he likes this reassurance too." Kissinger agreed.[72] At the same time, a second message from Helms was sent on August 25, which indicated that the Shah had also increased his current monthly subsidy by "a little more" than 50 percent and would provide the Kurds with more arms and supplies.[73]

In late August, President Nixon told Kissinger that he was planning to nominate him to replace William Rogers as the secretary of state, while keeping him on as a national security adviser. Views on Kissinger's appointment were mixed Among the State Department's top brass,, with some officials uncertain if Kissinger could manage the department's massive bureaucracy, while others welcomed the prospect of returning to the center of policymaking after years of being sidelined.[74] The dual appointments of Kissinger as the secretary of state and the national security adviser provided him with unparalleled influence over the machinery of US foreign policy. This would prove important as the pressure of the Watergate scandal began to weigh heavily on President Nixon.

On September 6, Kissinger informed the president of the conclusions the NSC's review of options and recommendations for the Kurdish intervention. The memo emphasized the importance of the operation in terms of the Cold War, with Kissinger describing the Iraqi regime as "the principal Soviet client in the Middle East." He raised the problems of the OMB withholding funds for the operation and the CIA's dwindling stock of foreign arms and ammunition, which would require considerable lead time to acquire more. Kissinger recommended ordering the OMB to release the money now so that it could have supplies on hand should fighting break out and supported Helms's view that increasing the subsidy would be more responsive to Barzani's needs than a one-off payment. Significantly, he emphasized to Nixon the importance of maintaining the Kurds in a defensive posture:

> We may wish to…avoid the impression of a long-term escalating commitment by telling Barzani that we will provide these additional funds for this year on a monthly basis but, in any event, would emphasize that we share the Shah's view regarding maintenance of the defensive posture of the Kurds.[75]

In the end, he recommended that the president approve an increase in the current subsidy to reflect the increasing cost of the Iraqi dinar, in addition to raising the US

subsidy by 50 percent to $375,000 per month for the 1974 fiscal year. Nixon initialed his approval and the next day Ratliff had the 40 Committee principals sign off.[76]

Mixed Signals

In the meantime, just as the United States was ramping up its Kurdish intervention, the INR circulated a report on August 23 that argued its relations with the Soviets had been "marked by tensions and difficulties." Soviet-Iraqi relations had always been subject to strains, but since the IPC settlement in February, the relationship had been increasingly "complicated and frustrating." The problem was that the two had "fundamental differences" about each other's "aims and perceptions" of the region. The Soviets were often held hostage to Iraq's unstable internal situation, and had to reconcile its interests there with those in other states in the region. At the same time, the Iraqis were inherently suspicious of Soviet intentions, particularly its pressure to form a National Front with the communists and the Kurds, and had shown uncertainty about its usefulness in supporting Iraq's regional ambitions.[77] The INR report confirmed that Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union were strained, just as the White House was considering increasing its support for the Kurds.

On September 2, Lowrie sent a personal letter to Assistant Secretary Atherton to reiterate his belief that the United States needed to adopt a policy of dissociating itself from the Kurds. Lowrie argued that "closing off the Kurdish option" was not an irrevocable act and could be reopened "if the anticipated benefits of a policy of disassociation do not materialize." He recognized that the Kurds had been effective at weakening the Ba'thist regime, but given its strained relations with Moscow he did not believe that this was the most effective means of countering Soviet influence, in fact, the opposite. According to Lowrie, "The regime's actions since the IPC settlement and particularly since the June 30 abortive coup accurately indicate the independent direction Iraqi policy will take if its domestic problems become manageable." In other words, the only thing preventing Iraq from distancing itself fully from the Soviets was the Kurds and their supporters in Iran and Israel—and unknown to Lowrie, the United States.[78]

It was in this context that the CIA produced a tentative analysis of Iraq's internal politics that warned against the United States moving closer to Iraq. On September 6, the CIA sent the analysis to the White House, along with a short memo written by Colby's special assistant, Sam Hoskinson, which was "tailor-made for the NSC staff." The study came to three main conclusions: (1) the level of political violence inside Iraq at this time was very high; (2) the Ba'thist regime had no significant constituency outside its own adherents; and (3) the regime had very limited administrative talent, with Saddam Hussein and Sa'dun Hammadi standing out as exceptions. Significantly, the CIA were mystified by the June coup attempt:

> We have a strong feeling that if we could sort out who tried to do what to whom and why, we would have a very good key to current political dynamics. We still suspect

> that Saddam was somewhere behind it or at least knew of it; if so the executions that followed were efforts to silence other participants who knew too much.

The memo came to a striking conclusion:

> We are left then, with a situation that is stable in the sense that virtually all the Ba'th's opponents, except the Kurds, have been terrorized or neutralized, but also with a structure that…rests on violence to maintain the leadership's position with respect to the people at the bottom or outside the structure. This is not a happy situation nor a happy government for the US to try to do business with.[79]

Clearly, CIA officials were uncomfortable with Lowrie's suggestion that the United States was moving closer to the Iraqi regime.

Throughout much of September, tension within the Ba'th Party continued to be evident. For instance, in mid-September, a series of brutal murders took place in middle-class neighborhoods in Baghdad, which added to the sense of unease following widespread dismissals from the bureaucracy, a purge of the Ba'th Party, and increasing Kurdish intransigence following the June coup. Then, during the last week of September, the regime imposed "extraordinary security measures in Baghdad," including imposing a nationwide curfew, closing the airports and borders, and conducting widespread house-to-house searches. The CIA was convinced that this was part of the ongoing power struggle within the regime. Interestingly, an unexpected by-product of the regime's policies was that it led to "a slight opening of windows to the West, particularly in commercial matters."[80] For instance, on September 22, Iraq awarded a US firm, Brown and Root (a subsidiary of Halliburton), a $122 million contract to build an offshore, deep-sea, oil terminal. This was the single largest business deal Iraq had ever signed.[81] Nevertheless, the CIA was unconvinced that Iraq's opening would "produce any major breakthrough in Iraq–US relations" or "a major deviation from [its] alignment with the USSR."[82]

Taken together, the INR's analysis on Soviet-Iraqi relations and the CIA's belief that the United States should approach Iraq with caution, on the eve of the October War of 1973, there was growing divide within the US government about how to approach Iraq's efforts to improve relations with the West. On the one side, Helms and the CIA remained unconvinced that Iraq's efforts to improve relations with the West was genuine, while Lowrie and the State Department viewed this as an opportunity that should be explored tentatively. Nevertheless, Iraq's awarding of the Deep Sea Terminal contract to a US firm suggested that there might actually be room for an opening.

The October War

When Egyptian and Syrian forces launched an assault against Israeli positions along the Suez Canal and in the Golan Heights on October 6, 1973, both the Iraqi regime and the United States were caught off guard. The Egyptians, Syrians, and Soviets had not informed the Iraqis of their military plans beforehand.[83] Although the US policy toward the October War has been examined elsewhere,[84]

the scholarship on Iraq's response to the war is limited.[85] Unlike the aftermath of the Six Day War, which saw Iraq sever diplomatic relations with the United States, the October War actually opened up opportunities for the United States and Iraq to improve relations. The Ba'thist regime shocked US officials when it renewed diplomatic relations with Iran, West Germany, and Britain; refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil boycott; and awarded a US firm with a major commercial contract. This again reflected the growing strength of the "pragmatist" faction of the Ba'th Party over the "extremist" one.

Two weeks before the war, Lowrie learned that the Soviets were sending Iraq 200 helicopters and 14 TU-22 "Blinder" supersonic bombers.[86] The planes arrived the next day.[87] About a week later, the Shah raised the bombers with US officials and demanded "a firm commitment" from the United States about the purchase of F-14/15s to balance Iraq's new weaponry.[88] However, just days before the outbreak of the war, a senior defense official leaked details of Iraq's receipt of the bombers,[89] prompting Helms to press Kissinger into reasserting the State Department's "traditional right to clear beforehand [all] Pentagon speeches having foreign affairs content."[90] Kissinger agreed and drafted a new presidential directive requiring all cabinet officers clear statements on foreign policy matters with the White House.[91] On October 4, the State Department cabled Helms and advised him to inform the Shah that the TU-22s had been delivered. This was the first instance where the Soviet Union had exported this type of aircraft to non-Soviet forces. In terms of conveying this information to the Shah, the department advised Helms to indicate that while the United States recognized that Iraqi policy had been erratic in recent months and that the delivery of the TU-22s increased its military potential, the United States would keep the situation under "careful review."[92]

When the October War broke out on October 6, the Ba'thist regime used the war to achieve a number of key domestic and foreign policy objectives, while showing some restraint in its retaliatory measures against the United States. For instance, when the regime announced the nationalization of the American-owned shares of the Basra Petroleum Company (BPC), it also offered the company's owners compensation. Iraq also announced a ban on oil exports to the United States. However, according to Lowrie, neither of these actions had any "practical importance in immediate future" nor did they come as a surprise. "Given Iraq's isolation from other Arabs and the battlefields," Lowrie observed, "a dramatic act was required to demonstrate its continuing role as [an] *avant garde* revolutionary."[93] Even more surprising, in the middle of the war, the Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) confounded US officials when it awarded US Steel a $15 million contract to purchase of four oil-drilling rigs.[94] Meanwhile, Iraq also asked Iran to reestablish diplomatic relations on October 7,[95] which was aimed at neutralizing its eastern borders so that it could turn its attention on Israel. Even though Iran accepted, Iraq was still only able to dispatch a single armored brigade to Syria.[96] Finally, the Iraqis also refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo, arguing that production cuts would only hurt Europe more than the United States.[97] Taken together, the BPC's nationalization, the decision not to sell oil to the United States, the awarding of a contract to US Steel, the resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran, its dispatch of only a token force to Syria, and

its refusal to participate in the oil embargo directed at Europe, all suggest that the Iraqi regime's response to the war was aimed at advancing its own interests, irrespective of the views of the rest of the Arab world.

On October 15, the ninth day of the war, Barzani sent Kissinger an urgent message asking for advice about an Israeli proposal to launch an offensive against Baghdad. The message read:

> The [Israelis] suggest we try to gain territories in Kurdistan while it is busy with the war. They promised that they will study helping us with arms with Iran. No troops have been withdrawn from our area and we have no such offensive weapons. We [would] like to know your opinion on this.[98]

Kissinger stated in his memoir that the proposal originated from an Israeli liaison officer "eager to burnish [his] credentials at home." However, from the outset, the Israeli plan was flawed because the Kurds lacked the weapons to fight an offensive war, like artillery, antiaircraft and antitank missiles, and tanks. Kissinger worried that if the Kurds launched an offensive from the mountains toward the plains, they would "not stand a chance…against a large Iraqi army equipped with advanced Soviet heavy weapons and hundreds of tanks. An offensive…would have guaranteed the complete destruction of Kurdish military forces." Consequently, Kissinger asked Helms to consult with the Shah.[99] On October 16, Helms spoke with the Shah and sent Kissinger a back-channel message outlining both their views on the matter. Helms said that the Shah shared Kissinger's concern about the Kurds launching an offensive, pointing out that all the arms they had provided were for defensive purposes and not "equipped to come out of their mountain terrain and attack on the plains. If they were to get chewed up militarily, it would deprive the Shah of his 'Kurdish card' and he does not want to see that."[100] Again, this underscored the overall objective of the operation, which was to have the Kurds tie Iraq's military down. In the end, all the key partners in the Kurdish intervention agreed that the Kurds attacking Iraqi forces would be suicidal. As a result, Kissinger had Helms inform Barzani that it was not "advisable for you to undertake the offensive military action that the Israelis have suggested to you." Barzani received the message on October 19.[101]

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war was a pivotal moment in Kissinger's career. In his dual roles of secretary of state and national security adviser, he was arguably the most powerful man in Washington, surpassing even Nixon, who was entirely consumed by the near-daily revelations about the Watergate scandal, his eroding domestic standing, and growing calls for his impeachment. While Nixon would cling to office for nearly another year, the pressure from Watergate would incapacitate him. From the 1973 war onward, Kissinger assumed control of the conduct of the US foreign policy, especially with regard to Iraq.[102]

Conclusion

In the year between Nixon's approval of the Kurdish intervention in 1972 and the October 1973 war, US-Iraqi relations underwent a remarkable thaw. The change

was due to the emergence of Saddam Hussein as the dominant force within the regime. He sought to improve Iraq's international standing by settling the IPC dispute, stabilizing domestic politics by forming a National Front government, and awarding US firms with important contracts, while distancing the regime from the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the contradictory nature of the US policy prevented the Nixon administration from seizing this opportunity. In Baghdad, Lowrie urged the United States to bolster the practical, moderate, technocratic "other" Iraq, while the Shah and the White House tried to allay Barzani's fears by increasing the level of their assistance.

At the same time, US intelligence agencies were also split on how to assess the power struggle within the Ba'th Party, which pit the "pragmatist" civilian wing against the "extremist" military one, which culminated in an attempted coup in June 1973. However, it was not until the outbreak of the October War that it became clear that the "pragmatists" had emerged victorious. This was evident in Iraq's actions during the war, where it nationalized the US-owned stake in the BPC; resumed diplomatic relations with Britain, Iran, and West Germany; awarded further contracts to US firms in the middle of the war; and would not participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo, though it refused to sell oil to the United States directly. In the aftermath, Iraq's "moderating" trend would escalate, particularly as the regime pulled itself away from the Soviets in favor of the French. Despite all these clear signals, the White House was either preoccupied with dealing with the consequences of the war or it ignored them. Kissinger was entirely committed to the Kurdish intervention and soon ordered a sharp increase in US support for the Kurds. This would have a profound impact in the coming year, when the Iraqi regime renewed its war against the Kurds, dragging both the United States' and Iraq's Soviet patron deeper into the Kurdish conflict.

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Kissinger and the Kurdish War: October 1973–March 1975

During the period between the October War in 1973 and the Algiers Accord in March 1975, Secretary Kissinger, who was also a national security adviser, and his deputy, Brent Scowcroft, took on a significant role in directing and managing the CIA's Kurdish intervention, often acting outside of normal diplomatic channels. Throughout this time, Kissinger continued to show a strong commitment to the Kurdish intervention, often ignoring the CIA's numerous warnings about the operation by ordering further US assistance, including finding ways to transfer to the Kurds Soviet-made arms captured by the Israelis during the October War. After President Nixon's resignation in August 1974, Kissinger stayed in his dual roles, and kept the new president, Gerald R. Ford, apprised of the Kurdish intervention on a "need-to-know" basis.[1] At the same time, Kissinger hid details of the operation from the State Department, which was hoping to build upon Iraq's positive gestures toward the United States during 1973.[2] This meant that a small, secretive group of US officials—Kissinger, Helms, the CIA station chief in Tehran (Arthur Callahan), and his deputy station chief—ran the Kurdish intervention. When the Kurdish War resumed in March 1974, three separate dynamics—the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran-Iraq rivalry, and Cold War interventionism—all coalesced to ensure that it would have a violent conclusion. Of these, the Ford administration's policy continued to be driven by the Cold War thinking. The United States was backing the Kurds in a war against the Soviet-supported Iraqi regime. As with 1963, the Kurdish War once again took on Cold War dimensions; only this time the superpowers had switched sides.

Like Nixon's decision to support the Kurds, the highly controversial and tragic end of the Kurdish War in March 1975 has been the product of much discussion among scholars. This was because when the Shah terminated his support to the Kurds, the US and Israeli operations to support the Kurds came to an abrupt halt. The dominant argument is that the United States abandoned the Kurds without warning, ignored Barzani's heartfelt pleas to assistance, and failed to provide humanitarian assistance in the aftermath. The leading proponent of this view was Representative Otis Pike, who led the House Select Committee on Intelligence, which was charged with investigating the financial side of covert action. Pike and

his committee were determined to show that the Kurdish intervention was illegal because the Nixon administration had bypassed the 40 Committee.[3] While the *Pike Report* provided valuable information on aspects of the Kurdish intervention, declassified documents reveal that the report was subjective. According to Gerald Haines, Pike had once admitted privately that he wanted to use the report to expose the CIA as an out-of-control "rouge elephant."[4] Kissinger modestly believed that Pike wanted "to show that [he was an] evil genius."[5] To a degree he was right. In January 1976, when Congress voted to keep the *Pike Report* secret, members of the committee leaked the report to the press.[6] On February 4, William Safire published an article in the *New York Times* that accused the Ford administration of selling out the Kurds. The accusations in the article, "Mr. Ford's Secret Sellout," clearly reflect the conclusions of the *Pike Report*.[7] Even though the State Department dismissed Safire's article as "a collection of distortions and untruths unsupported by any documents or the record,"[8] a full copy of the *Pike Report* was published in the *Village Voice* on February 16, which has had a distorting effect on our understanding of America's actual role in the end of the Kurdish War. The following chronicles the formulation and execution of the US policy during the 1974–75 Kurdish War and argues that the Ford administration's actions were reflective of a realistic analysis of its overt and covert capabilities.

