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Central
Intelligence

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National Intelligence Estimate

The Kurds: Rising Expectations, Old Frustrations

*This National Intelligence Estimate represents
the views of the Director of Central Intelligence
with the advice and assistance of the
US Intelligence Community.*

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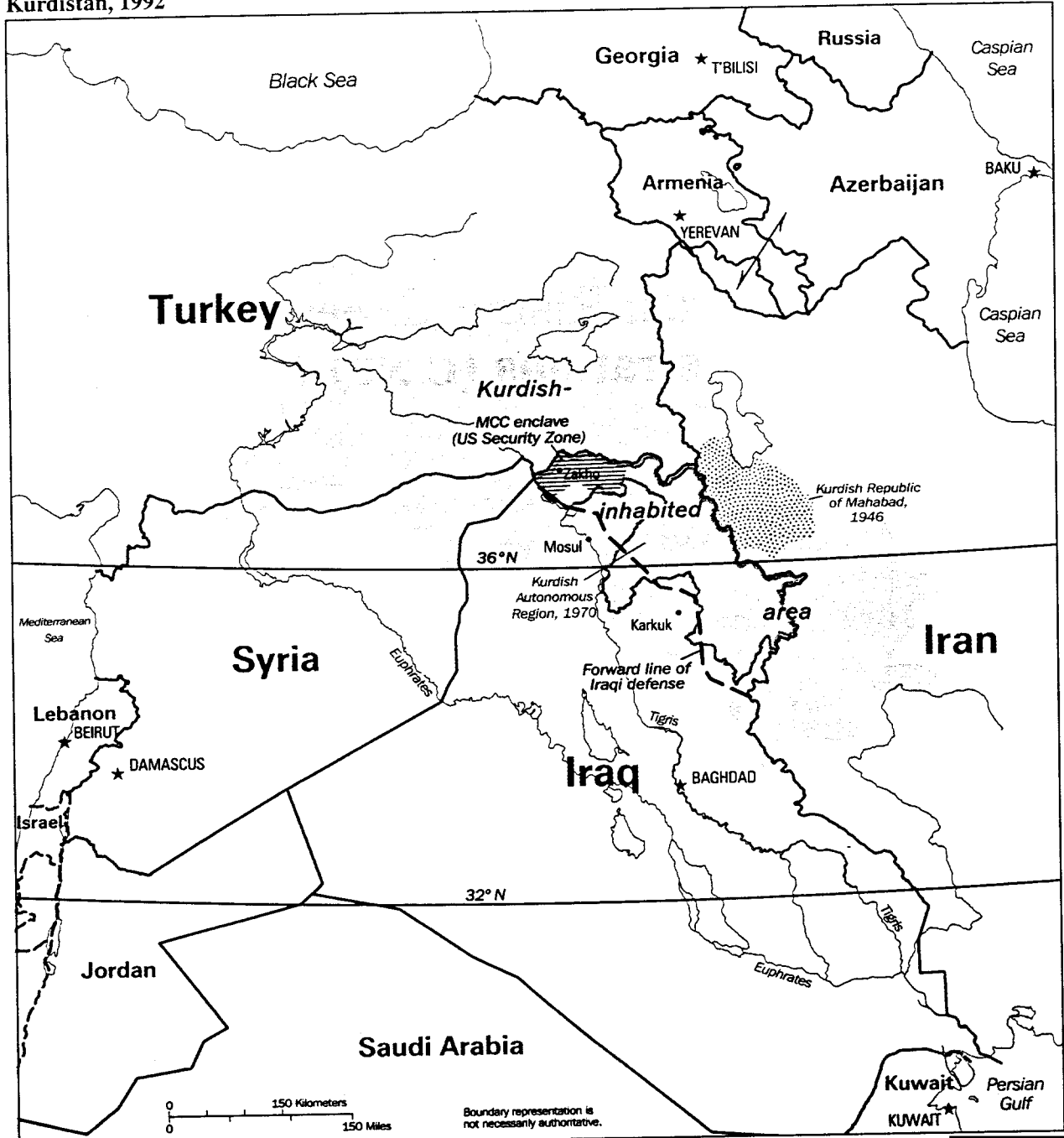
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The Kurds: Rising Expectations, Old Frustrations [REDACTED]

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Figure 1
Kurdistan, 1992



Key Judgments

The Gulf war and rising ethnic consciousness and conflict around the world have created a new context for the longstanding struggle of the Kurds to achieve autonomy if not outright independence. More broadly, Pan-Kurdish identity is being strengthened by developments that predate and will outlast recent events in Iraq and Turkey:

