



## Armed Conflicts Report

### Iraq - Kurds (1961 - first combat deaths)

Update: January 2005

#### Summary

#### Type of Conflict

#### Parties to the Conflict

#### Status of the Fighting

#### Number of Deaths

#### Political Developments

#### Background

#### Arms Sources

#### Summary:

***2004 The armed conflict between Kurdish separatists and the Iraqi government was overtaken by the US-led war of occupation of Iraq and the removal of the government of Saddam Hussein in early 2003.***

**2003** Fighting intensified in northern Iraq following the US-led invasion of the country in March. Kurdish armed groups, assisted by US forces, routed Islamic militants and seized control of large areas of land, exacerbating tensions with local ethnic groups and the Turkish government before a later withdrawal. Kurdish leaders were included in the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, reflecting the willingness of the main Kurdish political groups to seek a political solution to their long-standing struggle for autonomy.

**2002** Fighting in northern Iraq between rival Kurdish factions claimed at least 100 lives this year. Peace talks between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Ansar al-Islam were cut short in April although the Kurdish Democratic Party and the PUK agreed to put aside their differences to form a united armed opposition to Baghdad in anticipation of a US-led war on Iraq.

**2001** Clashes between rival Kurdish groups were reported throughout the year leaving at least 200 dead. The Iraqi military deployed large numbers of troops along the northern protected no-fly-zone and there were reports of artillery shelling by Iraqi forces. Two Islamic rebel groups in northern Iraq also announced they would form a new united party, Jund al-Islam (Soldiers of Islam), later renamed Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam).

**2000** Iraqi authorities continued widespread human rights violations against Kurds and other minorities in areas under government control. Turkey also continued military incursions into the area, pursuing members of the rebel PKK. Meanwhile, the PKK clashed with local rebel groups, the KDP and PUK and at least 200 died in the fighting.

**1999** Government forces continued sporadic shelling of Kurdish villages in the north, although there was no fighting reported between the two major rebel groups that control Iraqi Kurdish areas. Deaths were reported from the shelling, but no total casualty figures were available for the year.

**1998** A ceasefire between the two major Kurdish rebel groups held through 1998, but the Iraq government continued a campaign against Kurdish populations which included forced displacement, torture, and political executions.

**1997** With the cooperation of the Iraqi Kurdish rebel group the KDP, Turkish forces invaded northern Iraq in May to attack enemy PKK Kurdish rebels and establish a "security zone." In October, the two largest Kurdish insurgent groups in Iraq, the KDP and the PUK, ended a year-long truce with clashes that escalated into a major offensive in November. Meanwhile, government political executions continued.

## Type of Conflict:

State formation

## Parties to the Conflict:

### 1) Government:

of President Saddam Hussein, which was deposed in April 2003. Saddam Hussein was captured by US forces later in the year.

### 2) Various Kurdish groups, of which the two largest are the KDP and the PUK:

- Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP), founded in 1945, led by Massoud Barzani;
- Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), founded in 1975, led by Jalal Talabani;
- Islamic Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK) sponsored by Iran;
- Iraqi National Congress (INC) a grouping of multi-ethnic opposition parties;
  - Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam) created in December 2001 after the union between Jund al-Islam (Soldiers of Islam) and an Islamic splinter group under the leadership of Mullah Krekar.

This group is believed to have links with the al-Qaeda network led by Osama bin Laden, and targets all secular Kurd groups.

- and, various other groups make up a force called the Kurdistan Front.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan controls the eastern part of the autonomous zone, while the western sector is controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The rebels groups have historically been far from united and have clashed with each other and with the PKK, the Turkish Kurdish insurgent force with a presence in Iraq, on a regular basis. However, with the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, the two main Kurdish groups, the KDP and PUK, formed an alliance in order to increase their power in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which includes several Kurdish leaders.