Tying Down Iraq

During the five months between the October War and the outbreak of the Kurdish War in March 1974, the United States faced a number of problems, ranging from the skyrocketing price of oil to negotiating Israel's disengagement from Egyptian and Syrian territories. Meanwhile, Iraq continued to show interest in improving its relations with the West (especially France),[9] while its relations with the Soviets deteriorated due to Moscow's failure to consult with it prior to the October War.[10] Even America's relations with Iraq improved during this period, as the regime continued to award US firms with important contracts. However, just as Iraq was improving relations with the West, Kissinger concocted a scheme designed to secure Israel's disengagement from Egypt and Syria at Iraq's expense.

During the war, the Saudis led the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in an oil embargo that targeted nations that had supported Israel during the war, while at the same time cutting oil production. Unlike during the 1967 war, when the United States was a net exporter of oil, OPEC's efforts to use oil as a weapon against the United States had only a limited effect on the American economy. However, by 1973, the United States had become a net importer of oil, giving the oil-producing Arab states significant leverage over the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. The embargo and the cuts in production meant that oil prices in the United States and around the world skyrocketed from $3.01 per barrel to $5.11, and then doubled again on January 1, 1974, when OPEC increased the price to $11.65.[11] The quadrupling of the price of oil in just four months shocked the US economy, and sent it into a tailspin. America's gross domestic product (GDP) dropped from 7.2 percent in 1972, to 4 percent in 1973,

and then down to –2.1 percent in 1974.[12] Given the toll the oil crisis was taking on the US economy, it is understandable that this subject would dominate the Nixon–Ford administration's domestic and foreign policies for the next three years.

On November 4, Lowrie cabled the department his assessment of the October War's impact on the US policy toward Iraq. Apparently, the ceasefire agreement had outraged the Iraqi leadership, which responded by withdrawing its forces from Syria. This move upset the Iraqi military, which had been thrown into the war without adequate preparation and then withdrawn without prior consultation. Worse, Iraqi troops had not been given ammunition until just before entering Syria and it was taken away immediately upon return, sending a clear signal that the regime distrusted the military. More importantly, Lowrie reported that Iraq had decided to renege on its earlier promise to prohibit oil exports to United States and cut its production, which made him cautiously optimistic about the chances of improving US-Iraqi relations. After all, since the war, Iraq had rewarded US firms with a number of lucrative contracts, including a new $60 million deal to purchase of a fleet of Boeing passenger jets. This led Lowrie to conclude, "Despite nationalization of [the] Exxon and Mobil [shares in the BPC] and violent anti-US propaganda, there are recent indications that regime wishes to keep lines to US open."[13]

Iraq's relations with the Soviets continued to suffer, despite Moscow's efforts to make amends. For instance, on November 3, the Soviets approved a loan to Iraq worth approximately $115 million.[14] However, when Moscow sent a high-level delegation to Baghdad on November 27 to soften the impact of "policy differences,"[15] the Iraqis gave them a cold reception and announced that it was restoring diplomatic relations with Britain, a move that shocked US officials in Baghdad.[16] Clearly, Iraq was distancing itself from the Soviet Union and moving toward the West.

Coinciding with Iraq's opening to the West, Kissinger engaged in shuttle diplomacy to bring about Israel's withdrawal from Egypt and Syria.[17] On the Egyptian front, Kissinger achieved some success, securing a disengagement agreement in January 1974. The Syrian front, however, proved to be more challenging. Part of the problem was that in early November Algeria and Libya sent delegations to Iraq to convince the regime to return its troops to the Syrian front.[18] This was problematic for Kissinger, who saw the Iraqi regime's staunch opposition to the ceasefire as an obstacle to securing a disengagement agreement. On November 27, Sisco sent Kissinger a list of possible pressure points the United States could use against Iraq, but each option was problematic. The first was that the United States could order the Iraqis to reduce the size of their interests section in Washington, but Iraq would likely retaliate by closing down the USINT, which Sisco felt was a "valuable listening post." The second option was for the United States to discourage American businesses, like Brown and Root, US Steel, and Boeing, from doing business with Iraq, but this would only end up hurting American businesses and would not play well with the American public. The final option was for the United States to encourage the Kurds to undertake military action against Baghdad. This proposal was intriguing and actionable, but the State Department

was unaware of the ongoing Kurdish intervention. As a result, it warned that the US support for the Kurds could endanger US interests in Iran and Turkey. These options showed that America held little leverage over Iraq.[19]

However, in late 1973, Kissinger hatched a brilliant scheme with Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, whereby Iran would stir up trouble along the Iran-Iraq border to force Iraq to withdraw its forces from Syria. According to Henry Precht, a US diplomat in Iran at the time, "Kissinger wanted to divert Iraq's attention away from Arab-Israel issues as he went through negotiations with Egypt and Syria" and thought that the easiest way to do this was to have Iran stir up trouble in Kurdistan.[20] A few months later, Kissinger told Israeli prime minister Golda Meir, "the Egyptians [had] asked [him] to ask the Shah to put pressure on Iraq so Iraqi troops all leave Syria… That [was] why there was trouble in February between Iraq and Iran."[21]

The fighting between Iran and Iraq broke out on December 24 after an "Iranian incursion" into Iraq. This was followed by another round of skirmishes on February 4, 1974, and a large battle involving artillery exchanges and armored vehicles on February 10.[22] Eventually, Iraq took the matter to the Security Council, demanding that it condemn Iran's aggression,[23] leading to a rhetorical "slinging match" throughout February,[24] with the Iraqis demanding the council to pass a resolution or consensus statement condemning Iran's actions. This put the United States in a difficult position. With Iran about to be condemned at the UN, the White House was worried that the Iranians might ask it to use its veto to block a resolution. After all, it was Kissinger who asked the Shah to start all this.[25] Obviously, this was unacceptable; so Kissinger pressured the Shah to accept a watered-down consensus statement, which was passed on February 28.[26] Significantly, the Security Council called for the secretary general to appoint a special representative to investigate the event and report back.[27] Irrespective of this, the Iranians ignored the Security Council and continued to escalate tensions with Iraq into March.[28]

This crisis suggests that in the aftermath of the October War the United States played a key role in escalating tension between Iran and Iraq during the lead up to the outbreak of the Kurdish War in the spring of 1974. In fact, it is clear that Kissinger conspired with Sadat and the Shah to force Iraq to withdraw its forces from Syria by creating a diversion on the Iranian border. While this scheme was successful and helped contribute to Kissinger securing Israel's withdrawal from Syria in May 1974, the escalation of tensions between Iran and Iraq was instrumental in the renewal and dramatic escalation of the Kurdish War in March 1974.

Declaring Autonomy?

Despite Iraq's efforts to improve relations with the West following the October War, Kissinger's personal commitment to Iran and the Kurds overshadowed any desire to capitalize on these opportunities. While US officials in Baghdad and Washington wanted to reinforce and encourage this trend, the White House ignored their advice and increased its financial and military support for the

Kurds. Consequently, key opportunities to improve US-Iraqi relations were missed because Kissinger saw America's commitment to the Shah—who helped advance US interests in terms of America's Cold War strategy in the Middle East—as more important than cultivating friendly relations with Iraq. This stood in stark contrast to the more balanced approaches of all previous American administrations.

This tense situation was exacerbated on March 11, 1974, when the Iraqi regime passed an autonomy law and gave Barzani 15 days to accept.[29] The new law fell far short of what the regime had promised the Kurds in 1970, including long-standing demands like a proportional share of oil revenue and the inclusion of the oil-rich and culturally significant city of Kirkuk into the autonomous region. Moreover, the law gave the regime a veto over any Kurdish legislation, rendering it useless. In light of these conditions, it was highly unlikely that Barzani could have accepted it without major modifications.[30] Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi government reinforced its military units in the north and reports of clashes breaking out emerged, while rumors began circulating in Baghdad that the Peshmerga had been called to arms.[31]

In the two-week period before the deadline, Barzani sought reassurance from his allies of their support. On March 16, Barzani, Dr. Othman, and a SAVAK liaison officer met with the CIA's station chief, Arthur Callahan, in Tehran to discuss how to respond to the Iraqi ultimatum. Barzani made a number of key points: (1) Kurdish morale was high; (2) the government had withdrawn its forces from Kurdish strongholds in the north; (3) an economic blockade had been imposed; (4) at least 250,000 people had already fled to the north; and (5) he was in need of not only additional arms, like surface-to-air rockets, antitank rockets, antianticraft machine guns, and rifles, but also money and civilian supplies, like food, tents, clothing, and medicine. Callahan said that he would discuss these points with the Iranians and pass it along to headquarters, while informing Barzani that not even the Iranians had surface-to-air rockets, the CIA's funds for the operation were limited, and that raising the level of American assistance increased the risk of exposing the operation, which "could be fatal to the continuation of [US] support." Significantly, Barzani told Callahan that he wanted to set up an Iraqi Arab and Kurdish government in the north, which would then claim to be the sole legitimate government of Iraq and wanted to know if the United States would offer its support. Callahan said that he felt that this would require a lot of "preparatory groundwork" and asked Barzani to identify the Arab Iraqi leaders who would help form such a government. When Barzani refused to divulge this information for "security reasons," Callahan concluded that there was "no substantial group of anti-Ba'th Arab leaders" prepared to collaborate with him at this point in time.[32]

The next day, Barzani met with General Nassiri to reiterate his need for increased Iranian support. Afterward, Nassiri met with Callahan to keep him apprised on the talks. Callahan told Nassiri that the CIA had stockpiled weapons in preparation for the renewal of the war and that he was keeping the CIA headquarters informed of their talks. While Nassiri felt that Barzani was likely inflating the risk the Iraqi military posed to his position, he nevertheless

believed that it was essential to increase the level of support for the Kurds, who were cut off from other means of support and had to take care of 1.5 million civilians.[33]

Immediately after this meeting, Barzani met with the Shah to ask for increased economic, financial, and military support and for him to intercede with the Turkish government about reopening its border, which was sealed the day Iraq announced its autonomy law. He also raised the question of unilaterally declaring autonomy from Baghdad; presented the Shah with a $180 million budget proposal, which covered administration, defense, education, and public health; and asked for Iranian recognition and diplomatic support at the UN. The Shah told Barzani that he would raise his financial subsidy and look into providing him with better weaponry, but in the interim, he would need to consult his advisers on the autonomy question. The next day, Barzani met with Callahan again at a SAVAK guesthouse in Tehran. After the meeting, Helms cabled Kissinger's new deputy, Brent Scowcroft, and suggested that Iran was better positioned to intercede with the Turks and that the level of US diplomatic support for the Kurds at international forums, like the UN, would "depend on whether the Iraqis actually [engaged] in [a] genocidal war against the Kurds."[34] Meanwhile, on March 20, the Shah escalated tensions along the Iran-Iraq border, signaling in clear terms that he supported the Kurds.[35]

Barzani's request to declare autonomy "triggered a flood of communication."[36] Discussions focused on two elements: (1) whether the United States would support a unilateral declaration of autonomy; and (2) the level of support the United States was willing to give. Barzani's request for $180 million was far beyond what the United States could provide while maintaining plausible deniability. On March 21, Colby wrote to Kissinger, warning that hostilities between the Kurds and the Iraqi regime were imminent and informing him about Barzani's efforts in Tehran to secure increased US assistance.[37] In his memoir, Kissinger implied that Colby's memo cautioned against increasing the level of US assistance for the Kurds, commenting, "Colby's reluctance was as unrealistic as Barzani's enthusiasm." Instead, he pushed the NSC staff to submit a proposal, leading to intensive discussions among the NSC staff, CIA, and Helms in Tehran.[38]

On March 22, the CIA sent the White House a memo arguing against increasing funds, citing that the operation's objective was to stalemate the conflict, not support an autonomous Kurdish government.[39] The NSC staff was worried that Barzani's proposal went "well beyond" the CIA's covert capabilities and, if the United States agreed, the operation risked being exposed, which would create problems with the USSR, Turkey, and certain Arab states. "All of this was . . . pointed out to Mulla Mustafa at the outset of [our] relationship." Additionally, the NSC staff questioned the benefit of establishing a "kind of rump government" in Kurdistan, inquiring, "would it . . . even be to Mullah Mustafa's advantage . . . to formalize and symbolize his autonomy?" The NSC staff believed that a declaration of autonomy "would give Iraq no choice but to launch a major attack against Kurdistan if it [was] to protect its national integrity." Finally, the NSC staff wondered if Barzani could even form a government, and if he did, "would the Shah look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government?"

Instead, the NSC staff preferred the continuation of a stalemate situation that weakened the Iraqi regime. It concluded:

> Up to now neither the Shah nor [the US had] wished to see the matter resolved one way or the other… For Mullah Mustafa to attempt to form a government in [his] safe-haven would be to narrow his own options to a dangerous point and gratuitously provoke Iraq (with strong Soviet and possibly even Turkish support) [into war].

Recognizing the difficult conundrum the Kurds faced, the NSC staff proposed providing Barzani with a "token amount" of $500,000 to $750,000 in refugee aid and 900,000 pounds of non-attributable small arms and ammunition that the CIA had stockpiled. These gestures, the NSC staff believed, would signal Barzani that the United States was still sympathetic and friendly to his predicament, was prepared to continue to help on a scale that could be kept covert, but could not "play a prime role in the new ballgame."[40] The NSC staff sent this memo to Helms on March 26 and asked him for his views.[41] According to Kissinger's memoir, when Scowcroft presented him with the NSC staff's proposal on the Kurds upon his returned to Washington from a trip to Europe on March 28, it was clear that "the existing program was inadequate even for defense."[42]

Throughout late March and all of April, Barzani consolidated his positions in the north and prepared for the Iraqi offensive.[43] On March 28, Barzani allowed Saddam's deadline to pass and both sides prepared for war.[44] The regime responded on April 6 by calling up its reserves, imposing an economic blockade, unleashing its air force against Kurdish positions, and launching a few probing assaults, while holding off a major ground offensive.[45] Two days later, according to Lowrie, Saddam gave an interview, where he "made several references to Kurds being armed with American arms." In reporting this to Washington, Lowrie commented, "If situation deteriorates we can expect [the Iraq government] to drop circumspection of Saddam Hussein's recent remarks and attack [the] US directly and violently."[46] After receiving instructions from the department, Lowrie visited the ministry of foreign affairs on April 11, where he denied all reports that the United States was aiding the Kurds.[47] Nevertheless, the regime proved reluctant to launch a full-scale offensive at this point, believing that military action would represent a failure of its Kurdish policy. Instead, it maintained the public face of pressing ahead with the implementation of its autonomy law.[48]

Meanwhile, on April 11, Kissinger raised the issue of what steps the United States should take to support the Kurds with President Nixon. After reminding Nixon about the origins of the program and reviewing the debate, Kissinger asked for permission to provide the Kurds with a $1 million lump sum of refugee assistance, which was available from previously allocated funds, and to authorize the airlifting of the 900,000 pound stockpile of CIA weapons to Iran for onward transport to the Kurds. In Nixon's copy of Kissinger's memo, he circled the refugee assistance and scrawled in the margins, "if it can be used effectively." In taking these limited measures, Kissinger felt that this was adequate to show the Kurds that the United States was still concerned with their plight and was

willing to continue its support, while also showing that the United States was not able to support Kurdish moves toward autonomy. Kissinger also informed Nixon that the Shah was also increasing his assistance program to help the Kurds and that he too was unwilling to underwrite an autonomous Kurdish government on a long-term basis. In short, the United States was willing to support the Kurds in their fight against Baghdad, but could not help them in their quest for independence. Nixon approved Kissinger's request.[49]

However, before Nixon's orders could be sent to Tehran, the Shah sent General Nassiri to the US Embassy on April 16 to show Helms a draft of Barzani's autonomy proposal, which the Kurds planned to announce over the radio that evening. Upon reading the proposal, Helms went immediately to the palace and met with the Shah. It was clear that the Shah had not given this much thought, which was why he wanted to know what Helms thought. In his response Helms was very cautious, telling the Shah that once the statement was broadcast it could not be recalled. He pointed out that a declaration of this nature would constitute "a public burning of bridges," which would "virtually foreclose further negotiation" and give the Iraqi regime "a further pretext for major coercive military action." According to Helms's account of the conversation, the Shah then picked up his telephone and called SAVAK to order them to postpone the broadcast of Barzani's autonomy declaration until April 20.[50]

A few days later, on April 19, Kissinger back channeled President Nixon's orders to Helms, indicating that the United States was prepared to provide the Kurds with a refugee relief of $1 million, in addition to continuing the subsidy at its current level of $375,000 per month, and 900,000 pounds of non-attributable small arms and ammunition. Kissinger also told Helms to emphasize to the Shah that an early Kurdish promulgation of autonomy would not serve anyone's interests, which at this juncture were:

> (a) to give [the] Kurds capacity to maintain [a] reasonable base for negotiating recognition of rights by Baghdad, (b) to keep present Iraqi government tied down, but (c) not to divide Iraq permanently because an independent Kurdish area would not be economically viable and US and Iran [had] no interest in closing [the] door on good relations with Iraq under moderate leadership.

