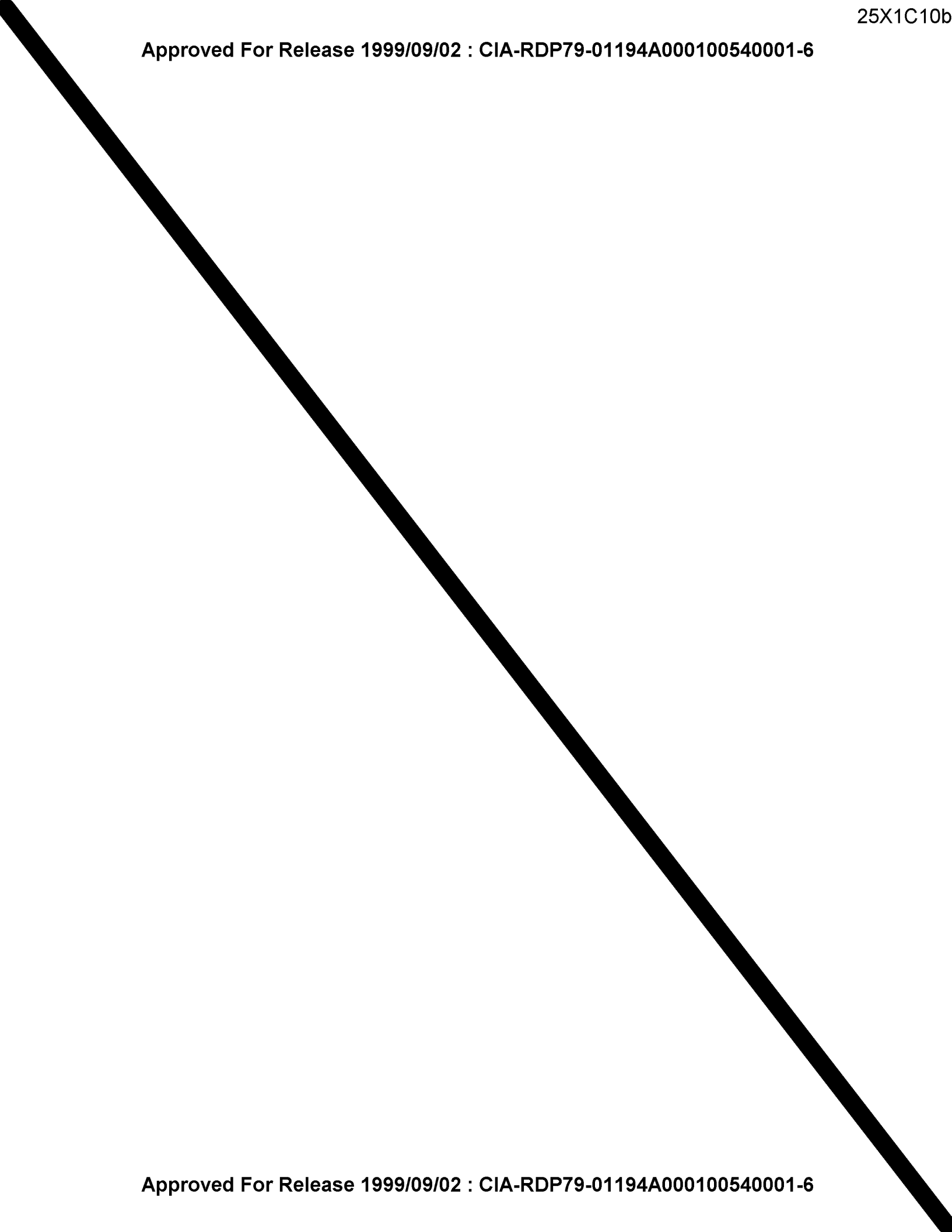


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# The Middle Eastern War Nobody Knows

This is the first in a series of six articles on the war between the Iraqi government and its 2.5 million Kurdish minority — "The War Nobody Knows."

By Smith Hempstone

Star-News Staff Writer

HAIJ OMRAN, Iraqi Kurdistan — "You are welcome," said Idriss Barzani. The uncertain light of the flickering kerosene lantern illuminated his red-and-white turban and his finely-honed features. "You are very welcome indeed."

Outside the sandbagged bunker, one sensed rather than saw the groups of armed men hunkered down in the moonlight, one eye on the Rumi (Roman, hence any Westerner) who had made his way to Idriss' tent, the other on the Big Dipper and the Bear, from which an Iraqi air raid might come.

AND INDEED, the 30-year-old third son and chief of staff of the leader of the Kurdish rebel movement had cause to welcome an American newsman to his camp high in the mountains of northern Iraq. Since serious fighting erupted here in mid-April, no American correspondent had made his way to this mountain fastness east of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Yet here, in this stark and beautiful land of towering peaks capped by eternal snows, a Middle Eastern war without witnesses is being waged by the Arab Baathist government of Iraq against its Kurdish minority of 2.5 million people.

As we sat cross-legged on a Persian carpet, sipping tiny glasses of heavily-sugared tea, messengers from the front came and went on sandaled feet and a field telephone rang insistently in the back of the bunker. Idriss hitched his Belgian-made .45-caliber automatic pistol into a more comfortable position and gave me a brief accounting of the situation.

It was, he said, a war pitting his turbaned Kurdish tribesmen and their bolt-action Brno rifles against the most modern Russian T-60

tanks, of a few ancient Dushka 12.7mm. anti-aircraft machine guns against the most sophisticated supersonic Soviet Tupolev-22 bombers, of curved Kurdish daggers wielded silently in the night and rolling fireballs of Iraqi napalm that consumed crops

and villages, leaving his people destitute but defiant.

This war, Idriss said, his words punctuated by the dull thud of Iraqi bombs falling westward down the valley toward Chouman, was the fifth and most serious Kurdish war since 1961.

There could, he said, nervously

tion of a black mustache, be only one outcome to this conflict: autonomy for his people within a democratic Iraq or their extinction.

I knew it was not the first time the Kurds had faced such a prospect in the 4,000 years since the founding of the Kingdom of Gutium. They, who like their cousins the Iranians are Moslems but not Semites, harried Xerophon's 10,000, battled the Romans, Parthians and Mongols, and made war against half a hundred kingdoms, governments and empires.

But despite a deserved reputation for ferocity, the Kurds have seldom left their land of swift-flowing mountain streams, ancient oak trees and red-legged partridges to harass their neighbors. This war, like earlier ones, is in defense of the land and integrity of a people denied their own nation. The Kurds here in Iraq, led by 71-year-old Mulla Mustapha Barzani, are locked in a make-or-break struggle with their Arab rulers; if they fail, the Kurdish nationalist movement, like that of their Armenian neighbors, will disappear into history.

THE KURDS, who were promised their own nation by the never-implemented 1920 Treaty of Sevres, are divided among five nations. Kurdish nationalists say there are 5 million in Turkey, 4 million in Iran, 2.5 million here in Iraq, 600,000 in Syria and 150,000 in the Soviet Union. The governments concerned say those figures are high.

The Turks deny the very existence of the Kurds. "We have only mountain Turks who have forgotten their native tongue," they say. And they have done their best to make this so. In the last century and the first third of the present one, there were countless rebellions in eastern Turkey that resulted in the massacre and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Kurds. Now

with the Iraqi Kurds fighting for their survival against their Arab overlords, the Turks have closed their border against the rebels.

The Kurds have fared better in Iran. There was a brief reign of terror there after the collapse in 1946 of the Kurdish Mahabad republic set up in northern Iran by the departing Russians. The republic's leaders were hanged, their supporters imprisoned and the wearing of the Kurdish national costume and the use of the language were banned.

IRAN'S SHAH Mohammed Reza Pahlavi has removed these proscriptions and distributed many of his personal estates to his Kurdish subjects. The Iranians have left open their border for trade and a small flow of arms and ammunition to the rebellious Iraqi Kurds, more than 60,000 of whom (mostly women and children) have taken refuge in Iran.

The Shah's help is not wholly disinterested: Iran and Iraq dispute the sovereignty of the waterway called the Shatt al-Arab, some 30,000 Iranians were expelled from Iraq a couple of years ago (at which time there were artillery exchanges between Iraqi and Iranian forces), Iraqi agents continue to infiltrate Iran to smuggle arms to dissident Baluchi tribesmen and Iranian troops are fighting Iraqi-backed Dhofari rebels in the Persian Gulf emirate of Oman.

The Soviet Union, although it gave sanctuary to Barzani and 500 of his followers in 1947 after the collapse of the Mahabad republic, long ago snuffed out the spark of nationalism among its own Kurds. Moscow, which seeks in Iraq a base from which to extend its influence over the oil-rich Persian Gulf, is pouring sophisticated aircraft and tanks into Iraq at a rate of more than \$1 billion annually. Soviet air force officers coordinate the air attacks on undefended Kurdish villages, their airmen reportedly fly an occasional combat mission themselves, and Russian advisors serve with the Iraqi army at least down to

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the brigade level. Just as Barzani's Kurdish rebels would have no chance of success without Iranian help, Iraq could not hope for victory against the Kurds without this massive flow of Russian military hardware. Indeed, the Sunni Baathists, the Kurds say, are so unpopular with their more numerous Shiite subjects — the theological distinction is roughly comparable to that between Protestants and Catholics — that the government in Baghdad almost certainly would fall of its own repressive weight were it not propped up by Russia.

