

# **The Politics of Iraqi Kurdistan: Towards Federalism or Secession?**

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## **Abstract**

Scholars of ethnic conflict resolution have suggested various approaches to addressing the ethnic right to self-determination, especially when an ethnic group perceives itself to be a nation. These approaches include autonomy, federation and confederation. One neglected area is whether an ethno-nation feels that one of these institutional designs can accommodate their aspirations or is secession their ultimate goal, especially in an ethnically divided society? For this reason, the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan presents as a particularly interesting case study with which to examine the tension between internal self-determination and secession, and test the utility of one such design, namely, federalism.

Since 1992 Iraqi Kurdistan has been in a politically more advantageous position than other parts of Greater Kurdistan in Turkey, Syria and Iran because population has gained an autonomous status. On 5 April 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 688 setting up the Safe Haven for the Kurds in Iraq by the Allies following the second Gulf War, thus acting to prevent the Kurds from facing an uncertain future. The Kurds used this opportunity to elect their first parliament on 19 May 1992 and to establish the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Since 1992 this Kurdish polity has been evolving, but its possible political futures have not been empirically examined in-depth. Thus, this thesis focuses on the issue of the future of Kurds in Iraq. It examines whether the formation of an independent Kurdish state is feasible and plausible. The research involved enquiry into the political views and activities of the Kurdish people in Iraq, asking them about their desired political future for Iraqi Kurdistan and their perceptions of what is feasible. In addition, this study used the researcher's field observations and data drawn

from secondary historical sources to provide a better and more profound understanding of Iraqi Kurdistan's political futures.

It was found that while Kurds considered themselves to comprise an ethno-nation and be entitled to nation-statehood, most people believed that autonomy within Iraq is the most feasible future. Further inquiry into the nature of this autonomy found that the pluralist type of federalism was seen as the most preferred and feasible political arrangement to address the question of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq.

## **Dedications**

I dedicate this thesis to:

My late father, Martyr Jabar Mohammed Jabary, who fought for justice, freedom and democracy.

My late mother, An'am Abdurrahman Jassem, who devoted herself to raising me and encouraging me to further my education.

And those who are fighting for a just cause on this globe.

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## **Abbreviations**

CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
IK	Iraqi Kurdistan
IL	International Law
IR	International Relations
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KTP	Kurdistan Toilers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
TAL	Transitional Administrative Law
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## Introduction

Theories of modernisation and Marxism see ethnicity as a thing of past, and predict the demise of ethnicity as a source of self-identification and political mobilisation. If modernisation led to the demise of ethnic consciousness in favour of identification with the state or social class, then the number of states troubled by ethnic unrest should be on the wane. However, history has shown otherwise; ethnic nationalist consciousness has not been in decline as a political force but has been in the ascendancy and state boundaries are being continually challenged by this force (Connor 1994). Ethnic nationalist consciousness is currently being felt throughout Asia and Africa as it is growing, along with demands for political recognition. Even developed countries have not been immune to the effects of this force, especially in Europe. Instances include the problems of Spain with the Basques; the demands of the French speaking peoples of Berne for political separation from Switzerland; the south Tyroleans' discontent with Italy; the rivalry of the Walloon and Flemish peoples within Belgium. Outside of Europe there is the example of the Quebecois movement challenging to the notion of a single Canada.

Modern day ethnic claims to self-determination show firstly, that ethnicity has retained its importance in politics in many countries of the world, and secondly, that ethnic groups often question their incorporation into modern states. Ethnic groups may seek the right to self-determination due to their perceptions of suffering from neglect, discrimination or injustice. In such circumstances, ethnic groups have, at times, organised to seek greater autonomy. In some

cases, their demands have been peacefully accommodated as in the case of the Aland Islands, the Faroes and Cook Islands. In other cases, struggles for self-determination have involved armed conflict over many years as dissatisfied ethnic groups have sought to secede such as the cases of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and Kachins in Burma. Shaky autonomy arrangements are sometimes made as compromises between warring parties, as is the case in Mindanao in the Philippines or Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. In rare instances, such as Kosovo, Bosnia or Southern Sudan, secession is achieved, but only with the assistance of the international community.

