

**MEMORANDUM
ON THE SITUATION
OF THE KURDS
AND THEIR CLAIMS**

*Summary of the Memorandum presented by the
Kurdish delegation in Paris on November
29 th 1948 to His Excellency Mr. Trygve Lie,
Secretary General of the United Nations*

PARIS

1949

**MEMORANDUM
ON THE SITUATION
OF THE KURDS
AND THEIR CLAIMS**

*Summary of the Memorandum presented by the
Kurdish delegation in Paris on November
29 th 1948 to His Excellency Mr. Trygve Lie,
Secretary General of the United Nations*

PARIS

1949

MEMORANDUM ON THE SITUATION OF THE KURDS AND THEIR CLAIMS

Among the number of pressing problems which remain unsolved in the Middle East the Kurdish question is one of the most tragic.

It may be well first of all to correct the arbitrary and summary idea that is held of the Kurdish people in many countries — in the measure that they are thought about. There is a tendency to think of them as being without links, without organisation, without power to progress, as composed of mountain tribes — primitive, nomadic and turbulent.

The word « tribe » applied to them in this sense is a foreign word. It does not exist in the Kurdish language. Kurdistan includes towns, villages and clans, whose inhabitants and members — while obliged according to the regions they live in to make seasonable displacements for the needs of their cattle breeding have strong roots in their soil, and love it, practise there in all their variety the sedentary customs which go to make up a stable people, keen to have an organised civic life, progress, social responsibility and spiritual improvement.

Here is a tribute to them :

Major SOANE in « To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise » says (pages 398, 399) : « Judged as a representative of the human type the Kurd is probably unsurpassable. The Kurds look what they are: the Medes of today, worthy if only they would unite of becoming a great military nation whose austere and hardy nature could hold in check the more inferior peoples among

whom they live. » « If we meet in the Kurdish character traits which according to western judgment are considered as virtues, the credit is due to a natural and fundamental disposition : loyalty, respect for the given word, generous affection for his neighbours, a very dignified attitude towards women, a literary sense and a love of poetry, a generous desire to make sacrifices for his clan and a fine pride in his nation and his country. » (pages 394, 395).

Martin HARTMANN writes in « Fünf Vorträge über den Islam » (Leipzig, 1912) : « In naming the Kurds among peoples likely to be won over to European culture, I fully realise that I shall come up against strong opposition. Yet all the accounts of travellers agree in stressing that under their rough exterior lies a world of deep and delicate feelings. Many testimonies show that they are endowed with natural intelligence, with a faculty for rapid assimilation and right judgment.

« If this nation one day finds its true leader, it will surprise the world by its strength and by the vigour it displays in adapting itself to world civilization. »

One of the best informed students of Kurdish affairs, Basile NIKITINE writes : « Contrary to the practice in other Moslem communities the Kurdish woman enjoys great freedom in her capacity as mistress of the house (Bani). In the absence of her husband she receives masculine visits on the same footing as he. She replaces him even at the head of the clan and we know of several such instances in Kurdish history. We had to deal on one occasion with a Kurdish lady, Myriam KHANOUM of Nehri of whose dignity and wisdom we hold excellent memories. Popular Kurdish lyrical or epic poetry eloquently testifies to the sex equality of the Kurds.

PHYSICAL, ECONOMIC AND ETHNIC GEOGRAPHY

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

The Kurdish people have occupied for ages a vast mountainous territory of about 500.000 square kilometres in area between the Pontique chain, the Caucasus, the Persian gulf and the steppes of Mesopotamia on one side and the Anti-Taurus and the Iranian plateau on the other.

Kurdistan is a mountainous country. It has vast forests where all the elements of temperate regions are represented : rich pastureland and beautiful fertile valleys : those of Diarbekir, Passen, Mouche, Kharpout, Djezireh, Mah-Abad, Hawler, Djanwaroud, Chahrizour made fruitful by a natural water supply.

Even in the present dilapidated state of the country, thanks to the work of the Kurdish peasant, agricultural production remains important in quantity and variety : rye, wheat, oats, maize, rice, flax, cesame, tobacco : all kinds of vegetables, and a great variety of fruit.

Cattle breeding constitutes one of its principal resources.

Its sub-soil contains considerable mineral wealth.

Only the copper mines of Argana and the oil wells of Kirmanshah, Kirkonk and Khanikin are now being exploited. There are also iron ore, zinc, lead, silver, chromium, molybdenum. Although Kurdistan is essentially agricultural, manufactured products necessary for the needs of the population, are provided by skilled craftsmen of the urban centres or by family industries. These industries are : weaving, carpet manufacture, arms manufacture, leather work, goldsmith's work. Kurdish woollen goods, silks and cottons are justly prized for their quality and beauty.

Exports consist mainly of wool, mohair, silk cocoons, butter, cheese, raw hides and cattle.