**SYRIA, TOO,** is a Baathist state (the Baath party is a pan-Arabist, non-Communist movement that rejects Egyptian Arab socialism) and the 600,000 Kurds who live there do so as a depressed and distrusted minority.

There is a Kurdish saying that "the Kurds have no friends." But Israel, like Iran, has an obvious interest in and sympathy for the Iraqi Kurds, if only because the five Kurdish revolts since 1961 have effectively tied down the bulk of Iraq's air force, its 2,000 tanks and six of its eight infantry divisions. There have been reputable reports of Israeli aid to the Kurds, but both sides deny these and they cannot be confirmed.

Whatever and from whom the flow of arms and money, it is not enough to give the Kurds the sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons necessary to launch and sustain the major offensive into the oil fields of the lowlands that is necessary to give them victory.

On the other hand, the Iraqis, despite their vast superiority in weapons and equipment, particularly tanks and aircraft (of which the Kurds have neither), lack either the will or the ability to fight their way into the mountainous heartland of Kurdistan.

In the first five weeks after fighting broke out on March 11, heavy spring rains kept the conflict at a low level. But with the bombing on April 24 of the undefended Kurdish town of Qal'a Dizeh, in which 130

people lost their lives, the fighting has grown in intensity.

**THE KURDS** appear to have had the best of it. Mas'oud Barzani, the nationalist leader's 28-year-old fourth son, who is head of Kurdish military intelligence, estimates that nearly 2,000 Iraqis have been killed (the bodies of more than 600, abandoned on the battlefield, have been recovered by the Kurds, he says), 3,000 wounded and 100 captured. In addition, he reports that more than 700 members of the Iraqi army, 500 of them officers and most of them Kurds, have defected to the rebels, as have 315 Kurdish mercenaries employed by Baghdad.

Despite the small number and inadequate caliber of their weapons, the Kurds claim to have destroyed more than 100 Iraqi tanks and armored cars, and to have knocked out nearly 300 other vehicles. They say they have downed 23 airplanes and damaged 16 others.

This has been accomplished, the Kurds say, at a cost of fewer than 200 of their own men, called *Pesh Merga* (literally, "those who face death") killed and 400 wounded. But nearly 400 civilians have been killed and 700 wounded in the more than 2,000 around-the-clock Iraqi air raids that have destroyed nearly 500 undefended villages and hamlets.

**THESE STATISTICS** may not be entirely accurate, if only because firm information is difficult to get here. At any rate, they are all one has to go on, since it was not until late July, with the casualties mounting and the reserves mobilized, that the Iraqi government admitted there was anything like a war going on in Kurdistan. On the basis of visits to four fronts, it would seem that the Kurdish claims are at least within the ballpark.

The Kurdish *Pesh Merga* are possibly the world's finest mountain troops. Armed with a bizarre assortment of Sniders, Martinis, Brnos, Lee-Enfields and Russian Kalashnikov automatic rifles captured from the Iraqis, they scamper like

mountain goats from peak to peak. At the front, they live on yoghurt, grey, doughy bread and heavily-sugared tea. There are only walking wounded: The others die before they can be brought down from the mountains.

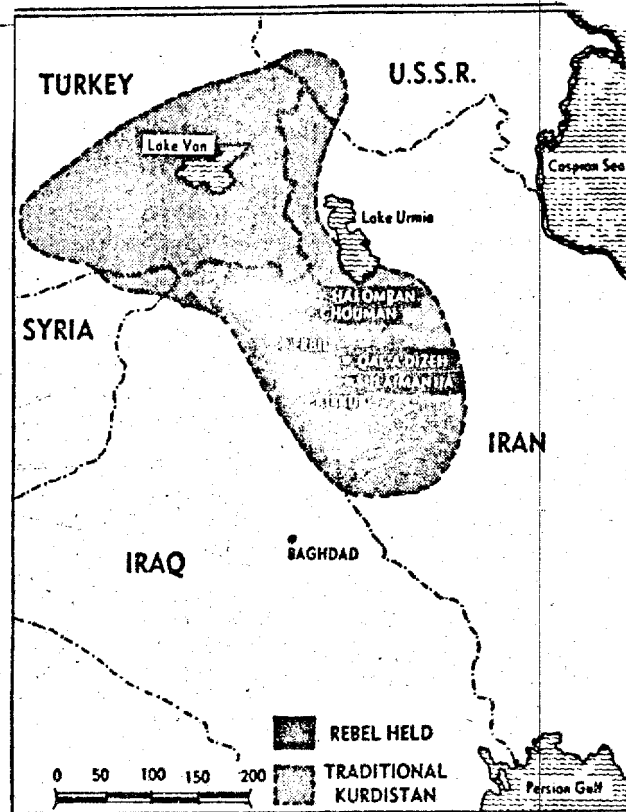
The *Pesh Merga* are superbly led by men some of whom have been with Barzani for nearly 30 years. Many of the division and battalion commanders have served in one particular mountain range, every foot of which they know, for eight, 10 or 12 years.

While the Kurds hold three static fronts vital to them in which no retreat is allowed — Barzan, Bilak and Shaqlawah — the conflict in most areas is essentially a guerrilla one. When government forces, heavily supported by tanks and aircraft, move up a valley, the Kurds inflict such losses as they can upon them, then pull back into the moun-

tains to harass the flanks and rear of the invaders. The Iraqis, remembering a disaster in the 1966 war when a 1,200-man Iraqi force was cut off and massacred to the last man, tend to be extremely cautious. Usually, after burning or harvesting the crops and destroying any villages under their control, they pull back to the safety of the plains.

The Kurdish territory under 24-hour rebel control is limited to the mountainous country in a triangle between the Turkish and Persian frontiers, an area 200 miles in length and no more than 60 deep. But there are Kurdish partisans far behind the Iraqi lines and when night falls, the territory under Baghdad's control shrinks to that lighted by the searchlights of their garrisons.

The Kurds, who after dark move and raid virtual-



Since this map was drawn the Iraqis have broken through to take Qal'a Dizeh, splitting the rebel-held area in two. Ruwandiz and Ranla also have fallen in battles that the Kurds say cost the Iraqis more than 1,000 dead. Iran has reinforced her troops in the Iraqi frontier.

ly at will over much of Iraq, have 60,000 *Pesh Merga* in the field, organized in 40 battalions, and 40,000 tribal irregulars. They claim that if they had the arms to give them, they could easily raise another 100,000 fighting men. Arrayed against them are more than 70,000 Iraqi troops supported by 150 jet airplanes and 1,100 tanks.

The Kurds are extremely sensitive to suggestions that Mulla Mustapha Barzani does not have the total support of the entire Kurdish people. The Baghdad government has managed to find 60 Kurds to serve in a puppet advisory council and has enlisted 6,000 Kurdish mercenaries, drawn mainly from the Kurdish Communist Party and from tribes traditionally opposed to Barzani. Obeidullah Barzani ("a traitor and a mercenary who will be treated as such," according to his brother Mas'oud), the general's eldest son, is a minister without portfolio in the Baathist government.

**HAVING SAID THIS**, however, it must be added that Barzani does seem to have the firm support of the great majority of the Kurds, both tribal and educated, who regard him with a reverence bordering on awe. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the legitimacy of his leadership is the \$2 million price the Baathists reportedly have put on his head.

Barzani agreed to a truce in March 1970 when the Baathists granted the principle of Kurdish autonomy. Kurdistan was to have its own schools, courts, local administration, internal security forces and a share of the Iraqi oil revenues commensurate with its percentage of the population.

But after the signing in 1972 of Iraq's 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, the Baathists, given access to the most sophisticated Russian weapons, saw no reason to negotiate Kurdish autonomy. Instead, they unilaterally promulgated a take-it-or-leave-it decree

that afforded the Kurds no share in the oil revenues and amounted, the Kurds claim, to no more than decentralization, with an appointive Kurdish council rather than elected one. When Barzani rejected the offer, fighting broke out. And this year, for the first time, he has been joined in the mountains by a great mass of urban intellectual Kurds who in the past had been troubled by the conservative nature of his leadership.

If one is to judge by the fury of their air raids on undefended villages and their treatment of Kurdish civilians who fall into their hands, the Iraqis are determined this time to seek a "final solution" to their Kurdish problem (the Kurds have been trying without success to press charges of genocide against Baghdad at the United Nations). For their part, the Kurds say there is no chance of negotiations with a repressive Baathist regime that already, and more than once, has demonstrated its bad faith.

There is, Idriss Barzani told me, only one question: Will an Arab military dictatorship, supported by the full military might of the Soviet Union, crush the Kurds? Or will the Kurds somewhere find the anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns that will enable them to come down out of the mountains and inflict a telling defeat on the Iraqis?

"**WE CAN BEAT** the Iraqis," Idriss said, pounding his small fist into the palm of his hand for emphasis. "we always have. But we cannot defeat the Russians without American help."

"Kissinger must see," Idriss continued, "that the Russian presence in Iraq has as its objective Soviet dominance of the Persian Gulf and its oil. Is this really in America's interest? And, if it is not, why not give us the little bit of help that we need to defeat the Baathists and expel the Russians from our country?"

It was very late, the stars were fading and in the east were the first pale streaks

of dawn. There was much hawking and spitting among the bodyguards clustered outside Idriss' tent.

"And what," I asked him, "will you do if you do not get American help?"

He shrugged his narrow shoulders.

God and the mountains

are on our side. We will fight and, if necessary, we will die. But we will never give in, for this would mean the end of us as a people."