- These developments include a weakening of tribal ties and the migrant experience in Europe. [REDACTED]

Despite these factors, the emergence of an effective Pan-Kurdish movement in the next three to five years is unlikely. The Kurds of Iraq and Turkey are more likely to sustain their struggle for more autonomy on separate but reinforcing tracks. Inter-Kurdish rivalries and Iraqi Kurdish dependence on Turkey will prevent lasting cross-border cooperation [REDACTED]

Ankara, Baghdad, and Tehran will use repressive military means to contain Kurdish insurgent activity. They will not succeed in stifling Kurdish nationalist sentiment, however:

- If Provide Comfort were to end, Saddam surely would bring his Kurds to heel. [REDACTED]

The coalescence of Kurdish activism could occur under altered circumstances, for example, if:

- Iraq's central government were substantially weakened or the country partitioned.
- States conducted major cross-border raids that would compel Kurds to coordinate their action.
- Far-reaching reforms in Turkey permitted greater intra-Kurdish cooperation than is now possible. [REDACTED]

Implications for the United States

Operation Provide Comfort will be a critical factor in determining prospects for Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Baghdad will move swiftly to reassert control over its Kurdish areas if Provide Comfort is not extended. Ankara's decision will depend on Turkish perceptions of Provide Comfort's impact on Kurdish aspirations, the strength of the PKK insurgency, concerns about relations with Washington, and coalition strategies vis-a-vis Saddam ██████████

US support for Turkey's and Iraq's existing borders could clash with the rising political aspirations of Kurdish groups, particularly those in Iraq who are part of the anti-Saddam coalition. ██████████

The growing Kurdish insurgency in Turkey will place greater strains on the US-Turkish partnership, especially if Ankara escalates its military campaign against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or cracks down even harder on the Kurdish insurgents in the southeast and expects US support in these efforts. ██████████

If a serious Pan-Kurdish independence movement develops—which we deem unlikely—the West may be pressed to change its longstanding policy and facilitate the peaceful emergence of a new ethnic state, while trying to preserve its strategic interests in the existing states.

██████████

Discussion

Is There a New Kurdish Problem?

The Gulf war and rising ethnic consciousness and conflict around the world have created a new context for the decades-long struggle of Kurds—who live mainly in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran—to achieve self-determination:

- The creation of an internationally protected zone in northern Iraq has strengthened the resolve of Iraqi Kurds to achieve greater independence from Baghdad. Already, Iraqi Kurds have established new institutions of self-government; elections were held in May 1992.
- At the same time, Kurds in Turkey are undergoing an important rise in cultural and political consciousness, stimulated in part by the increasing intensity of the eight-year conflict between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This struggle has particularly important implications for Turkey's stability.
- More broadly, we see a general strengthening of Kurdish identity. A weakening of tribal ties reinforced by years of urbanization and the migrant experience in Europe predated and will outlast recent events in Iraq and Turkey [REDACTED]

Nonetheless, the Kurds' political fortunes during the three- to five-year time frame of the Estimate will still depend heavily on the governments of the states where they live, on neighboring states, and on foreign benefactors and sympathizers. But Operation Provide

Comfort, the presence of coalition states and international relief workers in northern Iraq, and continuing international press attention introduce some new dynamics to one of the world's oldest ethnic problems. [REDACTED]

Two Ways of Thinking About the Kurdish Problem






Cycles of History

Many analysts of the Kurdish issue see a repeat of past patterns, whereby a number of factors prevent significant change in the Kurds' situation in any of the key countries. [REDACTED]

Forces of Disunity. Achievement of Kurdish aspirations will be hampered by differences in language, ideology, and historic experience. Kurdish clans and groups have traditionally competed, rarely cooperating for sustained periods. This proclivity is exemplified by the quarrelsome relationship between Iraqi Kurdish leaders Masud Barzani of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and between them and PKK leader Abdallah Ocalan. [REDACTED]

Prevailing State Interests. Each of the states in which Kurds live is capable of repressing or manipulating Kurdish ambitions. The common interest of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq in preventing an independent Kurdish state will shape their diplomatic relations and efforts to arm and exploit Kurds in neighboring countries in pursuit of their age-old rivalries.

