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Iraq (Kurds) (1961 - 1996)

The Kurds are an ethnic group in northern Iraq and neighboring Turkey and Iran. There are longstanding conflicts between the Kurds and the governments of all three countries (see also Turkey-Kurds conflict profile). Sustained warfare between the Iraqi government and Kurdish fighters dates from 1961. In the first phase of the war, the Iraqi government controlled the cities and major towns, while Kurdish peshmerga fighters controlled the mountains. Iraq used aerial bombardment while the Kurds relied mainly on guerrilla tactics.

An agreement that would have granted autonomy to the Kurds in was almost signed in 1970, but the two parties could not agree to the division of oil rights and the fighting resumed. With increased support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the Iranian government, the Kurds escalated the war. In 1975, when the CIA and Iran cut off their support, the Kurdish forces were significantly weakened. This phase of the war was characterized by mass displacements, summary executions, and other gross human rights violations.

In 1979, when Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq, he intensified the repression against the Kurds. Though Kurds resisted, large-scale fighting did not resume until the mid-1980s when Iran, now fighting its own war with Iraq, renewed support for the peshmerga. In 1987, Saddam Hussein appointed his cousin, General Ali Hassan al-Majid, to subdue the Kurds. "Chemical Ali," as he came to be known because of his use of chemical weapons, launched the Anfal campaign that resulted in the deaths of approximately 100,000 Kurds, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of others, and the destruction of more than 2,000 Kurdish villages. Independent observers, including Human Rights Watch, characterized the campaign as "genocidal."

In March 1991, shortly after the end of the Gulf War, Kurds in Iraq rebelled. Although Saddam Hussein launched a massive retaliation, Kurds attained a measure of autonomy as a result of the imposition of an Iraqi no-fly zone in the north, monitored by the United States, Britain, and France. With the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003, the Kurds have gained a voice in the new U.S.-backed Iraqi administration.

Print Resources

Human Rights Watch/Middle East. (1995) *Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gunter, Michael (1999) *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Online Resources

Human Rights Watch. *Iraq*.

Gendercide Watch. *The Anfal Campaign*.

Kurdish Media

BBC News. *Timeline: Iraqi Kurds*.

Timeline

- 1943 - Kurds attempt to form independent country in northern Iraq
- 1946 - Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) forms
- 1958 - new Iraqi Constitution recognizes Kurdish national rights
- 1961 - Kurds rebel; KDP declared illegal; fighting begins
- 1970 - Peace Accords agreed upon, granting regional autonomy
- 1971 - agreement breaks down, fighting renewed
- 1975 - Iraq and Iran sign Algiers Accord; Iran stops funding Kurds, rebellion collapses; Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) forms
- 1978 - PUK and KDP clash with each other
- 1979 - Saddam Hussein becomes Iraqi president
- 1980 - Iran-Iraq War begins
- 1983 - Iranian and KDP fighters attack Iraq from north; Iraq massacres 8,000 Kurds; PUK agrees to ceasefire with Iraq
- 1985 - PUK ceasefire breaks down
- 1986 - PUK and KDP jointly fight Iraq with Iranian support
- 1988 - Anfal campaign; gas attack on town of Halabjah kills thousands; Iran-Iraq War ends
- 1991 - Gulf war; Kurds rebel and are put down by Saddam Hussein; "safe haven" created
- 1992 - PUK and KDP form Kurdish government, sharing power
- 1994 - PUK and KDP clash militarily
- 1996 - KDP seeks aid from Iraqi government against PUK
- 1998 - PUK and KDP sign peace agreement in Washington
- 2003 - PUK and KDP form joint leadership; U.S. attacks Iraq; Kurds participate in Iraqi Governing Council
- 2005 - PUK leader Jalal Talabani becomes interim president of Iraq