The Iraqi artillery could be heard grumbling faintly far away to the west. There would, it seemed, be some dying this day in the Gorge of Ali Beg.

# The War Nobody Knows

## Chapter 2

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By Smith Hempstone  
Star-News Staff Writer

### DERBND, Iraqi Kurdistan —

Getting there, they say, is half the fun. If war-wracked and remote Iraqi Kurdistan is your destination, it can also demand the cunning of a Machiavelli, the patience of a Job and a healthy set of spinal discs. Which perhaps is one reason so few American reporters have covered the five Kurdish rebellions since 1961.

It began for me with a telephone call on a Monday morning late in June. Would I, my friend asked, be willing to talk to a delegation of Iraqi Kurds? Knowing that fierce fighting had broken out once again between the Kurds, an Indo-Aryan Moslem people, and their Arab overlords — and on a far more serious level than ever before — I said I would see them the next morning.

When I arrived at work the next day, the three Kurds were waiting for me: Abdul (Sami) Rahman, a former Communist, until March the Iraqi minister for Northern (i.e., Kurdish) Affairs and a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party's seven-man ruling politburo; Mohammed Dizayee, a former Iraqi ambassador (to Czechoslovakia and, later, Canada) and, until fighting broke out in March, minister of public works and housing in the Baghdad government, and M. S. Dosky, another former Iraqi diplomat.

All were dressed in well-cut business suits and, except for the bristling mustaches without which any Kurd feels naked, they bore little resemblance to the bandoleered mountaineers who for 4,000 years defended their mountain homeland in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Iran and the Soviet Union. (In 260 A.D., a Kurdish army in the service of the Sassanid Persians defeated the Roman emperor Valerian; he was flayed

and his stuffed *shamsa* preserved as a war trophy in the imperial palace at Seleucia Ctesiphon.)

**THE PURPOSE** of their visit, Abdul Rahman said, was to try to

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rally American support for the 2.5 million Iraqi Kurds against whom the Baathist government had launched a genocidal war, bombing undefended villages, burning crops and driving 60,000 refugees across the Iranian border.

For reasons I can only partially analyze, I decided on the spur of the moment that I would, if it were possible, make my way to Kurdistan to see what was happening with my own eyes.

That, Dosky said, could easily be arranged. While the Turkish frontier was closed, I had only to get myself to Tehran, and the Kurdish Democratic Party would see to it that I reached the liberated zone of Iraqi Kurdistan. But although I had never been to Iran, I knew that I couldn't reach Kurdistan without the knowledge and consent of SAVAK, the ubiquitous Iranian secret police. Dosky suggested that SAVAK would pose no problem.

I obtained a multiple-entry visa at the Iranian embassy and let it be known that my ultimate destination was Iraqi Kurdistan where, in the eyes of the Baghdad government, I would be an illegal and highly unwanted visitor. Since relations between Iran and Iraq, rivals for hegemony in the Shait al-Arab and the Persian Gulf, are characterized by a thinly veiled hostility punctuated by gunfire, it seemed unlikely that the Iranians would be unduly distressed by my travel plans.

"Where you go after you leave my country," the Iranian official said with just a suggestion of a smile playing on his lips, "is no concern of mine. By the way, I would not be surprised if someone called on you at your hotel in Tehran."

I made discreet inquiries at the Central Intelligence Agency as to whether a request on my part for an informal briefing on the Kurdish situation would be well received. Because of Watergate and other publicity — or perhaps because CIA was embarrassed by its lack of knowledge on the situation — the response was negative.

From the State Department, I received a rather sketchy low-level briefing, two invaluable large-scale British maps of northern Iraq and the distinct feeling that they wished

United States, while it sympathizes on humanitarian grounds with the plight of the Kurds, is intent on warming up its rather frosty relations with the Baathist regime in Baghdad. That, too, is the position of the other major powers with interests in the area — the Soviet Union, Britain and France — and the reason is oil: Iraq exports about \$9 billion worth annually, and much of it goes to the West.

**DOSKY AND I** met again in a Washington restaurant where he gave me letters of introduction to Kurdish agents in London, Paris and Tehran, and to other Kurdish officials at the rebel headquarters in the mountains of Iraq.

I started getting my inoculations — typhoid, gamma globulin, cholera, smallpox and polio — began a mustache that I hoped would enable me to pass more easily as a Circassian among tribes of doubtful loyalty to the rebel cause, and checked out from the Library of Congress its seven books on Kurdistan. Both of the reporters who had gotten into Kurdistan during the fighting in the 1960s and had written books about it had entered on horseback. So I started to assemble camping gear.

With my departure set for July 29, by then only four days away, I began to get a little concerned about my lack of current information on the state of the rebellion. I was, after all, entrusting my life to two men I had met only once, and a third I had seen but twice.

Since it was pretty clear that I was not going to receive much help from the United States government, I decided to take a chance and increase the number of people who knew of my plans. I got in touch with a friend at the British embassy and told him of my destination and my problem.

"You ought to call on M in London on your way out," he said. "He is extremely knowledgeable."

That did not help much, so I revealed my plan to another friend, the ambassador of an Asian nation that has no reason to love the Iraqis. My Asian friend, who is no stranger to the murky world of intelligence operations, offered what help he could and gave me this advice:

"Unless they are essential to your mission, do not make contact with the Kurdish representatives in London and Paris. Both cities are swarming with AMN-AAM (Iraqi intelligence) agents. The Kurds are bound to be under surveillance and the Iraqis are a ruthless lot who will stop at nothing. Secondly, gain the confidence of your SAVAK contact,

you; if you can, make him your friend. In this affair, he can help you — or hurt you — a great deal."

The day before my scheduled departure, I ran into CIA Director William Colby at a Blair House retirement party for Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, who was stepping down as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I'm on my way to Iraqi Kurdistan," I said. "What can you tell me?"

"NOT MUCH," Colby replied, "but keep your head down. It's getting pretty mean out there." That I already knew,

When we met in London, M turned out to be a bouncy little man with ruddy cheeks and bright blue eyes, who shook his tightly furled umbrella at passing taxis as if urging on a company of Assyrian levies against some mountain fortress, as indeed he had in times past. Over a lunch of cold salmon and Sancerre at the Belfry Club, he had these reassuring words for me:

"You'll have a jolly good time. But remember to break bread and eat salt with a Kurd just as soon as you can: Then he can't kill you. Eat only with your right hand and don't point the soles of your feet toward anyone. I shouldn't worry about the Iraqis too much. They're damned bad shots or I wouldn't be alive today, and no good at all in the mountains. About the only way they might hit you is if they're aiming at the chap next to you. Of course, with napalm and all that, one can be unlucky. And don't fall into their hands if you can avoid it; they still impale people. Funny you want to go there."

In Paris as in London, I avoided the Kurdish representative. But I did call on a French friend who knows the Middle East.

"I'm going to Iraqi Kurdistan," I said over a *kir* on the Boulevard St. Germaine.

"Then you are a fool," he replied, echoing a view expressed by other friends familiar with my plan. "C'est l'ennui du Watergate?"

"Perhaps."

It was as good a reason as any to explain why an editor, fat and 45, thought he could find happiness dodging MIGs in the Zagros Mountains in the company of men but a step removed from brigandage.

My flight from Paris arrived in Tehran, the Iranian capital, late on the sweltering night of July 3. At 8 a.m. the next morning, there was a light tap on my hotel door. I opened it to find a very small well-dressed Iranian, clean-shaven and wearing an enormous embossed ring on the little finger of his right hand.

"I am Gen. Fariborz," he an-

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nounced "You are Mr. Hempstone?"

I said that I was and invited him in.

"You are going to Kurdistan?" he inquired.

I said that I hoped to.

"Good. You have been wise to be honest with us. So many reporters waste a great deal of time—theirs and ours—playing little games with us. But you cannot go immediately to Kurdistan."

"And why not?"

HE SHRUGGED his well-tailored shoulders.

"It seems that Gen. Mulla Mustapha Barzani (the 71-year-old Kurdish nationalist leader) is not prepared to receive you at this time. He is away in the mountains. You can cross in a week or 10 days. Meanwhile, why not see something of Iran? We will, of course, send someone to accompany you."

I knew that the worst thing I could do was to lose my temper. So I tried to explain quietly how important it was for me to get to Kurdistan immediately, that no staff correspondent of an American newspaper had managed to get to Kurdistan since the intensification of the fighting and that I wanted to be the first.

"But I have explained: It is not in our hands. Barzani is not yet ready to receive you. Besides, is it so bad to see something of my country?"

I promised Gen. Fariborz that I would think about it and let him know.

"Do that, Mr. Hempstone," he said evenly. "It is the best course."

I called on a friend at the American Embassy for advice.

"You've got to play it their way," he said. "There may be a hundred reasons—some good, some bad—why SAVAK or the Kurds don't want you to cross over now. But you're in their hands and you won't make it without their help. So why not relax and enjoy it? This is, after all, the Middle East."

It seemed at least possible, however, that if SAVAK would not help me unless I cooperated, at least they might not obstruct me if I tried to enter Kurdistan solely under Kurdish auspices.

I called the number of the Kurdish agent in Tehran, Shaffiq Quazzaz. The line sounded as if someone were frying bacon on it. There were a number of suspicious clicks and bleeps, but no answer. On the eighth attempt, some six hours later, a man answered the phone.

"Mr. Quazzaz?" I inquired.

"No. He is away. This is a friend."