Second, Helms was to convey to Barzani that US support for a Kurdish government on a long-term basis was not possible because it could not be kept covert. These decisions were conveyed to the Shah and then passed to the Kurds.[51]

When Helms conveyed Nixon's orders on April 20, the Shah said that he agreed fully with the US position on whether the Kurds should declare autonomy and had asked Helms to have Callahan inform Barzani. The Shah welcomed the increase in US assistance, especially the refugee aid and the proposed weapons shipments, and indicated that he was increasing his subsidy from about $30 million annually to $75 million, a substantial increase. Following Helms's meeting with the Shah, Callahan met with Barzani and Dr. Othman in a SAVAK safe house, where he informed them of the level of assistance the United States was prepared to offer. According to Helms, Barzani's response came as a surprise.

Instead of being disappointed, Barzani said that he understood and expressed "warm gratitude" for the assistance the United States was providing. He then asked Callahan to convey his thanks to the president, Kissinger, and those at the CIA, who had "understood and supported his efforts to defend the rights of his people." In addition to this, Barzani said that he wanted to send a delegation to New York City to lobby the UN and rally support for the Kurdish cause by reaching out to the press. In the end, Helms was quite pleased with his exchanges with the Shah and the Kurds.[52]

On April 22, clashes finally broke out in the north, as Iraqi forces tried to break through to a trapped garrison in Dohuk and the IAF began a widespread bombing campaign of the north.[53] In late April, when the regime finally launched a major offensive against Kurdish positions, it was immediately apparent that this campaign would barely resemble previous ones due to important changes in Iraq's tactics.[54] After four years of escalating tension, the Kurdish War had once again recommenced.

For a number of reasons, this account of how the United States formulated its position on whether to support Barzani's plan to declare autonomy stands in contrast to the *Pike Report*'s claims that the United States urged the Kurds to reject the Ba'th Party's offer. First, there was no indication that the United States had "prodded" Barzani into rejecting the Iraqi offer. In fact, it was clear that the United States had warned against declaring autonomy because it was certain to provoke the Iraqi government into attacking. Second, the *Pike Report* left out a number of inconvenient truths, like its claim that the United States "refused to provide humanitarian assistance," which clearly was not true.[55] Furthermore, the *Pike Report* manipulated the wording of sentences to suit its agenda. For instance, it altered the NSC staff's question "would the Shah look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government?" to read, "We would think that [our ally] would not look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government."[56] These two passages have much different conotations. Taken together, these misrepresentations raise an important question about the *Pike Report*'s objectivity.

The Second Iraqi Back Channel

The outbreak of a new round of fighting in the Kurdish War led to a joint American and Israeli effort to provide the Kurds with advanced weaponry. The origins of this plan came about in early May 1974. As part of his shuttle diplomacy to achieve an Israeli-Syrian disengagement (signed on May 31), Kissinger met with Israel's prime minister, Golda Meir. During the conversation, Meir passed Kissinger an Israeli report recommending that Kurds be provided with antiaircraft and antitank weapons. The report stated:

> If fighting [continued] for a long time, the Kurds [would] find it difficult to hold out against the Soviet backed Iraqi army . . . and to defend their traditional strongholds in the heart of Kurdistan. However, the Kurds [stood] a good chance of holding out

> in the mountainous area provided that they [had] sufficient artillery and adequate supplies of [anti-aircraft] and [anti-tank] ammunition.

Kissinger agreed that the situation looked worse than previous wars and promised to look into the matter.[57] This would eventually lead to a major arms deal that provided the Kurds with Soviet weaponry captured from Egypt and Syria during the October War.

On May 15, Kurdish officials met with the acting station chief, Callahan's deputy, in Tehran, and asked if Barzani could meet with Kissinger in person to explain the "political opportunities presented by the present conflict." The reason for this request, according to a memo Colby sent to Kissinger on May 23, was that Barzani wanted to make "a personal plea for still another substantial increase in material assistance from the [USG]—both in quantity and offensive capability." In his memo, Colby reported that operational secrecy had been maintained: "The Agency concludes from public statements made by Iraqi officials and from our intelligence reporting that the Iraqis have no concrete evidence that the [USG] has given the Kurds material or financial assistance." As for the arms Barzani required to hold out against Iraqi forces, Colby indicated that the CIA was planning to adopt a new approach, which would go beyond small arms and ammunition to include "procurement of heavier weaponry and ammunition through the Iranians." However, Colby was hesitant about recommending a direct meeting between Barzani and Kissinger: "A personal meeting between you and Barzani or his emissary would significantly increase the security risks by thus raising the level of contact with Barzani" and recommended that Callahan inform Barzani that this was not feasible at this time.[58]

Meanwhile, against the backdrop of the Kurdish War, on May 20, the UN secretary general issued an inconclusive report on the February skirmishes between Iran and Iraq. The only positive outcome was that both had agreed to a ceasefire, withdraw from the border, and create an atmosphere conducive to achieving peace. In addition, they agreed to resume bilateral talks to achieve "a comprehensive settlement" of outstanding issues.[59] These points were enshrined in Security Council resolution 348 on May 28.[60] Significantly, the resolution set the stage for increased contacts between Iran and Iraq and eventually led to the Algiers Accord in March 1975.

However, beginning in late May 1974, the Iraqi regime stunned US policymakers when it indicated that it wanted to improve its relations with the United States. In a series of meetings on May 26–28, foreign ministry officials indicated that Saddam Hussein's wife needed to visit Washington, DC, for medical treatment at Johns Hopkins Medical Centre and wanted American approval. The Iraqis were also pleased with the State Department's apparent refusal to meet with Kurdish representatives visiting the United States. The approach immediately caught the State Department's attention and was forwarded to the White House.[61]

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1974, an opportunity arose where the United States could establish a back-channel communication with the Ba'thist regime. In mid-April, Kissinger attended a luncheon organized by the UN secretary general, Kurd Waldheim. At the time, Iraq's ambassador to the UN, Talib El-Shibib,

was the president of the Security Council for April. A British-educated Ba'thist and diplomat, Shibib happened to sit next to Kissinger at the table, which led to a conversation about Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union and Iran's support for the Kurds. While denying any American involvement with the Kurds, Kissinger somehow planted a seed that developed into a potential back channel to the Iraqi regime.[62]

On June 5, the US ambassador to the UN, John Scali, sent Kissinger a back-channel message indicating that Ambassador Shibib had approached him about establishing a secret high-level dialogue with the United States. According to Scali's message, Shibib said that the Ba'thist regime desired an increase in pragmatic business-like economic relations with American firms and was not interested in blocking or conspiring against Egyptian-Syrian peace moves, despite its hardline public position and propaganda against the peace process. In Shibib's meeting with Scali, he asked for the United States to encourage Iran to ease tensions along the border, cease its support for the Kurds, and reach mutually beneficial settlement of outstanding border issues. Shibib indicated that his government recognized that it had many differences with the United States, but was "very willing" to establish a dialogue to help work through these challenges. Importantly, Shibib cautioned the United States about taking its public rhetoric at face value, explaining that the government's attitude was not "as negative as its propaganda." Responding to Shibib's comments, Scali explained the limits of US influence over the Shah, pointing out that he frequently adopted positions that were adverse to American interests, like its vote at OPEC to raise oil prices to $11.65 in January. For these reasons, Scali cautioned Shibib not to expect Iran to listen obediently every time the United States advised a particular course of action. However, the US position was that an Iraqi rapprochement with Iran was in America's interests and had urged the Shah to negotiate their differences diplomatically. Finally, Scali indicated that he would relay his views to Kissinger, who would likely confine details of this dialogue to himself, the president, and Scali, to "guarantee maximum candor, flexibility and results satisfactory to both side." However, he warned Shibib that any leaks to another government or to the media would be interpreted as a signal that Baghdad was not really interested in talks.[63]

On June 8, Kissinger responded to both the Iraqi request to have Saddam Hussein's wife visit the United States and the Iraqi proposal to establish a secret back channel at the UN. Regarding the first request, Kissinger said that this was an "interesting and encouraging development," since it was the first time since 1967 that Iraq—on an official level—had broached the subject of improving political relations with America. He did, however, warn the USINT's interim chief principal officer, John Gatch, who was manning the outpost while Lowrie was away, to "proceed cautiously" and leave the initiative to the Iraqis, but if raised again tell the Iraqis that it had been "brought to [the] attention of senior levels of [the] Department where it was received with interest." Gatch was to also reiterate Washington's policy of nonintervention with regard to the Kurds and its hope that it could be resolved peacefully.[64] When Gatch conveyed Kissinger's message to the Iraqis on June 22, the foreign ministry said that his message would be

raised with Iraq's new foreign minister, Shathil Taqa, who said, "patience would be required before obstacles [in US-Iraqi relations] could be overcome."[65] Despite this, on August 2, the Iraqi foreign minister opened a new channel to the USINT, giving Lowrie direct access to the highest level of the foreign ministry.[66]

On the secret back channel, Kissinger told Scali to inform Shibib that he had given a full report of the conversation to the highest levels of the US government, and that he welcomed Iraq's "readiness to continue this dialogue which he feels will be useful to the interests of both our countries." More importantly, Kissinger said that he was interested in inviting Shibib to Washington sometime in July to engage in a more substantive conversation on US-Iraqi relations.[67] When Scali passed along Kissinger's message to Shibib on June 10, the Iraqi ambassador said that he "was certain his government would be interested in continuing a confidential high-level dialogue," but he was being reassigned to West Germany. However, he indicated his interest in traveling to Washington if the Iraqi government asked him to act as a secret envoy.[68] Taken together, these two exchanges clearly indicate that in June 1974, the United States and Iraq were making tentative moves toward normalizing relations.

Also that month, the United States learned that the Iraqi regime had mended its relations with the Soviets because it needed arms resupply. On June 19, a group of Kurds met with US officials at the UN, where they discussed Kurdish efforts to have Iraq's "genocide" once again put on the General Assembly's agenda. During the conversation, the Kurds claimed that a Soviet officer, Lt. Col. Alexander Vasilev, was in charge of IAF bombing operations.[69] Meanwhile, the Shah told Callahan that SAVAK had learned that the Soviets were preparing to deliver SCUD missiles to Iraq, while noting that the "partial easing of strains" with Iraq was "more cosmetic than real." This was a reference to Iran's acceptance of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 338, which called on both Iran and Iraq to withdraw their armed forces from the border and resume negotiations. Agreeing, Callahan informed Kissinger that the Shah's "continued heavy support to the Kurds [was a] better indicator of his real attitude than the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and the cessation of direct military confrontation of Iraq and Iranian forces in the border areas." Given this, he was convinced that despite the easing of tensions, both saw each other as enemies.[70]

On June 24, Kissinger wrote to President Nixon again to ask him to authorize the financing of the Kurdish intervention for the 1975 fiscal year. Overall, Kissinger described the operation as a success. Although the Kurds were struggling against an economic blockade, regular air strikes, shelling from heavy artillery, and troop assaults, Kissinger believed that the intervention, when coupled with an increase in Iranian support, had "helped the Kurds to resist Iraqi efforts to subdue them." Given this, Kissinger asked that Nixon approve $8.06 million to maintain the current subsidy at $375,000 per month and for the purchase of additional arms and ammunition for the Kurds. Nixon agreed and the 40 Committee principles signed off on the slight increase in funding the following day.[71]

By late June, the IAF's relentless bombing campaign against civilian targets had begun to take a toll on Kurdish civilians, as women and children fled to Iran

to seek safe haven. On June 26, SAVAK officials told the US consul to Tabriz, Ronald Neumann, that it had established a number of refugee camps along the border for some 25,000 refugees and warned that the numbers would continue to grow.[72] A few days later, the Shah confirmed the establishment of the camps, but said that refugees had grown to 42,000 and would increase as Iraqi planes and armor continued to batter Kurdish villages. Reporting these details to Kissinger, Helms observed that the war resembled an act of genocide:

> The genocidal war which the Ba'th regime is waging against the Kurds has taken a heavy toll of civilian non-combatants. Unable to engage the [Peshmerga] on favorable terms, the Iraqis have resorted to day and night terror-bombing of Kurdish towns and villages, using high-altitude TU-16 and TU-22 bombers and employing heavy bombs and napalm.

Helms said that the Kurds were virtually defenseless, having "no anti-aircraft weapons capable of reaching the Iraqi planes" and the situation was growing worse, as 250,000 Kurds had fled to the north from Baghdad and the Arab south. Given these staggering numbers, the CIA felt that its financial contribution for medical aid should be increased from $10,000 to $30,000 monthly, in addition to the $1 million in refugee relief provided earlier that summer. The Shah had also begun a propaganda campaign to raise awareness of Iraq's "genocidal war," with Helms adding that the CIA station was "discreetly supporting" the Kurds "in the media field." Finally, the Shah raised the prospect of action at the UN, but Helms was pessimistic whether this would work. He argued that the safest option was to continue supplying the Kurds, since the United States had "reached the upper limits of concealable assistance" for the refugees. If the CIA provided any more, Helms observed, it would have to come "through voluntary agencies or some acknowledgeable government assistance program." He advised Kissinger to assign a member of his staff to study the problem "because it [would] predictably be coming [their] way before too long."[73] Helms was correct. On July 24, the Shah forwarded an urgent plea for additional assistance. While the details of Barzani's request remain classified, Kissinger indicated the Shah attached "a warning of his own regarding the grave consequences—for Iran and the entire Gulf—should Kurdish resistance collapse."[74]

At the end of July, Asadollah Alam, the Shah's minister of court, summoned Helms's deputy, Jack Miklos, to the palace to inquire about Iraq's loosening of ties with the Soviet Union and efforts to improve relations with other Arab countries and the West. Alam said that both the Shah and King Hussein wanted to know Kissinger's views on this trend.[75] Having also received the message in Baghdad, on August 2, Lowrie confirmed that Iraq's effort to improve relations with other Arab states was not an isolated event, pointing toward its resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran, West Germany, and Britain, and its awarding of development contracts to Western and American firms. He said that the USSR and Eastern Bloc countries were "disturbed" and "complained bitterly" about Iraq's current policy, concluding, "while there is certainly cause for Iranian and Jordanian suspicion of this regime, [the] thrust of [its] policy toward

non-alignment, pragmatism and concentration on economic development [was] unmistakably clear."[76]

The department agreed with Lowrie's observations, stating that while it understood Iran's suspicions of Iraq, there was some divergence in Iran and Jordan's assessment of the situation and their own. Concluding, the department said that Iraq appeared to be "genuinely interested in improving its relations with other Arab States, and with [the] West as well." To this end, it felt that Iraq's drift toward nonalignment was in America's interests, though the "time span of this development [was] too brief to draw hard and fast conclusions."[77] This response caught Helms off guard and, on August 7, he wrote to Assistant Secretary Sisco to ask if the department's response actually reflected Kissinger's views and whether he wanted them to be passed on to Alam. When Sisco responded the next day, he advised Helms to present Alam with this argument, unless he felt that there was an overriding reason not to do so. He also advised Helms to point out that this was only an early assessment and that the United States recognized that its analysis differed from the Shah's.[78]

On August 9, the Watergate scandal that had plagued and destroyed Richard Nixon's presidency ended with his resignation in disgrace. Replacing Nixon as president was Gerald Ford, who had been appointed the vice president on December 6, 1973, after former vice president Spiro Agnew had been forced to resign amid criminal corruption charges that October. While Nixon's resignation was a devastating blow to America's prestige worldwide, Ford's retention of Kissinger in his dual roles as secretary of state and national security adviser ensured a continuity of the Kurdish intervention. Significantly, it is clear from the outset that Kissinger opted to keep Ford—like Nixon—apprised on a need-to-know basis, consulting with him only when major decisions required presidential approval.[79] Therefore, the Kurdish intervention continued to rest in Kissinger's hands.