Figure 2
Kurds in Selected Countries^a

	Turkey	Iraq	Iran	Syria	Lebanon	CIS
Kurd population (million)	10-12 ^b	3.4	4.0	0.5-0.7	0.02	0.15
Kurds as percent of total population						N/A
Where they live	<i>Dispersed in major cities</i> <i>Large concentrations in southeast</i>	<i>In north</i> <i>Some in Baghdad</i>	<i>Northwest</i>	<i>Northeast</i>	<i>Beirut</i>	<i>Armenia, some in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan</i>
Conditions	<i>Southeast is economically poor</i>	<i>Resource-rich area</i> <i>Population displaced</i> <i>Economy undeveloped</i>	<i>Resource-rich</i> <i>Economy undeveloped</i>	<i>Not well socially integrated</i>	<i>Poor migrant status</i>	<i>Poor rural agrarian</i>
Language	<i>Most speak Kurmanji</i> <i>Some Dimili (Zaza)</i>	<i>Kurmanji in north</i> <i>Sorani and some Gurani in south</i>	<i>Kurmanji in north</i> <i>Sorani in center</i> <i>Gurani in south</i>	<i>Kurmanji</i>	<i>Mixture</i>	<i>Kurmanji</i>
Religion	<i>Sunni Muslim, some Alevi</i>	<i>Mostly Sunni Muslim</i>	<i>Sunni, Shi'a</i> <i>Some Christians and Jews</i>	<i>Sunni Muslim</i>	<i>Sunni Muslim</i>	<i>Shi'a</i>

^a In addition there are an estimated 500,000 to 750,000 Kurds living in Western Europe.

^b Perhaps half live in urban areas outside Southeast; 3 million Kurds in Istanbul alone.

However, their policies on autonomy or political rights short of independence vary widely and will remain flexible and often unpredictable [REDACTED]

International Resistance or Indifference.

Since World War I, the international community generally has resisted the idea of a Kurdish state, although Western governments and others have exploited Kurdish aspirations to serve their Middle East interests. Foreign governments have remained committed to Turkey and Iraq as states within their recognized boundaries. More recently, the numerous ethnic disputes that have sprouted in the post-Cold War era have probably strengthened the conviction of major Western states that fostering minority rights within existing borders is preferable to civil wars that seem to attend most efforts to establish new ethnic states. [REDACTED]

Fragility of a Kurdish State. An autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq could form the nucleus of a Kurdish state that might eventually include territory from Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Such an entity would face a precarious existence. Landlocked in largely mountainous terrain, the Kurdish state would depend on its neighbors for access to trade routes, trading partners, and safe borders and would be difficult to defend without more sophisticated weaponry and international guarantees of its borders. [REDACTED]

New Factors Make It Different Now

At the same time, analysts acknowledge important differences in how the Kurdish question will probably evolve in the 1990s as compared with earlier periods [REDACTED]

New Contacts Among Kurdish Groups. The spring 1991 refugee crisis, the continued presence of Iraqi Kurds in Turkey, the prominent visits of Barzani and Talabani to Ankara, the posting of permanent PUK and KDP representatives in Ankara, and Iraqi Kurds' apparent ability to transmit radio into Turkey have created new cross-border ties. Kurdish newspapers in Turkey, for example, cover events in "southern Kurdistan" (northern Iraq). Efforts are under way to create a standard Kurdish dialect for media usage, and Turkish Kurds also hope to set up Kurdish-language television. Progress in these directions will strengthen Pan-Kurdish identity, even if formal political links are slow to develop. [REDACTED]

The recent achievements of Kurds in northern Iraq have reinforced the commitment of politically active Kurds in Turkey to change their own status. Hoping to emulate the May elections in Iraq, some Turkish Kurdish activists, including Ocalan, speak of holding unofficial "elections" in the southeast to form a local Kurdish parliament. Iranian Kurds have also become more active this summer, although not on a scale of their Iraqi and Turkish counterparts. [REDACTED]

Key Iraqi Kurdish leaders express support for creation of a unified military force, although we doubt that political and tribal leaders will readily give up the control they enjoy over their forces. Such a force would provide an important psychological boost to Iraqi Kurds and affect outside perceptions of the prospects for statehood. But a more effective Iraqi Kurdish fighting force could also intensify tensions with the PKK and generate new conflict with Turkey and Iraq. [REDACTED]

Current Weakness of the Iraqi State. UN economic sanctions, destruction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and Baghdad's loss of control over the north have seriously weakened the Iraqi state. This has inspired Iraqi Kurds—and, to a lesser extent, Kurds in other countries—to escalate their demands for political rights. Should the coalition resume attacks against Iraq, its Kurds would be further emboldened [REDACTED]