"My name is Hempstone and I come from Mr. Dosky in Washington."

I know. Quazzaz is away. They are not ready to receive you. Perhaps next week." He hung up.

I gave up and telephoned Gen. Fariborz. And that is how I came to view the wonders of Isfahan and Shiraz, the oil refinery at Abadan, the computerized supertanker at Khark Island in the Persian Gulf, the lonely tomb of Cyrus the Great near Persepolis and the duck-haunted waters of the Caspian Sea, all in the company of a genial and intelligent SAVAK officer.

BACK IN TEHRAN a week later, I finally caught up with the elusive Mr. Quazzaz in a sleazy hotel off Pahlavi Avenue. I told him I expected to cross the frontier in the company of my new-found Iranian friend in three days' time.

"We will have someone there to meet you," he promised, giving me a letter of introduction to Idriss Barzani, the nationalist leader's third son and chief-of-staff. As I was leaving Quazzaz's hotel, a SAVAK underling I had seen once in Gen. Fariborz's company popped out from behind a potted palm, smiled and wished me a good morning. It was indeed the Middle East.

From Rizaiyeh on the shores of Lake Urmia, near where the Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian frontiers meet, we drove in a southwesterly direction over bone-jarring mountain roads to the Iranian town of Khaneh, where we picked up a Kurdish liaison officer wearing the baggy-seated brown trousers gathered at the ankle that are the uniform of the *Pesh Merga* (the 60,000-man Kurdish partisan force) and the red and white turban of the Barzani tribe.

The Landrover groaned up over the Shinak Pass, past the Iranian fortifications and police post and rushed down the dirt mountain road to Haj Omran, the Kurdish crossroad where I said goodbye to my Iranian escorts. They eyed the armed Kurds uneasily and did not linger.

Ahmed Hadji, a genial middle-aged Kurd with the bright blue eyes, bristling mustache and carriage of a British sergeant-major, led me into a low stone building, leaned his Kalashnikov AK-47 Russian assault rifle against the wall and ordered metal chairs, a table, cool water, English Craven A cigarettes and tea brought for me.

Idriss, he said, was off directing the fighting. But he would receive me later, perhaps that very evening. Meanwhile, when I had finished my tea, he, Ahmed Hadji, would take me to a place where I could rest.

I said I was ready and indeed I was: Having once known the agony

of spending a solid fortnight on horseback, I had taken the precaution of applying tincture of benzoin, a skin-toughener, to my backside for a couple of weeks, the net effect of which had been to make my trousers stick to my skin.

I strode purposefully into the courtyard toward a group of tethered horses. But Ahmed Hadji waved me away with a depreciating gesture, threw his AK-47 on the front seat and indicated I was to get into an ancient yellow automobile with a Persian carpet on its floor, mud smeared on its roof by way of camouflage and its headlights dimmed by blue paint.

And that is how I came to enter Kurdistan in a Mercedes-Benz rather than on a horse. It had, when all was said and done, taken some doing.

# The Middle East War Nobody Knows

## Chapter 3

By Smith Hempstone  
Star-News Staff Writer

QAL'A DIZEH, Iraqi Kurdistan

Qal'a Dizeh is Kurdistan's Guernica. But no Kurdish Picasso has emerged to make of this ravaged town that once sheltered 25,000 people a symbol of man's inhumanity to man.

Like the Basque village of 7,000 people devastated by Nazi Germany's Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War, Qal'a Dizeh had little military importance. It nestles in the wheat fields and melon patches of the valley of the Lesser Zab River, 13 miles from the Kanirash Pass that leads into Iran, and an equal distance from the large lake formed by the Iraqi-held Dukan Dam.

It is true that the headquarters of Hasso Mir Khan's Kawe Division is here, that a certain amount of rebel military traffic goes through the town, that there are Pesh Merga (Kurdish soldiers; literally, "those who face death") in Qal'a Dizeh.

(Since this dispatch was written,

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*Qal'a Dizeh has been stormed by an Iraqi armored column with a heavy loss of life.)*

But just as the Nazi allies of General Franco bombed Guernica primarily because it contained the ancient oak tree symbolic of the liberty of the Basque people, the Iraqi pilots and the Russian staff officers who plan their operations had a particular reason — and one that was political rather than military — for wanting to wipe Qal'a Dizeh off the map.

WHEN THE UNEASY four-year armed truce between the Iraqi Arabs and their Kurdish co-religionists broke down on March 11, the entire Kurdish faculty and student body of the university of Sulaimaniya, 30 miles to the southeast of here, took to the hills. They were joined here in Qal'a Dizeh by Kurdish students and professors from universities in Baghdad and Kirkuk.

The students and their professors did not join the partisans of 71-year-old General Mulla Mustapha Barzani, the Kurdish nationalist leader, but with a staff that included 23 Ph.D.s, 20 Masters and 30 B.A.s, the 600 Kurdish students planned to continue their studies in the liberated zone, out of reach of Iraq's hated ruling Baath party.

This was something that in all the Kurdish people's long struggle to be free never had happened. In the four previous Arab-Kurdish wars since 1961, Kurdish intellectuals, many of whom had been heavily influenced by Marxism, in the main had stood aloof from Barzani, a conservative, anti-Communist tribal leader whom most of them admired but did not entirely trust.

But now the Kurdish Democratic party, the mouthpiece of the urban Kurdish intellectuals, purged of its Communists by Barzani (who is its president) and KDP secretary-general Habib Mohammed Kassim, was solidly behind Barzani. That the Russians since 1972 had been supplying Iraq with modern arms obviously intended by the Baathists to be used against the Kurds made the decision of the intellectuals easier.

So in striking Qal'a Dizeh, the seat of the university-in-exile, the Iraqis clearly intended to teach the intellectuals a lesson and to drive a wedge between the KDP's urban members and the Kurdish tribal fighting men.

ANOTHER POSSIBLE reason for attacking Qal'a Dizeh, and one

that the pattern of subsequent Iraqi aerial tactics lends credence to, was that the town was jammed with several thousand refugees. These were mainly women and children from Iraqi-held lowland areas who were making for the Iranian sanctuary on the other side of the Kanirash Pass.

For the first six weeks after the breakdown of the truce on March 11, heavy spring rains kept all military activity, including aerial attacks, at a low level. No Kurdish villages were attacked by air during this period. The weather cleared in the third week of April and Qal'a Dizeh's fate was sealed.

This is how it was on the morning of April 24, 1974, just two days short of the 39th anniversary of the bombing of Guernica by the Nazis, as pieced together from eye-witness reports:

Spring is a time of ecstasy in Iraqi Kurdistan, which has boiling hot summers and brutally cold winters. With the end of the rains, April 24 gave a promise of rebirth and plenty, the wheat fields tossing in a light spring breeze, the sun gentle on the wild flowers and pale green wattle trees cloaking the banks of the Lesser Zab as it meandered its way down from the mountains and through the valley to Dukan Lake.

In the marketplace it was too early for the peaches, apricots, plums and grapes that are the small luxuries of this hard and poor land. But the vendors had put out clots of wild honey, coarse salt, piles of yellow spices, bars of homemade soap and sides of freshly slaughtered sheep and goats.

The refugees and the townspeople, although it was well past 9 a.m. (the Kurds are notoriously late risers for Middle Easterners), were just finishing their breakfasts of yoghurt, rough gray bread and sweet tea. Only a few students were catnapping in the two university dormitories, since classes were not due to start until the following week.

AT ABOUT 9:35 A.M., the two Russian-built Sukhoi-7 bombers came in at rooftop level from the west along Qal'a Dizeh's main axis. Because the Kurds are very short of anti-aircraft guns, the town was totally undefended. Because it was the first air raid of the war, no slit trenches or other shelters had been dug. It was, as they say, a piece of cake for the Iraqi pilots.

While the few Pesh Merga in Qal'a Dizeh fired their bolt-action Brno rifles at the jets, the Sukhois dumped their bombs, scoring a direct hit on a primary school, another on the marketplace and a near-miss on the university, the concussion of which buckled the steel doors and tore parts of the roofs off the two university dormitories. The bombers wheeled lazily around in the sky and came in for a second run, with the rising sun at their backs, straffing the town and the university dormitories with high-explosive rockets. It was all over, survivors say, in about three minutes.

The Iraqi pilots flew away to the west to receive the congratulations of their Russian mentors at the Kirkuk airbase. And the Kurds began the sad task of pulling the dead and wounded from the flattened buildings. The toll was 131 killed and more than 300 wounded, including seven university students and one professor. Most of the remainder of the casualties were women and children, since the majority of the men were at the front.

The rape of Qal'a Dizeh provoked a reaction among the Kurdish intellectuals who heretofore had been cool toward Barzani, but it must not have been precisely what the Iraqis had in mind: On the day after the bombing, the students and their professors voted not to reopen the university until the war was won, and marched off to join the Pesh Merga.

"Qal'a Dizeh," says Majib Yussif, a senior majoring in physics at the University of

Sulaimaniya, "opened my eyes as nothing else could have to the nature of this struggle: Either the Kurds will win their freedom or the Baathists will exterminate us; there is no middle way."

Despite the historic enmity between Arabs and the non-Semitic Kurds, a few non-Kurds, including two forcibly retired Iraqi generals, have gone over to Barzani, who already had the support of Iraq's 150,000 Assyrian Christians and its 50,000 Yezidi "Devil-worshippers." This had broadened and deepened Barzani's movement from one for Kurdish autonomy to one for freedom and democracy for all Iraqis.