"... Kurdish leaders are adjusting rapidly to the realities of post-Hussein politics. First, to maximize their national influence, the PUK and the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have renounced the differences that led to civil war in their 17,000-square-mile enclave in the 1990s. The two groups now speak with one voice, and they say they are preparing to merge the dual administrations that rule separate sections of the Kurdish region in northeastern Iraq... More importantly, Kurdish leaders say they have jettisoned their long-standing dream of an independent ethnic homeland..." [*The Washington Post*, August 12, 2003]

"[Ansar al-Islam] is reportedly supported by Mr. Hussein and has links with Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network." [*The Christian Science Monitor*, April 9, 2002]

### 3) Other:

US government and allies involved in "Operation Provide Comfort" (UK, France). This operation began after the first Gulf War (Desert Storm) in 1991 to provide a safe area in northern Iraq for the Kurdish population. A "no-fly zone" over northern Iraq was patrolled by US, French and UK air forces. As part of the US-led invasion in March 2003, the US established a second front by deploying thousands of troops to northern Iraq. These allied themselves with local Kurdish fighters to defeat Iraqi security forces located in the north.

"A northern front in the war in Iraq began to take shape yesterday when U.S. forces flew in during the early hours of the morning. Four C-130 transport planes carrying troops, equipment and vehicles landed at an airstrip in this village, 10 kilometres outside Sulaymaniyah, the main city in

eastern Kurdish Iraq, according to a senior Kurdish official... The United States and its coalition partners had planned to bring about 40,000 to 50,000 troops into the north of Iraq from bases in Turkey... but the Turkish parliament rejected a deal worth at least \$6-billion (U.S.) to allow the coalition access to those bases..." [*globeandmail.com*, March 24, 2003]

Turkey has had troops in northern Iraq for several years to defend its border against Turkish Kurds who have fought the Turkish government for the past two decades. It sent reinforcements into northern Iraq following the US-led invasion in 2003 to discourage Iraqi Kurds from securing additional territory and power along the Iraqi-Turkish border.

"Several thousand Turkish troops are stationed [in northern Iraq], with Iraqi Kurdish approval, to monitor the PKK [Kurdistan Workers party] rebels who waged a bloody guerrilla war in south-eastern Turkey for Kurdish rights over the last two decades. Turkey has also repeatedly staged military incursions into Iraq over the past decade in pursuit of the Turkish Kurdish forces." [*The Guardian*, November 11, 2003]

## Status of Fighting:

**2003** The US-led invasion of Iraq, which began in March, transformed the armed conflict in the north of the country, most significantly by the dissolution of Iraqi government forces, one of the parties to the conflict. In April, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan fighters, with the support of US warplanes and special forces, routed the Islamic militant group Ansar al-Islam, killing over a hundred and dispersing hundreds more. Also in April, US-backed Kurdish fighters seized the northern Iraqi cities of Mosul and Kirkuk, forcing Iraqi security forces to retreat south. The fall of Saddam Hussein's government did not end tensions, however; clashes between Kurdish, Turkmen and Arab populations continued sporadically throughout the year, largely over disputed land. There were also reports of clashes between Iraqi-based Turkish Kurds and US forces.

"Last week, at least six people were killed in ethnic clashes in the city [Kirkuk] - mostly Turkmens and Arabs at the hands of the well-armed and organized Kurd militias. In late August, at least 10 were killed in similar incidents." [*Christian Science Monitor*, January 9, 2004]

"An explosion at the offices of a Kurdish political party [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] in the northern town of Kirkuk killed four people on Thursday... The PUK is a group that supports American efforts in Iraq. Party chief Jalal Talabani is the current head of the U.S.-installed Iraqi Governing Council. Nobody claimed responsibility, but insurgents have warned they will target anyone who collaborates with occupation authorities." [*globeandmail.com*, November 20, 2003]

"US troops and officers of the new Iraqi border police force clashed with Turkish Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq at the weekend in an incident that left one policeman dead and wounded several others... 'There were clashes not only with the United States but also between [Iraqi Kurdish fighters] and the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party]...' Abdullah Gul, the Turkish foreign minister, said yesterday." [*The Guardian*, November 11, 2003]

"He is one of thousands of Arab villagers across central and northern Iraq who are forming armed militias to resist attempts by local Kurds to force them from the land they have been farming for decades. The move, which comes as Kurds move to reverse Saddam Hussein's 'Arabisation' process of ethnic cleansing, threatens widespread communal violence across a large part of the country. Hundreds have already died in inter-ethnic clashes." [*Guardian Weekly*, April 24-30, 2003]

"US forces took over control in Mosul and Kirkuk over the weekend as Kurdish forces that seized the two key towns withdrew following pressure from Turkey." [*Agence France Presse*, April 15, 2003]