In the period between the outbreak of the Kurdish War in March and Nixon's resignation in August, the White House responded by increasing its support for Barzani and cautioning against declaring autonomy. As the fighting escalated, Kissinger ordered the CIA to increase aid further, including the secret provision of humanitarian assistance for refugees inside Iran. While the war forced Iraq to mend relations with the Soviets to secure its resupply, the regime continued to show an interest in improving relations with the West and the United States. This was evident in the establishment of a secret back channel to the Ba'thist regime through the UN. Even though Kissinger saw the benefit of establishing a back channel, it was clear that his priority was to the Kurds. After all, the Kurdish intervention was contributing to America's Middle Eastern strategy by checking Soviet influence in the region and tying down Iraq's military. The Israelis had also benefited considerably from the Kurdish intervention, having secured its disengagement from Syria. Unfortunately, the Shah's long-standing desire to gain control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway had gone unfulfilled. The imbalance in the benefits gained from the Kurdish intervention would eventually lead the Shah to escalate the war to unprecedented levels in the fall of 1974 as he pressed the Iraqi regime harder to make concessions.

The Israeli Arms Deal

The period between Nixon's resignation in August 1974 and the end of the year saw a major escalation of the Kurdish War. As Iraqi forces slowly moved into the mountains, Iranian support for the Kurds became overt, culminating in Iran shooting down of two Iraqi jets in December. Meanwhile, Kissinger worked closely with Israel and Iran to arrange for the Kurds a large shipment of weapons, including antiaircraft and antitank missiles. The introduction of these weapons had a considerable impact on the fighting. However, Iraq's improved tactics—thanks to Soviet military advisers—meant Kurdish victories became less and less frequent and by the end of the year their situation was dire. In the meantime, against the backdrop of the escalating war, Iran and Iraq continued to meet periodically—as required by the UN—to seek ways to resolve outstanding disputes between the two countries. This, in turn, would eventually provide an avenue for a future rapprochement, and the abandonment of the Kurds.

The war escalated sharply on August 6, when Iraq launched a major offensive against the Kurds.[80] It was immediately apparent to US officials that the Iraqis had changed tactics. Instead of all-out assaults, the Iraqis moved cautiously, building protected, company size fortifications every half mile or so, but the Kurds had also adopted new tactics too. Recognizing that they were incapable of holding fixed positions, the Kurds used delaying actions. They hoped that if they could "bleed the Iraqis at [a] minimum rate of 30 killed per day," they would create a situation so intolerable that it could force either a change of government policy or the government itself. By late August, the Iraqis managed to cut off a major supply line from Iran and captured a number of key Kurdish strongholds, including the Rawanduz gorge, leading to Barzani's headquarters.[81] Fearing a Kurdish defeat, the Iranians responded to Iraq's offensive by initiating clashes along the border further to the south and authorizing its forces "to return fire and shoot to kill instead of firing warning shots when border raids [occurred]."[82] Over the next week, tensions escalated further, with Iraq killing two Iranian children during a bombing raid, artillery exchanges, and finally a five-hour pitched battle on August 23.[83] Relations were clearly deteriorating.

In this context, Barzani requested another increase in American assistance. After reviewing Barzani's request, Scowcroft wrote to Helms on August 22 to warn that little more could be done to assist the Kurds without disclosing the US operation. "On the basis of your cable and the Barzani request, we reassessed the whole picture again and came to the same conclusion. We are about at the limit and to go farther would risk all that has been done so far." However, he indicated the United States had arranged for the delivery of AK-47s and had made $1 million available for the procurement of antitank weapons, which the CIA was helping the Iranians purchase in Europe. The problem was that the antiaircraft weaponry Barzani needed "to meet the threat of high-flying bomber aircraft simply [was] just too big . . . , too complicated and too expensive to pursue." It seemed that all the Ford administration could do was urge humanitarian aid groups to help Iran with the refugee problem and work on ways to generate interest in the plight of the Kurds among American journalists.[84] While the United States could

not increase its direct funding for the Kurds, it was making clear efforts to assist the Kurds in the war.

Two days later, the Shah sent Kissinger a message inquiring whether he should use Iranian troops to help the Kurds.[85] In fact, Iranian units dressed in Kurdish clothing had been operating inside Iraq since early July.[86] Although the CIA was opposed to this, Kissinger actually favored the option, but was cautious about saying this "on record" because of "all the leaks."[87] As a result, Kissinger cabled the Shah and said, "this must be basically an Iranian decision [and the US would] understand whatever they [decided] to do."[88] The Shah took this as a sign of Kissinger's approval and the next day ordered his military to send into Iraq company-sized mortar units on 48-hour missions to help the Kurds. He also ordered a battalion of US-supplied 175-mm artillery to be stationed on the Iranian side of the border, which began shelling Iraqi positions around Qala Dizeh and Ranya.[89] Iran was clearly escalating its involvement in the Kurdish War.

Kissinger's cable to the Shah on August 24 also addressed Israel's interest in providing the Kurds with antitank missiles.[90] The Israelis had proposed transferring the Kurds a large cache of Soviet-made antitank missiles that they had captured from Egypt and Syria during the October War and wanted the United States to reimburse them with American-made antitank missiles. On August 25, Helms had informed Kissinger that he had raised the matter with the SAVAK chief, General Nassiri, who agreed that it was the best option. However, Helms was cautious about involving the United States in the matter, which he said was unnecessary because the Israelis had already established a working logistics pipeline to the Kurds and were about in the process of delivering 300 tons of ordnance.[91]

Despite Helms's warning, Kissinger wanted to go ahead with the arms transfer and took the matter to President Ford. According to Kissinger's memoir, when Kissinger met with Ford on August 26, he was given carte blanche to pursue the matter as he saw fit.[92] According to a transcript of the conversation, Kissinger explained in general terms the Kurdish intervention up to that point, explaining that the Kurds had been instrumental in diverting Iraq's attention from the Syrian front. "If Iraq weren't tied down [with the Kurds, it] could put more [troops] into Syria" and spoil the peace process. However, by this point, the Kurds were in a fight for their very existence, and without more assistance they were in danger of collapse. After a short discussion on whether this would affect active units, Ford told Kissinger to go ahead with the Israeli arms deal.[93] Later that day, Kissinger cabled Helms to inform him of Ford's approval of the Israeli proposal.[94]

Meanwhile, on August 26, Lowrie traveled to the Iraqi foreign ministry, where he met with Taqa to discuss the status of US-Iraqi relations and the opening of a secret back channel. From the outset, it was clear that Taqa was uncomfortable with the idea of a back channel, describing Ambassador Shibib's meeting with Kissinger at the UN in April as an accident. The problem was that the United States and Iraq had "deep differences" on Middle East affairs, especially on Israel, and that "these would have to be narrowed before improvement in bilateral relations could take place." Another problem was America's support for Iran, which had shown undisguised support for the Kurdish rebels fighting Iraqi forces in

the north. On a personal level, Taqa felt that a direct meeting with Kissinger was a bit "premature," because it would likely be "full of bitterness and sharp exchanges." However, on bilateral US-Iraqi relations, the regime's awarding of contracts to US firms or its request that Saddam's wife visit the United States for medical treatment showed that bilateral relations were already improving. In assessing the conversation, Lowrie pointed out that relations with the United States had become a subject of intraparty conflict and that he believed Taqa's sensitivity was more reflective of his concern that others in the regime might accuse him of being "pro-American" as opposed to his own views on the matter. Nevertheless, this conversation was a major development, as Lowrie had just established a direct line of communication to one of the highest-ranking officials in the Iraqi government.[95]

For much of August, Iranian and Iraqi diplomats met in Istanbul as required by the UN to resolve outstanding bilateral issues. On August 31, Iran and Iraq issued a joint communiqué stating that talks would continue at the foreign minister level during the upcoming General Assembly in October. According to Lowrie, during the talks, the Iraqis had "swallowed some of their pride" and appeared determined to reach an agreement, but the Iranians remained belligerent.[96] On September 6, Iran complained to the Security Council that four Iraqi aircraft had crossed its border and were forced back with antiaircraft fire. According to the Iranian complaint, two Iraqi aircraft dropped bombs on an Iranian village, killing 15 inhabitants (9 of whom were children). The Iranians said that they had "pieces of these bombs" showing foreign markings.[97] Therefore, just as political progress was being made, the Kurdish War continued to undermine Iran-Iraq relations.

However, the Iran-Iraq negotiations occurred in the backdrop of a major escalation of the war. On September 4, Neumann cabled the State Department from Tabriz to warn that Iraq's "long heralded" military campaign against the Kurds had begun. To take on the Kurds, the Iraqis deployed six regular divisions, two specialized divisions (one trained in mountain warfare), and several independent battalions. Significantly, Neumann noted, the Iraqi troops were far better equipped than in previous wars, "making full use of Soviet supplied aircraft, mostly older MIGs and T–22 bombers, and new T–55 tanks." Explaining Iraq's apparent strategy, Neumann observed:

> The Iraqi strategy apparently is to drive a wedge from the plains along a route roughly parallel to the Iranian border until they reach the Turkish border and then fortify this line to prevent the inflow of Iranian supplies and the outflow of Kurdish civilians.[98]

Up to this point, Iraq's strategies to defeat the Kurds had largely failed. From March to July, Iraq had imposed an economic blockade against the Kurdish areas, hoping that this would disrupt the civilian population and turn them against Barzani. In fact, the opposite happened; the Kurdish people rallied to Barzani and internal differences were overcome. From mid-July to the end of August, the Iraqis managed to cross a narrow line of mountains to occupy Qala

Diza and cut off an Iranian supply line to Sardasht, next to the Iranian border, while crossing two major mountain ranges to secure the treacherous Gali Ali Beg pass and occupy the town Rawanduz, near which the infamous Battle of Mount Handren took place in 1966. This put Iraqi forces within 70 kilometers from Barzani's headquarters at Haji Omran.[99] It was also evident that the Iraqis had adopted new tactics. According to Neumann, the Iraqi army only attacked using large units, it rarely maintained an attack in the face of heavy fire, even when it considerably outnumbered the Kurds, and tended to rely on air and artillery strikes before renewing the attack. On the Kurdish side, the problem was that they lacked antitank and antiaircraft weapons. Nevertheless, up to this point, the Kurdish strategy had been to fight "delaying actions while maintaining a steady stream of attacks in the rear of the main battle areas and hoping to bleed the Iraqi Army to a level which will be intolerable and will eventually force either a change of policy or of the government."[100] Neumann's account showed that by the end of the summer of 1974 the Iraqi offensive had been relatively successful at achieving its objectives, while the Kurds were in desperate need of advanced weaponry.

As fighting escalated in late August and early September, the CIA passed Kissinger a message from the Shah, asking his advice on whether the Kurds should attack IPC facilities near the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, in northern Iraq. Barzani had requested that he be allowed to use 240 Katyusha rockets to bombard the Iraqi oil installations, which he believed could help starve the regime of much-needed oil revenue and increase pressure on it to seek accommodation. When Kissinger responded to the Shah's inquiry on September 18, he said that he "strongly [believed] that a Kurdish attack on the Kirkuk oil installations would be a serious mistake." The White House was doubtful that an attack would convince the Iraqi regime to ease off its offensive against Kurdish positions; in fact, the opposite happened. A Kurdish attack "could generate even stronger and more concentrated attacks designed to break the Kurdish resistance quickly if at all possible." At the same time, Iran's known support for the Kurds could provoke Iraq to retaliate against Iran's major oil production facilities in Abadan, which sat entirely exposed across the Shatt al-Arab waterway to the south. In view of these factors, Kissinger could not endorse such an action.[101] In his memoir, Kissinger offered two additional reasons for rejecting Barzani's proposal: (1) he was worried that an attack on Iraqi oil facilities could "compound the already grave energy crisis by triggering a cycle of violence against Middle East oil installations"; and (2) he feared this would strengthen the hand of opponents of the Kurdish intervention within the US government, "by allowing them to claim that the Kurds must be possessing sufficient resources to defend their redoubt, if they were pressing for additional weapons so that they could conduct a major offensive."[102]

In early October, Iran and Iraq's foreign ministers, Abbas Ali Khalatbari and Shathil Taqa, respectively, met in New York City to build upon the Istanbul talks. According to Khalatbari, talks were "tough, and certainly not smooth," because "neither side [could] afford to make concessions." Nevertheless, progress appeared to have been made.[103] Unfortunately, tragedy struck on October 20 when Taqa died unexpectedly of a heart attack while in Rabat, Morocco, during a stopover on his way home. Taqa's death had a negative impact on US-Iraqi

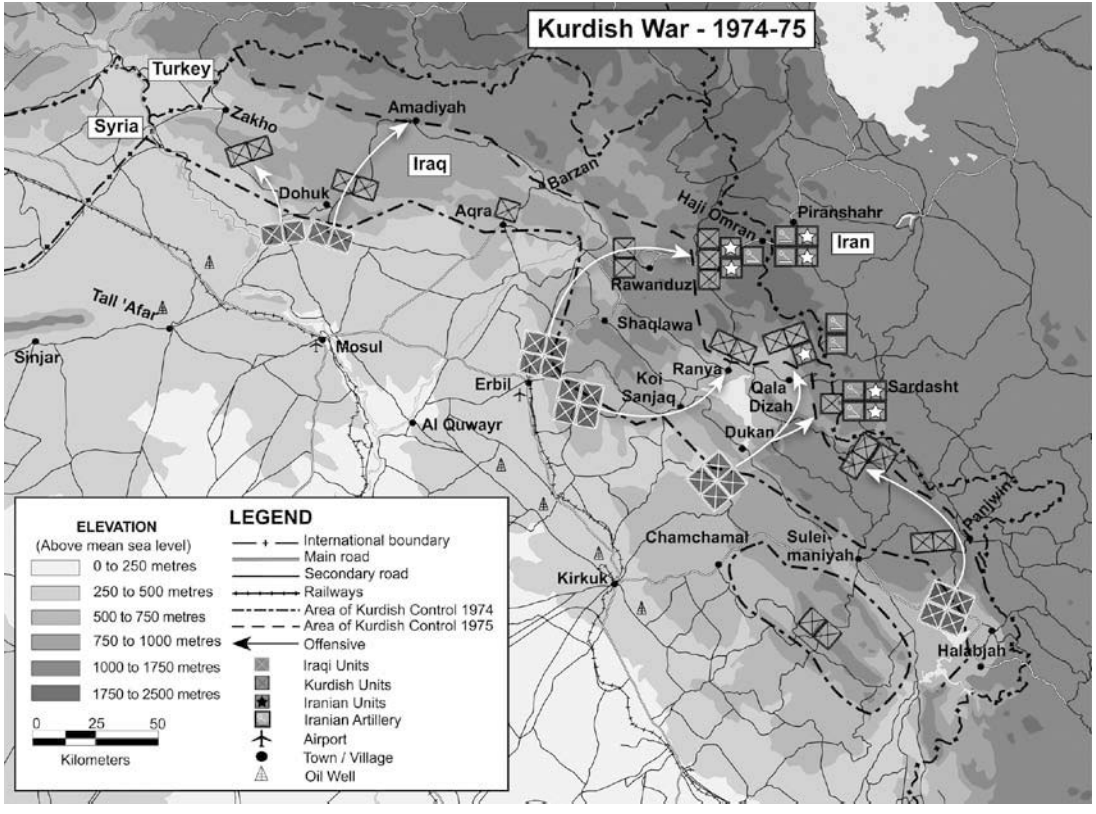
relations, because he had increased USINT's access to the foreign ministry and had played a role in the establishment of a back channel to the Iraqi government. With his death, Lowrie concluded, "this link has now been cut."[104]

