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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 March 1963

O/NE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Kurdish Problem: New Dangers

1. The rebellious Iraqi Kurds, led by Mullah Mustapha al-Barzani, already control all but the urban centers in the northern quarter of Iraq in which they live. Emboldened by their long and successful defiance of Qassim, they are apparently demanding from the new government in Baghdad a greater degree of autonomy than that regime, with its strong Arab nationalist bias, is prepared to concede. Negotiations appear to have made little progress to date. Should they break down entirely, renewed fighting is likely.

2. Within Iraq, the consequences could hardly be anything but dismal. There is no reason to believe that the still fragile new regime would be any more effective than Qassim in trying to suppress the tough and well-entrenched tribesmen by military means. Continued fighting in the north would encourage

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opposition by most other elements in the country unfriendly to the new government -- most particularly the Communists. It would pose a threat to the security of the important oil installations in the Mosul-Kirkuk area and could have an adverse effect on oil earnings which are so important to the country's rehabilitation.

3. The broader implications of an exacerbation of the Kurdish problem are even more disturbing. We do not believe that Mullah Mustapha -- despite his several years' residence in the USSR -- is a Communist; indeed, he has sought and sometimes actually claimed Western support for his cause. However, he and most other Kurdish leaders in Iraq and elsewhere would almost certainly be prepared to accept such Communist support as they thought essential to their purpose. The downfall of Qassim and the emergence of an anti-Communist regime in Baghdad have removed the main inhibition on Soviet support of Kurdish dissidence, and the Kurdish areas and leaders are generally more accessible to the USSR than to the West.

4. Other anti-Communist governments in the area, notably Turkey and Iran, also have substantial Kurdish minorities who are generally sympathetic to the cause of their fellows in

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Iraq. The spread of unrest to the Kurdish areas of Iran would be particularly dangerous. Even an abortive Kurdish rebellion there would tend to distract the Shah from his effort to stabilize and reform his government and might encourage other opposition elements to move against him. In addition, certain Iranian Kurds occupy territory generally contiguous to that of the USSR and could serve as a channel for Soviet subversion of the whole Kurdish area.

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