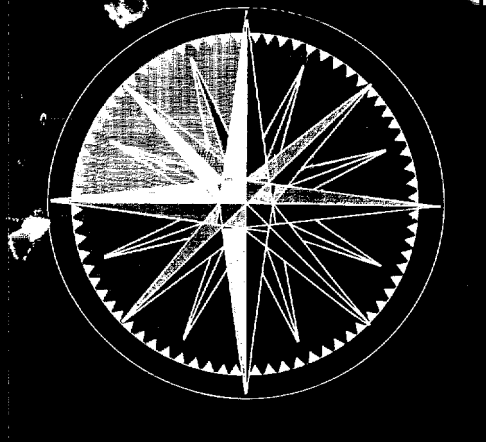


SECRET

Release 2006/11/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004800110003-7 23 April 1965

OCI No. 0286/65B

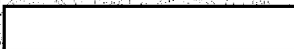
Copy No. 54



# SPECIAL REPORT

THE KURDISH WAR—ROUND FOUR

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE



SECRET

GROUP I Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and declassification

48-728527/1

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/11/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004800110003-7

Approved For Release 2006/11/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004800110003-7

**SECRET**

23 April 1965

**THE KURDISH WAR--ROUND FOUR**

The military campaign recently launched by the Iraqi Army against the Iraqi Kurds marks Baghdad's fourth attempt to resolve its problems in northern Iraq by force since former premier Qasim first stumbled into war in Kurdistan in 1961. In the initial phase of this year's round of fighting, the army appears intent merely on pushing the rebels out of the relatively exposed positions they occupied in the Kurdistan border lowlands during the 14-month cease-fire that just ended. In time, however, this campaign promises to be as long, bloody, and costly--but probably as indecisive--as that conducted by the Baathist regime in 1963. Both sides again face considerable difficulties. The army is still untrained to cope with the guerrilla tactics of the rebels, and morale is low. The Kurds are somewhat more divided than they were in 1963, and their morale also may suffer as the war continues without results. The present campaign seems likely to underline the essential situation that has prevailed in Kurdistan for the past four years--stalemate.