Rise of the PKK. The Kurdish organization has developed into a significant insurgency and a serious challenge to Turkey's stability. The recent liberalization of cultural rights for Turkey's Kurds has provided new opportunities for the PKK to spread its message. Although still committed to Marxism, the PKK now plays down social ideology in favor of nationalism. The PKK may increasingly appeal to a broad range of Kurds, not only in Turkey but also in Iraq, Iran, and Syria where the PKK operates. [REDACTED]

Pro-PKK sentiment, while difficult to measure, appears to be rising in southeastern Turkey because of the PKK's willingness to confront the Turkish military. It seems likely that the PKK message is also reaching many of the millions of Kurds who have moved from the southeast to major cities in Turkey, in part because moderates among Turkish Kurds are finding it difficult to define a more moderate Kurdish agenda. Kurds who oppose PKK terrorism and violence nonetheless are frequently intimidated by the PKK, acknowledge that it is monopolizing the debate between Turks and Kurds, and credit it with forcing the Turkish Government to make the liberalization measures it has to date. [REDACTED]

Turkey's Changing Self-Image. Turkey's desire to maintain its association with Western institutions and to be accepted as a European state will continue to influence official policies toward the Kurds. But its policies have fallen short of promoting a transformation of Turkey into a liberal multiethnic society [REDACTED]

The rise of Turkic consciousness and Turkey's rapidly evolving relationships with the ethnically Turkic states of the former Soviet Union have created interest in Turkey's assuming the leadership of a Turkic bloc. Pride in an ethnic definition of Turkishness will probably contribute to less tolerance for the cultural and political distinctness of Kurds. [REDACTED]

International Acceptance of New Ethnic States. The fall of Communism and the resultant emergence of small ethnically based states lead the Kurds to hope for international support. At a minimum, some Western governments may become more willing to support Kurdish demands for autonomy or for the establishment of federal or confederal arrangements for Kurdish lands if the struggle drags on and intensifies over the next few years [REDACTED]

The Most Likely Scenario: Separate but Reinforcing Tracks¹

We expect the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Iran to continue to seek greater autonomy and political distinctness from their central governments. In each of

¹ It is also possible that the Kurds in the two key countries could face divergent futures: that is, Kurds in one country make progress, while a successful crackdown occurs in another. [REDACTED]

The PKK: Insurgents Who Use Terrorism

The US Intelligence Community regards the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—like the New People's Army in the Philippines and the Peruvian group Sendero Luminoso—as a rural-based insurgency that uses terrorism as one of its tactics.

During the 1980s, PKK terrorist attacks in southeastern Turkey targeted government officials, village guards and their families, teachers, and schools. In reaction to negative publicity, the PKK became more discriminating in 1990 and 1991, focusing mainly on village guards, soldiers, and Turkish security officials. This year, however, the PKK has again widened its assaults on civilians, including extortion, assassination of perceived PKK opponents, and attacks on commercial establishments and the wealthy, disregarding the safety of civilians in the vicinity of the intended targets, many of whom were murdered or injured. According to Turkish Government figures, approximately 1,000 civilians are included among the 4,500 people killed in PKK-related operations since 1984.

Since late 1991, the PKK has sporadically conducted terrorist activities in Turkey's major cities; most analysts expect urban attacks to rise.

The PKK also was responsible for three kidnappings of Westerners in southeastern Turkey last year. PKK leader Ocalan warned that the PKK has the right to detain foreigners who enter Kurdistan without PKK permission.

The PKK maintains ties to numerous leftwing Turkish groups, most notably Dev Sol, which since early 1991 has killed two Americans and carried out dozens of bombings against US facilities in Turkey. Dev Sol cells may have provided logistic and intelligence support for PKK attacks against Turkish security forces in Istanbul this spring.

The PKK has also carried out terrorist activities throughout Western Europe over the past decade. The group uses Europe primarily for fundraising by extorting protection money from Kurdish and Turkish expatriates, as a base for recruitment, and as a safehaven from Turkish authorities. The PKK also has conducted at least 11 assassinations in Europe since 1984.

the three cases, however, they will work primarily within their particular national context. Cooperation could over time become more significant as their community of interests and interdependence grows. But we see

important tensions and rivalries inhibiting cooperation in the short run.