Ethnic conflicts may arise within states which do not permit ethnic minorities to have access to the resources they see as vital to preserving, expressing, and developing their identities. This is because, historically, the state has been an ordering system reliant upon the symbols of its dominant culture to represent what is desirable, good and true against subordinate cultures whose symbols have often come to stand for the opposite. Thus, the social, economic and political structural borders of the state can be said to be created by the dominant group, as a means of defining the inclusive or exclusive nature of its membership via the institutionalisation of the self/other or we/they dynamic that is basic to individual interactions.

Ethnic self-determination struggles to obtain political, economic and cultural rights and safeguard ethnic identities occur especially in situations where ethnic minorities are territorially concentrated. The predicament of territorially concentrated ethnic groups arises when the boundaries of the states do not coincide with ethnic identity, but especially when borders are used as “barriers rather than bridges because the reigning model of world governance is based on sovereignty of the nation-state” (Mingus 2006, p.577). That is, borders are created as “cognitive structures (“us” as opposed to “them”) and as legal structures” (Mingus 2006, pp.578-579). This predicament can be intensified when minority ethnic groups live in undemocratic countries

dominated by an ethnic majority which does not confer special rights on ethnic minorities, but, rather, seeks to impose its own values, practices and institutions.

The denial of ethnic political, economic and cultural rights may cause ethnic minorities to have no sense of belonging to the country where they live, so, they are unwillingly subjugated by the majorities. This can be the root cause of conflicts within multi-ethnic countries, especially when there is a historical hostility and no trust between the diverse ethnic groups. Hence, the principal aspiration of a number of ethnic minorities is to set up their own independent states (nation states), to represent their ethnic identity and provide a safe shelter for them. This aspiration may emanate from their conviction that they have the right to secede in accordance with the precept of the right to self-determination in international law (IL). The secession of ethnic groups can be seen as an unwelcome move by other states because they see problems associated with the recognition of a new state. For example, state creation may require the realignment of the boundaries of more than one state, and might induce instability in a region as well as set a precedent for other secessionist groups (Danspeckgruber 2005). United Nations (UN) members almost always oppose ethnic secession precisely because this will give an incentive for other ethnic groups to secede, especially in the countries of the UN permanent members of the Security Council, such as Russia and China.

While full independence may not be an option for many ethnic groups, the resolution of ethnic disputes has been supported by members of the international community through the promotion of power-sharing and federal arrangements. The power-sharing and federal arrangements are intended “to promote practices and institutions that satisfy all major ethnic groups in society and

to reconcile the potentially divisive precepts of self-determination and democracy in ethnically divided states” (Sisk 1996, p.viii).

This thesis is concerned with these questions of ethnic self-determination focusing specifically on the issue of the future of Kurds in Iraq. It examines whether the formation of an independent Kurdish state is feasible and plausible or whether federalism is the most viable arrangement. These alternatives are explored through enquiry into the political views and activities of the Kurdish people in Iraq and consideration of the external and internal factors that will influence whether Iraqi Kurdistan remains a federal region within the Iraqi state or makes the transition to become a *de jure* state.

## **The Kurdish Self-determination Issue in Iraq**

Iraqi Kurds have been depicted as an “invisible nation”, and one of the largest nations without a state (Lawrence 2008). Ethnically and linguistically the Kurdish people belong to the Indo-European family of nations. They speak a language which belongs to the north-western Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The homeland of the Kurds is Kurdistan which is a vast mountainous territory located in western Asia. Greater Kurdistan is equivalent to France in size, with an area of 392,000 square Kilometres (Meho 1997).

There are more than 30 million Kurds living in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia (Aziz 2011). In Iraq, there are more than 4 million Kurds (Muller and Linzey 2007). Iraqi Kurds have struggled for decades to gain their right to self-determination. Their right to form a Kurdish state was recognised following World War One in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, but the treaty was annulled by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Consequently, Kurdistan was partitioned. The Southern part of Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan nowadays) was incorporated into

Iraq, an action viewed by Kurds in this region as one of betrayal of Kurdish rights by the victors of World War One. Thus, the Iraqi Kurds resorted to the self-determination struggle as successive Iraqi regimes were unable to conclude an agreement that would accommodate the aspirations of the Kurds in Iraq.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Iraqi Kurds were subject to marginalisation, assimilation and genocide by the successive Iraqi regimes, especially Hussein's regime (1979-2003). In 1990, the Kurds revolted against Hussein's regime following the invasion of Kuwait. They succeeded in liberating a large part of Iraqi Kurdistan, but they were then defeated by Hussein's army. This caused a mass exodus of Iraqi Kurds to the Turkish and Iranian borders. On 5 April 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 688 which enabled the Allies to set up the Safe Haven for the Kurds in Iraq following the Second Gulf War, and thus the Kurds were protected from the Iraqi regime. The Kurds used this opportunity to elect their first parliament (19 May 1992) and to establish the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), an entity recognised by the Iraqi federal constitution of 2005.