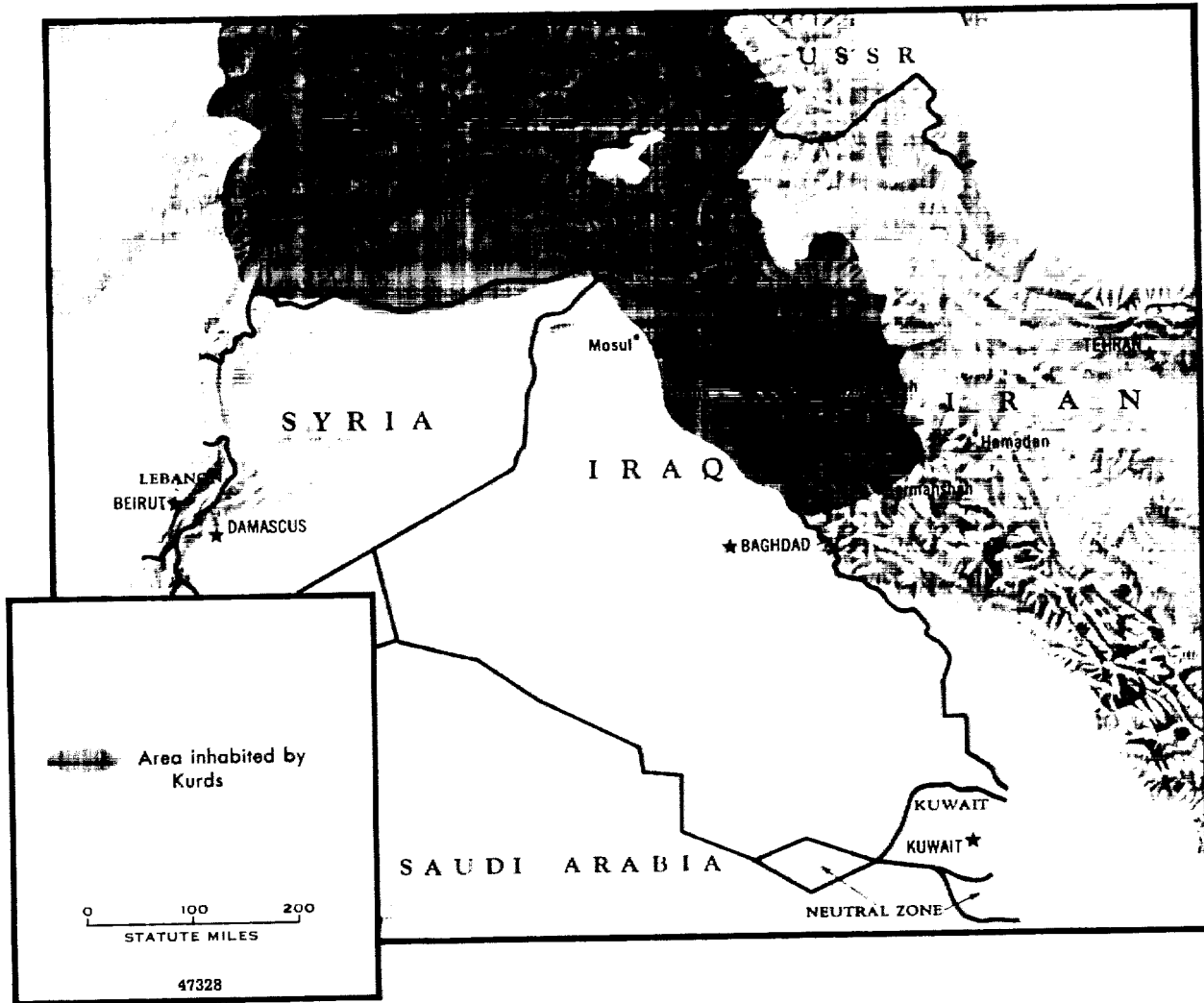
The 1963 Campaign and the Truce

The 1963 campaign directed by the Baathist government was far more ruthless and determined than the two drives conducted by the Qasim regime. Although the army managed to push deep into Kurdish-held territory, the Baathist regime was unable to defeat the rebels decisively before it fell in November 1963. The new military government withdrew some of the forces engaged against the Kurds for security duty in the Baghdad area. The fighting dragged on in desultory fashion until a cease-fire was arranged with rebel leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani in February 1964.

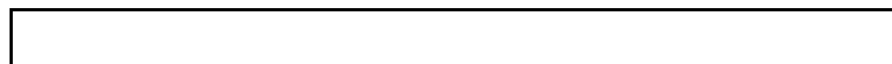
The cease-fire had advantages for both sides. The new government needed a period of relative quiet in which to consolidate its hold on power, while the Kurds, at war almost continually for nearly two and a half years, needed a breathing spell. This was especially true of the tribal forces that had borne the brunt of the fighting on the Kurdish side. The members of the urban-based Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the political arm of the Kurdish separatist movement, were far less anxious to conclude a cease-fire, which in any case was little more than an armed truce.

1

**SECRET**



25X1



**SECRET**

The cease-fire ushered in a period of relative calm in Kurdistan--by far the longest since the fighting had first begun--but it did not bring a solution to the problem of Kurdish disaffection. The more extreme Kurdish separatist demands envisioned the establishment of a virtually independent state having only the most tenuous ties with the central government in Baghdad. The shaky, ethnocentric Arab nationalist regime in Baghdad, or indeed any government likely to come to power, could not contemplate such a situation. On the contrary, it soon made clear that the Kurds could not expect official recognition of their ethnic and cultural separateness.

It soon became apparent that the Kurds and the government had conflicting ideas of what the cease-fire itself actually meant.

In announcing the cease-fire agreement, the government issued a nine-point program in which it stated that it acknowledged "the national rights of our Kurdish brothers within the framework of the Iraqi state," and that it would release all Kurdish prisoners, return local administration to the north, reinstate dismissed Kurdish officials and employees, and begin reconstruction in Kurdistan. The government then publicly claimed that there was no longer a Kurdish problem and that there was nothing to discuss with the rebels, even though the latter

still remained under arms in the north.

The Kurds, for their part, claimed that the government proclamation should be considered merely as the starting point for negotiations designed to settle the Kurdish problem. They were soon complaining that the government program itself was being implemented very slowly or not at all.