Overall, Iraqi Kurds will be in the strongest position. So long as Provide Comfort continues

the Kurds will be able to preserve their new institutions and de facto autonomy, even if a strong central government emerges in Baghdad. Should Provide Comfort end because of the fall of Saddam Husayn, Iraq will likely face short-term instability, during which time the Kurds could take advantage of the turmoil to advance their agenda but would also face risks to their well-being. [REDACTED]

Many Iraqi Kurds believe that Ankara's uneasy tolerance of their political activities will not outlast Provide Comfort. Still, the Iraqi Kurds, dependent on Turkey for land routes, will try to strengthen these links. Turkey's President Ozal and PUK leader Talabani have spoken in favor of a special relationship between Turkey and northern Iraq, including talk of a zone of influence and even, reportedly, placing the former Ottoman province of Mosul under Turkish protection. But Prime Minister Demirel and most of Turkish officialdom appear less comfortable with any hint of border changes or of adding more Kurds to Turkey's demographic mix. Many Iraqi Kurds oppose greater dependence on Turkey and think that Talabani has endorsed such ideas for tactical reasons. [REDACTED]

Kurds in Turkey will continue to struggle among themselves and with Ankara to define the parameters of their political debate. Some hope for formal autonomy; others, including PKK followers, are convinced that only secession and independence will protect their rights, meaning that no end of PKK-led violence and Turkish countermeasures is in sight. Still other Kurds would settle for greater recognition and identity within the Turkish state. The would-be leaders of such a moderate movement will be intimidated by the PKK—indeed, their lives may be at

stake—and they will need encouragement and serious political reform from the Turkish elite. Such a “moderate” movement would probably be compelled to reach a modus vivendi with the PKK. [REDACTED]

Possibly with pressure from the West, the Turkish establishment might be willing to take some steps toward decentralization, resume development projects in the southeast, or further liberalize cultural and political rights. Most politically active Kurds, however, will regard such measures as inadequate. INR believes the PKK could be undermined by an antiviolence Kurdish political party, provided it is allowed to express itself fully and to operate without fear of Turkish harassment. Turkey could still satisfy the goals of the overwhelming majority of Kurds through far-reaching political reform, although the time for doing so is rapidly growing short. [REDACTED]

Iran's Kurds will continue their low-level insurgency against Tehran, but they are unlikely to achieve a major breakthrough unless other ethnic minorities in Iran also become more assertive and weaken Tehran's military capabilities or divert its attention. Iranian Kurds have indicated some interest in receiving Western support and attention, which could mean that the success of the Iraqi Kurds has expanded their own ambitions. [REDACTED]

Competition and rivalries will continue to define relations among Kurdish leaders. Short-lived alliances will be the rule, and each group will give information about the others to central authorities as they maneuver for position. Current leaders may be served by keeping the Kurdish movements separate. Talabani and Barzani evidently see

strategic advantage in pursuing a relationship with Ankara, the price for which is an anti-PKK stance. Ocalan, an advocate of Pan-Kurdism, will try to undermine the Iraqi Kurdish leaders as pawns of the West. His ties to Baghdad will probably boomerang, furthering divisions between him and Iraq's Kurds. [REDACTED]

Next Most Likely: Governments Effectively Stifle the Kurds

The central authorities in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran will, if circumstances permit and if they believe international opprobrium will be manageable or short lived, try harder to repress the Kurdish insurgencies, as they have done in the past. They unquestionably possess sufficient military power to prevent the Kurds from establishing political institutions, but some low-level insurgent activity would continue even after a successful crackdown. Massive military action against the Kurds could radicalize moderate Kurds and would also generate considerable international attention:

- *Turkey's* current leadership feels justified in using all necessary military measures to repress the PKK insurgency, and is finding growing support from the Turkish public for the crackdown on the PKK. If Ankara's fears for its territorial integrity were to rise, it would be prepared to undertake even stronger and more massive repression of insurgents in the southeast.
- *Iraq* will continue to use military means to intimidate the Kurds. If Provide Comfort leaves while Saddam is still in power, Baghdad will act forcefully to bring the Kurds to heel. If Saddam were gone, Baghdad's efforts might be tempered in the