The Winter War

In the winter of 1974–75, the Kurdish War escalated to an unprecedented level. On October 31, Scowcroft sent Kissinger a memo describing a recent Kurdish approach to the Shah, which included a letter from Bargain. According to the memo, Barzani was concerned about the impending winter and the lives of 400,000 refugees in northern Iraq and another 100,000 in Iran and wanted the United States to intercede with the Turkish government to allow noncombatants to take refuge across the border or be allowed to use Turkey as transit to Iran. In addition, both Barzani and the Shah wanted the United States to help influence American and international relief organizations to help Iran care for the Kurdish victims of the "genocidal Iraqi campaign." Unfortunately, as Scowcroft pointed out, it was a long-standing US policy not to interfere with the independence of aid organizations.[105]

Meanwhile, in late October, the Israelis concluded a study on what arms they felt the Kurds needed to defend themselves against the Iraqis. This list emphasized a need for antitank and antiaircraft weapons, but also millions of rounds for AK-47s and Brno rifles, mortars, and heavy artillery. To provide this, the Israelis needed roughly $24 million to cover the cost of procurement.[106] The CIA was uncomfortable with the proposed Israeli arms deal. On November 2, Colby sent Kissinger a memo that cautioned, "against increasing the level of [US] support to Barzani because a further increase in aid would risk exposure of this sensitive operation." Since 1972, the United States had provided the Kurds with nearly $20 million in assistance, including 1,250 tons of ordnance. Given this, he felt that Iran was perfectly able to provide the Kurds with the assistance they needed. The memo pointed out that Iraq's assaults had forced Barzani to concentrate his forces near the Iranian border to protect his headquarters. Colby warned that if Barzani lost this area, many of his supporters would eventually desert him and he would be forced to resort to guerrilla tactics.[107] However, in his memoir, Kissinger rejected Colby's argument, "as if secrecy were more important than the plight of the Kurds," and questioned the logic of leaving support up to the Shah. He feared that Iran would overextend itself if it provided the Kurds with more equipment from its own stocks, arguing, "Unless [the US] supplied replacement weapons [the Shah] would be weakening his own armed forces. But if we did so, we would find ourselves in a hopeless congressional battle."[108] Kissinger was, therefore, determined to help the Kurds in a way that would not weaken Iran or Israel's defenses. He told the Israelis that he would raise the matter with the Shah and report back.[109]

In early November, Kissinger traveled to Tehran, where he met again with the Shah. While the primary purpose for the meeting was to find ways in which Iran could help the Ford administration alleviate the economic pressures the oil crisis



MAP 8.1 Kurdish War: 1974–75.[110]

had imposed on the American economy, the issue of Iraq and the Kurds came up. According to Kissinger's report of the conversation to President Ford, the Shah said that even if the Iraqis destroyed the Kurds, Iranian forces would still tie them down along the border, which he thought the Iraqis would prefer over facing the Israelis on the Syrian front. However, the Shah was worried about the 100,000 refugees that had flooded into northwestern Iran and appeared anxious to secure assistance from international refugee organizations to help with the problem. In the end, Kissinger and the Shah agreed to "green light" the Israeli arms transfer.[111]

A few days after Kissinger's visit to Tehran, he met with the new Israeli prime minister, Yitzak Rabin, who said that the Kurds had "destroyed several Iraqi tanks" thanks to the recently received Sagger (AT-3) and Strela missiles (SA-7).[112] However, the Israelis were frustrated about delays in reimbursement for the cost of procuring these missiles. When the issue was raised with Kissinger on November 16, he told Israel's ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, and his deputy, Mordechai Shalev, that the Shah had approved the arms deal, but some items still had to be procured in Europe and paying for these items had become a problem. For instance, the Israelis said that they needed cash to pay for the weapons, whereas Kissinger preferred to just transfer replacement equipment. To Kissinger, the problem was that coming up with $20 million for a secret arms deal would attract unwanted attention. Nevertheless, Kissinger assured them that he would find a way to pay and asked the Israelis to begin transferring the weapons to the Kurds.[113]

By mid-November, Iran's support for the Kurds had reached an unprecedented level. According to an INR analysis, because of Iran's support for the Kurds, tensions with Iraq had reached a point where there was "a real possibility of major clashes." At this point, Iran had deployed several units inside Iraq, including two artillery battalions (one with Soviet-made 130-mm and one with US-made 155-mm and 8-inch artillery), several mortar platoons, several air defense batteries, and two British-made Rapier surface-to-air missile units. Furthermore, since October 25, Iranian units had been permitted to fight inside Iraq for up to 10 days at a time. Complicating matters, on November 12, an Iranian 23-mm air defense battery stationed inside Iraq shot down a Sukhoi SU-7 fighter-bomber.[114] On November 12, the Shah told Callahan that Iranian artillery support was "very effective" and the Kurds were "no longer withdrawing but were fighting tenaciously." He said that his support would continue, but the Iraqi army had shifted to tactics and appeared to be determined to hold ground in the coming winter. Referring to Barzani's recent appeal, Callahan told the Shah that Kissinger had received a letter and was following up on it, but added that the CIA "had exhausted its budget for this operation for this fiscal year." When Callahan reported the conversation to Kissinger, he added, "the Iraqis and Soviets surely know the Iranians have been providing this fire support but neither have said anything yet." Clearly, Iraq's determination to hold its lines during the winter, the Shah's increasing frustration with the Kurds' fighting ability, and the CIA's growing opposition raised questions about the operation's viability.[115]

Meanwhile, on November 11, the Ba'th Party announced a major cabinet shuffle, sacking four ministers and naming eight new ones. According to Lowrie, "Saddam Hussein has consolidated his control of [the] state machinery and strengthened [the] internal cohesion of regime by putting Ba'thists loyal to him in key posts and expelling or downgrading non-Ba'thists." This suggested that Saddam had no intention of sharing power with any other political parties and had consolidated power in his own hands. Lowrie also felt that the cabinet shuffle significantly improved the regime's overall competence, particularly the appointment of Sa'dun Hammadi as the foreign minister. "On balance," Lowrie concluded, these changes seemed "to augur well for political stability and [the] continuation of [Iraq's] trend toward more non-aligned and realistic policies."[116] More importantly, Saddam's consolidation of power in November 1974 came at a time when the Kurdish War was going terribly. Having replaced the cabinet with loyalists, Saddam was now able to approach the Kurdish War as he saw fit.

By December, the Iraqi offensive against the Kurds had "sputtered, flared and finally [went] out" with the onset of winter. While Barzani's headquarters at Haji Omran and the main Iranian supply line remained secure, the Iranians had built a new supply road to the Iraqi border and established a second supply line to Kurdish forces fighting near Qala Diza. Thanks to Iranian artillery fire and the onset of winter, the Kurds had also forced Iraqi units to withdraw to the valleys. However, the winter of 1974–75 was quite mild and so Iraqi aircraft were able to continue pounding Kurdish positions. The most serious fighting, according to Neumann, was in the mountains near Rawanduz, where "British radar technicians…[had] observed regular and heavy Iraqi aircraft activity…for several weeks." Fortunately, Iranian assistance and the Barzani's recent acquisition of antitank and antiaircraft weapons had prevented further Iraqi advances.[117]

Meanwhile, just as Iranian, Israeli, and American assistance was having a clear impact on the war, Helms became alarmed that the Shah was reconsidering his support for the Kurdish intervention. For instance, in a meeting on December 4, the Shah mused aloud, "I wonder why the Iraqis do not simply settle with us" on the Shatt al-Arab? "After all, the issues are minor as far as they are concerned." Later, Helms learned that King Hussein had been acting as a secret intermediary between the Iranians and Iraqis. When Helms raised this matter with Alam on December 10, he explained that the Shah had received a message from King Hussein about an Iraqi approach, but would not elaborate further. When Helms reported his concerns to Kissinger, he worried that anything short of an Iraqi agreement on the Shatt al-Arab will get nowhere with Iran. To achieve this, the Shah was convinced that a different regime would need to be in power in Iraq, which was why he was supporting the Kurds. However, if Iraq was willing to settle on the waterway, the Shah might be tempted to cut a deal because the war was becoming increasingly expensive and hazardous.[118]

Not long after King Hussein's démarche, the Shah appeared to test Iraq's resolve and willingness to compromise by sharply escalating the Kurdish War. Over the course of December 14 and 15, Iranian forces stationed inside Iraq shot down two Iraqi TU-16 Badgers over Iraqi Kurdistan. When Iraq accused Iran of this, the Iranians made no attempt to conceal their responsibility, claiming that the Iraqi

jets had been hit over Iranian airspace and had "limped back to Iraq," where they crashed.[119] Outraged, the Iraqis tried to drag the United States into the controversy, claiming that the jets were shot down by American-made Hawk missiles, while warning Iran and its backers that they will "bear the consequences of their acts."[120] Upon learning of Iraq's accusation, Helms cabled Washington to point out that Hawk missiles had not yet arrived in Iran.[121] According to an INR report, at the time that Iran shot down the two Iraqi jets, there was "no evidence of Iranian deployment of Hawk missiles in or near Iraq," though there was ample evidence that the missiles were British-made Rapiers.[122] Just after the shooting down of the Iraqi planes, Alam recalled discussing the matter with the British ambassador to Iran, Sir Anthony Parsons, who was "over the moon about the success scored by British-made Rapier missiles."[123] Nevertheless, through this provocative act, the Shah had sent Iraq a clear signal that Iran was the dominant regional power and the only way to avoid further escalation was to concede the Shatt al-Arab.

Iran's actions prompted Lowrie to draft a position paper on December 23 that called on the State Department to make the "strongest possible démarche" to the Shah to end the escalating Iran-Iraq conflict. Lowrie argued that this was not only in Iran's interests but the entire region. Viewed from Baghdad, he felt that the Kurds were "fighting a hopeless battle" and that "no interested party [wanted] to see them succeed." Indeed, "even the Iranians [said] they [would] not give them enough assistance to take [the] offensive. Their sole hope… [appeared] to be [the] overthrow of [the] Baghdad regime." Worse yet, Lowrie indicated that the British ambassador to Iraq, Sir John Graham, had told him that the Shah planned to escalate the war in the spring by increasing his arms supply to Barzani. "If this represents [the] Shah's thinking," Lowrie warned, "then we are almost certainly heading for [a] large scale regional conflict." In light of this, Lowrie urged the State Department to approach the Shah and urge him to "test the seriousness of Iraqi desires for rapprochement rather than inflexibly maintaining that [the] Baath regime is incorrigibly hostile to it."[124]

American officials in Tehran met Lowrie's recommendations with open hostility. On December 30, Jack Miklos, Helms's deputy, cabled Washington to argue that the Shah saw the Iraqi regime as a "bunch of thugs and murderers," who were "implacably hostile to [Iran]," was unconvinced of its efforts to improve relations with the West, and did not think that the Kurds were fighting "a hopeless battle." Miklos also dismissed Lowrie's suggestion that the Iran-Iraq conflict was heading toward a regional war, concluding:

> Baghdad must realize that if it launched a direct overt attack on Iran, the Soviets, with high stakes in Iran as well as in Iraq, would likely stand aside and Iran could inflict serious damage on Iraq in retaliation. As far as Iran is concerned, it has evidenced no desire to go beyond ensuring Kurdish survivability and frustrating Baghdad's attempts to crush the Kurds once and for all.

In fact, Miklos saw great value in Iran's support for the Kurds, pointing out that it tied down 80 percent of Iraq's military, which could not be used against Israel, Kuwait, or the Gulf. Therefore, Miklos argued, Lowrie's suggestion to

ask the Shah to cut its ties with the Kurds was "inadvisable because it would be unheeded, unwise because the premise on which it is proposed is unsound (or at least unconvincing), and that in fact it would not serve overall US interests." Once again, the differences between US officials in Tehran and Baghdad could not have been further apart.[125]

In late December and again in early January, the Israelis raised the question of the arms transfer to the Kurds. On December 23, Ambassador Dinitz told Kissinger of difficulty "getting [their] agreed program translated into effect." He said that the cost of the missiles had gone up to $28 million and the NSC staff had not found a way to finalize the deal. Dinitz was worried that if the arms were not delivered before the spring melt, the Kurds would have difficulty holding off the Iraqis' offensive. Recognizing this, Kissinger promised Dinitz that he would "find a way" to get the arms to the Kurds.[126] However, a few weeks later, the Israelis raised the matter again. On January 16, 1975, Yigal Allon, Israel's deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, emphasized to Kissinger the need to speed up the transfer. For the first time ever, the Iraqis had managed to hold their positions in the mountains over the course of the winter and were well positioned to launch a major offensive against the Kurds. Kissinger said, "there is no disagreement about it. We're giving you the weapons." The problem was a series of bureaucratic obstacles. To overcome this, Kissinger suggested that the United States would "add $28 million" to Israel's next major arms purchase. Significantly, Allon raised concerns about the Shah's intentions, commenting that while he was "doing more than his share," the Shah appeared to be playing "his own game." In the end, Allon gave Kissinger an ominous warning, "to abandon the Kurds [would be] a crime."[127]

By the start of 1975, it was clear that the Americans, Israelis, and Iranians were moving forward with a large arms deal for the Kurds. In the past, the Kurds had always managed to use the winter to push back Iraqi forces from their hard-fought gains, but this time around, the situation was entirely different. Soviet influence on Iraq's tactics had a strong impact on the army's ability to take and hold positions, leading the Iranian military to take on a more overt role in the conflict. However, Saddam Hussein's consolidation of power and King Hussein's unexpected role as an intermediary between Iran and Iraq raised the possibility of a rapprochement. To test Iraq's resolve, the Shah ordered his forces to shoot down two Iraqi jets in December. Despite this, there were growing signs that the Shah was reconsidering his position on the Kurds, which was evident in Helms's observations and Yigal Allon's ominous warning to Kissinger. With the war reaching a boiling point, both the Shah and the Iraqi regime faced a decision: they could continue to escalate the war or decide to negotiate with one another. For years, the Shah had made known to Baghdad that his support for the Kurds was designed to force Iraq to concede partial sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab, but the Iraqis had always rejected this. In short, the Shah had escalated the Kurdish War to such a level that the Iraqi regime had to choose between giving up partial sovereignty over the waterway or losing the north of the country. Even so, Kissinger's commitment to the Kurdish intervention made clear that Cold War considerations still dominated US thinking.

The Sell Out

Throughout early 1975, secret negotiations took place between Iran and Iraq that culminated in the Algiers Accord in early March and would cut off all American support for the Kurds. It is clear that Kissinger was against this decision, believing that the Ba'thist regime in Iraq was untrustworthy and the border concession offered was minimal compared to the strategic value gained from supporting the Kurds. Kissinger knew that Iran's development of its Gulf ports, particularly its oil export terminal on Kharg Island, meant that the Shatt al-Arab waterway was not vital for the exportation of Iranian oil. He also felt that the deal would empower a regime with close links to the Soviets and help Iraqi communists consolidate power. In short, he believed that a short-term deal to secure an insignificant waterway would undermine America's Cold War strategy in both the Gulf and the wider Middle East region.