#### Kurdish Demands

The Kurdish demands to the new government differed little from those that the rebels had been putting forward regularly since 1962. These demands included allocation of a percentage of the government's oil revenues to the Kurds, since most of Iraq's proven oil reserves are located in Kurdistan; appointment of Kurdish administrators in all parts of Kurdistan; specific recognition of Kurdish rights in the new constitution; dissolution of the government-supported Kurdish mercenaries still stationed in the north; withdrawal of regular army units from Kurdistan; resettlement of Kurds in lands around the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul from which they had been removed by the Baathist regime; the retention of an armed Kurdish force under the command of Mulla Mustafa Barzani; and instruction in the Kurdish language in the schools. These demands, if accepted in full, would have amounted to the virtual creation of a Kurdish state within a state.

**SECRET**

**SECRET**Baghdad's Reaction

Baghdad did not seriously consider the demands, and continued to insist that the Kurds must be treated exactly like other citizens of Iraq. Although the two sides soon began sporadic talks, these were in fact less real negotiations than periodic restatements of the position of each side. Nonetheless, such talks continued at intervals until the end of March.

During this period, the government did release a considerable number of Kurdish prisoners, but little construction work was undertaken in Kurdistan, few Kurdish administrators were returned to their posts, and army forces remained in the north although in somewhat reduced numbers. Civil administrators were introduced into areas accessible to government control, but in other areas of Kurdistan, Mulla Mustafa Barzani maintained effective civil as well as military control. Indeed, a working agreement was reached between the government and Barzani in which the Kurdish leader was in effect recognized as de facto viceroy for the government in much of Kurdistan. Barzani probably received government funds for awhile in return for keeping peace in areas out of effective government control. This arrangement prevented the usual outbreak of fighting between the army and the Kurds in the spring of 1964.

Kurdish Factional Fighting

Such a tacit modus vivendi, however, was clearly abhorred by the more militant leaders of the KDP, who hoped to achieve complete Kurdish independence by further fighting. They also could point out that the government was not fulfilling even its minimal commitments under the cease-fire agreement and that the whole question of the future of Kurdistan remained in suspense.

Pressure by these leaders to resume the war led to increasing friction with Barzani, culminating in April 1964 in an unsuccessful attempt to oust him from the leadership of the KDP. Barzani reasserted his authority, and his tribal forces engaged in a series of armed clashes with the followers of the militant KDP leaders, Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad, the then secretary general of the party. An attempted reconciliation failed, and in July Barzani had the militants expelled from the KDP. His forces then drove the armed followers of Talabani and Ahmad across the Iranian border, where they were briefly interned and partially disarmed by the Iranian authorities.

Barzani's Political Moves

Although it proved easy enough to dispose of the

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

dissident Kurdish militants in a military sense, Barzani is aware of the political threat they can still pose for him. In place of Ahmad and Talabani and their associates, he has installed a new central committee of the KDP composed of his own trusted followers. In October, he further reasserted his control by formalizing a "Kurdish Revolutionary Command" composed of himself and 11 of his lieutenants, including several tribal leaders as well as KDP members. This organ is to operate, together with a 43-man "Leadership Council," as the executive and legislative bodies in Kurdistan pending the winning of Kurdish national rights.

The Revolutionary Command immediately promulgated a "constitution" and issued various laws and regulations governing the judiciary, administration, and tax structure of the "liberated areas of Kurdistan." The Kurds also appointed judges and civilian administrators throughout Iraqi Kurdistan--even in areas under nominal government control--who by early 1965 constituted the only effective administration in the north. These moves fell somewhat short of the unilateral establishment of an independent government, or, in practice, even of full autonomous administration, but they effectively undercut the appeal of the militant faction of the KDP by demonstrating that Barzani had not lost sight of the ultimate Kurdish nationalist objectives. Barzani reinforced this impres-

sion by sending Baghdad a stream of Kurdish complaints and demands.

In pursuing a policy of limited detente, of continuing sporadic negotiations, and of uttering periodic threats to renew the fighting without actually doing so, Barzani throughout 1964 appeared to be taking into account the general weakness of the Baghdad regime. He evidently thought the regime might fall before a crisis was again reached in relations between the two sides. In dealing with the present military government, he has been faced with a narrowly Arab nationalist regime which has proved itself virtually unable to recognize any legitimacy in the Kurdish desire for at least cultural and administrative autonomy. He probably has calculated that a successor government might be easier to deal with. Barzani probably believed that even if a regime of similar outlook were to replace the present one there was no guarantee it would honor any significant agreement he might reach now and that therefore there was no good reason to try very hard to reach such an agreement.