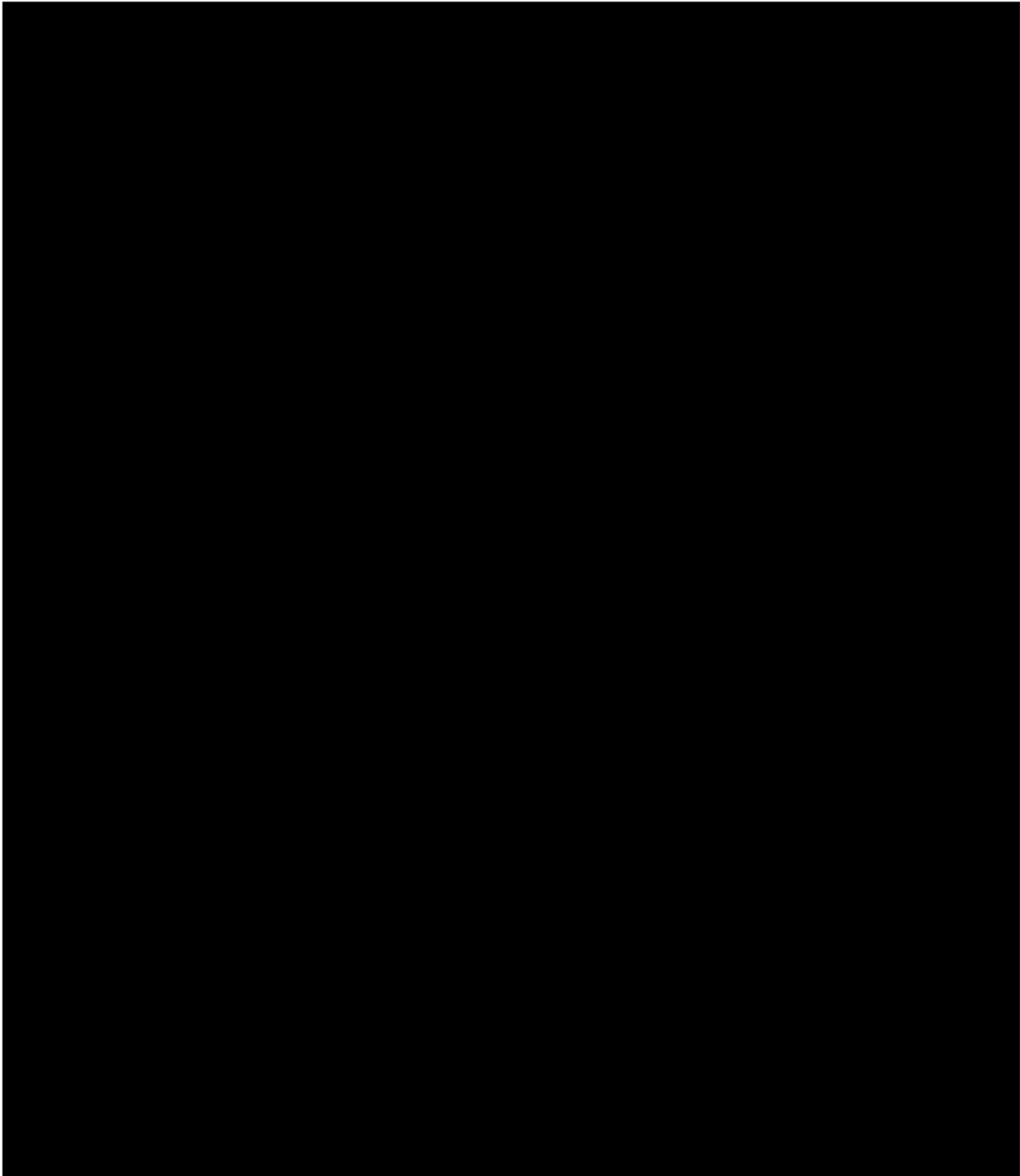
short run by a desire to achieve some political reconciliation with the Kurds for the sake of restoring national unity and with an eye to the international reaction, but such a new regime could make life hard for the Kurds again.