Kurdistan has about twenty towns. The most important are : in Turkey: Diarbekir, Kharpout, Malatia, Ourfa, Mardin, Erzurum, Erzindjean, Mouche, Van, Bitlis, Khozat, Maaden, Djezireth-ibn-Omar; in Iran: Khoy, Sauj-Boulak, Ouchnou, Saqqiz, Bijar; in Iraq: Suleymanieh, Kerkouk, Hawlêr, Zakho, Koy-Sandjak, Rawandouz, Amadié.

There are so far no reliable official statistics available in any of the countries in which Kurds live. The following estimate, while approximate, is none the less very close to the truth.

in Turkey	3.800.000	Kurds
in Iran	3.000.000	«
in Iraq	1.200.000	«
<hr/>		
Total.....	8.000.000	Kurds

The Kurdish people is Aryan. Its language is Indo-European, of the Iranian group. The majority of the Kurds are Sunnite

Moslems, but there is a fairly large Shiite minority as well as Yesidi and Christian elements.

HISTORY — *from Ancient Times to the 20th Century :*

The history of the Kurds and Kurdistan goes back to the beginning of the ages. Recent archaeological discoveries permit one to think that the people who have inhabited the mountains of Kurdistan played a major role in the civilisations of the Middle East. Until their conversion to Islam their history was that of the Aryan empires of the East. Heirs of the Medes they rallied to Cyrus and helped him in his conquests. In the Achaemenid Empire they played a big role holding notably the privileged mission of guarding the Temples.

Xenophon in *Anabasis*, in connection with the retreat of the ten thousand, refers to their fierce tenacity in fighting and to the superiority of their arms.

With the coming of the Sassanides they again found the traditional place which they occupied under the Achaemenides and the Parthians.

Why, after having victoriously resisted the Moslem conquest and having shown themselves fiercely devoted to Zoroastrianism, did the Kurdish people suddenly become converted to Islam? History has not yet made the reason clear. The Kurdish people then placed their energies as a mountain people and as warriors in the service of their new faith. They were so devoted to it that they sacrificed for the Moslem universalist ideal the opportunity to constitute their own national independent state.

In the tenth century following the weakening of the central power of the Khalifes several principalities were formed in Kurdistan: the Cheddadites, the Hassanweides, the Mervanides, the Banon-Annaz who had a brilliant history and whose sovereigns were great Maecenas, patrons of the arts and letters.

It was to a Kurdish prince belonging to the Rawend clan that fell the task and glory of saving Islam, doubly threatened by the weakness of the Abbassides and growing internal anarchy and by the aggression of the Crusades.

What Ahou Muslim did 350 years later, another Kurd, the gallant knight Saladin, favoured rival of Richard Cœur de Lion, great captain, great statesman, did to save Islam once again from the crisis that threatened to engulf her.

His work was not only political and administrative. Thanks to the loftiness of his mind Saladin purged morals, put an end to corruption and licence and gave a new upward surge to Islam.

Like the other Kurdish dynasties, the Eyoubides succumbed to the Mongol tide.

But at the end of the 15th century the Kurds recovered themselves. And when in 1514 the sultan Selim I attacked the rising power of Shiism he made an appeal to the Kurds.

It was to their alliance that he owed his victory in the battle of Chaldiran, a victory which eliminated Persian influence in south west Kurdistan.

The pact of Chaldiran guaranteed the independence of this part of Kurdistan, confirmed the hereditary rights of its princes, and sealed their military collaboration with the Ottoman Empire. A period of great development followed.

But soon military charges, the men and arms demanded by the Porte began to weigh on the Kurds.

Their loyalty to the pact of Chaldiran involved them in the adventurous expeditions of the Sultan of the Yemen up to Vienna.

And the intrigues of the representatives of the Porte divided Kurdish circles. The heavy burden of military expenditure irritated feelings and impoverished the people.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the results of this policy began to be felt.

The last Kurdish principality, that of Emir Bedir-Kahn, after seven years struggle, was overwhelmed by the Ottoman armies in 1848.

Encroachments on the prerogatives of the Kurdish regions continued. The exactions of a corrupt bureaucracy exasperated the Kurds. The Porte tried to evacuate certain regions of Kurdistan and to decimate the Kurdish population.

Then their country entered upon a long series of risings which have continued until the present day.

THE TREATY OF SEVRES - AUGUST 10th 1920

After the armistice of Moudros the Kurdish people through the voice of their representatives claimed their right to independence.

The Allies solemnly recognised the justice of the Kurdish claims. The Ottoman government agreeing to negotiate on the basis of the Wilsonian principles, the Treaty of Sevres of August 10th 1920, in Section III, articles 62 and 64, granted the Kurds the right to autonomy and independence :

Kurdistan in the Sèvres Treaty

The Treaty of Sèvres also provided for a Kurdish State. The three Articles, concerning Kurdistan, read as follows :

Section III

KURDISTAN

Article 62

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the Southern Boundary of Armenia, as it may be hereafter determined and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas and with this object, a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.