MEANWHILE, there have been other Qal'a Dizehs since April 24, although none so costly. Halabja has been partially flattened, Rania has been heavily damaged, Zakho is a burned-out shell. In all, the Kurds say, 80 big villages and more than 400 hamlets have been destroyed or heavily damaged.

Columns of refugees have been straffed and crops napped. Lacking other targets, the Iraqi Migs, Sukhois and even Tupolev-22s, the most advanced Russian supersonic bomber, have attacked flocks of sheep and herds of cattle.

The Iraqi objective, the Kurds say (and their intelligence is excellent), is clear: to make a wasteland out of Kurdistan, to terrorize civilians, to turn them against Barzani's leadership to threaten them with starvation this winter when the passes from Iran are blocked with snow and there is nothing to replace the burned crops and the slaughtered animals.

"If this is not genocide," says Idriss Barzani, the nationalist leader's son and chief-of-staff, "it will do until a better example comes along."

But the United Nations has turned a deaf ear to Kurdish charges of genocide, although the bombing goes on around the clock, night and day.

Since Qal'a Dizeh, the Kurds know what to expect and are a little better pre-

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pared. Whole villages have moved into the caves that honeycomb these rugged mountains, an estimated 250,000 people having been made homeless by the war, 73,000 of whom have fled to Iran. The peasants carry on their lives as best they can, coming down into the plains to harvest their crops by the light of full moons.

THE KURDS simply do not have enough anti-aircraft guns to defend the civilian population. The few Dushka 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns and Hispano Suiza 30mm cannon that they have must be concentrated to defend Barzani's headquarters and that of the KDP, the Haj Omran-Chouman road that is Kurdistan's principal lifeline to Iran and the outside world, and the troops at the front. And these weapons are of such small caliber that, even when they are emplaced on 9,000-foot peaks, the Iraqi aircraft can

still bomb with impunity from high altitudes.

The civilian population's only real defenses are dispersal, the caves and slit trenches, supplemented by a primitive but ingenious "early-warning system": sentries with the sharpest eyes and the keenest ears, are posted on the mountain peaks. At the approach of Iraqi planes, the first sentry to spot them fires a rifle shot, which is repeated by other sentries as the planes move within their ken.

"The Kurds have no friends," a Kurdish saying goes, and that has been about the size of it for the past 4,000 years. Since the recent series of five wars began in 1961, only Iran and possibly some of the Persian Gulf emirates and Israel (which is not unmindful of the fact that the Kurds are tying down six of Iran's eight divisions, half of Baghdad's 2,000 tanks and most of its air force) have given Barzani any assistance.

And this aid, with the exception of Iranian humanitarian assistance to the 73,000 Kurdish refugees on her soil, has been both small and clandestine.

Because of the huge amount of Russian military aid to the Baathist government in Baghdad, the absence of any American help to the Kurds is a particularly sore point with Idriss Barzani and his father. Says Idriss:

"WE ASKED for American help as long as 10 years ago, and to this day we have had no answer. Ten years is a long time to wait for an answer. The doors of American embassies are open to all other people of the world, but they are closed to Kurds: 'Go away,' they say, 'you are Iraqis and we cannot help you.'

"We can defeat this repressive, anti-American Iraqi regime, as we have always done before. But we

cannot defeat the Soviet Union, and that is who we are fighting. The Russians send the Baathists advisers, aircraft, tanks, artillery, bombs, napalm, even poison gas, although the Iraqis have not used this yet. Yet America will not send us a single cartridge to help us defend our homes, not a roll of bandages to bind the wounds of our women and little children:

"'Go away,' your State Department says to our emissaries, 'and die quietly: this is not our affair.' But does your President so love the Russians that he will allow them to butcher a small nation that would be your friend? If this is so, then we have only God and our mountains to protect us."

But neither God nor the mountains had been able to save Qal'a Dizeh any more than the Basques' tree of liberty had been able to shelter Guernica.

Tomorrow: To the Dukan front

Washington Star-News

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# The Mideast War Nobody Knows

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By Smith Hempstone  
Star-News Staff Writer

MIRGAH, Iraqi Kurdistan — In a post-midnight talk, while we sipped tea and squatted cross-legged on carpets in his sand-bagged tent, Idriss Barzani, the Kurdish leader's third son, chief of staff and possible political heir, gave me leave to pass to Hasso Mir Khan's Kawe Division guarding the Dukan front.

To be my personal bodyguard, he gave me Ahmed Saids from his own retinue. "This kak's (respected older brother's) life is your life," Idriss told Ahmed, and from the serious look on Ahmed's face, I gathered that the injunction was something more than rhetoric.

And so it was that we passed through Haj Omran with Yacub, a Nestorian Christian whiskey smuggler from Kirkuk, at the wheel of the Jeep, and along the Iranian border by the rushing waters of the Lesser Zab, past fields of sunflowers, winnowed wheat and ripening

melons, to Sardasht, then across the throat-tightening Kanirash Pass and down into bomb-scarred Qal'a Dizeh, a ghost town that once had 25,000 inhabitants and now has 5,000.

WHILE YACUB went in search of Hasso, we sat in his garden and I questioned Ahmed through Mohammed Ter, the Erbil secondary school headmaster who had joined the Pesh Merga and was my interpreter.

Ahmed is 45 years old, stands about 5'5" and has an outsized leonine head that would be in proportion on a man more than six feet tall. He looks like the actor Anthony Quinn, has several missing teeth and a number of gold ones of which he is inordinately proud, and a deep, gravelly laugh that begins in the neighborhood of his blue-and-white cummerbund and erupts from his barrel chest like a mountain freshet.

He has a wife of 35, and another

(he concedes with a chuckle) of 21. Between them, they have given him seven sons and six daughters. He hoped to have 21 children before he is through — a program that he alleges has the enthusiastic support of the two Mrs. Ahmeds — but he admits that he may have to take a third young wife in his declining years to achieve this objective.

Ahmed, a Barzani tribesman, was with the General at the Mahabad uprising as a boy of 16. He has more than compensated for his personal population explosion by killing between 60 and 70 men. These are the ones, he says, "whose faces he has seen." He has wounded many others, and some of these may have died of their wounds. He bears the white crease of a bullet on his chest and has another wound in his left leg. He has a fund of stories mostly involving war, tribal feuds and his years in Iraqi jails and exile. He is a very funny and gentle man.

Hasso Mir Khan, who fought be-

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side Barzani at Mahabad in 1946 and followed the General on his epic 52-day march across Iran, Iraq and Turkey, ending with an 11-year exile in the Soviet Union, came swaggering in about dusk.

**A SHORT MAN** with a bristling mustache, a twinkle in his eye and a chest like a pouter pigeon, Hasso commands 2,000 Pesh Merga and 1,500 tribal irregulars. But 150 of the latter lack rifles. Hasso, who has been in charge of this sector for eight years, is faced with the 12,000 troops of the Iraqi III Division that guard the Dukan Dam.

(Since this dispatch was written, an Iraqi armored column has broken through and taken Qal'a Dizeh with a heavy loss of life.)

We dined by the light of a kerosene lantern in Hasso's garden. There was roast chicken, bits of fried lamb, mounds of rice, bowls of tomato gravy, rice wrapped in grape leaves, dishes of finely ground salad cooled by ice cut from the mountains in winter, and a foot-high stack of rough, grey bread in thin loaves the size of dinner plates, all washed down with mastow, a mixture of water and yoghurt made from sheep's milk.

We washed our hands when we had eaten our fill from the common bowls and sat cross-legged on carpets under the stars while Hasso waved his guards to the table to deal with the remains of the feast.

Hasso, who says he is 43 but looks older, said he had not enjoyed his stay in the Soviet Union. The Kurds had been conscripted into the Red Army for a year, then put to work and not allowed to move about freely. Hasso had learned Russian and read Tolstoi, Chekov and Turgenyev; also Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn, Hasso said, had written truly of the nature of Stalin's dictatorship. The Russians, he added, were not a hospitable people.

Yes, Hasso said, he knew I had Idriss' firman to see whom and what I wished. The Dukan front I would find interesting. If he had one big gun and the orders to destroy the dam, he could flood Baghdad. He would send me within the hour to Yussif Hamad's fourth bat-

alion headquarters at Mirgah.

**IT WAS BETTER** to travel at night because of the Iraqi Migs and Sukhois. They were bombing and strafing all the time. As an escort, he would give me his own nephew, Nuri Suleiman, and five red-turbaned Barzani fighting men.

We lurched off into the night in a wheezing Land Rover with no superstructure, the top halves of its headlights painted blue to reduce their visibility from the air. After an hour over a rough track, we reached the banks of the Lesser Zab, where it makes a great bend to flow southward to form, behind the Iraqi-held Dukan Dam, a lake 20 miles long and perhaps four wide.

In a few minutes, a 15-foot wooden boat called a balem, its outboard motor cut, glided silently out of the shadows and into the muddy shore and we climbed aboard for the half-mile trip to the other bank.

On the other bank another Landrover, in even more atrocious condition than the first, was waiting for us, with Nuri Suleiman at the wheel.

It was not until well past midnight that we reached Mirgah, a substantial village of stone-and-mud houses through and around which flowed a number of streams. The houses were terraced so that the door of one opened out onto the roof of another. Sentries having been posted, I unrolled my sleeping bag and fell quickly asleep on the flat roof of Mirgah's principal home.