By mid-January, US officials realized that Iraqi policy was shifting. With an agreement drawing near, Hammadi toured the region from January 11 to 13 to urge other Arab states to pressure Iran into accepting a deal.[128] A few days later, on January 15, Lowrie learned that President al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein had accepted an invitation from King Hussein to visit Jordan.[129] The next day, when Iran and Iraq's foreign ministers met in Istanbul for further talks, the Iraqis complained that the Kurds would have been defeated if not for Iran's support.[130] Although the Istanbul talks were again fruitless, the two sides agreed in principle to a basic outline of an agreement.[131] However, their terms were very different. Iran wanted Iraq to accept its demands on the Shatt al-Arab before it would discuss the Kurds, while the Iraqis wanted the opposite. In short, all that needed to happen at this stage was one of the parties to budge.[132]

On January 22, Barzani sent Kissinger a long letter analyzing the political and military situation in Kurdistan, asking for increased military support and whether he could send an emissary to Washington to give "a personal and more detailed presentation" of the issues he outlined. Although this last passage was somewhat vague, the CIA and NSC staff believed that Barzani wanted to visit Washington personally.[133] On February 5, Kissinger's special assistant, Peter Rodman, forwarded him Barzani's letter along with a memo outlining the CIA's concerns about the implication of the Kurdish request to send a delegate to Washington, stating:

> Colby advises against a visit (a) because its main purpose would be to importune you for more aid, which we can't afford, and (b) because of the security risks. A visit by Barzani could not possibly be done securely; Colby does feel that a visit by an emissary, on the other hand, could be kept secret, at least at this end.

Even so, while Rodman felt that this kind of visit would "serve no purpose except as a handholder," Barzani's "valiant and important effort" necessitated a positive response, like informing him of the secret Israeli arms deal.[134] Once again, in the face of Colby's opposition, the White House continued to view the Kurds as an important asset.

However, on February 1, Lowrie cabled the State Department to advise that the likelihood of an Iran-Iraq rapprochement was growing. In particular, Lowrie noted that Egyptian, Jordanian, and French efforts to convince the Shah that the Iraqi regime was "pragmatic, nationalistic, determined to be non-aligned and that [its] radical rhetoric [was] becoming form without substance." In his cable, Lowrie reported a conversation with the Egyptian ambassador to Iraq, Abd al-Moneim al-Naggar, who said that he was optimistic about an Iran-Iraq rapprochement. He indicated that during the Shah's recent visit to Cairo from January 8 to 12,[135] Sadat gave the Shah an "objective analysis" of Ba'thist regime, which al-Naggar did not believe he had ever heard before because all "those around him…fear [expressing] views [that] contradict those [that] he has previously expressed." According to al-Naggar, the Shah was intrigued, but still wondered if the Iraqi regime was actually nationalist or if it was just a "tool of Soviets." To this, Sadat said that he was convinced that the Iraqis were nationalists. He pointed out and was interested in acting as a "go-between" to help arrange a direct meeting between the Shah and Iraq's leadership. In commenting on his conversation with al-Naggar, Lowrie expressed his agreement with the Egyptian analysis. He pointed out that during the past two years, the Iraqis had taken a wide range of actions—Iraq's resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran, France, and the United Kingdom; its public rapprochement with conservative Arab leaders; its extensive economic deals with the United States, West Europeans, and Japan; its recent signing of a contract to build two Sheraton hotels in Baghdad; and its purchase of eight additional Boeing aircraft—all of which suggested that Iraq was emerging from its isolation and moving away from the Soviets.[136]

Meanwhile, by the start of February, it had become clear that the anticipated Kurdish winter counteroffensive had failed to materialize. The problem was that the past winter had been unusually mild, allowing the Iraqi military to continually harass Kurdish positions.[137] The Kurds' failure to dislodge the Iraqi army during the winter of 1974–75 proved to be a decisive factor in the war's outcome. According to Neumann:

> The Kurds, for all their skill as defensive fighters, showed no appetite for the kind of attacks necessary to storm through wire and machine guns to take fortified positions, even when cloud cover prevented the Iraqi air force from operating. The result was that as the winter was drawing to a close the Kurds had taken back very little if anything and were going to have to start fighting from positions into which they had been pushed the previous fall.[138]

This meant that the Kurds would be even more dependent on Iranian military assistance and would have a major impact on the Shah's assessment of the war.[139]

On February 18, the Shah blindsided Kissinger during a meeting in Geneva when he said that he was considering a deal with the Iraqis to abandon the Kurds for a concession on the Shatt al-Arab. The Shah told Kissinger that the Kurds had "no guts left" and that he was worried that a Kurdish defeat could lead to an "autonomous Kurdish state which would be under the dominance of a Communist Iraqi central government." He was also concerned that Iraq could

stimulate incidents along the Iran-Iraq border that could lead to an internationalization of the Kurdish War and be brought before the Security Council, which he wanted to avoid. According to Kissinger's report of the meeting to Ford, the Shah seemed "tempted to try to move in the direction of some understanding with Iraq regarding the Kurds, but [was] understandably skeptical that [a deal was] possible." Therefore, the Shah was considering meeting with Saddam Hussein at an upcoming meeting of the OPEC held in Algiers in March to sound out the Iraqi position.[140] According to Kissinger's memoir, he responded negatively to this proposal, reminding the Shah of his "own repeated warnings that the collapse of the Kurds would destabilize the entire area." He also said:

> Any assurances by Saddam regarding the governance of the Kurdish area . . . would be worthless. And since the Soviets would view Iran's retreat as symptomatic of the growing weakness of the West, their adventurism was likely to increase even on that front.

Kissinger clearly felt that an agreement with Iraq was a "bad idea—particularly the idea that he believed the [Iraqi regime's] assurances that no Communist would be put in [charge of the autonomous Kurdish zone]." When the conversation ended, the Shah gave Kissinger assurances that he would continue to support the Kurds for the time being. A few days later, Kissinger warned the Israelis that the Shah was "afraid the Kurds have had it. He may begin a negotiation with the Iraqis if they meet at OPEC, in exchange for a veto over whom they put in if Barzani gets driven out." Clearly, Kissinger was worried about losing his "Kurdish card."[141]

With the Shah's assurances, on February 20, Kissinger responded to Barzani's message from January. In an unusually personal letter, Kissinger's concern for the Kurds was clearly evident:

> I want you to know of our admiration for you and your people and for the valiant effort you are making. The difficulties you have faced are formidable. I very much appreciated reading your assessment of the military and political situation. You can be assured that your messages receive the most serious attention at the highest levels of the United States Government because of the importance we attach to them.

On the proposed visit, Kissinger suggested instead that Barzani send an emissary to Washington in secret:

> I am convinced that secrecy has been of paramount importance in maintaining our ability to do what we have done; it is only for this reason—plus our concern for your personal safety—that I hesitate to suggest a personal meeting here with you.

The fact that Kissinger responded positively to Barzani's request to send an emissary suggested his belief that the Shah had been dissuaded from dropping the Kurds. This message was passed to Barzani on February 22.[142]

It is also clear that Barzani had no knowledge of the Shah's intentions. In late February, he sent the Shah a message asking for more sophisticated weaponry

and increased Iranian military support. According to the Shah, Barzani indicated to the Shah that while it was possible for the Peshmerga to recapture many enemy positions, it would come at a cost of major casualties. He also warned that it would be virtually impossible for the Kurds to hold those positions, because it would expose them to fire from Iraq's heavy long-range artillery and air force, which would force them to fall back.[143] He also complained that "it was becoming impossible…to carry on fighting under [the] existing circumstances" and asked to declare independence, as Cyprus had recently. Given the Shah's growing uncertainty, Barzani's unwillingness to risk his troops and launch a major, when coupled with his request for increased aid and permission to declare independence, led the Shah to begin questioning how he could increase his military commitment to the Kurds without the conflict turning into a regional war with Iraq.[144]

Barzani's request appeared to have pushed the Shah toward a breaking point. However, it was a meeting the Shah had on March 2 with Ashraf Marwan, a key adviser of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abd al-Nasser's son-in-law, which sealed the Kurds' fate. According to US officials in Tehran, during the meeting:

> Marwan repeated the message that [he] had received through others, i.e. that Saddam Hussein was ready to pull Iraq out of the Soviet orbit if Iran would remove the military pressure which was forcing Iraq into the arms of the Soviets. Marwan expressed the view that it was almost certain that Saddam would pull away from the Soviets as promised.

Therefore, the Kurds' failure to launch a winter counteroffensive, Barzani's demand for better weapons, and his desire to declare independence, when coupled with high-level assurances of Saddam's desire to seek a compromise, led the Shah to decide to cut a deal with the Iraqis and abandon the Kurds.[145]

The next day, the Shah flew to Algiers, Algeria, for the OPEC meeting. Over the course of two days of intensive negotiations with Saddam Hussein, he would determine the fate of the Kurds. The Shah described the negotiations in a message to Kissinger on March 10:

> Regarding the Kurds, I got two promises from Saddam: the first, that Barzani and his people would have one week to decide whether they wanted to stay in Iraq or withdraw without bloodshed into Iran where they would find a haven and a decent life. They will be given until the end of the month [on the Iranian calendar March 20 is the end of the month] for their withdrawal…The second promise was that the security services of the two countries would work together, briefing each other on which Kurds were good and which were bad (read communist). This will, I hope, prevent the establishment of a communist Kurdish community in Barzani's territory.[146]

As a show of good faith, on March 5, the Shah contacted General Nassiri and ordered him to tell Barzani that Iran would cease its support immediately. When Nassiri visited Barzani, who was in Tehran at the time, he said, "in bluntest imaginable terms":

> (a) [the] border was being closed to all . . . movement, (b) [the] Kurds could expect no more assistance from Iran, (c) Barzani should settle with Iraq on whatever terms he could get, and (d) Peshmerga units would be allowed to take refuge in Iran only in small groups and only if they surrendered their arms to [the] Iranian army.

According to Nassiri, Barzani "acted stoically" as his lifelong dream of securing Kurdish autonomy in Iraq came crashing down in one fell swoop.[147] The next day, the Shah and Saddam Hussein held a joint press conference, where they smiled and embraced, and then laid out terms of the agreement:

1. Demarcation of the river frontier according to the thalweg or median line;
2. Demarcation of land frontiers on the basis of the 1913 Constantinople Protocol and minutes of 1914 Frontier Demarcation Commission;
3. Strict and effective control along borders to end all subversive infiltration from either side; and
4. The aforementioned three arrangements are indivisible elements of a comprehensive settlement.

In addition, both parties agreed to remain in constant contact with Algerian leader Houari Boumédiène while the accord was implemented and that the foreign ministers would meet to establish a commission to implement the agreement.[148]

According to David Korn, the Iraq desk officer at the time, Helms was at the Tehran airport on March 7 when the Shah arrived back from Algiers. "He found the Shah's aides as uninformed, and as puzzled, as he was." The Shah then told Helms, "the cutoff of Iranian assistance to Barzani's Kurdish insurrection would also entail terminating all American assistance."[149] The next afternoon, General Nassiri gave Helms a message from the Shah providing him with a bit of background information on the talks in Algeria, in preparation for a scheduled meeting at the palace. The note said that prior to his trip to Algiers, the Shah had received separate assurances from Boumédiène, Sadat, and King Hussein that the Iraqis "were ready to settle all . . . disputes with [Iran] provided that [he] discontinued his aid to the Kurds."[150] When Helms met with the Shah, he was asked to pass on a detailed message to Kissinger describing the secret talks in Algeria and his reasons for abandoning the Kurds. The Shah said that Boumédiène had pushed him hard to meet with Saddam and so he obliged. Besides gaining control of the Shatt al-Arab, the Shah felt that Barzani had lost the will to fight and that the Iraqis were willing to distance themselves from the Soviets. Given this, he felt that pulling the Iraqis out of the Soviet orbit was more important than his support for the Kurds.[151] In other words, the Shah viewed this deal in terms of the Cold War strategy.

Reactions among US officials to the accord were mixed. There were those, like Helms and Lowrie, who saw the agreement as a major step toward achieving regional stability.[152] Kissinger, however, did not share in their jubilation. Upon learning of the deal, he was furious that the Shah had ignored his advice and led him to believe that the deal was on hold. Furthermore, he could not conceive how the accord was a good deal. Why would the Shah so carelessly trade

a valuable coercive asset, like the Kurds, for a modest border concession on the Shatt al-Arab—a deal that the development of Iran's Gulf ports would render useless? In response, Kissinger sent the Shah a "frosty telegram," questioning both the benefits of the agreement and Iraq's sincerity. The telegram stated:

> With respect to the Kurdish question, there is little I can add to what I have already said to you personally during our recent meeting. This is obviously a matter for Your Majesty to decide in the best interests of your nation. Our policy remains as always to support Iran as a close and staunch friend of the [US]. I will, of course, follow with great interest the evolution of Iraqi-Iranian relations and of Iraqi policy in your area generally and toward the Soviet Union in particular.[153]

Kissinger's frustration was justified. He had spent a great deal of time, money, and effort during the past three years to help the Kurds keep the Iraqi regime destabilized and prevent the Soviets from cultivating a strong regional ally. To Kissinger, the Shah's abandonment of the Kurds was a clear mistake.

The Israelis were equally stunned by the Shah's decision. As Parsi observed, "the agreement took Israel…by complete surprise. The Shah neither consulted nor informed his Israeli and American allies about the negotiations with the Iraqis, nor did he indicate that the collaboration with the Kurds was in jeopardy."[154] According to Randal, the Algiers Accord came as a shock to the Israeli military officers stationed in Kurdistan, including Zuri Sagy. "Two and a half battalions of Iranian artillery and antiaircraft guns and their troops, stationed in Iraq, were abruptly ordered back across the frontier," explaining to their Kurdish and Israeli allies that the sudden move was a "routine troop rotation." The Mossad team realized what had happened immediately, and fled across the border, lest the Iraqis catch them.[155] After a decade of unbending support to the Kurdish cause, this was a miserable way to end a highly productive relationship.

As part of the agreement, the Iraqis had promised the Shah to give Barzani until March 20 to accept refuge in Iran or face military action, but the regime reneged on its promise. The day after the accord was announced, Iraq threw the full weight of its army against the Kurds, who were still reeling from the betrayal. According to Helms, Iraq's offensive put the entire Algiers Accord in jeopardy and shocked the Shah; Saddam had "immediately [violated] the letter and spirit of their Algiers agreement by ordering an all-out attack on the Kurds on all fronts."[156] In dire straits, Barzani sent Kissinger a heartbreaking letter on March 10, describing the tragedy unfolding in northern Iraq:

> Our hearts bleed to see that an immediate by-product of [Iran and Iraq's] agreement is the destruction of our defenseless people in an unprecedented manner as Iran closed its border and stopped help to us completely and while the Iraqis began the biggest offensive they have ever launched and which is now being continued. Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone.

Citing a moral and political responsibility, Barzani begged Kissinger to "take action" to stop the Iraqi offensive, help open a way for talks with the regime to

negotiate a face-saving solution, and use his personal influence with the Shah "to help [the Kurds] in these historically tragic and sad moments." Barzani concluded by saying that he was "anxiously waiting [Kissinger's] quick response and action and [was] certain that the [US would] not remain indifferent during these critical and trying times." When Helms passed Barzani's letter to Kissinger, he added:

> Since the Iranians clearly have blood on their hands, and we to a lesser extent on ours, an obviously distressed and disconsolate Barzani, it may be desirable for you to send him some kind of comforting message, otherwise, and maybe anyway, we will get a batch of unpleasant publicity which we may be able to avoid.