Article 63

The Turkish Government hereby agrees to accept and execute the decisions of both the Commissions mentioned in Article 62 within three months from their Communication to the said Government.

Article 64

If within one year from the coming into force of the present

treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these people are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.

The detailed provisions for such renunciation will form the subject of a separate agreement between the Principal Allied Powers and Turkey.

If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul Vilayet.

TURKISH NATIONAL PACT AND THE KEMALIST POLICY

The movement of Turkish resistance which then arose, later known under the name of « Kemalist », had become sufficiently big to oppose the putting into force of this treaty.

However the Turks fixed their conditions for an acceptable peace in the six articles of the national pact of January 26 1920, the principal of which are :

Article 1: The fate of the territories of the Ottoman Empire exclusively inhabited by Arab majorities and which were, at the time of the conclusion of the armistice of October 30 1918 (Moudros) under the occupation of the enemy armies, should be settled according to the freely expressed will of the local population.

« The parts of the Empire situated on both sides of the armistice line and inhabited by a Moslem-Ottoman majority, whose constituent elements, united by religious and cultural ties and moved by a same ideal, are inspired by a reciprocal religious respect for the ethnic rights and social conditions, form a whole

which can suffer no dissociation in fact or in right under any pretext whatever.

Article 5 : « The rights of the minorities will be confirmed by us on the same basis as those established for the benefit of the minorities in other countries by ad hoc conventions concluded between the parties to the agreement, their opponents and certain of their associates.

« On the other hand, we have the firm hope that the Moslem minorities of neighbouring countries will enjoy the same guarantees in so far as their rights are concerned ».

It was clear after paragraph 2 of article 1 that the Turks admitted that the population of the territories claimed (1) were an *Ottoman Moslem* population of different race and non-Turkish, and, in adding that these elements were inspired by a reciprocal religious respect for ethnic rights and social connitions, they confirmed their own respect for the said rigths and social conditions.

Among the ethnic elements covered by this paragraph the Kurds took first place.

The authorities in Ankara went so far as to allow the Kurds to envisage the constitution of a future autonomous Kurdish state within the Turkish frontiers and Hussein Awni Bey, deputy of Erzeroum, was justly able to declare : « This country belongs to the Kurds and the Turks. In this assembly only two nations have the right to raise their voice : the Kurdish nation and the Turkish nation. »

But, scarcely had the treaty of Lausanne been signed, when Mustapha Kemal by a reversal of the policy of collaboration and in violation of his promises and even the contractual undertakings of the Turkish government concerning the rights of minorities (treaty of Lausanne) threw off the mask and had the national assembly dissolved. And, in reply to the Kurds who reminded him of his promises, he ordered the closing of their schools and the arrest of patriots and influential personalities. Persecutions started. As if by magic, Turkish deputies were returned for Kurdish territories in the elections for the new chamber. Several former Kurdish deputies were arrested and

(1) Turkey in Asia only includes the plateaux of Anatolia and Kurdistan (Larousse Universel, page 1165, Paris 1923.)

handed over to courts martial and draconian measures were applied throughout Kurdistan.

REVOLT OF SHEIK SAID OF PIRANE

In face of this denial of the pledged word and this treachery the Kurds were not slow to react.

Resistance was organised under the direction of Colonel Khalid Bey, the lords of Jibranli assisted by intellectuals and officers.

Let us quote from Captain H. C. Armstrong (1) who in his book *Mustapha Kemal* (Payot, Paris, page 230) writes : « In two months the Kurds had cleared the provinces of Maamourett-el-Aziz and Kharpoutt, expelled the Turkish garrisons and now they were approaching the town of Diarbekir. All Kurdistan rose up and threatened the provinces of the East. The young Turkey was shaken. The state and the nation were in danger of death.

« Then suddenly Mustapha Kemal aroused himself from his torpor and kicked away wine and women.

« He shook himself from his lethargy and immediately entered into action, summoned the nation to arms : Turkey is in danger... Britain is backing the Kurds and supplying them with money and arms... »

In his statement to the National Assembly Mustapha Kemal did in fact declare : « The worst is that Britain is behind the Kurds. She has continually used the Kurds against Turkey. During the World War she sent into Kurdistan her most active agents — Lawrence and Noel — to incite the Kurds to stab the Turks in the back. By the treaty of Sevres she promised them independence. Her agents are operating throughout the country arming and stirring up the tribes. Britain wanted to have Mosul and its oil. The Kurds held the keys to Mosul and Iraq. Britain wanted to incite them against Turkey to oblige the latter to abandon Mosul. »

The Turkish authorities while admitting that the rising aimed at the liberation of the Kurds, had it spread abroad through foreign correspondents that it was only a fanatical reactionary

movement against the progressive and liberal reforms of the lay Republic.

1) *British military attache in Turkey.*

After eight months the Kurds succumbed in face of all the forces Turkey had mobilised. The leaders did not seek to escape. They were taken one after another.