The next morning, Yussif Hamad, the fourth battalion commander, who is even shorter and burlier than Hasso, joined us at a breakfast of boiled bits of goat, onions, bread and watered yoghurt. It was a five-hour march to the base of the mountain overlooking the Dukan Dam, so, he said, perhaps it would be best to take a chance and cross the plain by Land Rover and approach the mountain by balem. I thought I detected a look of apprehension on Ahmed's face, but he remained silent.

**WE DROVE** for more than an hour over a treeless

plain the color of a lion's pelt, a cloud of dust pluming out behind us. But there were no Migs (it was a Friday, and perhaps the Iraqi pilots were enjoying the Moslem sabbath) and in due course we reached the village of Khoshaw, a mean place set in dusty wattle trees. (Khoshaw now is in Iraqi hands). There I left my pack after Ahmed had told the headman in gory detail what would happen to him if so much as a thread of it were damaged, or a sock stolen from it.

Ahmed's reputation as a killer of men obviously had preceded him, and the headman swore that he would guard the pack as if it were his wife's honor, a turn of phrase that provoked a remark from Ahmed that set the entire village into laughter. After a draught of cool water from the village spring, we boarded two balem and, hugging the east shore of the reservoir, wound our way under rocky cliffs to a small, flinty cove where we debarked. The face of the cliff was nearly sheer and its height about 300 feet, which for a 45-year-old Sunday doubles player proved to be a little too much. I was well winded by the time we reached the top, where carpets had been spread for us by refugees living in caves, and tea, served in three-ounce glasses and sickly sweet, was offered us.

Mercifully, mules were produced for Yussif Hamad and myself, raw-boned, spindly-shanked beasts with mouths like iron. I started to mount from the left, in the American fashion, but Ahmed tut-tutted me around to the other side and, there being no stirrups, gave me a leg up. The Kurds, being good Moslems, regard the left as unclean, knot their turbans on the right, step off on the right foot and mount their horses and mules from the right. Christian I might be, he muttered, but as Idriss' honored guest I might as well learn proper behavior.

As we rode off into the foothills, Ahmed, perhaps to make up for his sternness on matters theological, scampered into a vineyard and returned to hand me a huge bunch of grapes, some

black, some green, all tart and delicious.

**THE PATH** up the 4,000-foot mountain, over which all of the fourth battalion's food, water and ammunition must pass on the backs of men or those of the four mules assigned to it, is narrow, steep and precipitous. The angle was so steep that, without stirrups, one could only cling desperately to the pommel and apply as much knee and thigh pressure as a wide freight saddle would permit. It took more than an hour to reach the top, where perhaps the world's finest mountain troops, the Kurdish Pesh Merga (literally, "those who face death") stared down like gaunt wolves from the crags at the hated Iraqis.

While we waited in the battalion CP for the men on foot to catch up with us, Yussif told me his problems. The Iraqis at times had massed as many as 175 tanks against him. He had no anti-tank guns, but had managed to knock out four with mines. He had one anti-aircraft gun, an obsolete Dushka 12.7mm. machine gun that had succeeded in damaging one Iraqi Mig. The base plate was cracked and the firing pin broken on his most powerful artillery piece, a 122mm mortar. Next to that, the biggest gun he had was an 82mm Russian mortar, and of these he had only one.

That he had to defend two mountain ranges 12 miles apart with 550 Pesh Merga and 500 tribal irregulars did not concern him unduly. The Iraqis were cowards, he said, and, regrettably, never attacked him. But it was frustrating not to have the weapons to go down into the plains and destroy the Dukan garrison. "Send me just one anti-tank gun from America, just one. Kak, and I will be your slave," Yussif asserted.

We lunched on bread and chickpea soup and, in honor of the occasion, a box of Iraqi cookies carried through the lines from Baghdad by some whimsical smuggler (it is indicative of the Kurds' ability to move at will under cover of darkness that, despite the war, smuggling to and from

Iraq accounts for a quarter of liberated Kurdistan's total trade).

In the afternoon, I watched through Yussif's binoculars while the 82mm shelled the Iraqi garrison. There are no such luxuries as field telephones, and range corrections were shouted down to the gun crew 100 yards below us. Every round hit within the fort's walls, sending two Russian T-54 tanks parked outside into action.

Since a mule can carry only four rounds of 82mm ammunition, we fired only eight rounds and hurried back down from the crest. By the time the Iraqi tanks and guns began returning our fire, we were safely napping on the reverse slope.

**IN THE AFTERNOON,** we walked down the moun-

tain and to a cove where our boats were to meet us. Since they were not there, those of us who could swim (which seemed to include about a third of the Kurds) stripped and threw ourselves into the cooling waters of the lake. Ahmed stripped to the pajama bottoms that all older Kurds wear as underwear and, with a blood-curdling yell, did a magnificent belly-flop into the lake.

When an hour had passed and our boats had not come, we hailed a passing balem that leaked prodigiously. Leaving half of our retinue to make their own way home, we, with two men bailing constantly, just made it back to Khoshaw. There we said goodbye to Yussif, since it was our plan to go all the way to the Qal'a Dizah shore by boat, thus avoiding the dusty and

bone-jarring Landrover trip.

We left at dark. An hour later, the wind through the gorge began to howl and we had begun to ship water over the bow. The boatman said he could not make the turn into the gorge without swamping us, so he was putting into shore. We waded ashore in the pitch dark somewhere between the gorge and Mirgah and sat down in a melon patch to decide what to do.

Finally, we stumbled five miles in the dark until we set to barking the big, cropeared sheep dogs of Mamandana, a village where we rested on the roof of the headman's house while his women, saucily unveiled and dressed in bright colors as all Kurdish women are, brought us cool melons, fried eggs, yoghurt and tea. (Mamandana also

tell a few days ago).

Eventually, another Land Rover turned up, the wind died down and we found a boatman willing to take us over to the Qal'a Dizah shore where Yacub had been waiting for us in the Jeep. It was 1:30 a.m. before we staggered into Hasso Mir Khan's compound and fell asleep on his lawn.

Next, I decided, I would ask Idriss' leave to pass to his cousin, Sheikh Abdullah, who commanded the Ager ("Fire") Division defending Barzan, the heart of the Kurdish rebellion.

That meant a chance for Ahmed to see his two eldest sons, serving in the Pesh Merga there, and to visit the home he had not seen since March. And so it was agreed.

**TOMORROW:** Barzan: The Lion's Den.

# The Mideast War Nobody Knows

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

By Smith Hempstone  
Star-News Staff Writer

**BARZAN, Iraqi Kurdistan —** My motives for wanting to visit Barzan were several: It seemed important that I see the homeland of the warlike tribe that was the heart of the Kurdish rebellion. There was always the chance that there I might run across General Mulla Mustapha Barzani, the 71-year-old rebel leader. I wanted to meet his second son, Luqman, who had taken over the day-to-day leadership of the Barzani tribe. And there was always the possibility that there might be heavy fighting there.

Although Barzan was only a day's drive to the north over one of Kurdistan's three roads, this trip, like all others, had to be personally approved by Idriss Barzani, the general's third son and chief of staff. Like other meetings with Idriss, who at 30 looks like a younger edition of King Hussein of Jordan, this one took place late at night at a different location from the previous one.

On three of the four counts, Idriss was discouraging: He did not know where his father was, but

he was not in Barzan; Luqman was six days' mule-ride from Barzan, somewhere near the Turkish frontier; there had been no reports of heavy fighting in Barzan. But if I wished to go, I could do so, and he would give me a letter of introduction to Sheikh Abdullah, his first cousin and the commander of the Ager ("Fire") Division guarding the western approaches to Barzan.

And so it was that the four of us — Syamand, my interpreter, Yacub, the Assyrian Christian driver of the Jeep, Ahmed Saids, my Barzan bodyguard, and I — left at 8:30 the following morning for Barzan. The red-turbanned Ahmed Saids was in high spirits: The visit to Barzan would give him his first chance since the fighting began in March to see his home in Spindar and his two sons there, Hassan and Khalil.

**WE PASSED** by way of Galala over George's Road, built by a single Assyrian Christian bulldozer operator in the lull between the 1970 fighting and the present war, to give the Kurds an access route to Barzan not exposed to direct fire from the Iraqi fortress of Spilak.

As the crow flies, the distance from Chouman to Barzan is no more than 80 miles. But the road crosses such rugged mountain country that the distance is at least twice that far, and the trip cannot be done in less than seven hours.

George's Road had been heavily bombed and it was pock-marked with bomb craters. Burned-out Landrovers and Jeeps, their bodies twisted into surrealistic shapes by Iraqi rockets, stood like warning mileposts along its verges. The mountains through which George's Road twisted and turned were blackened with napalm. The Christian villages tucked into their folds, once famous for their wine-making, were abandoned and silent, their inhabitants having taken shelter from the air raids in the caves of the Barodosti Mountains.

Yacub drove as fast as the road's bad condition would permit, a plume of red dust billowing out behind the Jeep, while the rest of us kept an eye out for MIGs.

We made good time and by one o'clock had reached Spindar, Ahmed's village just inside the

marches of Barzan, each of whose 75 inhabitants was in some way related to him. Of his immediate family, only Khalil and Hassan were still in Spindar, his wives and his other 11 children having accompanied him to Haj Omran where he was attached to Idriss' personal retinue.

**LIKE MOST** Kurdish homes, Ahmed's single-storied, flat-roofed house of mud, stone and wattle contained no furniture. So we sat cross-legged on mattresses brought to the porch on the shady side of the building.