To avoid the publicity, Helms recommended continuing the subsidy at the present rate in exchange for the Kurds providing continued intelligence on "the Kurdish as well as the Iraqi situation."[157]

The CIA was quick to dissociate itself from the Kurdish tragedy, with Colby seizing upon Barzani's letter to justify cutting off the agency's support. On March 13, Colby sent Kissinger two messages to this effect. The first indicated his belief that the Shah's agreement with Saddam had left the United States in an "exposed position." In light of the "complexity of [the] situation" and the "continuing murkiness" of what was happening in Kurdistan, Colby wrote, he had to "argue forcefully for deferring decisions concerning shape of [the CIA's] relationship with Kurds, including [its] monthly subvention, until clearer picture emerges and there has been opportunity for fuller study and discussion . . . of [the agreement's] ramifications." In the second message, Colby asked Kissinger to distance the White House from the Kurds. "The fundamental premise of our past commitments has been that all aid to Kurds must be indirect via the Iranians, and in the new situation we believe direct aid . . . would be even less defensible than in the past." He also doubted that the Shah would allow Iran to continue to act as a conduit for American and Israeli aid, and even if he did allow it, "there [was the] very serious question [of] whether it [was] justifiable . . . to continue it." Colby also warned that the Kurds' "current emotionalism" after being abandoned created the "possibility of undesirable indiscretions," like revealing the CIA's operation. To avoid this, Colby proposed continuing the subsidy at least for the time being.[158] In his memoir, Kissinger expressed unveiled distaste for Colby's reaction to the abandonment of the Kurds, suggesting that his proposal to study the situation was designed to buy time, knowing that by the time the study was complete "it would be too late."[159]

On March 13, the Shah managed to convince Baghdad to halt its offensive and allow him time to confer with Barzani. According to Korn, when the two met, the Shah explained his concern about being drawn deeper into war with Iraq and had no choice but to conclude an agreement with Iraq. However, the Shah said that he saw the agreement as "temporary" and was not convinced that Iraq would respect it. In the meantime, all aid would be terminated but the border would remain open for another 30 days, during which any Kurds who wanted to come across would be welcome. When Dr. Othman tried to argue against the decision,

the Shah cut him off: "I am telling you my decision. There is nothing to discuss." This was a fait accompli.[160]

One discrepancy about the end of the Kurdish War has been whether Kissinger ever responded to Barzani's emotional plea for assistance. Kissinger himself states in his memoir that he "did not reply… to [Barzani's] desperate pleas for help because there was nothing [he] could say."[161] Similarly, the *Pike Report* cites a CIA cable, stating, "no reply has been received from Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to the message from Barzani." The report indicates that Barzani sent two further messages underscoring "the seriousness of the Kurds situation, the acute anxiety of their leaders and their emotional appeal that the USG use its influence with Iran to get an extension of the cease fire."[162] Given this, it is widely accepted that Kissinger's lack of response was both callous and uncaring.[163]

However, declassified documents show that Kissinger did, in fact, respond to Barzani. On March 15, he sent Helms a message that read:

> We appreciate the deep concern which prompted… Barzani's message to Secretary Kissinger. We can understand that the difficult decisions which the Kurdish people now face are a cause of deep anguish for them. We have great admiration for the courage and dignity with which those people have confronted many trials, and our prayers are with them. We will be talking with our Iranian friends and will be in contact with the General later.[164]

This message was passed to Barzani's CIA liaison on March 17.[165] Although the letter avoided offers of further aid, Kissinger's instructions to Helms reflect great concern about how to handle the fallout, particularly if Barzani was to make the betrayal public. He stated:

> On the one hand… there would seem to be some responsibility not to cut them off suddenly and completely. You should find a tactful way to mention the problem both the Iranian and US Governments will face in the US and elsewhere if there is a massacre and Barzani charges that he has been let down. The plight of the Kurds could arouse deep humanitarian concern. On the other, it would create an impossible situation if we were to be working at cross purposes with Iran.[166]

Kissinger also ordered Helms to determine how Iran would handle its relationship with the Kurds. Finally, he approved the continuation of Barzani's monthly subsidy; "a pitiful Band-Aid considering the tragedy about to descend on the Kurds."[167]

With the Shah having cut the Kurds off and the United States indicating that it also could not continue the operation, Barzani returned to Kurdistan on March 18 and informed his top military commanders that he could no longer go on fighting:

> It was a hopeless situation, but if anyone wanted to take up the battle in his place, Barzani said, he would give that man his full moral support. The offer, however, seemed more pro forma than real. To those who heard him, it was clear that Barzani was saying "this is the end, we must stop now." So when he canvassed the room, the commanders agreed that without an open border through which to receive arms and supplies, it would be impossible to continue.[168]

In the meantime, that same evening, Callahan met with the Shah to discuss the future of the Kurdish intervention. The Shah said that he could see "no other alternative…to either letting the Kurds be destroyed by the Iraqi spring offensive, or openly going to war [with Iraq] to protect them." Callahan raised the question of whether the United States should continue to provide Barzani with a monthly subsidy, suggesting that March's payment might be the last. The Shah did not object.[169] On June 4, Colby sent Kissinger a memo confirming that the agency had terminated the Kurdish intervention.[170]

Following the abrupt collapse of the Kurdish intervention, Barzani and his family fled to Iran, where he was treated inhospitably for the next four years. Tragically, in July 1975, Barzani required medical treatment in the United States. On July 25, Ratliff sent Kissinger a memo outlining the CIA's views as to why he should allow Barzani to enter the United States to receive vascular surgery. Ratliff indicated that the CIA felt that there would be "greater risks in trying to discourage the visit," which would only "embitter Barzani and increase the likelihood that our aid to the Kurds might be revealed." However, the CIA acknowledged that allowing Barzani to enter the United States for medical treatment could "engender some gratitude, and enable us to make a direct presentation to emphasize the desire for secrecy about our aid and to disclaim any knowledge of the Shah's decision to settle with Iraq." Kissinger approved the request.[171] After arriving in the United States in September 1975, Barzani was diagnosed with cancer.[172] He died in the United States on March 1, 1979.[173]

The tragic story of the Kurds does not live and die with one man. On March 23, 1975, well over 100,000 Kurdish fighters and their families crossed the border into Iran, joining the thousands of refugees already in camps, while others accepted the regime's "generous payments" for surrendering their weapons. The aftermath of the war was a bitter period for those who stayed behind as the regime imposed its harsh authoritarian rule on Kurdistan, creating a security zone 30 kilometers wide along the Iranian and Turkish borders. According to McDowell, this involved razing as many as 1,400 villages by 1978 and the internment of at least 600,000 Kurds in resettlement camps.[174] But the worst fate was left for the villagers of Barzani's hometown, Barzan. After its capture in 1975, the villagers were transported to an internment camp. In July 1983, when Kurdish rebels assisted the Iranians in capturing Haji Omran during the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi forces rounded up 8,000 males, both young and old, who were then paraded through Baghdad. This was the last time they would be seen. For his part, Saddam openly acknowledged the slaughter: "They betrayed the country…and we meted out a stern punishment to them and they went to hell."[175]

Conclusion

In the period between the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973 and the end of the Kurdish War in March 1975, it is clear that Henry Kissinger was the driving force behind the US intervention in Iraq.[176] His dominance of the decision-making process meant that his personal views often overwhelmed a well-informed analysis

based on a variety of opinions. In these circumstances, Kissinger's personal policy often clashed with the State Department's, which resulted in some missed opportunities. For instance, following the October War, when Iraq appeared to be tacking toward the West by reestablishing diplomatic relations with Britain, France, Iran, and West Germany, and made overt gestures aimed at improving relations with America, Kissinger ignored these signs and urged the Shah to attack Iraq so he could secure an Israeli withdrawal from Syria. Certainly, this made tactical sense in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but it undermined a clear opportunity to improve relations with Iraq and draw it away from the Soviets. Kissinger's actions contributed to the renewal of the Kurdish War in March 1974, which forced the Iraqi regime to turn to the Soviets for arms resupply. However, Kissinger's realism came through in early 1974 when the possibility of establishing a back channel to the Iraqis arose. All this showed that, while his commitment to the Kurds was firm, he was also willing to seize opportunities to improve relations with Iraq.

Unsurprisingly, when the Kurdish War resumed in March 1974, Kissinger increased the level of US support for the Kurds, approved humanitarian assistance for Kurdish refugees, and worked with the Israelis to transfer the Kurds with enough weaponry to keep the Iraqi army locked in a stalemate. He also cautioned Barzani against declaring autonomy because he believed that it could create problems with America's allies and could provoke an Iraqi offensive. At the same time, because the Iraqi law fell far short of meeting even the most standard Kurdish demands, there was little chance that Barzani would have ever acquiesced to Iraq's demands. Taken together, this account stands in stark contrast to the *Pike Report*'s claim that the United States had prodded Barzani into rejecting the regime's autonomy offer.[177]

Kissinger's reaction to the tragic way in which the Kurdish War came to an end underscored just how involved he was in the operation. It is clear that he saw the Kurdish intervention as a valuable means of advancing the US Middle Eastern strategy. After all, the Kurds had managed to tie down 80 percent of Iraq's army during the October War, prevented the formation of a strong Iraqi government, and proved valuable in drawing the Iraqis away from the Israeli-Syrian front, thereby contributing to the May 1974 disengagement agreement. However, Kissinger's actions also suggest that he felt a genuine obligation to help the Kurds defend themselves. He consistently ignored the CIA's warnings about the scale of the intervention, approved considerable amounts of humanitarian assistance, and went out of his way to provide the Kurds with advanced weaponry. Taken together, the Kurds had proven to be a valuable ally in advancing US interests in the region. For these reasons, Kissinger's frustration and anger upon learning that the Shah had ignored this advice and reached agreement with Saddam Hussein are understandable. When the Shah decided to cut support for the Kurds, he presented this to the United States as a fait accompli. With neither Iran nor Turkey willing to let the United States support the Kurds from their territory, the Americans and Israelis were left with no other option but to end their operations.

In the end, the US policy toward Iraq during the Kurdish War can best be explained by Cold War considerations. The Nixon and Ford administrations both saw the intervention as a viable means of destabilizing what appeared to be a Soviet ally, Iraq. In December 1975, Kissinger followed up on his earlier efforts to establish a back channel to the Iraqi regime by paying a visit to Baghdad, where he met with Foreign Minister Hammadi. When Hammadi pointed out American news reports suggesting that the United States had secretly assisted the Kurds during their war against Iraq,[178] Kissinger explained that he approved the Kurdish intervention because he "thought [Iraq was] a Soviet satellite." He went on to say that the Algiers Accord had alleviated any concern about Iraq's relationship with the Soviets and assured him that the United States would no longer support the Kurds. Echoing John Foster Dulles's observation from a decade and a half earlier, Kissinger told Hammadi, "We have a more sophisticated understanding [of Iraq] now."[179] This conversation leaves no room to doubt that the Kurdish War in 1974–75 was a Cold War conflict: the United States was arming and supporting the Kurds, while the Soviet Union was doing the same for the Iraqis. Unfortunately, as Brent Scowcroft recalled in a 2011 interview, "the Kurds are pawns in great power politics . . . as they have been for a long time," and like all pawns, they were expendable.[180]

Conclusion

Between Iraq's revolution in 1958 and the end of the Kurdish War in 1975, the driving force behind US policy toward Iraq was America's Cold War strategy. In one fell swoop, Iraq's revolution upended America's containment strategy and opened the country to superpower competition and intervention. Throughout the 1958–75 period, both superpowers intervened in Iraq's domestic affairs in an effort to influence the direction of whatever regime was holding power in Baghdad. Consistently, America's decisions and actions were based on the denial of Soviet Union influence over Iraq and the region. This is exemplified by the Eisenhower administration's tentative collaboration with Nasser to prevent the communists from coming to power during the 1958–59 period; the Kennedy administration's support for the first Ba'th regime during its brutal war against the Soviet-backed Kurds in 1963; the Johnson administration's friendly relations toward the anticommunist, Arab nationalist Arif brothers; and the Nixon–Ford administrations' backing of the Kurds in order to undermine the second Ba'th regime after it appeared to be pulling Iraq into the Soviet orbit. A pattern can therefore be established, where if a regime in Baghdad appeared to display pro-communist behavior, the United States would intervene in order to counter this threat, often relying on covert action. Likewise, if the Iraqi regime was viewed as potentially anticommunist, the United States adopted a policy of engagement, cultivated friendly relations, and sought to prevent communist or pro-Soviet forces from gaining influence. In each instance, the primary motivation for America's interventions in Iraq was its perceived position in Cold War geopolitics. Alas, America's competition with the Soviet Union over Iraq and the broader Middle East would contribute to Saddam Hussein's rise to power and, ultimately, the destabilization of Iraqi politics today.

Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi revolution prompted a reaction from the Eisenhower administration that was driven by its concern that the Iraqi Communist Party could seize control of the country. This book showed that the Eisenhower administration saw events in Iraq during 1958–59 through the prism of its Cold War competition with Moscow, premising its decisions on the need to block perceived Soviet advances. The Eisenhower administration contemplated working with Nasser in order to limit any communist advances, but the White House was ultimately divided over how to respond. It is clear now that America's actions were not a decisive factor in preventing a communist takeover in Iraq, and may have in fact been detrimental to its goals. By establishing a tacit working relationship

with Nasser, the United States unintentionally forced Qasim to rely more on the communists for political support. However, when the communists overplayed their hand during the Kirkuk uprising in July 1959, Qasim was forced to turn to Iraq's military as a base of support. At this point, it is clear the United States and Britain did not share, as Blackwell claims, a "common perception" of the communist threat. The United States saw the threat as a clear and present danger to its strategic interests in the region. Furthermore, the Special Committee on Iraq's records make clear that the United States was fearful of Qasim's relationship with the communists, whereas the British saw Qasim as a potential alternative to Nasser and tried to support him. This was classic divide-and-rule strategy, which became evident when the British warned Qasim of the Rashid Ali plot in late 1958. In time, Britain's flirtation with Qasim backfired, which was undeniable by the time that he threatened to invade Kuwait in 1961. Finally, history shows that the primary evidence available today cannot substantiate claims of American involvement in the Ba'th Party's assassination attempt against Qasim in October 1959.

When the Kennedy entered office, he did not feel that Iraq deserved the same level of scrutiny accorded to it by the Eisenhower administration, and disbanded the SCI. This was a mistake, because it left the White House unprepared for a series of crises during 1961–62, like the Kuwait crisis, the outbreak of the Kurdish War, the expropriation of the IPC concessionary holding, and then the downgrading of diplomatic relations with the United States.

New documentary revelations have helped clear up various claims made about the CIA's operations inside Iraq during 1961–62. It has been suggested, for instance, that the CIA urged the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad in this period; however, documents reveal that US diplomats and intelligence officers in the field had warned Washington of an impending war and were ignored. Furthermore, evidence from Soviet archives suggests that Soviet intelligence officers might have urged Barzani to fight in 1961. It has also been alleged that the CIA tried to "incapacitate" Qasim in 1961–62 by mailing him a poisoned handkerchief, but again the evidence suggests that Mahdawi, the pro-communist head of the People's Court, would have been a more likely target. Finally, it has been widely believed that the CIA was behind the Ba'thist coup that overthrew Qasim in February 1963. The CIA was indeed plotting against Qasim in the 1962–63 period; nonetheless, it has also been uncovered that the CIA was also engaged in a major intelligence gathering operation, which was primarily aimed at gaining information about Soviet antiaircraft weaponry. With access to a virtual "intelligence bonanza" at stake, the Kennedy administration showed great reluctance about aggravating Qasim. Such a bold move, like overthrowing the Iraqi government, would have probably been deemed too risky at the time. Moreover, a high-level CIA official, who claimed to have helped plot Qasim's demise, has divulged that the CIA's plans to overthrow Qasim had not yet been finalized when the Ba'th Party seized power. In sum, barring the release of new information, the preponderance of evidence substantiates the conclusion that the CIA not behind the February 1963 Ba'thist coup.

After years of frustration with the Qasim regime, the Kennedy administration viewed the Ba'thist coup as a welcome surprise. However, some have argued

that the CIA provided the Ba'th with lists of communists, who were then arrested and in many cases killed. While the existence of these lists has been documented, US officials at the time suggested that the Ba'th Party had already determined the identity of communist party members and their supporters. Given this, it is possible to conclude that the Ba'th Party did not need the lists provided by the CIA, since they already knew their targets. Regardless, Iraq became a full-fledged Cold War battleground when the first Ba'th regime took over, with both superpowers intervening on behalf of their respective clients. In response to the Ba'thist campaign against the ICP, for instance, the Soviet Union retaliated by supporting the Kurds publicly, accusing the regime of genocide at the UN, and even sponsoring a failed coup attempt. Correspondingly, the Kennedy administration urged its Arab allies to undermine this Soviet charge at the UN, approved a $55 million arms deal with Iraq in August 1963, and initiated a secret effort to bring about a ceasefire. America's efforts were largely in vain, however, as internal disputes within the regime over questions related to of unification with Syria and the disastrous conduct of the war escalated into violence in November 1963, leading the military to seize power just days before President Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas, Texas. In light of these events, Iraq's significance as a Cold War battleground and the superpower interventions in 1963 have been overlooked in the historiography of the Cold War, though scholars have begun to revisit this period in recent years.