The trial of the leaders of the revolt was a tragic travesty of justice. Coming on top of police brutality which accompanied the arrests and interrogations, the accused were spared no irony, no insult at the hearings.

The trials lasted one month. The chief prosecutor started his indictment with these words : « The causes and origins of the latest revolution which broke out in the eastern provinces of the eternal Turkish fatherland are identical with those which in a not too distant past led to the rising of Bosnia and Herzegovina, bordered on three sides by non-Turkish and non-Moslem races, with those which, in spite of the brotherhood of five centuries, led the Albanians to strike the Turks in the back during the Balkan war, the Turks who have always shown the greatest affection for their compatriots. The ideal and the aim which nurtured the Kurdish revolution are the same which corrupted Syria and Palestine. »

He concluded by demanding the heads of the 53 accused.

The President of the court in his summing up, addressing himself to the accused, said : « Some of you guided by your egoism, others led by political ambitions, but all united on one point, that is the constitution of an independant Kurdistan — you went ahead. It is on the scaffold that you will pay the price of your crimes. » (1925-1926).

RISINGS OF AGHRI-DAGH

In 1927 a secret congress met at Aghri-Dagh composed of the delegates of patriotic organisations, clans, towns and revolutionaries who had taken refuge in the mountains.

This congress decided on the amalgamation of all the organisations, the appointment of a single command, the establishment

of stores of food supplies and munitions and on a plan of operation; and finally to end the Kurdo-Armenian misunderstanding. This was the origin of the Kurdish National League « Hoyboun » (Independence).

Ihsan Noury Bey, commander of the general staff, former commander of a contingent of the National Forces in 1925-26, was appointed Generalissimo, and a civil administration under the direction of Ibrabim Pasha Haski of Tello was instituted in Aghri-Dagh where the Kurdish flag was hoisted.

The government of Ankara was surprised by the speed of the Kurdish recovery. It thought it had created a vacuum. Was its army, greatly weakened by its reverses at the beginning of the 1925 revolution, capable of campaigning again? As one of the two weapons on which it had always depended was not sure, the Ankara government had recourse to the other : to corruption and false promises. It started negotiations with the Kurds. It proposed to them a general amnesty. It offered personal advantages to Ihsan Noury Bey. But not a word, of course, of the national claims. The Kurdish delegates refused. The Turkish government had to resort to arms. Two army corps were concentrated in the neighbourhood of Aghri-Dagh under the command of Salih Pasha.

That lasted for one year. Their munitions exhausted, the forces of Aghri-Dagh had to disperse. Ihsan Noury Pasha took refuge in Iran.

As always, vengeance against the civilians was pitiless — defenceless villages bombarded and set on fire; at Van and in all Kurdistan mass arrests and summary sentences, in a word, terror which had not ceased since 1925.

The Second International in session at Zurich protested against this bloody attack against the rights of men, against this violation of the treaty of Lausanne. The resolution of its executive of August 30 1930 said this : « The executive of the I.O.S. draws the attention of the world to the massacres by means of which the Turkish government is trying, not only to reduce the Kurds struggling for their liberty but also to exterminate the peaceful Kurdish population which did not take part in the insurrection, and by which they are trying to inflict on the Kurdish people the fate of the Armenians without public opinion of the capitalist countries protesting against this bloody barbarism. »

Of what importance was it to the Turkish Government ? The latter had promulgated in May 1932 a law whereby the territories of Turkey were divided into four zones. Three of these closed in Kurdistan, the last was completely evacuated and forbidden « for sanitary, material, cultural, political and strategic reasons as well as for reasons of public order. »

The law, it was stated, will not recognise any legal status in the tribes. All rights acquired in this sphere, even those supported by judgments, decrees and other documents, are abolished.

The powers of chief, of Beg, of Agha and of Sheikh of tribes, all organisations and institutions, on whatever documents, traditions and customs they are based, are abolished.

All property, which by virtue of whatever act or document, was recognised as belonging to legal entities represented by their chiefs, Beks, Aghas or Sheikhs, will pass into the full and entire ownership of the state.

This property will be distributed and granted by decision of the cabinet and government decrees to immigrants and private farmers (Turkish immigrants).

The minister of the interior has power by decision of the cabinet to transfer and install in zone N° 2 persons who have been, before the publication of this law, chiefs, Beks, Aghas or Sheikhs of tribes, persons suspected of espionage near the frontiers and persons holding a dominant position in the East as well as their families.

It is forbidden for those speaking any other mother tongue than Turkish to constitute afresh villages or districts, groupings of craftsmen, employees or classes; or to acquire exclusively for their dependents a village, district, grouping according to trade or a branch of work. The minister of interior will have power by decision of the cabinet to disperse such groupings, even those having existed hitherto.

This exclusive law served as the basis for the discriminatory statute which is still in force to day in Turkey. Has one sufficiently grasped the implacable destiny ? Is not this the complete destruction of a people ?