#### The Egyptian Factor

An additional factor in his calculations no doubt has been the attitude of President Nasir of Egypt, whose influence on the regime in Baghdad has from the beginning been especially strong. Nasir had steadily advised restraint on

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

those elements within the Iraqi military government who wished to resolve the impasse in Kurdistan by force.

In the summer and autumn of 1964 when the Iraqi Government appeared to be pressing Egypt to enter into an immediate formal, constitutional union with Iraq, Nasir demurred. He cited as one major reason the continuing Kurdish problem, which he insisted would have to be solved peacefully before final arrangements for union could be worked out. Undoubtedly Nasir thereby expected to impose a long delay on the question of union with Iraq because he remains extremely reluctant to assume responsibility for Iraq's many social and political problems.

Nasir's partisans within the regime, who, with their usual exclusively Arab orientation and outlook, might normally be the group least willing to reach an accommodation with the Kurds, have in fact proved to be the strongest advocates of a negotiated settlement. The various disputes over this issue have been very largely a reflection of personal and partisan rivalries rather than of conviction, but they nonetheless served to postpone, until this spring, any final decision about

renewing the use of force against the Kurds.

The struggle between the two major factions within the regime--the pro-Egyptians and those opposing early union with Nasir--probably reached some sort of climax in November 1964. However, a government shake-up at that time strengthened the hand of the pro-Egyptian faction and the Kurdish question was apparently shelved for several months.

#### Renewed Hostilities Planned

Last February, however, the army began a major transfer of forces to the Kurdistan area, and tension rose sharply in the north. A propaganda war started. The Kurds claimed through their representatives abroad that the government was planning a war of genocide in which poison gas was to be used. The government admitted for the first time since the cease-fire had gone into effect that all was not peaceful in Kurdistan, and accused the rebels of being "imperialist agents" with no popular support. An economic blockade of Kurdistan was also imposed by the Baghdad authorities.

**SECRET**



**SECRET**

Hostilities apparently were planned to resume in early April. A delegation headed by Premier Tahir Yahya went to Cairo on 2 April to ask for Egyptian support of the contemplated action, and specifically for authorization to use in the campaign the 600-700 Egyptian combat troops stationed in Iraq. This authorization was denied.

25X1

[Redacted]

Those elements of the Iraqi regime favoring the use of force against the Kurds probably also expect that the Iraqis' visit to Cairo just before hostilities began will make both the Kurds and the Arabs believe that Nasir has tacitly endorsed the government's actions.

25X1

[Redacted]

### The New Campaign

In this initial phase, the new campaign is probably relatively popular among most Iraqi Arabs, who, like their government, find it virtually impossible to consider seriously even the Kurds' most modest demands for cultural or political autonomy.

The large Shia Arab religious community, however, also has serious grievances against the present regime, which is dominated by Sunni Arabs. A possible antiregime Kurdish-Shia alliance is rumored, but is unlikely. The Shias have traditionally harbored anti-Kurdish sentiment and their community is largely unorganized politically. Nonetheless, the Shia factor is important in the army, since the majority of the enlisted ranks are Shia. Their morale is not high, and Kurdish ambushes and hit-and-run tactics are not likely to improve it.

The army has committed some 45,000 men--three full divisions and elements of a fourth, including armor and artillery units --to the new campaign. This force should have little trouble pushing the Kurds back from their forward positions, but as in previous campaigns, it will have increasing trouble as it moves into the mountain fastnesses that constitute the heart of Kurdistan. As before, Kurdish mercenaries recruited from the tribes traditionally opposed to the Barzani tribe will bear the brunt of the fighting in the mountains.

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

25X1



### The Kurdish Position

Kurdish strength is hard to estimate. Mulla Mustafa Barzani probably has a hard core of 5,000 tribal fighters under his command. He could perhaps call on an additional 30,000 men, including armed townsmen of the KDP. He would be hard put, however, to arm adequately a force of this size.