In the Johnson years, the US policy toward Iraq was once again at odds with its closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. The reasons for this stemmed from the perception each of these states had of Iraq. From the US perspective, as long as the new regime in Baghdad was anticommunist, it could accept Nasser having a high degree of influence, or even unification with Egypt. Britain's focus, as in 1958–59, was not on the Cold War, but on its rivalry with Nasser. Throughout the 1960s, Britain struggled with the challenge posed by local nationalists to its global empire, especially in the Gulf, and many in London believed that Nasser was to be blamed. With the coming to power of a pro-Nasser regime in Baghdad and the ensuing unification talks, the British viewed Iraq as a potential threat to their strategic position in the Gulf. The Israelis and Iranians shared Britain's unease about Nasser's growing influence in Baghdad, though for different reasons. The Israelis were concerned about Iraq's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and wanted to tie down the Iraqi army inside the country. They also did not want Nasser to gain access to Iraq's considerable oil wealth. Likewise, the Shah loathed Nasser and distrusted his intention to establish himself on Iran's western border. For these reasons, Britain, Israel, and Iran found common cause in seeking to undermine the new regime by supporting the Kurds. While Britain's efforts during this period are not well documented in secondary sources, Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds are. Despite claims that the CIA encouraged Iran and Israel to support the Kurds, there is no evidence to support this conclusion. Instead, this study makes clear that the Johnson administration managed to achieve friendly relations with Iraq between 1966 and 1967, culminating in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the White House in January 1967 and a private meeting between President Johnson and Iraq's foreign minister just days before the outbreak of the Six Day War.

The Six Day War destroyed whatever progress the Johnson administration had achieved in its relations with Iraq, which severed relations with Washington. In the aftermath of the war, it became painfully clear that the United States did not have a functioning policy toward the region and was instead forced into a reactive mode of jumping from crisis to crisis, with no real concerted strategy. Complicating matters still further, Britain's announcement in January 1968 that it planned to withdraw its military forces from the Gulf region immediately upset the regional balance of power, increasing the threat the Soviet Union posed to Western interests. After intensive consultations with the British, the Johnson administration adopted a policy designed to build up Iran and Saudi Arabia as the region's "twin pillars" of power, thereby filling the power vacuum and staving off Soviet influence. When the Ba'th Party came to power again in July 1968, it posed different challenges to the United States than the first Ba'th regime had. Despite Hahn's claim that the United States initially viewed the second Ba'th regime favorably, the overthrow of Arif's moderate, anticommunist regime was a clear loss for America's Cold War strategy in the Middle East, threatening its interests in Iraq, the Gulf, and the Cold War. The Ba'th Party's radical policies toward Israel, its desire to renew the Kurdish War, and its swift tack toward the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance, convinced the Johnson administration that it had become a vehicle for Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty. Once again, the Cold War became a dominant factor in US decision making toward Iraq.

During the Nixon administration, US policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. At the start of his first term, Nixon avoided involving the White House in regional policies, preferring instead to focus on more pressing or sweeping matters, such as extricating the United States from Vietnam, the opening to China, and achieving détente with the Soviet Union. The Gulf was not a priority until the end of the term. Instead, the Nixon administration largely left the management of Gulf matters to the State Department or to regional allies, like Iran. This was evident following Iraq's execution of nine Jews in January 1969, when the Shah provoked the 1969 Shatt al-Arab crisis, urged the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War, and then tried to overthrow the Ba'thist regime in January 1970. As Alvandi observes, the Nixon administration was happy to encourage the Shah's aggressive actions against Iraq. Yet, the Shah was outraged in March 1970 when his Kurdish allies agreed to a ceasefire with the Ba'th Party. In the aftermath, Iran and Israel tried to convince the United States that the March Accord was in fact a Soviet ploy to gain influence over Iraq, but the Nixon administration pointed to Iraq's repressive campaign against the communists between March 1970 and September 1971 when dismissing their entreaties as manipulative. The Nixon administration's views of Iraq and the Gulf nevertheless began to change with the British withdrawal in December 1971. Soon thereafter, the United States learned that Iraq had signed a secret arms deal with the Soviet Union in November 1971 and had ceased its repression of the communists. The major turning point occurred in April 1972 when the Ba'th Party signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviets, thereby aligning Iraq with the Soviet Union in the Cold War and bringing about an American intervention.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to why Nixon agreed to support the Kurds during his visit to Iran in May 1972, with the majority arguing that it was in response to the Soviet-Iraqi treaty, while a minority believe the Shah had overinflated the Soviet threat and manipulated the United States into building up Iran as the regional policeman. In light of this scholarly debate, what is peculiar is that there is no official record of Nixon agreeing to support the Kurds during his visit to Tehran. Instead, the record shows that Kissinger expressed concern about the Soviet-Iraqi relationship and agreed with the Shah that something needed to be done. The only official record of Nixon agreeing to the Kurdish intervention was Kissinger's memorandum to the 40 Committee's principals on August 1, 1972. That debate aside, Nixon's approval of the Kurdish intervention was premised on five factors: (1) concerns about the rapid improvement in Soviet-Iraqi relations after the British withdrawal; (2) Iraq's enhanced importance after the departure of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972; (3) a desire to build up the Shah of Iran as a regional power to prevent Soviet encroachment on the region; (4) US concerns about Iraq's nationalization of the IPC in June 1972; and (5) a recognition that the Kurds could be a useful coercive tool to undermine the pro-Soviet Ba'thist regime. Clearly, Nixon's decision to support the Kurdish intervention was not just based on a naive acceptance of the Shah's manipulation but a realistic analysis of a sequence of events suggesting that Iraq was drifting toward the Soviet orbit. In fact, Kissinger personally told Iraq's foreign minister, Sa'dun Hammadi, that this was the primary reason why the United States provided support to the Kurds.

Following the approval of the Kurdish intervention, US policy toward Iraq was bifurcated. On the one hand, in August 1972, the State Department sent an American diplomat, Arthur Lowrie, to Baghdad with orders to improve US-Iraqi relations, while on the other, the White House sought to undermine the Iraqi regime using the Kurdish intervention. In the period leading up to the October War, US-Iraqi relations underwent a remarkable thaw. This was because Saddam Hussein had emerged victorious in a power struggle within the regime and moved to bring Iraq out of isolation. In a short period of time, he settled Iraq's long-standing dispute with the IPC, stabilized Iraqi politics by forming a National Front government with the communists, and improved relations with France, helping to offset Western concerns. He also told journalists that he was interested in improving US-Iraqi relations and then awarded US firms lucrative contracts, while also seeking to establish a secret back channel to Washington. Despite all this, the White House responded to Iraq's friendly gestures by increasing its support to the Kurds. Even during October 1973, when Iraq resumed diplomatic relations with Britain, Iran, and West Germany, awarded further contracts to US firms in the middle of the war, and refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo, the United States continued to increase its support to the Kurds. The October War seems to have convinced Kissinger of the value of the Kurds, whom he believed had prevented the Iraqi army from playing a greater role in the conflict. This was evident when Kissinger urged Iran to initiate hostilities with Iraq in December 1973 and then February 1974 in hopes of forcing the Iraqis to withdraw their military from Syria. While this tactic helped Kissinger secure Israel's

disengagement from Syria, it also contributed to the resumption of the Kurdish War, with the result of further destabilizing Iraq.

When the Kurdish War resumed in March 1974, it again took on Cold War characteristics, with both superpowers supporting opposing sides. With the United States, Iran, and Israel supporting the Kurds and the Soviet Union backing the Iraqi regime, Iraq had once again emerged as a Cold War battleground. The United States responded to the war by increasing its military and financial aid to the Kurds. Significantly, in contrast to the *Pike Report*'s claims,[1] the United States provided Iran with $1 million to help Kurdish refugees. Furthermore, the *Pike Report* asserted that the United States had prodded Barzani into rejecting Baghdad's autonomy law in March 1974,[2] when in fact the Nixon administration had warned Barzani against declaring autonomy because it could provoke the Iraqi regime into attacking. What the authors of the *Pike Report* did not know was that Barzani and the Kurds could never have accepted Baghdad's watered-down autonomy law, because it excluded long-standing principal demands, such as a proportional share of oil revenue. In addition, the law allowed the regime to veto any Kurdish legislation, rending the assembly effectively useless. The resumption of the Kurdish War forced Iraq to improve relations with the Soviet Union so as to obtain both arms resupply and military advisors. This had a significant impact on the war's outcome, since with Soviet assistance the Iraqi army for the first time managed to take and hold key areas in Kurdistan. As the war escalated throughout the fall of 1974, Iran's support for the Kurds became more overt: it shelled Iraqi forces regularly, its military forces participated in battles (dressed in Kurdish clothing), and it shot down of two Iraqi jets in December 1974. Despite this, Iraq managed to seize and hold ground throughout the winter of 1974–75. Fearing the Kurds' defeat, Kissinger and the Israelis sought to provide the Kurds with $28 million worth of arms, hoping to hold off the Iraqis. Unfortunately, this effort proved fruitless.

Despite the widely held view that the United States sold the Kurds out in March 1975, the decision was presented as a fait accompli. While Kissinger had known that the Shah was considering abandoning the Kurds, he believed that he had talked him out of it. At least, this was the thrust of Kissinger's letter to Barzani in February 1975, when he agreed to meet with a Kurdish emissary. Nevertheless, Kissinger saw the Kurdish intervention as a valuable means of advancing US Middle Eastern strategy. After all, the Kurdish intervention had tied down Iraq's army during the October War, allowed Kissinger to secure Israel's disengagement from Syria, and prevented the formation of a strong Iraqi government. In the end, Kissinger's frustration upon learning that the Shah had ignored his advice and had reached agreement with Saddam Hussein in Algiers is explained by his belief that the Kurds were a valuable Cold War card, to be used to advance US interests, while denying the Soviet Union a strong base of influence. Once again, Cold War considerations were the driving motivation behind US policy toward Iraq in this period.

This study shows that both the *Pike Report* and William Safire's highly critical articles have had a distorting effect on the historiographical discourse on the Kurdish War.[3] Certainly, the Kurdish intervention was a "cynical enterprise";[4]

after all, it advanced America's Cold War interests, though not entirely at the expense of the Kurds. The primary objective of the US operation was to increase the Kurds' bargaining power with Baghdad in order to help them secure reasonable terms on autonomy. Nevertheless, both the *Pike Report* and Safire's articles do not represent an objective assessment of the Ford administration's handling of the Kurdish intervention. This study has shown that the *Pike Report* ignored inconvenient truths;[5] manipulated evidence;[6] misattributed quotes;[7] falsely accused the United States of not providing the Kurds with any humanitarian assistance;[8] and, finally, claimed that Kissinger had not responded to Barzani's tragic plea,[9] when in fact he had.[10] None of these claims appeared to be substantiated. As Gerald Haines argues, the *Pike Report*'s real purpose was to expose the CIA as a "rogue elephant" and scale back the White House's control over foreign policy.[11] In other words, this was not the "textbook case of betrayal and skullduggery" that the *Pike Report* had led many people to believe.[12]

It is now clear that Iraq actually played a greater role in the Cold War in the Middle East than has been previously recognized. On three separate occasions between 1958 and 1975, Iraq became a key Cold War battleground that was exposed to superpower interventions: in 1958–59, in 1963, and finally in 1972–75. In each of these instances, either the Soviet Union or the United States relied on local or regional proxies to achieve their strategic objectives. Sadly, the Kurds have often fallen victim to these machinations, being built up when it served the superpowers' designs, only to be dismissed abruptly when no longer needed. In the end, all the decisions and actions taken by each US administration—from Eisenhower to Ford—were designed with one goal in mind: denying the Soviet Union influence over Iraq and a strategic base in the oil-rich Gulf region.

Lamentably, the superpower interventions in Iraq during the 1958–75 period—whether they wanted to or not—played an important role in placing the Ba'th Party in power. Indeed, the Aligers Accord eliminated two major challenges to the Ba'ath Party's rule: the internal threat from the Kurds and an external one from Iran. By eliminating both, the Ba'th Party was secured, paving the way for Saddam Hussein's rise to power: in 1979, he seized power from Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr; in 1980, he launched the eight-year long Iran-Iraq War; in 1983, he began using chemical weapons against Iran; in 1988, he tried to eliminate the Kurds altogether; in 1990, he ordered the invasion of Kuwait; and in 2003, he was finally overthrown, plunging Iraq into a sectarian civil war that has destabilized the country even further. Given this sequence of events, there is little question that the origins of Iraq's ongoing political instability can be found in the superpower interventions during the Cold War.

Notes

Introduction

1. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–60, Vol. XII, document 157. Herein, documents used from this source will be identified by FRUS, date range (i.e., 1958–60), volume number, and document number.
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3. FRUS/1969–76/XXVII/302.
4. This argument has been raised in Douglas Little, "The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12/4 (2010), pp. 63–98; and Peter Hahn, *Missions Accomplished?* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 38–62.
5. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
6. Ibid., p. 3.
7. Roham Alvandi, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf," *Diplomatic History*, 36/2 (2012), p. 338.
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10. See FRUS/1958–60/XII/46.
11. See Nigel Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955–58," *Review of International Studies,* 19/2 (1993), pp. 123–37.
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14. Ibid., p. 158.
15. Ibid., pp. 12–13.
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17. Hahn, *Missions Accomplished*, pp. 38–62.
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19. Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958–70* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 16–20.
20. Nigel Ashton, " 'Great New Venture'? Anglo-American Cooperation in the Middle East and the Response to the Iraqi Revolution, July 1958," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 4/1 (1993), pp. 59–89; Stephen Blackwell, "A Desert Squall: Anglo-American Planning for Military Intervention in Iraq, July 1958 – August 1959," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35/3 (1999), pp. 1–18; and Fain, *American Ascendance*, pp. 96–105.
21. Blackwell, "A Desert Squall," p. 1; Ashton, " 'Great New Venture'," pp. 59–89.
22. See John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo American Relations in the Cold War and After* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
23. Douglas Little, "Mission Impossible: The CIA and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East," *Diplomatic History*, 28/5 (2004), pp. 694–98; and Little, "A Cold War Story," pp. 63–98.
24. See Richard Sale, "Exclusive: Saddam Key in Early CIA Plot," *Information Clearing House*, April 10, 2003; Con Coughlin, *Saddam: His Rise and Fall* (London: Harper-Perennial, 2004), pp. 38–39; Little, "Mission Impossible," p. 695; and Nathan Citano, "Middle East Cold Wars: Oil and Arab Nationalism in US-Iraqi Relations, 1958–61," in Kathryn Statler and Andrew Johns (eds.), *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 254–59.
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26. Little, "Mission Impossible," pp. 695–96; Citano, "Middle East Cold Wars," pp. 254–59; and David Painter, "Oil, Resources, and the Cold War, 1945–1962," in Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume I* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010)," p. 503.
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28. See Weldon C. Matthews, "The Kennedy Administration, Counterinsurgency, and Iraq's First Ba'thist Regime," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43/1 (2011), pp. 635–653; Eric Jacobsen, "A Coincidence of Interests," *Diplomatic History*, 37/5 (2013); and Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicutt, "Embracing Regime Change in Iraq," *Diplomatic History*, January 10, 2014 (advance copy).
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36. See William Linn Westermann, "Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, 24/1 (1945–46), pp. 675–86; Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic," pp. 247–69; and William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).
37. Golan, *Soviet Policies*, p. 159.
38. See Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Revolt, 1961–1970* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973); Stephen Pelletiere, *The Kurds*; McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds*; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle, 1920–1994* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996); and Lawrence, *Invisible Nation*.
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40. Roham Alvandi, H-Diplo Article Review: Little, "The United States and the Kurds," May 2011, p. 2.
41. Vladislav Zubok, "Spy vs. Spy: The KGB vs. the CIA, 1960–62," *Cold War International History Project*, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, No. 4 (1994), pp. 28–29.
42. Golan, *Soviet Policies*, p. 160.
43. Hahn, *Missions Accomplished*, pp. 49–50.
44. Little, "A Cold War Story," pp. 71–72.
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