The first two paragraphs abolish all organisations and institutions : social destruction. The third paragraph confiscates the means of existence : destruction of the means of subsistence. The

fourth legalises expropriation for the benefit of Turkish immigrants which the government would not have been able to impose over virgin lands : spoliation of the right of ownership.

The fifth paragraph legalises deportation, grants the administration discretionary police powers : destruction of civil rights. The sixth and eighth paragraphs, not content with measures of coercion capable of breaking all national survival among deportees in the territories assigned to them, add to these restrictive measures concerning work : destruction of vital energy itself.

Peasants saw themselves barred from the villages : they were condemned to waste away in the towns.

That is not all : the Kurds no longer have the right to call themselves Kurds, the use of their language is no longer permitted in public. From now on, their only official denomination is : Turkish mountain people.

The cultivation of tobacco, essential source of income for the peasant, is forbidden in Kurdistan. Banned are national costumes, works of folklore — which means the death of Kurdish craftsmanship.

Crushing taxes — the tax amounts to 30 piastres per sheep's head which Mr Balsan affirms (page 224, note 1) « absorbs almost the value of the wool ». Levies are imposed for the benefit of the air force and the navy. One of every two goats is taken from the peasant.

The Kurd is excluded from the higher military ranks as well as from high administrative posts. But what is still much worse is the treatment imposed on Kurdish military conscripts. We leave it to an Englishman writing under the pseudonym of Tigris to speak : « Turkish opposition to Kurdish nationalism deliberately aims at the extermination of the race. Although I cannot claim to have absolute proof, I think I am not mistaken when I say that male Kurds are being moved en bloc into the famous Turkish labour corps, always to posts far from their homes, so much so that the propagation of the race is interrupted... I prefer not to add to the present wave of stories of horrors and atrocities by recounting individual cases known to me, any way the effect would be lost in the surfeit of instances. But I shall ask your readers to recall the ferocity of the Turks

in the past, now practised in a manner less public and in a region less known to the public. »

Ismet Pasha Inonu, then prime minister, and the minister of justice, Mahmoud Essad, spoke in a way which said much about the psychosis of official circles.

In his speech inaugurating the Sivas railway, the premier declared : « The revolution which has lasted for five years in our eastern provinces and which is fanned by intrigues hatched from abroad has today lost half its strength... The Turkish nation alone has the right to claim ethnic and racial rights in this country. No other element has this right. The day when this railway reaches the frontier all hesitation will disappear, all intrigue will be without effect in face of this fact which will then be established in an absolute fashion. » (Milliet N° 1636, August 31 1930).

And Mahmoud Essad speaking to his electors at Eudemiche in August 1930 went still further, saying : « We are living in the freest country in the world which is called Turkey. Your deputy could not find a more propitious group in which to speak with sincerity of his convictions. Therefore I shall not hide my feelings. The Turk is the only lord, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish origin have only one right in this country : the right to be servants, the right to be slaves.

« Let friend as well as enemy, and even the mountains, know this fact. » (Journal, Milliet N° 1655, September 19, 1930).

What had become of the promises of autonomy ? What had become of international law, of the undertakings of the treaty of Lausanne, the rights of the minorities ?

The Ankara government went further. Internal measures did not suffice against the national aspirations of the Kurds. There must be a coalition, Iran and Iraq must be brought in under a combined plan of action.

This was what was done under the Treaty of Saadabad in 1937. *Article 7* of this treaty laid it down that : « Each of the high contracting parties undertakes to take measures, in its own sphere, against the formation or activity of armed bands, associations and organisations aiming at the overthrow of established

institutions and liable to affect the order or security of any part or frontier of the territory of another party, or liable to affect the authority of the government of that party. »

WERE IRAQ PLAYS A COMMANDING ROLE

Scarcely had the armistice of Moudros (October 30, 1918) been signed when, by a joint declaration on November 8, 1918, France and Britain affirmed that they had no other aim but « the complete and final liberation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national governments and administrations taking their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations. »

This was the strict application of the Wilsonian principles. It was therefore natural that the Kurds, as much, if not more, than the peoples of the old vilayets of Bagdad and Basrah, expected national independence. Now, it appeared that the British efforts in reality aimed only at detaching the south western part of Kurdish territory (where the oil wells lie) from the rest of Kurdistan, before the fate of the latter was definitely decided, in order to join it, against the unanimous will of the population, to Iraq, a new national entity purely Arab in essence.

The Kurds resisted and there followed a series of revolts.

On December 24, 1922, the British high commissioner made the following statement : « His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of Iraq recognise the rights of the Kurds living within the frontiers of Iraq to establish a Kurdish government inside these frontiers. They hope that the different Kurdish elements will as soon as possible reach an agreement among themselves concerning the form they desire this government to take and the boundaries to which they wish to extend. The Kurds will send responsible delegates to discuss their economic and political relations with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Iraqi Government. »

This statement, like the others, remained a dead letter.

