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OCI No. 2024/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
13 June 1963

Clifton

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Iraq-Kurdish Rebellion

1. Kurdish irredentism has been a problem to Iraqi regimes ever since the country was formed in 1921. Kurdish dreams of a Kurdish state carved out of parts of Iraq, Turkey, and Iran date back to the peace settlement after the First World War. Several Kurdish rebellions have occurred in Iraq since then, the latest in August 1961 during the Qasim regime. Other revolts occurred in Turkey in 1925 and, with Soviet backing, in Iran in 1947.

2. Iraqi Kurds believe that the regimes in Baghdad have consistently discriminated against them in the fields of local autonomy, educational opportunities, economic development, and government jobs. This was especially true during the Qasim regime (1958-63). Qasim's mishandling of his relations with the Kurds sparked the lengthy Kurdish rebellion led by Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani.

3. Iraqi Kurdish leaders hailed the overthrow of Qasim and initially cooperated with the new Baathist regime in Baghdad. Prospects of some concession to Kurdish demands for local autonomy and a better economic and social deal brightened considerably. However, the Baathist regime's unstable hold over the government, its quarrel with Nasir over the form of a united Arab state, and fear that the country's other large minority--the Arab Shia Muslims in the south--also might demand autonomy have influenced the regime to adopt a hard line with the Kurds. Both the Kurds and Arab Shias fear being swallowed up in a larger Arab state dominated by Sunni (orthodox) Arabs.

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4. The Kurds and the Baghdad regime have carried on almost continual negotiations since the February coup against Qasim, but the government's dilatory attitude--and its reinforcement of military posts in the Kurdish area--have convinced the Kurds of its insincerity. Present Kurdish demands are for local autonomy, a larger share of government spending in the Kurdish area, and wider use of the Kurdish language in local government and teaching of Kurdish in the schools.

5. Iraqi forces in the area have been steadily built up during the past several months and now are estimated at about 45,000 men, nearly two-thirds of the Iraqi army. Air strength has been augmented proportionately.

6. This week the regime proclaimed martial law in northern Iraq and sent an ultimatum to the Kurds demanding unconditional surrender to government forces. Fighting broke out almost immediately, as government forces moved on the Kurds. In the first few days, Kurdish villages have been shelled and bombed, and small clashes between troops and Kurdish irregulars have occurred.

7. The regime's estimate that it can clean up the Kurds in a few weeks or even by autumn is far too optimistic. Internal rivalries among the Kurds are being submerged by a feeling of unity against the overwhelmingly Arab regime in Baghdad. The campaign almost certainly will be prolonged and costly, and the breach between the Kurds and Arabs will be so widened that eventual compromise will hardly be possible. Considerable suffering, and possible starvation, among the non-combatant population is likely.

8. The Iranians have given limited support to the Kurds in the hope that such aid will placate the Kurds in Iran, at least for the time being.

9. The Soviet Union, despite its continued economic and military aid to the Baghdad regime, has given limited propaganda support to the Kurds. On 12 June, Moscow accused the government of a "crime" against the Kurds.

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