"A hundred US special forces led thousands of Kurdish peshmerga fighters in a massive assault last week that destroyed the headquarters of the radical Islamist group Ansar al-Islam in northeastern Iraq." [*Guardian Weekly*, April 3-9, 2003]

"The Kurds, backed by U.S. warplanes, are moving slowly toward Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq, and Kirkuk, hub of an oil-rich region. As Iraqi soldiers retreat, the Kurds have begun to absorb villages in their area of control." [*The Washington Post*, April 9, 2003]

"With the threat of a U.S. invasion looming over Iraq, residents in this community... say they already live in the middle of a war between the secular government and Islamic radicals holed up in the mountains. The most recent attack on Saturday killed seven people... Ansar, which controls several villages, has declared war on secular Kurdish parties... On Saturday in Qamesh Tapa, about 190 miles northeast Baghdad, Ansar operatives assassinated a well-known minister, Shawkat Haji Mushir, two other senior leaders, and four civilians." [*Associated Press*, February 14, 2003]

**2002** Combatants from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Ansar al-Islam engaged in skirmishes which killed many fighters and some civilians. A Human Rights Watch report claimed Ansar al-Islam perpetrated human rights abuses against Kurds, including murdering surrendered combatants. The United States and Britain intensified their bombing campaign in the no-fly zone in northern Iraq, killing civilians and Iraqi soldiers. In anticipation of a US-led war against it, the Iraqi regime stepped up detentions and executions of civilians and military officers accused of disloyalty.

"The battle is the latest in a long series of skirmishes between Ansar and the Patriotic Union, which has sought to drive the extremist Muslim militia from its mountain stronghold on the eastern edge of the Kurdish autonomous zone in northern Iraq." [*boston.com*, May 5, 2002]

"During a mission to Iraqi Kurdistan in September 2002, Human Rights Watch investigated reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by members of Ansar al-Islam in areas under their control. These reports suggested that Ansar al-Islam had been responsible for arbitrary arrests of numerous Kurdish civilians, prolonged and illegal detention, the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and the killing of combatants after surrender." [*Human Rights Watch*, February 5, 2003]

"Hostilities in the [no-fly] zones have ebbed and flowed over the years, and the 2002 year-end total of 78 coalition strikes is much higher than the 43 of

2001, but nearly matches the 80 of 2000." [boston.com, December 31, 2002]

"Iraq considers the patrols a violation of its sovereignty and frequently shoots at the planes. In response, coalition pilots try to bomb Iraqi air defenses." [Associated Press, October 22, 2002]

**2001** Clashes were reported between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), an Iraqi based Kurdish rebel group, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish rebel group retreating from Turkey. Fighting was also reported between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the newly-formed Jund Al-Islam. A major Iraqi troop buildup began in June along the border with northern Kurdish enclaves, with reports of artillery shelling by Iraqi forces.

"The head of a leading Kurdish faction in northern Iraq pledged that his military would continue fighting rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who have retreated from Turkey. 'The presence of the PKK in our region is unacceptable,' Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said after talks with senior Turkish diplomats. 'If the PKK insists on staying, our struggle to get them out of the region will continue and is continuing,' he added." [Associated Press, May 8, 2001]

"Iraqi troops are massing near the northern no fly zone for what military analysts suspect may be an attack inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Military experts say the military build up is centered just south of the town of Arbil, in the Western-protected enclave set up in April 1991 to protect the Kurds and deter Iraqi attacks." [The Washington Times, June 25, 2001]

"The Al-Sulaymaniyah newspaper 'Hawlati' of October 7 pointed out that after the military 'fiasco' resulting from the PUK attacks at the beginning of October, some of the Jund fighters had left their lines and contacted and joined the Islamic Group or PUK." [RFE/RL, Iraq Report, October 2001]

"...Iraqi government forced the population of as many as 30 villages to leave their homes as they faced repeated bombardment by Iraqi artillery." [RFE/RL, Iraq Report, October 2001]

**2000** Iraqi authorities continued widespread human rights violations against Kurds and other minorities in areas under government control. Turkey also continued military incursions into the area, pursuing members of the rebel PKK. The two Iraq-based Kurdish rebel groups KDP and PUK clashed with the PKK in separate incidents, seeking assistance from, and coordinating military activities with, the Turkish forces.