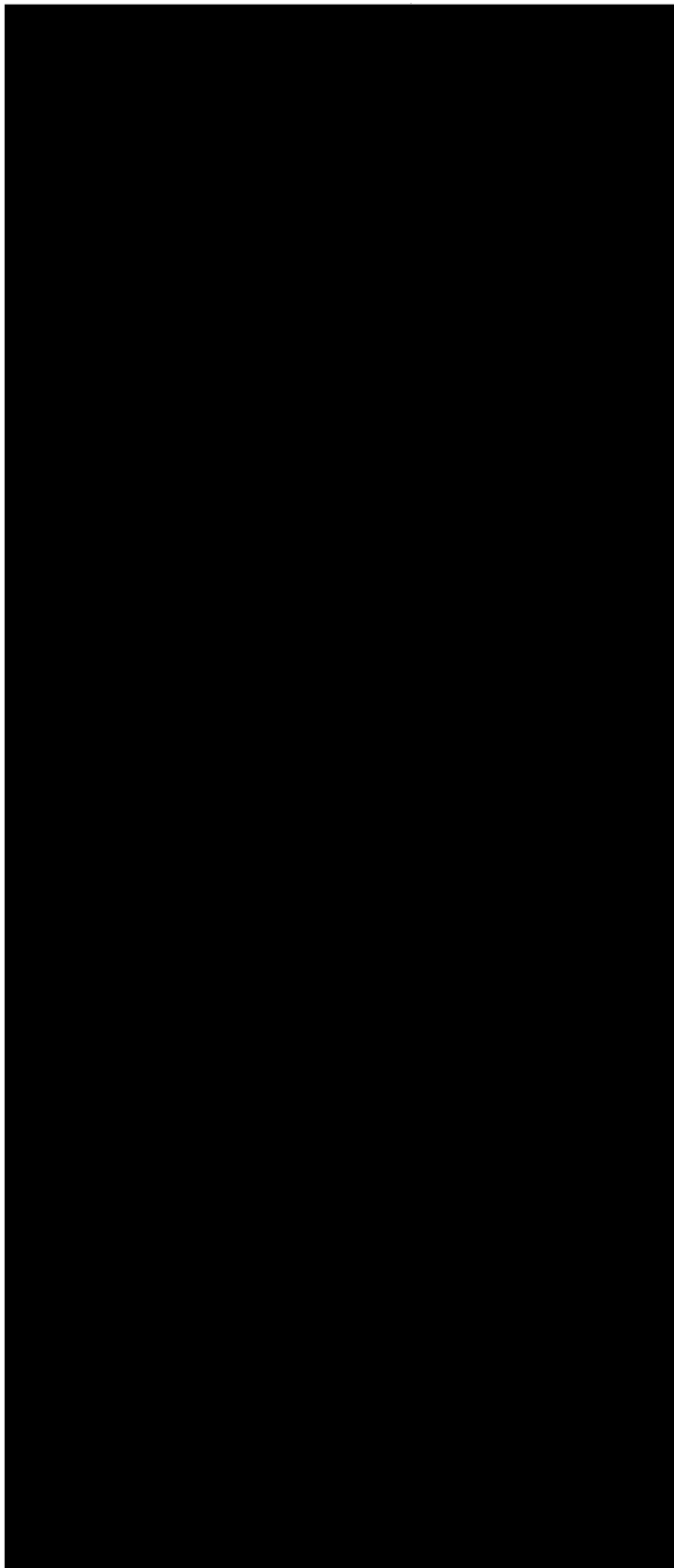
- *Iran* also will use military force to keep the Kurds, who live close to Azeri-inhabited areas—the most strategically important—from threatening the state. It has recently increased its military presence in Kurdish areas. [REDACTED]

Alternative Scenarios: Emergence of a Single Movement

The coalescence of Kurdish activism in Iraq and Turkey and possibly even Iran is very unlikely over the time frame of this Estimate. This judgment would be altered, however, under certain circumstances:

- If the Iraqi state continues to weaken and Iraqi Kurds work actively to create an international network, the environment will be more favorable for development of Pan-Kurdish consciousness.
- The de facto or formal breakup of Iraq—widely feared by Iraq's neighbors—could accelerate serious Pan-Kurdish cooperation, with Kurds outside Iraq looking increasingly to the model of Iraqi Kurdistan.
- A massive crackdown across borders by at least one of the three key states—most likely Turkey—could compel Kurds to coordinate their military and diplomatic strategy.





- A dramatic change to liberalize Turkey's internal political system—which we deem unlikely—could also be a peaceful catalyst for greater intra-Kurdish cooperation and solidarity. [REDACTED]

Decline of Kurdish Nationalist Sentiment

A parallel decline of the political ambitions in each of the key countries seems unlikely, but we cannot totally dismiss the possibility that Kurds could decide that their interests no longer required outright independence or even greater autonomy. This would require a dramatic change in circumstances in their countries of residence—for example, the rise

of pluralism in Iraq after Saddam—and we believe that such a change would take years to develop [REDACTED]

Implications for the United States

In the broadest sense, the Kurdish issue has the potential to become another serious challenge in the post-Cold War era. The United States and its Western Allies seek policies to preserve the territorial and political integrity of Iraq. But those policies would inhibit prospects for Kurdish statehood, and, if the violence in the region is prolonged and spreads, the failure of the international community to bring about the peaceful resolution will prompt comparisons to the Balkans tragedy and may lead to charges of accountability for the violence that ensues. [REDACTED]