Ahmed said that until 1969, when the Iraqis had managed to seize Barzan, Spindar had boasted a great chestnut tree, "the like of which was unknown throughout all Kurdistan, and perhaps the world." When they had been forced to evacuate the village, the Iraqis had poured gasoline on the chestnut tree and set it aflame, depriving the village of an important source of food during the winter months.

As we talked on the porch, the men of the village, ranging in age from 12 to 70, gathered to hear Ahmed's news and to view his visitor. Although Kurdish women go unveiled, they stay out of the way of strangers, and neither in Spindar nor anywhere else did they share a meal with us.

Having lunched on a meal of *mastow* (watered yoghurt), fruit and bread, dispatched a teen-aged nephew to the market for news of Luqman Barzani's whereabouts (there was none) and left a bottle of beer in the village spring to cool against our return, we left for the Valley of Barzan, following George's Road in a generally northwesterly direction along the ridgelines, skirting sheer drops into gorges hundreds of feet below.

There were, Ahmed said, many great caves in the mountains of Barzan, where one could walk for hours without reaching the end. And in these mountains were bears, wolves, mountain goats, wild boars and red-legged partridges, although all were fewer than in his youth, because everyone was armed and the people were hungry. The mountain goats had been almost wiped out, but Barzani had ordered that they no longer be killed, and they were coming back; but a bounty was still paid for the skins of wolves, which caused much damage to the flocks.

**CRESTING A RIDGE**, there spread out beneath us the Valley of Barzan, protected on all sides by mountain ramparts and through it

flowing the twisting Greater Zab. Looking down upon this green and pleasant land, studded by oak trees, it was easy to understand why Mulla Mustapha Barzani, his family and his retainers had been willing to fight for it.

Having rattled down the mountain road to the floor of the valley, Ahmed and I were swimming at dusk beside a bombed-out bridge over the Rukuchuk River, a tributary of the Greater Zab, when Sheikh Abdullah, a shortish, blue-eyed man with fair skin and a gingery little mustache, presented himself. It was dangerous, he said, to swim so close to the bridge, which the Iraqi airplanes still attacked from time to time. And would we not join him for dinner?

Sheikh Abdullah's house stood in the middle of the village of Barzan, and we dined in its garden, along with some 20 of his retainers. And there began the familiar business of attempting to dissuade me from proceeding farther in the direction of the front: The Iraqi air and artillery had been very active, there was no bridge or ford across the Greater Zab, the land mines had not been cleared from the crest of the Piris Mountains to the west, which his battalions were holding.

I thanked Sheikh Abdullah for his concern, but said that, *inshallah* (God willing), I would sleep the following night upon the crest of the Piris. *Inshallah*, Sheikh Abdullah replied somewhat doubtfully, and showed us to the roof of the building where we were to sleep.

At breakfast, Sheikh Abdullah confirmed that Luqman Barzani was wandering in the mountains near the Turkish frontier and could not be reached. He said he was sure I would not want to leave for the Piris front before seeing Barzani's home, visiting the mosque and looking in on the hospital. It being but 7 a.m. and protocol demanding agreement, I said I would see these things and then, *inshallah*, leave for Piris.

**BARZANI'S HOME** has been razed to its foundations 14 times over the years by the Iraqis, and the present structure is remarkable only in that it is three stories high and of concrete, with a fine view out over the village to the valley and the river.

Having seen this, the mosque and the hospital (all of whose patients were civilians), I pointed out to Sheikh Abdullah that the temperature was rising and that I was eager to leave for the Piris. The mules, Sheikh Abdullah replied, had not yet been found and he had invited a number of notables to a lunch in my honor. Surely I would not disappoint him? Syamand, the

interpreter, whispered that I dare not refuse, so I accepted with the best grace possible, which I fear was not very much.

There followed a three-hour meal during which the temperature rose into the high 90s. The flies buzzed insistently over bowls of mutton and mounds of rice and the notables and I stared at each other in silence.

Sheikh Abdullah observed that it was very warm. Since all of us were sweating profusely, it seemed pointless to disagree. In that case, asked Sheikh Abdullah, why not rest during the heat of the day and ride up to the Piris in the cool of the evening? This was a bit too much: I told the quaking Syamand to inform Sheikh Abdullah that, by my eyes, I would leave that very minute for the Piris, with or without him, mules or no mules. Sheikh Abdullah nodded and smiled sweetly: Of course we would go; he had not realized I was in such a hurry.

**MIRACULOUSLY**, a raft, a rickety wooden platform set on six innertubes and propelled by a single oarsman, was waiting at the Zab. Even more remarkably, two mules were grazing on the west bank, with the promise of the three more we needed (since the division's doctor was to accompany us to the front) at the next village.

At that village, which we reached after a half-hour's climb, a woman, apologizing that she had nothing better to offer us, brought us a cool bowl of buttermilk from which we drank in turn. With the air of one who has known better times, she said she was from the Iranian side of the border, but had "grown old in this place."

Here Sheikh Abdullah made his apologies for not accompanying us to the top of the mountain, and said he hoped on our return we would have a swim at his headquarters on the banks of the Rukuchuk. That was, I knew by now, as much a command as an invitation.

The mule track followed a ridge, dipping down from time to time into gorges where it was incredibly hot. No birds sang, and the only sound was the "*hatchas*" of the muleteers urging on our mounts.

More than three hours passed before, at a turning in the trail, we came upon Gazi Haj Melo, the dark, taciturn and thrice-wounded commander of the battalion guarding the Piris Pass.

From the pass, which we reached in another half-hour, we could see the abandoned town of Amadan, the Berat Hills held by a Kurdish skirmish line and the interlocking system of nine strong Iraqi forts to the north of them. There had been

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reports, Gazi Haj said, of an Iraqi tank build-up, and the leaders of the *jash*, the Kurdish mercenaries fighting on the side of the government, had been summoned to Baghdad, so it would not be surprising if there were an Iraqi attempt to break through to the Valley of Barzan.

Gazi Haj said his instructions were that he and his men were to die there rather than yield a foot, and he had no doubts as to his men's ability to hold the pass. All leaves had been canceled and Sheikh Abdullah could easily more than double within 24 hours the size of the 6,000-man Ager Division by calling the red-turbaned Barzanis away from their harvesting and threshing.

AS NIGHT FELL, we made ourselves comfortable on the 15-foot-wide rock shelf above a sheer, 3,000-foot drop to the valley of the Zab that was Gazi Haj's headquarters. "It is your bad luck," he said, "that there is no fighting; but at least there is meat for dinner."

While small arms fire crackled and popped from the picket lines in the Berat Hills, we talked into the

night. The substance was the same as on previous visits to the front: the need for anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, the attitude of the West in general and America in particular toward the Kurdish cause.

"When a few hundred Greeks and Turks are killed on Cyprus," Gazi Haj said bitterly, "there is an uproar. But if we all die here, the world does not care."

Since I was due back in Haj Omran the following day for a tentative interview with the elusive General Barzani, we said goodbye to Gazi Haj at dawn and sent the mules on ahead. It was fine walking down the mountain in the cool of the morning to the village of the Iranian woman, where we breakfasted on yoghurt, bread and tea.

At the bottom of the mountain, on the west bank of the Greater Zab, there were refugees and their flocks waiting to pass over. Their homes on the west slope of the Piris had been destroyed by Iraqi air strikes that they sensed were a prelude to the expected offensive.

The river was swift-flowing but inviting and, leaving my clothes for the others to bring over on the raft, I waded in and struck out for the

opposite shore, being carried by the current to a spot a half-mile below where I had gone in. As I pulled myself from the water, cooled by the snows of Turkey, I could see time-fused artillery shells bursting above the crest of the Piris.

Yacub rescued the Jeep from the depression where he had left it camouflaged with branches and we lurching off to Sheikh Abdullah's headquarters, a leafy bower by the banks of the Rukuchuk, where he was busily decoding a message from Idriss to all 17 division commanders: An Iraqi offensive was expected when the moon was full the following week.

After a swim and tea—and refusing yet another invitation to lunch from the remorseless Sheikh Abdullah—we said our farewells and headed back down George's Road toward Chouman.

On the way, we passed a convoy of battered Landrovers loaded with *Pesh Merga* heading in the direction of the Valley of Barzan. It was clear where Idriss thought the Iraqi offensive would come.

Tomorrow: The quest for Barzani.

# The Mideast War Nobody Knows

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By Smith Hempstone  
Star-News Staff Writer

HAJ OMRAN, Iraqi Kurdistan — In Washington back in June, Mohammed Rahman, a former Iraqi cabinet minister and a member of the seven-man ruling politburo of the Kurdish Democratic Party, had assured me that I would have an interview in rebel Kurdistan with General Mulla Mustapha Barzani, the 71-year-old father of Kurdish nationalism.

*This is the last in a series of six articles on the war between the Iraqi government and its 2.5 million Kurdish minority — "The War Nobody Knows."*

When I had been delayed for 12 days in Iran enroute to the liberated zone of Kurdistan, the reason given by both the Iranians and the Kurds had been that Barzani was traveling among his people and hence was not prepared to receive me. So when I finally was allowed to cross into Kurdistan, it was on the not

unnatural assumption that Barzani was prepared to see me.

But things are never quite what they seem in the Middle East, and all assumptions are dangerous.

After each of five trips to the front, I sought a meeting with Idriss Barzani, the general's principal aide, to inquire about my interview with his father. Each time the answer was the same: I was not to worry I would see Barzani, but only in Haj Omran, his headquarters. He was traveling in the countryside and could not be reached.