"...incursions were carried out in April, May, and August 2000... In July, armed clashes broke out between PKK and KDP forces, lasting several days and reportedly resulting in forty casualties, most of them PKK fighters. In mid-September, fierce fighting broke out between PKK and PUK forces, which continued intermittently for over two weeks in several areas, including Qala Diza, Rania, and Zeli, with scores of casualties reported on both sides. The fighting ended on October 4 when the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire." [Human Rights Watch, 2001 World Report]

"According to reports in Turkey, as many as 10,000 Turkish troops have poured into the Kurdish controlled enclave since December 20...." [Electronic Telegraph, 8 January 2001]

"The PKK has been trying to expand its operations in northern Iraq after withdrawing most of its forces from Turkey and declaring a ceasefire there. But the Iraqi Kurds do not want to give ground to the PKK...Turkey is providing technical assistance to both the PUK and the other Iraqi Kurdish group, the KDP, to help them fight the PKK." [BBC News, January 10, 2001]

"The Iraqi government continued to commit widespread and gross human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests of suspected political opponents, executions of prisoners, and forced expulsions of Kurds and Turkmen from Kirkuk and other districts." [Human Rights Watch, 2001 World Report]

**1999** Iraqi forces continued sporadic shelling of Kurdish villages in the north. Although there was no fighting reported between the two major Iraqi Kurdish groups that control northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) imposed a blockade on Assyrian villages and abused villagers.

"The regime continued its intermittent shelling of villages in the Kurdish administered north. Some deaths were reported... No hostilities were reported between the two major Iraqi Kurdish parties in de facto control of northern Iraq. During the year, the KDP reportedly imposed a blockade on Assyrian villages, and later entered the villages and beat villagers.... The Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan agreed in September 1998 to unify their administrations. Little progress was made toward implementing the 1998 agreement." [Iraq Report on Human Rights Practices for 1999, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, 2000]

**1998** A ceasefire between the two major Kurdish rebel groups held through 1998, but the Iraq government continued a campaign against Kurdish populations which included forced displacement, torture, and political executions.

**1997** With the cooperation of the Iraqi Kurdish rebel group the KDP, Turkish forces invaded northern Iraq in May to attack enemy Kurdish rebels and establish a "security zone." In October, the two largest Kurdish insurgent groups in Iraq ended a year-long truce with clashes that escalated into a major offensive in November. Meanwhile government political executions continued.

"On Friday an Iraqi opposition group reported that the PUK had used missiles to attack the KDP main base; at the same time the PUK itself faxed Western media to accuse the Turks of allying with the KDP and sending Turkish jet bombers to attack PUK positions. The sudden outbreak of fighting between the two this week marked the end of a year long truce between the two Iraqi Kurdish factions." ["IRAQ: Iraqi Kurds At Each Others' Throats Again," Dilip Hiro, IPS, LONDON, Oct 17, 1997]

## Number of Deaths:

**Total:** During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s (especially in 1988), fierce government attacks resulted in perhaps more than 100,000 Kurdish deaths or disappearances. Fighting among rival Kurdish groups has killed over 5,000 people since 1994. In 2002, the government of Iraq estimated that close to 1,500 people had been killed by US and allied bombing in the no-fly zones.

"A total of 1,479 Iraqis have been killed since the no-fly zones were set up, according to Baghdad." [*Agence France-Presse*, May 23, 2002]

"He [UN Special Rapporteur] estimates that the total number of Kurds who disappeared during Anfal could reach the tens of thousands. HRW estimates the total at between 70,000 and 150,000, and Amnesty International (AI) at more than 100,000." [*Iraq Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, January 30, 1997]

**2003** At least 200 people died in fighting in northern Iraq, including over one hundred Ansar al-Islam militants killed by US-backed Kurdish fighters in April.

"Since April 10, when Kirkuk fell to Kurdish forces, at least 40 civilians have been killed in inter-ethnic violence... Tens of thousands of Arabs have fled the city and other places in the north for fear of reprisals." [*Guardian Weekly*, April 24-30, 2003]

"A US warplane bombed American special forces and their Kurdish allies today, killing at least 18 people in a 'friendly fire' attack in northern Iraq, witnesses and Kurdish sources say. A senior Kurdish official told Reuters 18 Kurds were killed and more than 45 wounded..." [*Reuters*, April 7, 2003]

"Kurdish officials claimed that 120 Ansar militants had died in the fighting." [*Guardian Weekly*, April 3-9, 2003]

**2002** At least 100 people were killed in the fighting between rival Kurdish factions. Precise numbers of people killed by bombing in the northern no-fly zone were not available.