Barzani's hard-core force, however, is well supplied with weapons, including bazookas and other relatively modern infantry weapons. Much of this materiel has been purchased by the Kurds in Europe. Some ammunition and small arms are obtained by raids on Iraqi military installations. Rebel morale is relatively high, but a degree of war-weariness was evident at the time of the February 1964 cease-fire, and such a feeling could again develop if the rebellion drags on.

Barzani has also achieved a relatively high degree of cohesion among the Iraqi Kurdish tribes especially since the fall of the Qasim regime in early 1963. Unlike previous Kurdish uprisings, which were largely local, the present rebellion encompasses virtually all of Iraqi Kurdistan. Most Kurds, and certainly all of the tribal fighters who have borne the brunt of the conflict, allow Barzani to speak for them and generally follow his lead in negotiation with the Baghdad authorities.

All the Iraqi Kurdish tribes, however, are not involved in the rebellion. A small number have remained neutral and the traditional enemies of the Barzani--the Zibari, Harki, Baradost, and Surchi tribes--continue in large measure to oppose the rebels. The dissident radical faction of the KDP still remains unreconciled with Barzani, largely as the result of personal antipathy between Mulla Mustafa and Ibrahim Ahmad. In addition, there have been rumors that certain tribal leaders, especially in the extreme north of Kurdistan, are not as anxious as before to engage in a new round of fighting. Barzani apparently had to engage in a fence-mending expedition among these tribes when the transfer of government forces to the north in February and March indicated that a new outbreak of hostilities was likely.

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

These differences among the rebels may have been in part responsible for the relatively conciliatory negotiating position the Kurds presented to the government last winter. This new, "minimum" set of demands significantly modified the rebel position on administrative autonomy. The Kurds announced that they were willing to give up earlier demands for full self-government, for a Kurdish parliament, and for amalgamation of the Kurdish provinces into a single unit, as well as for a proportional share of the government's oil income. Barzani probably calculated that even these modified demands would prove unacceptable to the government--as indeed they were--and that his relatively moderate position would put the onus for renewal of the fighting on the Baghdad regime. The government, for its part, has carefully refrained from announcing that its troops have gone into action in the north, doubtlessly calculating that if the Kurds are the first to announce that fighting has been resumed the rebels would appear to be the aggressors.

#### Outside Aid

In this new round of fighting the Kurds can expect to re-

ceive a limited amount of covert aid from the Iranian Government --as they have in varying degrees since 1962. Indeed, the Shah has for some time been encouraging Barzani to resume hostilities whatever the attitude of the Baghdad authorities might be. He continues to be anxious about the extent of Nasirist influence in the Iraqi Government and feels that the present regime has in effect brought Nasir to his western border. He believes that continued fighting in Iraqi Kurdistan will fully occupy the attention of the authorities in Baghdad, lessen their capabilities for causing him trouble among the Arab population of southwestern Iran, and perhaps in time result in the overthrow of the Iraqi regime itself.

In the spring and summer of 1964, the Shah encouraged and worked closely with the dissident KDP elements led by Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad, since this group was intent on renewing the war against the Baghdad authorities at any cost. It has become apparent that this faction has no military potential in Iraqi Kurdistan, however, and the Shah has once more shifted his attention to Mulla Mustafa Barzani. It is likely that

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

he will continue to support Barzani's forces as long as Mulla Mustafa can command their loyalty, and as long as they continue to form the backbone of Kurdish resistance.

As Iraqi preparations for the conflict progressed Baghdad's relations with the Soviet Union, which had grown steadily warmer during the summer of 1964, have again begun to deteriorate. The USSR continues to offer propaganda support for Kurdish autonomy within the Iraqi state-- as it has done since the fighting first commenced in 1961-- but this support has been strictly limited to propaganda. Neither

the Soviet Union nor the European satellites have supplied arms or other material aid to the rebels, and there is no indication that this position is likely to change. Indeed, the USSR is continuing to supply the Baghdad government with arms and equipment which can be used in the fighting in the north. Arms shipments to the anti-Communist Baathist government were halted briefly at the height of the 1963 offensive against the rebels, but it is unlikely that this experience will be repeated. The present regime has been careful not to exacerbate its relations with the Soviet Union.

25X1

\* \* \*

**SECRET**

***SECRET***