Finally, an appointment was made for the day before I was scheduled to return to Iran. I returned dusty and exhausted from the Betwatae front to be summoned to a midnight meeting with Idriss. His father, he said with some evident embarrassment, had not returned. He was expected within three days. Would I extend my stay?

For a number of reasons, this was extremely inconvenient, and I let Idriss know that it was. Could he guarantee an interview at the end of the three days?

Idriss hesitated for a moment, fidgeting with the knot of his turban. He looked very tired. Nothing in life, he finally replied, was certain; he could only say that he would try.

I WAS TEMPTED to call the whole thing off and return to Iran. But coming to Kurdistan in 1974 and not seeing Barzani would be like visiting revolutionary America in 1779 and failing to see George Washington. I said that I would stay, but only for three days.

With the coming of the full moon, the Iraqi air raids on the headquarters area intensified, there was no news of my interview and I began to fear that Barzani's advisors had made him hole up somewhere in the mountains.

On the morning of the third day, I began to stuff my things into my pack and to distribute presents to those who had been my companions during my stay in Kurdistan. In mid-afternoon, 10 minutes before my scheduled departure for Iran, the word came. I would see Barzani that night.

Just as the moon rose, a car came

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for me. For security reasons — there were three assassination attempts on Barzani between 1970 and 1973, and the Iraqis are said to have placed a price of \$2 million on his head — the short trip to the General's headquarters was made in three stages. At each, there was an identity check, a change in vehicles and retinue, and an inspection of the presents I brought for the General, Idriss and Mas'oud, his fourth son and head of the Kurdish military intelligence.

The last few miles of the journey were at a hair-raising speed over a twisting mountain road in a totally blacked-out Landrover. At the end of the road, we reached a single-story and well-sandbagged concrete building surrounded by anti-aircraft guns and bunkers. Clusters of armed men stood in the shadows of the building, talking softly.

MAS'OD, who is a carbon copy of his better-known older brother, greeted me on the steps and led me into a room lighted by two flickering kerosene lanterns, where we were met by Idriss. A few minutes later, we were joined by Dr. Mahmoud Osman, a little man with a Charlie Chaplin mustache who is a legendary figure in Kurdistan.

In the Kurdish wars of the 1960s, Mahmoud, a member of the KDP politburo, was the only physician the rebels had (now they have nearly 100). He operated on casualties by day and ran the civilian administration by night.

Mahmoud enjoys immense prestige and not a little power by virtue of his role as Barzani's personal physician, political advisor, English interpreter and constant companion ("Find Dr. Mahmoud," I had been told, "and you will find Barzani."). He could well emerge — if Idriss does not — as the dominant force in the collective leadership that almost certainly will take over the Kurdish movement when Barzani dies or is killed.

The four of us had barely seated ourselves in aluminum-and-plastic lawn chairs when Barzani appeared. His two sons departed, leaving me alone with the general and Dr. Mahmoud.

The General wore a faded red-and-white Barzani turban, somewhat carelessly tied, the brown jacket without insignia and baggy trousers gathered at the ankle that are the uniform of the Kurdish rebels, and unlaced black shoes. In his intricately knotted blue waist sash nestled a foot-long curved dagger with a wooden handle.

BARZANI IS tall for a Kurd — he is about 5-foot-8, has piercing brown

eyes, shaggy eyebrows and a prominent nose. He walks a little stiffly, but has a firm handshake.

Although he is less well known, Barzani must rank with Mao Tse-tung, Tito and General Giap as one of the world's foremost guerrilla leaders. He was first imprisoned at the age of one (with his mother) when his elder brother was hanged by the Turks for nationalist activity. His rebellions against the British and the Iraqis were annual rites of spring in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1946, Barzani crossed into Iran with 2,000 followers to fight for the Soviet-sponsored Kurdish Mahabad republic. When the Russians withdrew, the republic collapsed and its leaders were executed by the Iranians. Pursued by Iranian, Iraqi, British and Turkish troops, Barzani sent his women and children into the mountains and began an epic 52-day march with 500 picked followers. The march ended with the swimming of the Araxes River and an 11-year exile in the Soviet Union for Barzani and his men.

When the British-sponsored Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in 1958, Barzani and his followers were invited to return by the new government in Baghdad. Remarkably — given the fact that their long stay in the Soviet Union had made the Kurds vehemently anti-Communist — the Russians agreed.

Three years later, in 1961, the first of the five recent wars for Kurdish autonomy broke out. And Barzani has been almost constantly in the field since that date.

Although Mulla Mustapha Barzani's family for generations has been the religious and political ruler of Barzan, membership in such families, because they are so large, is no guarantee of prominence. As a hot-headed, teen-aged third son, Barzani began his career with no more than 20 rifles at his command. Through strength of character, military ability and political skill, he is now president of the 50,000-member Kurdish Democratic Party and commander of 100,000 armed men.

BARZANI BEGAN our two-hour talk by emphasizing that his quarrel was not with the Iraqi Arabs but with the Baathist government in Baghdad.

"Our struggle," he said, "is not for Kurds alone but for all the people of Iraq. We seek only an autonomous Kurdistan within a democratic Iraq."

The Baathists, who are allied both with the Soviet Union and with the Iraqi Communist party, he described as "scorpions, serpents, wolves" who have executed and tortured to death more than 10,000

Iraqis in the six years since they seized power in Baghdad.

No negotiated peace was possible with such a regime, he said, if only because the Baathists time and again had demonstrated their bad faith. "Either we will have victory and the government in Baghdad will fall, or they will destroy us," he said, puffing vigorously on a hand-carved briar pipe (on Dr. Mahmoud's orders, he has given up the hand-rolled cigarettes of light Kurdish tobacco that everyone smokes here).

Barzani mentioned Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as Middle Eastern states not totally unsympathetic to the aspirations of the Kurds. But he said that the only "practical help" he was receiving was from Iran, which has a running quarrel with Iraq.

"IF THE United States would only hint to its Middle Eastern friends that you would like to see us helped, perhaps they could get up their courage to do it," he added.

"I simply cannot believe," Barzani said, "that the American people will sit by while a vicious, unworthy regime such as the Baathists, fully supported by the Russians, wages a war of genocide against a small people that wants only to be your friend. Give us anti-tank guns and ground-to-air-missiles and we will overthrow the Baathists and expel the Russians from the headwaters of the Persian Gulf. This is in our interest. But is also in the interest of Iran and the United States. So why not do it?"

Barzani, with a note of sadness in his gruff old voice, conceded that independence for Iraqi Kurdistan — let alone for a Greater Kurdistan uniting the 9 million Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Syria and the Soviet Union — was out of the question.

As we sipped strong, sweet tea from tiny glasses and nibbled at an enormous tray of fresh fruit, Barzani emphasized that his ambitions were restricted to Iraq and that he was prepared to enter into formal commitments with Turkey, Iran and the United States to that effect.

"But the gates of your embassies are closed to us," Barzani said. "When I send envoys to Washington, they are received by friends such as Senator Jackson. But Kissinger will not see them, Sisco will not see them, Atherton will not see them. Kissinger spends days traveling between Damascus and Jerusalem to stop the fighting between Syria and Israel, but he will not spend five minutes in his own office to talk about the war here. We could understand being low down on the list. But fear we are not even on

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Kissinger's list."

I MENTIONED that America is concerned about the flow of Arab oil, of which Iraq produces about \$9 billion worth annually.

"Is it really in your interest," Barzani snorted, "to have this oil controlled by an anti-American regime tied so closely to Moscow? They sell oil to you today, but will they do so tomorrow? Would it not be well to have a non-Arab source of oil controlled by your friends?"

Barzani agreed that some of the reluctance of foreign nations to recognize the existence of the Kurdish problem might be related to his age and the uncertainty of the nature of the leadership that might succeed him. But he pointed out that the Kurdish revolution had become institutionalized through the KDP, from which he has purged the Communists.

"But if America acts now," he said, "she can deal with one grumpy old man. We do not need troops or advisors. We are not as well-armed as Israelis, but there are more of us and we are just as good fighters. With a few anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft missiles, you can do a big thing here, one that will reduce Russian influence in the Gulf and contribute to the stability of the Middle East. At least, for God's sake, come and talk to us about it, or let us come to you."

IT WAS past midnight and Barzani, who for security reasons never sleeps in the same place two nights in a row, looked tired. Before me lay an all-night drive over dirt roads to the Iranian city of Tabriz and the different world beyond Kurdistan. We exchanged presents a battery calculator for Barzam, a riding crop for Idriss, a knife for Mas'oud, a curved dagger for me — and said goodbye by the light of the full moon.

"They say," Barzani remarked, "that the Kurds have no friends. If this is so, we will all die here. Do not let America wait too long to discover that people who want to be her friends, who seek nothing that is not theirs, are dying for their freedom."

"Inshallah (if God wills it), General," I replied.

"Inshallah," he repeated, with a note of resignation in his voice. We saluted each other and I drove off down the winding mountain road to Tabriz, leaving Mulla Mustapha Barzani standing in the moonlight, an erect, lonely but somehow indomitable figure.

The Kurds believe that each man has his own star in the firmament, and that he will not die until it falls. As we pulled out onto the Tabriz road, a shooting star streaked across the night sky and, away the west, like the grumbling of summer thunder, I could hear the thud of Iraqi bombs falling on Kurdistan.