"On 4 July, Ansar militants attacked PUK positions and killed eight Peshmergas, though the attack was beaten back." [*BBC News*, July 24, 2002]

"Kurdish militiamen battled Islamic militants believed to be linked to al-Qaida in northern Iraq early Wednesday, and as many as 30 militiamen were killed or wounded..." [*washingtonpost.com*, December 4, 2002]

**2001** At least 200 combatants died in clashes between rival Kurdish rebel groups.

"On September 23, thirty-seven PUK fighters were killed by Jund al-Islam in the village of Kheli Hama on the Sulaimaniya-Halabja road. Several died in an ambush, but the majority was reportedly killed after surrender. Photographs of the victims made available by the PUK showed that some of the prisoners' throats had been slit and some of the dead had been beheaded or mutilated, including by having their sexual organs severed. During the ensuing clashes, an estimated one hundred PUK fighters and some forty Jund al-Islam fighters were killed. The PUK regained control of Halabja and its vicinity by September 26, arresting suspected supporters or members of Jund al-Islam, and during October the fighting extended to Sharazur, Hawraman, and elsewhere. At least thirty-eight Jund al-Islam fighters were reportedly killed in these clashes, while some twenty-four others were captured or surrendered." [*Human Rights Watch, World Report-Iraq 2002*, February 2002]

**2000** At least 200 people died in 2000, mostly rival Kurdish rebels.

"The PKK and the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have been at war since September, with up to 200 PUK fighters reportedly killed in recent weeks." [*Electronic Telegraph*, 8 January 2001]

"The Turkish news agency Anatolia said forty people had been killed in fighting between Turkey's Kurdish rebels of the PKK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of northern Iraq. The agency said most of the dead belonged to the PKK, which has in the past used bases in Kurdish-administered northern Iraq to launch attacks against Turkey." [*BBC News*, 11 July 2000]

**1999** Some deaths occurred from Iraqi shelling of Kurdish areas but no casualty estimates were available for the year.

**1998** Casualty figures were unavailable for 1998 but were likely fewer than 1997 with the exception that government political executions may have reached the 1997 estimate of hundreds.

**1997** Rival group fighting, rebel attacks on civilians, and state political executions left over 1,500 dead.

"There were many other credible reports of mass executions; on August 31, approximately 170 persons arrested by the Government during its brief 1996 occupation of Irbil were executed on the one-year anniversary of the Iraqi attack on that city;... Intra-Kurdish fighting in October and November resulted in the deaths of over 1200 fighters and an undisclosed number of civilians." [*Iraq Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, January 30, 1998]

## Political Developments:

**2003** In March, a US-led coalition declared war on Iraq and, while most coalition forces entered southern Iraq, the US flew troops into Kurdish-controlled, northern Iraq. The alliance formed between

Kurdish fighters and US forces resulted in the former gaining control over significant portions of northern Iraq held by the Iraqi government. Turkish authorities, concerned that this new Kurdish authority would create unrest among their own Kurdish population, threatened to intervene militarily if the Kurdish fighters failed to relinquish certain areas, resulting in a Kurdish withdrawal from Mosul and Kirkuk. The two main Iraqi Kurdish political groups, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which had joined to solidify the Kurdish bloc within the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, abandoned their goal to establish an independent Kurdish homeland and indicated a federal system within Iraq, consisting of highly-autonomous regions, would be an acceptable political solution.