In spite of recognition of the KRG in the Iraqi federal constitution, federalism has not been implemented in Iraq and has been widely rejected by Iraqi Arabs. The political status of Iraqi Kurdistan is thus ambiguous and shaky. This thesis, therefore, explores which political arrangement is likely to be more effective and solve the issue of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq. Is it secession or federalism? The views of different people in Kurdistan to internal and external obstacles to the implementation of federalism and/or the creation of a Kurdish state are examined to help in understanding which political direction Iraqi Kurdistan is more likely heading toward.

## **Research Problem and Question**

The main research problem is whether the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan is the most practical and effective way of addressing the Kurdish issue of self-determination in Iraq. This indicates the overall research question:

Is Iraqi Kurdistan evolving into a federal region of Iraq or an independent state?

This question leads to the following sub-questions:

- Is independence feasible for Iraqi Kurdistan?
- Is federalism more likely than full independence?
- What are the perceived imperatives and obstacles affecting Iraqi Kurdistan's political future as a federal region of Iraq or a *de jure* state?
- What roles are international actors playing in determining the political future of this region?
- What are the Iraqi government's and Arabs' attitudes towards the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan?

These questions are explored from the points of view of the Kurdish population, a perspective which has not been utilised in previous research.

## **The Objectives and Significance of the Research**

The objectives of this study are, first, to examine the plausibility of the formation of a Kurdish state. Second, it examines whether federalism can be considered an alternative to secession and an attractive approach to resolving the Kurdish question in Iraq. Third, the study identifies the imperatives and obstacles that play roles in determining the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurdish people. Fourth, the research aims to elucidate a range of Kurdish opinions on

contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. Finally, it seeks to establish the trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan's political development historically, from the present into the future.

Iraqi Kurdistan is geopolitically and strategically a very important region. It borders Iran, Turkey and Syria. Any political developments of this region have far-reaching implications for these neighbouring countries where Kurds are also striving for the right to self-determination. Furthermore, political developments in Iraqi Kurdistan affect the longer-term political and constitutional development of Iraq. The future of Iraqi Kurdistan also plays a significant role in the development of peace and political stability in the Middle East at large. At a macro level, this study contributes to an understanding of the potential paths to resolving questions of self-determination for ethnic groups worldwide who are striving for the right to self-determination. More specifically, it attempts to discover which path is likely to be the most beneficial and feasible in addressing the issue of ethnic self-determination for the people of Iraqi Kurdistan.

### **Justification of the Research**

An extensive review of the existing scholarly literature indicates that overall very little research has been done on the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan. What literature there is has largely focused on either the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan as a negative move (Ozcan 2004; Killgore 2006; Barkey 2007) or as a positive one (Byman 1996; Gunter and Yavuz 2005). There have been remarkably few in-depth studies tracing the trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan towards such political developments. This research assesses the direction in which the region is heading, paying particular attention to the views of the population of Iraqi Kurdistan through interviews with persons of influence and knowledge in the politics, economy and society of Kurdistan. It also surveys members of the highly educated younger generation who will be the future leaders. The perceptions of these persons about the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan are significant as they

can be seen as the basis on which decisions are made and actions are taken. This research presents thick descriptions and analysis of contemporary Kurdistan and helps to fill the gap in research on what can be anticipated as the future of this region. The research also makes an original contribution to the study of ethnic politics, conflicts and their resolution more generally.

## **Thesis Organisation**

The thesis comprises nine chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to ethnicity, self-determination, ethnic conflicts and the question of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq. It sets out the objectives, the research questions, and the significance of this research. The main aim of the research is to explore and examine attitudes in Iraqi Kurdistan on the feasibility and desirability of alternative political futures for the region.

The second chapter discusses the methodological approaches used in the 2010 field study on Iraqi Kurdistan. It delineates the methods used in the study, details of participants and the locations of the research. In addition, it explains the nature of and reasons for the data collection, sampling procedures, analysis techniques and research limitations.