Sir D. Clayton in February 1929 made it known to the Iraqi government that the British government was ready to support

the entry of Iraq into the League of Nations after having signed a treaty with it.

This treaty was signed in 1930. Great agitation resulted among the Kurds. Their complaints, their petitions poured into Geneva and London. This is how Captain Philip Mumford, for seven years member of the British Intelligence Service, reported on developments :

« The Anglo-Iraqi treaty, defining our relations with Iraq when this country would have become independent, was published in June 1930. There followed petitions and disturbances among the Kurds who attempted, wisely or not, to boycott the elections of that summer.

« This agitation ended by a revolt when the Iraqi army fired on a Kurdish crowd. Sheikh Mahmoud took this as a pretext to launch an open revolt. Mahmoud asked for a limited form of autonomy under British protection and protested against the direct influence of the government of Bagdad.

« It was hoped that the government would be able to settle the situation alone. It quickly became evident that this was out of the question owing to the depth of Kurdish feeling and the incompetence of the Arab army.

« The Royal Air Force had to bear the largest part of the operations. The bombing of Kurdish villages became inevitable if the rebellion were to be got under control. And even then Sheikh Mahmoud did not surrender until eight months later... » (Lecture given at an ordinary session of the R.A.S., Vol. xx, January 1933).

In concluding a note (S.G. of May 8, 1931) Sir Henry Conway Dobbs, former Iraqi high commissioner, exactly summed up the situation of the Kurds in Iraq and defined the responsibilities of Great Britain : « It is a fact that there is a danger that British forces can come to be employed as a mercenary instrument of tyranny in the hands of an eastern government which is encouraged to commit acts of tyranny against its subjects, knowing that they are deprived of the natural remedy against tyranny, that is hope of a successful insurrection. And the weight of this system will bear in the first place on the non-Arab, the most important and most warlike minority, the Kurds. »

A correspondent of *The Times*, in an article devoted to events in Iraq in 1930-31, revealed on his part the basis of the British attitude : after having reported and expressed disapproval of the hanging by the Turkish authorities of one hundred Kurds from Iraq, who had taken refuge in Turkey, on the ground that these sentences were in execution of judgments dating back more than 18 years etc... he added : « This had the effect of convincing the Kurds once more that, in spite of the desire of some British advisers who personally did all they could to have justice rendered them, it was useless to hope for anything from the British embassy in Bagdad. »

Useless also to hope for anything from the Iraqi government which did not intend to make peace. They wanted to reduce the Kurds to silence for ever. They hastily prepared to resume operations. They were resumed in November 1931 and lasted until June 1932. The region of Barzan was half devastated by attacks by the R.A.F. In the districts of Baroj, Mizouri and Schirvan, the number of villages destroyed totalled 79, the number of houses 1365 out of a total of 2382. In the face of such ferocity protests arose from almost everywhere.

The Times of September 23 in an editorial recalled that « under the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty the role of the British air force was to be limited to the defence of the Iraqi frontiers and of British air communications against aggression from outside. » These were, as always, only academic discussions.

LAST KURDISH REVOLT IN IRAQ

Exasperated by the injustices and cruelties of the Bagdad government, the Kurds of Iraq took up arms. The last revolt dates from 1943-46.

In the spring of 1945, the Iraqi government reorganised its forces. After the arrival of two Iraqi motorised units formed and trained by the British in Egypt, it thought itself strong enough to raise a pretext for attacking the Barzanis. It invited the great Kurdish leader Mella Mustapha to Bagdad, with the purported aim of seeking bases for a new agreement. Mella Mustapha mistrusted the invitation and declined it. However, to show his

goodwill he declared himself ready to negotiate with any delegate whom the government might send him. As was to be expected, the negotiations did not lead anywhere.

Anticipating this setback the Government in July 1945 had concentrated 42.000 men, comprising 30.000 men of the regular forces and 12.000 gendarmerie and police, and the whole of its air force, amounting to 25 fighters and bombers. The command was entrusted to the British officer General Renton (former commander of the « Desert Rats ») assisted by his general staff.

Mella Mustapha was also ready. Only the men under his command did not number more than five thousand, armed with rifles and light machine guns, most of these being material seized from the Iraqi army in 1943.

On August 7, 1945, the Iraqis resumed the offensive in the Rawandouz area. The air force went into action. A bloody battle was engaged. At « Dallet » in the centre four Iraqi battalions were annihilated. The Iraqi army then abandoned the front in disorder...

Without leaving the Iraqis time to regroup, Mella Mustapha pursued them and dispersed them. The road to Erbil lay open to him, the road to Bagdad lay open to him.

It was urgent, was it not, to have recourse again to the RAF. The latter surprised the Kurdish force twenty kilometres from Erbil. In a few days 55 villages were entirely or partially destroyed. There were nearly one thousand killed and injured, nearly 15.000 women, children and old men had to flee into the mountains. Several thousand head of cattle were killed.