"The Bush administration has decided to let the Kurdish region remain semi-autonomous as part of a newly sovereign Iraq... The officials said their new position on the Kurdish area was effectively dictated by the Nov. 15 accord with Iraqi leaders that established June 30 as the target date for Iraqi self-rule. Such a rapid timetable, they said, has left no time to change the autonomy and unity of the Kurdish stronghold of the north, as many had originally wanted." [*The New York Times*, January 5, 2004]

"... Kurdish leaders are adjusting rapidly to the realities of post-Hussein politics. First, to maximize their national influence, the PUK and the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have renounced the differences that led to civil war in their 17,000-square-mile enclave in the 1990s. The two groups now speak with one voice, and they say they are preparing to merge the dual administrations that rule separate sections of the Kurdish region in northeastern Iraq... More importantly, Kurdish leaders say they have jettisoned their long-standing dream of an independent ethnic homeland..." [*The Washington Post*, August 12, 2003]

"The alarming sight of US led Kurdish fighters capturing northern Iraq's oil-rich city of Kirkuk yesterday prompted Turkey to issue a stern warning against the peshmerga staying there too long. With as many as 70,000 heavily armed troops amassed along the Turkish-Iraqi border, officials in Ankara said the Kurds' permanent presence in the strategic town would not only be 'unacceptable' but cause for a counterattack... Officials fear control of the region would provide Iraqi Kurds with the financial muscle to take further steps towards independence, galvanising Turkish Kurds to follow suit." [*The Guardian*, April 11, 2003]

"A northern front in the war in Iraq began to take shape yesterday when U.S. forces flew in during the early hours of the morning. Four C-130 transport planes carrying troops, equipment and vehicles landed at an airstrip in this village, 10 kilometres outside Sulaymaniyah, the main city in eastern Kurdish Iraq, according to a senior Kurdish official... The United States and its coalition partners had planned to bring about 40,000 to 50,000 troops into the north of Iraq from bases in Turkey... but the Turkish parliament rejected a deal worth at least \$6-billion (U.S.) to allow the coalition access to those bases..." [*globeandmail.com*, March 24, 2003]

**2002** Talks to reach a political agreement between the PUK and Ansar al-Islam initiated in December 2001 were cut short after an April assassination attempt on Barham Salih, Prime Minister in the PUK regional government. The PUK blamed Ansar al-Islam, although the group denied all involvement. In September, the PUK and the KDP decided to form a united armed opposition to the Iraqi regime with support from Washington. The US also offered military funding to four other opposition groups to secure their support in a war against the Iraqi regime.

"Talks were held with the PUK between December 2001 and late March 2002, aimed at arriving at a political agreement, but the assassination attempt on April 2, 2002 against Barham Salih, prime minister in the PUK regional government, led to their suspension." [*Human Rights Watch*, February 5, 2003]

"The two main Kurdish groups that control northern Iraq have agreed to resolve their long-standing rivalry and form a united front to seize the opportunities that may arise from American-led efforts to topple President Saddam Hussein. The accord between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan was encouraged by Washington and greeted by other opposition figures as a sign of the pressure building against Baghdad." [*Times On Line*, September 10, 2002]

"The United States approved military funding yesterday for six Iraqi opposition groups [including the SCIRI, the INC, the Iraqi National Accord, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Movement for Constitutional Monarchy, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan]... Under an order signed by President Bush yesterday, SCIRI [the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq] would be eligible for \$92 million worth of military training and defense articles from the Pentagon as specified under the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act." [*washingtontimes.com*, December 10, 2002]

**2001** Reconciliation attempts were made between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In September, two dissident Islamic Kurdish groups announced the formation of Jund Al-Islam (The Soldiers of Islam), later renamed Ansar al-Islam. In December, the Ansar al-Islam declared a ceasefire and peace talks between the PUK and the Ansar al-Islam were initiated.

"Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, (KDP), hailed the recent rapprochement between his KDP and its arch-rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani. 'I hope this will contribute to the reconstruction of the region,' he said. The two feuding sides have recently outlined several confidence-building measures in a bid to implement a long delayed peace agreement, signed in 1998 under US auspices." [*Associated Press*, May 8, 2001]

"Two Kurdish dissident groups, the Islamic Tawhid and Soran Force-2, deployed in Northern Iraq's Sharazur and Hawraman regions, agreed on September 1 to form a new organization called 'The Soldiers of Islam'. Initial reports indicate that parts of the organization's leadership draws from Kurdish and Arab cadres who have returned from active service in Afghanistan." [*Janes Defence Weekly*, September 19, 2001]

**2000** Despite the 1998 US-brokered peace agreement, and ongoing US mediation efforts, relations between the KDP and PUK remained strained. The two groups were reportedly unable to agree on sharing power and revenues from oil smuggling to Turkey. Meanwhile, Massoud Barzani, the leader of

the KDP, pledged renewed cooperation with the Turkish government.