The third chapter reviews the theoretical literature on ethnicity and the right to self-determination. It explains the key terms, ethnicity and nationhood, and the major theories of ethnicity and nationalism, and their implications for the quest for the right to self-determination. The chapter also delineates the idea of the right to self-determination and its relevance to ethnicity in international law. Moreover, it elucidates various kinds of political arrangements associated with ethnic conflict resolution. There is also a discussion of paradiplomacy and the contribution this might make to ethnic conflict management.

The fourth chapter presents the historical background of Iraqi Kurdistan from 1918 to 2009 with the aim of elucidating who the Kurds are and what is their history. Understanding the Kurdish quest for self-determination in Iraq requires an in-depth analysis of Kurdish modern history. Thus, the chapter examines the historical political developments in the Kurdish region and demonstrates how these developments have a crucial impact on determining the direction that Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards today.

The fifth and sixth chapters present the qualitative findings of the field study carried out in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2010. The qualitative data generated from thirty-one semi-structured interviews provide a wide and diverse range of views on the political future of Iraq Kurdistan. These data derive from the public and non-state sector interviewees. These data chapters present the opinions and attitudes of respondents on whether federalism can be an alternative to secession in Iraqi Kurdistan. The chapters also elucidate their views on the feasibility and plausibility of the creation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East, and delve into the imperatives that are pushing towards secession, and the impediments that hinder the Kurdish people from establishing a *de jure* state.

The seventh chapter presents the quantitative findings from responses to a questionnaire delivered to students of Sulaimani and Salaheldin Universities. It contains the views of the sixty respondents studying political science. Twelve questions were asked on federalism and secession as preferred political futures.

The eighth chapter presents the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative findings chapters drawing from the literature review for guidance. The chapter reveals the complexities involved

in creating a Kurdish state. It explains the consequences of such action in the Middle East in the opinions of Kurdish people; it also delineates the key internal and external obstacles to the creation of a Kurdish state. The empirical research findings and the conceptual framework that emerges from Chapter Three, guide the discussion of the imperatives and the impediments to the creation of a viable Kurdish federal region in Iraq. The approach that is more likely to address the Kurdish self-determination issue in Iraq is identified and how this relates to popular sentiments is set out.

The ninth chapter, the conclusion, reviews the thesis and the research it contains before presenting the key findings and lessons that have emerged.

## **Chapter Two: Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodological framework of the research. It begins with a discussion of case-study and mixed methods that were employed in the project. It then describes and explains key issues in data collection and data analysis. It also delineates the use of triangulation and the sampling design that were used. Limitations to the study are discussed at the end of the chapter.

### **The Case Study Approach**

In this research the case study approach was adopted. A case study “is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real life context” (Yin 2003, p.13). It is counted as “a distinctive form of empirical enquiry” (Yin 2003, p.10). The rationales for choosing the case study method were firstly that it was a useful method “when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context” (Yin 2003, p.1). Because the focus of this research is Iraqi Kurdistan, the case study method enabled the researcher to focus on and examine the specific contemporary issue of Kurdish self-determination “within real life context.” Secondly, the case study method assisted in understanding the complex Kurdish issue in Iraq because it facilitated the identification and in-depth examination of factors which played crucial roles in the history of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq and its contemporary manifestation.

The third justification for using the case study approach was its appropriateness for exploring participants’ views on a particular subject (Shavelson & Townes 2002). The case study method was, thus, very useful for investigating the political currents in contemporary Kurdistan. The

case study method, nevertheless, has limitations. One of these limitations is that the case study is criticised as being too subjective. Researchers who do case studies are, thus, often regarded as “having insufficient precision (that is, quantification), objectivity and rigor” (Yin 2003, p.xiii). This is because the case study approach relies on personal interpretation of data and inferences. Another limitation is that results are unlikely to be generalisable, and are difficult to test for validity, and rarely offer a problem-solving prescription. Yin (2003, p.10) suggested, nevertheless, that “case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.” In this sense, in doing a case study this researcher’s aim was to expand and generalise theories.

## **Mixed Methods**

There are two major types of research methodologies, namely, qualitative and quantitative. This research used both methodologies, thus adopting a mixed method approach. The mixed method approach is a research paradigm that uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in a single study (Creswell 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Mertens 2005). Combining qualitative interview and quantitative survey data is a typical example of mixed method.