Mella Mustapha and his forces, entrenched in the mountains, would have been able to hold out victoriously for a long time yet against Iraqi attacks, even against the RAF, if there had not arisen at that moment the Kurdish liberation movement in Persia under the direction of Qazi Mehemed at Mahabad.

Mella Mustapha believed that if his collaboration with Qazi Mehemed provided the latter with a contingent of wartried, relatively well armed troops and helped in the consolidation of the young state of Mahabad, it would be to the advantage of the Kurdish cause as a whole. He therefore withdrew into Iran and placed himself at the disposal of the Kurdish republic of Mahabad.

SITUATION OF THE KURDS OF IRAN

The Kurds in Iran suffered the same fate as those in Turkey and Iraq.

The generals of Riza Shah were free to stifle complaints, sobs, cries, to drown in blood the slightest stirring of revolt.

Let us quote this passage from *The Kurdish Question* (page 52, 1934): All Kurdish social organisation, literature or other forms of expression are banned. The entry into Persia of records in the Kurdish language is forbidden; as in Turkey they say « Turkish mountain people » to avoid saying « Kurds », so it is in Persia where they speak of « Persian mountain people ».

And Colonel Elphinston in his turn writes: « The policy of Riza Shah was rough but effective... Hundreds of chiefs of tribes were deported and placed in enforced residence in Teheran and elsewhere. Their properties were confiscated. Military posts linked together by roads were established at strategic points in Kurdish territory. Deprived of their chiefs, the Kurds were at the mercy of the corruption and brutality of Persian officials. »

As always in the course of the vicissitudes of their history the Kurds, wrapped up in themselves, patient, indomitable, awaited their hour.

It came in November 1941 when the Allied armies occupied Iran. Kurdish territory was then completely liberated.

Then Qazi Mehemed, great Kurdish intellectual, supported by Mella Mustapha Barzani, created the Kurdish republic of Mahahad.

His programme was as follows :

- 1 — The Kurdish people in Iran will enjoy the freedom of self-government in the administration of their local affairs and will obtain autonomy within the framework of the Persian state;
- 2 — The Kurdish language will be the official language and will be used for all education;
- 3 — The provincial council of Kurdistan will be immediately elected according to constitutional law; and will exercise its right of control and surveillance in all public affairs;

4 — All state officials will be autochthonous.

5 — The Kurdish democratic party will endeavour to achieve complete communion and brotherhood with the people of Azerbaidjan and the Christian elements living on the territory of the latter;

6 — The Kurdish democratic party will apply itself to improving the moral, sanitary and economic conditions of the Kurdish people by the development of education, hygiene, agriculture and trade.

On December 15, 1945, the Kurdish national flag was hoisted, at a moving ceremony attended by the chiefs of clans, the members of the new democratic party, and a vast crowd from all parts of the territory...

On January 22, 1946, Qazi Mehemed was elected President of the autonomous Kurdish Republic. A government was constituted. Its progressive but well-balanced spirit, its wisdom, its faith, its methodical activity were guarantors of the future of the young Republic.

The first preoccupation of the new government was education. Mr. L. RAMBOUT (*The Kurds and the Law*, page 103) wrote : « Was it not symptomatic that, on the very day of the proclamation of independence, Qazi Mehemed inaugurated a high school for girls and the publication of the newspaper *Kurdistan*, official organ of the new government ? »

Next a series of decrees regulated finance, civil administration, jurisdiction of courts, codification of laws, and organisation of the militia. The survey of the country was started. Urgent hygienic measures; printing of books and school text books in Kurdish; translation into Kurdish of foreign works; literary and political reviews were all got under way so that the Kurdish spirit, so long stifled and disfigured, could unfold itself anew.

Agriculture and agrarian problems were entrusted to a special department. A broadcasting station was solemnly inaugurated at Mahabad. At last an era of freedom, equality and national justice was opening.

In face of this accomplished fact, the government of Teheran invited the President of the Kurdish Republic to visit the Iranian capital in order to negotiate with him.

Qazi Mehemed went, but the negotiations had not been concluded, the truce had not been completed when the Persian government was already concentrating its military forces against the Kurdish Republic.

REACTION OF THE IRANIANS AGAINST THE KURDS

The government of Mahabad answered back. General Mustapha Barzani concentrated troops on the front of Sakkiz-Mahmoudabad. Fierce skirmishing took place, but it was indecisive. However the Kurds obliged the Iranian troops to evacuate several positions.