[Sources: *Human Rights Watch*, 2001 World Report; *Guardian Weekly*, 11-17 January 2001; *BBC News*, 5 October 2000]

"...little progress was made towards the implementation of the provisions of the 1998 Washington Accord. Both sides pledged to normalize relations but continued to maintain separate administrative, legislative and executive structures in areas under their control. On October 22, senior officials from the two parties agreed on a series of measures, including prisoner exchanges, the gradual return of internally displaced people to their homes, and arrangements for the organization of free movement of people and trade between their respective areas. Most of these measures were not implemented." [*Human Rights Watch*, 2001 World Report]

"...one of the main obstacles to peace... is the DPK's refusal to share revenue it makes from the smuggling trade. The DPK admits to making \$75 million (US) a year from duties on smuggled oil being trucked to Turkey through the border crossing it controls." [*The Toronto Star*, 26 June, 2000]

**1999** In December, a new cabinet dominated by the KDP was formed in northern Iraq without representation from the rival PUK. The peace agreement between the KDP and PUK signed in Washington in 1998 made little progress as the KDP and PUK pursued their affairs on an independent basis.

"A new cabinet controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) has been formed in northern Iraq. The new cabinet is led by Nechirvan Barzani, nephew of the KDP leader Massoud Barzani, and includes members of the Iraqi Communist Party, Democratic Assyrian Movement, Islamic Union, Iraqi Independent Kurdistan Workers' Party and Turcoman Cultural Union... Engaged in a power struggle with the KDP, the Jalal Talabani-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) will not form part of the new cabinet. A Washington-brokered peace between the rival KDP and PUK made little progress and each party runs its own affairs." [*Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 5, 2000]

**1998** In September the two major Iraqi Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, agreed in Washington to new power sharing arrangements that consolidated a ceasefire agreement from late 1997. By year end, the US government passed the Iraq Liberation Act which approved nearly \$100 million in support for Iraqi opposition groups.

"In September the leaders of the two major Iraqi Kurdish parties, Massoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), met for the first time in several years. They agreed to increase their efforts to implement the 1996 Ankara Accords. This consolidated the cease-fire that the two parties established in November 1997." [*Iraq Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, February 26, 1999]

**1997** Although a 1996 ceasefire brokered by the US failed in October, the fighting ended in late November with a new ceasefire agreement.

"Before the unsuccessful attempt by British diplomats in early October to settle the differences between the KDP and the PUK, the U.S. state department had held consultations with Jalal Talabani, the PUK leader, in Washington to ensure that the truce that the PUK and the KDP had signed in October 1996 held. It failed, and the PUK withdrew from the Peace Monitoring Force (PMF) that had been set up as part of the ceasefire." ["IRAQ: Iraqi Kurds At Each Others' Throats Again," Dilip Hiro, *IPS*, October 17, 1997]

"A ceasefire established on November 24 ended the fighting for the remainder of the year, albeit with a few sporadic clashes." [*Iraq Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, January 30, 1998]

## Background:

In northern Iraq ethnic Kurds have fought for an autonomous state since 1961 when the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) launched a rebellion. After the US-led Gulf War forced Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991, a Kurdish revolt ousted government forces from most of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, Iraq quickly recaptured half of the lost territory, triggering a massive migration of refugees. During this time, the Iraqi government sought to establish control over Kurdish territory by expelling the Kurds and replacing them with Arab settlers. Many Kurds returned when US and other NATO forces made Iraqi troops withdraw south of a line roughly along the 36th parallel. Under foreign air control of the northern "exclusion zone," the Kurds gained some autonomy in spite of an economic blockade by the Iraqi government. In 1994 a power-sharing arrangement between the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) broke down into severe factional fighting, while Turkish and Iranian government forces joined Iraq in launching recurrent attacks on enemy Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. A US-brokered 1996 KDP-PUK ceasefire failed a year later, with renewed inter-rebel fighting adding to the death toll, but the truce was reinstated by the end of 1997. In late 1998 the KDP and the PUK agreed in Washington to new power sharing arrangements following which the US government approved nearly \$100-million to support Iraqi opposition groups. In December 1999, a new KDP-dominated cabinet was formed without the inclusion of the PUK, and relations remain strained between the two groups although some confidence-building measures were adopted in 2001. In 2002, the PUK and KDP agreed to form a united front against the regime in Baghdad in the event of a US-led war in Iraq. During the year, the United States and Britain stepped up the bombing campaign in the no-fly zones. The US-led invasion of Iraq which toppled the government of Saddam Hussein in 2003 led to Kurdish forces seizing a vast amount of territory in northern Iraq, which threatened to destabilize relations between the Kurdish and Arab populations in these areas. The inclusion of Kurdish leaders within the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) brought the previously-alienated Kurds back into the Iraqi political sphere.