Growing Kurdish activism is likely to place key US interests in greater conflict. In particular, long-term bilateral relations with Turkey will be strained by the unintended consequences of Operation Provide Comfort. Some in the region already perceive inconsistency in policies toward Turkey and toward northern Iraq, which have been characterized—simplistically in our view—as protecting Iraqi Kurds while condoning the repression of Turkey's Kurds. Nonetheless, a full-blown insurgency that compels Ankara to escalate its actions in the southeast could reinforce this perception. [REDACTED]

Operation Provide Comfort will be a critical factor in determining prospects for Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Baghdad will move swiftly to reassert control over its Kurdish areas if Provide Comfort is not extended. Ankara's decision will depend on Turkish perceptions

of Provide Comfort's impact on Kurdish aspirations, the strength of the PKK insurgency, concerns about relations with Washington, and coalition strategies vis-a-vis Saddam. [REDACTED]

US Policy Toward Iraq

A long-term self-governing zone in northern Iraq could put into motion a process that will make more difficult the US commitment to a unitary Iraq. Kurds will continue to make requests for incremental gestures of recognition and, if sanctions against Iraq continue, for establishing a distinct economic relationship. Kurds may also be concerned that the fall of Saddam will shift the focus from protecting Kurds to shoring up the integrity of the Iraqi state. [REDACTED]

Relations With Turkey

US support for Turkey will be challenged by Ankara's human rights failures on the Kurdish issue. Turkish authorities will expect US sympathy, if not active assistance for their anti-PKK efforts. Should Washington support the Turks, US relations with some European Allies could be strained, as occurred in early 1992 when Germany temporarily punished Turkey for use of its military equipment in anti-Kurdish operations. US policies to protect Iraqi Kurds will be hard to mesh with friendly relations with Turkey if Ankara expands cross-border attacks into Iraq or decides not to extend Provide Comfort. The Turkish establishment will question the bilateral relationship if Washington is perceived as pro-Kurdish and if the United States raises more concerns about human rights and democratic practices. In any event, US ability to ease the Turks toward greater political and cultural liberalization

will be limited. INR believes that the United States and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe could influence Ankara toward greater political and cultural liberalization, provided they remain strongly supportive of Turkey's security and diplomatic needs. [REDACTED]

Relations With the Kurds

Kurdish groups, whether working separately or together, will seek US recognition. They will try to build on the 1991 and 1992 experiences of visits to Washington and cooperation in the anti-Saddam coalition. While probably accepting that formal support for statehood is not achievable, Kurdish political leaders will press for commitments from Washington regarding protection of their human rights, economic freedom, and political status within Iraq and Turkey. Iraqi Kurds could ask for arms or military intervention if a government crackdown looms. But Turkey's Kurds will very likely remain skeptical of US intentions; many already resent US military support for Turkey and believe the United States is directly helping Turkey with intelligence support against the PKK. Such attitudes could lead the PKK to target US persons or facilities. [REDACTED]

Repercussions in Iran and Syria

Other US interests in the region could be complicated by Kurdish developments. For example, tensions between Turkey and Iran over PKK camps could increase the risk of sustained military conflict and of drawing in

the United States. A rise in Kurdish violence from bases in Syria and Lebanon could also affect US priorities with Damascus, where the bilateral agenda is already crowded with the peace process, terrorism, and human rights issues. [REDACTED]

Other Regional Concerns

US policy toward the Kurds will be closely monitored by other parties in the regions:

- Palestinians will look for signs of a double standard or inconsistencies vis-a-vis their own status.
- Arab governments will worry that the US commitment to current Arab state boundaries is eroding.
- Syria will oppose any policy moves that could awaken Kurdish consciousness or create new domestic social pressures in Syria and will have to manage the PKK issue with both Washington and Ankara.
- Israel may be emboldened to work more openly with the Kurds, as it has done in the past, to create counterforces to Arab nationalism.
- Contact with Iranian Kurdish leaders would affect Iran's perceptions of US intentions and deepen the anti-American instincts of the Iranian leaders. [REDACTED]

Warning Notice

Intelligence Sources
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**National Security
Information**

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**Information available as of 24 September 1992 was used
in the preparation of this National Intelligence Estimate.**

**The following intelligence organizations participated
in the preparation of this Estimate:**

The Central Intelligence Agency
The Defense Intelligence Agency
The National Security Agency
The Bureau of Intelligence and Research,
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also participating:

The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence,
Department of the Army
The Director of Naval Intelligence,
Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence,
Department of the Air Force
The Director of Intelligence,
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	ORCON (OC)	Dissemination and extraction of information controlled by originator
	REL...	This information has been authorized for release to...
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