Qazi Mehemed on his part declared on June 1st, 1946, to the correspondent of A.F.P.: « The Kurds would be satisfied if the central government decided really to apply democratic laws throughout Iran, and recognised the laws now in force in Kurdistan concerning the education of the Kurd and the autonomy of the local administration and army. »

The correspondent asked : « Do you not fear that an armed conflict between the central government and Kurdistan would involve foreign intervention ? » Qazi Mehemed replied: « The situation in Kurdistan is very different from that in Azerbaidjan. Our country has never been occupied by Soviet troops, and, since the abdication of Riza Shah, neither the gendarmerie nor Iranian troops have penetrated into Kurdistan. We have therefore practically been living in independence since that time. Further we shall never tolerate foreign intervention wherever it comes from. The question of Kurdistan is a purely internal affair which should be settled between the Kurds and the central government. »

Qazi Mehemed recalled the terrible struggles which the Kurdish people had had to hear, blow upon blow, for its freedom. That after first world war the creation of a Kurdish state already figured in the treaty of Sevres. « If today », he concluded, « we have to claim with persistence the partial autonomy of our country, the fault lies with the central government which has done nothing for our recovery. We earnestly desire to enter upon the path of progress. We do not desire to imitate either the Americans or the Russians, but we refuse to live in the position of animals of the civilised countries. »

Foreign observers invited to Mahabad « noted that the Kurdish Republic was a going concern » (Archie Roosevelt: The Republic of Mahabad); that « the town of Mahabad, hitherto a typical provincial town, dull and asleep, had become picturesque and full of activity and life. » And further he said: « Great efforts have been made to give a firm foundation to Kurdish education. » — « Contrary to the rest of Azerbaidjan, Kurdistan is free of Soviet agents. » — « While terrorism reigns uncontrolled in Aberbaidjan, there is very little in Kurdistan; there are no political prisoners; only one or two cases of assassinations, perhaps political, have been reported; only a few Kurds having little sympathy for the regime have taken refuge in Teheran. In the streets of Mahabad you can hear broadcasts from Ankara or London, whereas in Tabriz whoever listens to such broadcasts is punished with death.

« Whether this freedom is due to the moderation and liberalism of Qazi Mehemed and his cabinet or to the presence of clans who would not have supported violence against their neighbours, the fact remains that the regime was popular, at least among the citizens of Mahabad who rejoiced in this respite after the exactions and oppression which they considered as characteristic of the central Iranian government. »

This good fortune was to be of short duration. In November 1946 came a sudden change.

On December 15 Sadr Ghazi, brother of Qazi Mehemed, deputy of the Iranian Parliament who had served as intermediary between his brother and Iran, went to Myandouab and informed General Houmayoun that the Kurds were ready to receive peacefully Iranian contingents entrusted with the mission of ensuring the freedom of the forthcoming elections.

The troops of General Mustapha Barzani received the order to evacuate Mahabad so that the Iranian troops could enter. Was not this the best proof of the moderation, the understanding and the good faith of the Kurds ?

But, behind the friendly aspect of these relations, behind the official visits of the Iranian military commander to Qazi Mehemed, a terrible repression was about to begin.

On December 17 the first arrest took place. Then Qazi Mehemed, Seifghazi and members of the government were arrested, and on the 30th Sadr Ghazi, the mediator who had returned

to Teheran, was brought back to Mahabad and imprisoned with his brothers.

Handed over to a court martial they were sentenced to death. Their execution took place at the end of March 1947.

What was said of this outside? Mr Archie Roosevelt thus summed up the action of the military government in the country. « The Iranian military government, in conformity with its programme, succeeded in effacing all trace of the Kurdish regime. Even the Kurdish printing plant was destroyed, education of the Kurd was forbidden and all books in Kurdish were publicly burned.

CONCLUSION

B. Nikitine, speaking of the Kurdish problem (Foreign Political Review) expressed himself thus: « It appears to me that hitherto, in seeking particularly to discover foreign influences, the Kurdish problem has not been placed in its proper light. Indeed the aspirations for Kurdish independence take their roots deep in the origins of the social structure of this people and are the result of a long historical evolution. »

A. Roosevelt said: « If the countries where the Kurds live grant the Kurdish population a certain local autonomy and renounce their attempts to submit them to a nationalism which is foreign to them, they may succeed in obtaining from them a loyalty analogous to that found among the multiple populations of Switzerland. The Arab countries appear to have made a step in this direction. A similar policy in Iran could be a cause of unity rather than separatism between the two peoples of this nation. »

The facts reported above clearly establish that the development of the question has, during recent decades, assumed the character of a policy of systematic extermination with regard to this people.

It is no longer only a question of reestablishing them in their indefeasible rights to freedom and independence as a national entity, but also of urgently protecting them from the destruction which is threatening them.

If the Armenians and the Jews, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans underwent a similar fate, tragic as it was, in a more or less distant past, the Kurds are being submitted to the same fate now in defiance of and in opposition to the principles proclaimed by the United Nations concerning both the « rights of countries non-autonomous or under trusteeship » and « respect for the rights of man and the fundamental freedoms ».

The Kurdish question is at the very basis of all stability in the Middle East, any solution aimed at pacifying feelings there and ensuring a durable peace which ignores this question is fatally destined to be fruitless.

IMPRIMERIE LOUIS JEAN - GAP (H.-A.) - 31.2787
DÉPÔT LÉGAL N° 40-49