The reasons for choosing the mixed method approach is firstly that the triangulation strategy, which is the use of different methods and the comparison of different data sources to crosscheck results, provides confirmation or corroboration within a single study (Jick 1979). This is because the triangulation strategy mixes “methods and multiple data sources to strengthen the credibility and applicability of findings” (Hoque 2006, p.6). It can increase both the validity and reliability of evaluation data and may also allow a researcher to modify or expand the research design and

the data collection methods (Patton 1990). Thus, the mixed methods brought academic rigour to this study. Second, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection in one study can be seen to have the potential to provide a richness of detail and a deep understanding of the issue being investigated (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). Hence, mixed methods provided a better understanding of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq rather than either a qualitative or quantitative approach alone. Third, mixed methods provide the opportunity for presenting a greater diversity views than when using only one method (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). Qualitative interviewing of senior officials, academics, journalists, military officers and businessmen coupled with a quantitative survey of students generated a more representative range of attitudes towards the contemporary issue of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq than if only one of the methods had been used.

The mixed methods approach does have disadvantages. First, the use of two different methods of data collection is costly in terms of both time and resources. Hence the process of data collection may take more time and be more expensive to conduct than a purely qualitative or quantitative study (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). Second, purists believe that because of the different epistemological and ontological goals and purposes, “qualitative and quantitative approaches cannot be mixed without causing a violation of these differences” (Greene & Caracelli 1989, p.25).

Third, mixed method research often generates a large amount of data during the course of investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). For many researchers, organising, analysing and reporting this data can be time-consuming and difficult. In addition, some publishers may be reluctant to publish mixed method studies as their contents may exceed the standard word limits

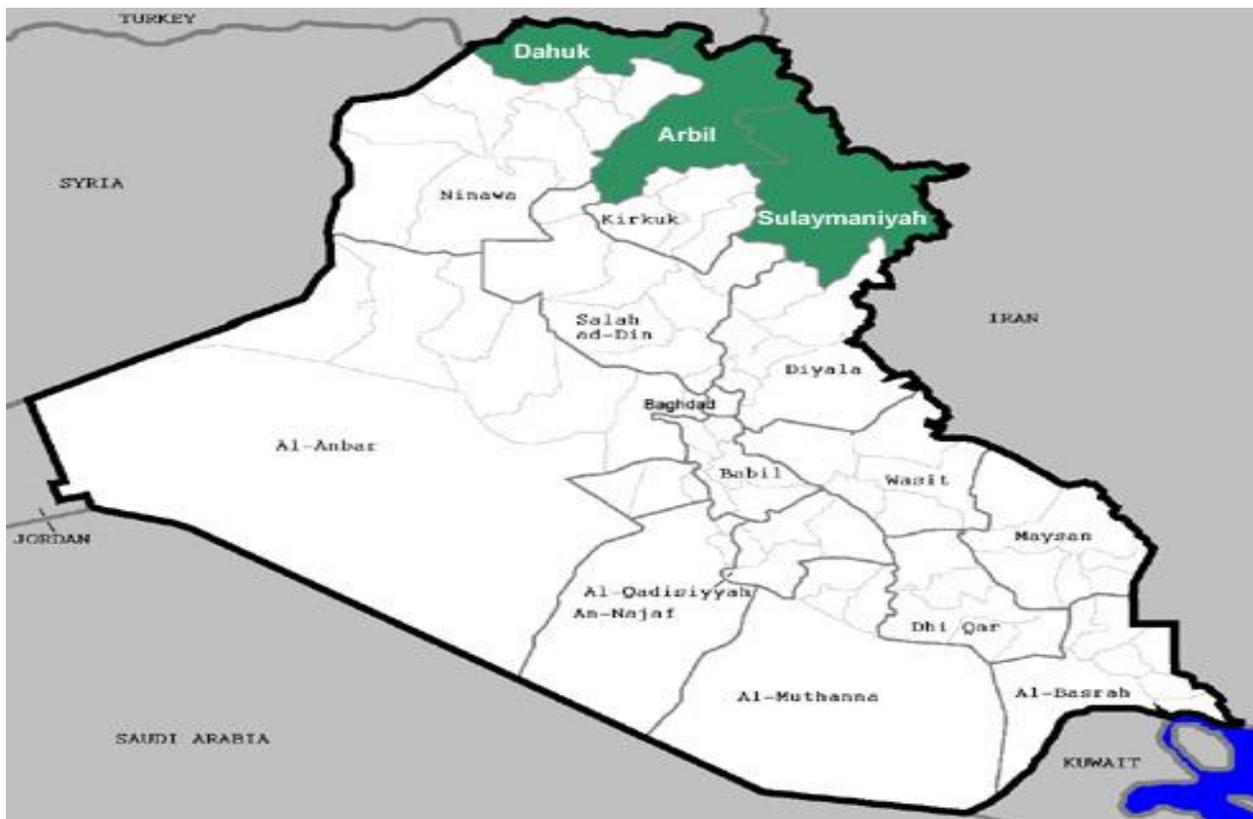
of journals (Thurmond 2001). Fourth, using two data collection methods may serve only to increase the magnitude of the inherent errors if the study has a design flaw. However, this study is not subject to these shortcomings as the researcher paid careful attention to the feasibility of using two methods and avoided excessive data collection. In addition, close attention to the study design ensured the avoidance of flaws that might have resulted in inappropriate data collection.