"Arabisation, one of the most pernicious Ba'athist policies, has deeply scarred Iraq. Saddam aimed to alter the ethnic balance of the north by diluting the Kurd's demographic dominance. The policy involved transplanting hundreds of thousands of Arabs. Since 1991 at least 120,000 Kurds have been forcibly displaced." [*Guardian Weekly*, April 24-30, 2003]

"There is a long history of hatred between Kurds and Turks. Turkey has fought a long and bitter conflict with nationalist-minded Kurds within its territory. Bloodshed and decades of efforts to suppress the Kurdish language and traditions embittered Kurds on both sides of the border. Turkish claims on parts of northern Iraq as a traditional homeland for Turkmen, an ethnic Turkish population in Iraq, have also fed fears of a land grab." [*The Washington Post*, February 25, 2003]

## Arms Sources:

Iraq has been subject to a UN economic and arms embargo since shortly after its annexation of Kuwait in 1990. Previously, the USSR, France, China, Brazil, and a host of other countries sold military equipment to the Baghdad regime. Bosnia was accused of violating United Nations sanctions by selling arms to the regime in Baghdad. There have been reports of arms supplies from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey to different Kurdish and Islamic rebel factions. In 2002, the United States offered to provide military funding to six Iraqi opposition groups, including the INC, the PUK, and the KDP.

[Source: *The Military Balance 1999-2000*, International Institute for Security Studies, 1999; *BBC News*, October 27, 2002; *The Washington Times*, December 10, 2002]

"Bosnia's top international representative, Lord Ashdown, has issued a stern warning to the country's politicians over the alleged sale of arms to Iraq in breach of United Nations sanctions." [*BBC News*, October 27, 2002]

"Baghdad smuggles arms to the Ansar through the Kurdish area, and is using the group to make problems for the PUK, one of the opposition factions ranged against Saddam Hussein... But Kurdish sources also believe that Iran is arming and training Ansar members, despite Tehran's denials. Ansar wounded are also said to have been treated in Iranian hospitals." [*BBC News*, July 24, 2002]

"Barzani reportedly sought more arms aid from Turkey [during a September meeting with Turkish officials]. Turkey was said to be planning to give only small arms to the KDP." [*Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 September 1996, p.6]

"... the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which has received arms from Iran. There also have been reports in recent weeks -- denied by the Iranian government but given credence in Baghdad -- that Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been fighting alongside the PUK." ["U.S. isolation weakens its hand," *Globe and Mail*, September 4, 1996]

Also, "British media sources have claimed that the Lucnik plant in Radom, Poland, has exported 16 containers of weapons to Iraq..... The weapons were allegedly shipped from the Black Sea coast to Akaba via Cyprus". [*Military and Arms Transfers News*, Vol.94:2, 17 June 1994]

## Economic Factors:

Many of Iraq's oil deposits are based in the northern region of the country, a fact which has contributed to the armed conflict for control of these lands over the last several decades. This is illustrated by the Kurdish seizure of the oil-rich cities of Mosul and Kirkuk in April 2003, and the subsequent Turkish threat of military action if these cities were not relinquished.

"In the major oil-producing districts around the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk, Kurdish and Arab groups are currently struggling for control of land, economic resources and political power." [*The Washington Post*, August 12, 2003]

"Two-thirds of Iraq's oil, the resource President George W. Bush says he wants to preserve for the Iraqi people, flows out of the ground around Kirkuk and Mosul. Its quality is significantly higher than the oil from the southern fields having less density and sulfur. Since the major reserves were discovered in northern Iraq in the 1920s, the prize has been at the center of tribal wars as vicious as any. It is this oil and who controls it that was the core of Saddam's persecution of the Kurds in the 1980s and '90s; a persecution in which some 100,000 Kurdish people died." [*United Press International*, April 3, 2003]

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