The nature of the knowledge generated in this study was exploratory. Exploratory research basically signifies “the inquisitive processes of examining, investigating, and the like” of a phenomenon (Stebbins 2001, p.2). Both quantitative and qualitative data may be gathered during the exploration of a specific phenomenon. Researchers use the exploratory approach when “they have little or no knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine” (Stebbins 2001, p.6). The exploratory study is valuable in social scientific research because it is “essential whenever a researcher is breaking new ground, and it almost always yields new insights into a topic for research” (Babbie 2002, p.84). In addition, the exploratory study helps “satisfy the researcher’s curiosity and desire for a better understanding” (Babbie 2002, p.83). This research was exploratory in character because it aimed to provide a better understanding of the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan by gathering new data through interviews and questionnaires. The exploratory approach is typically used when “a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of the study itself is relatively new” (Babbie 2002, p.83). This exploratory approach fitted this description as it aimed to examine both the public opinion and the views of those holding significant and influential positions in the Kurdistan government and society on the future of this region and its contemporary political developments.

## Location of the Empirical Study

This study was conducted in Erbil, the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan, and Sulaymaniyah, a cultural city of Iraqi Kurdistan between July and October, 2010. Erbil is the fourth largest city in Iraq after Baghdad, Basrah and Mosul, and is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world (UNESCO 2011). Erbil lies 350 kilometres north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad (see Figure 2.1) and Sulaymaniyah is situated 265 kilometers north of Baghdad.

**Figure 2.1: The Kurdish cities of Iraqi Kurdistan**



**Source:** Kurdistan Regional Government website: [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org)

## **Data Collection**

The research used the following methods to collect data: semi-structured interviewing, questionnaire survey, documents and non-participant observation.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

The semi-structured interview lies between the structured and unstructured. The degree to which an interview is constructed depends on the research topic, purpose, resources, and the type of information sought (Sarantakos 2005). The semi-structured interview is seen as a flexible instrument and generally comprises a questioning plan (O'Leary 2004). While, the interviewer may start with a few clearly defined questions, he/she should be ready to pursue any interesting deviations that may develop. The semi-structured interview is a useful technique when the researcher cannot observe participants directly, but can access important information through interaction with key informants.

The semi-structured interview also “allows people to answer more on their own terms than the standardised and more highly structured interview permits” (May 1997, p.129). Elaborating on this point, May (1997, pp.109 &129) observed that semi-structured interviews “yield rich insights into people’s experiences, opinions, aspiration, attitudes and feelings.... [I]nterviews are used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it.” Thus, it enabled this study to gather a wide range of attitudes from the public and non-state sectors on federalism or secession as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan.

Semi-structured interviews have several shortcomings. First, they are taxing, especially for novice researchers involved in studies that require extensive interviewing (Creswell 2007). Second, there can be a lengthy process involved in transcribing audiotapes from the interviews.

Third, there is an issue with validity as the researcher has no real way of knowing if the interviewee is lying. Fourth, the use of a recorder in the interviews may “disconcert interviewees as they become alarmed at the prospect of their words being preserved” (Bryman 2004, p.490). However, this study is not subject to these shortcomings as the researcher paid careful attention to the time frame of each interview and avoided excessively lengthy interviews. In addition, close attention to the semi-structured interview design ensured the avoidance of flaws that might have resulted in excessive data collection. In regard to recording interviews, the researcher asked for the interviewees’ consent before recording their responses. The interviewees selected were highly-reputed people for whom lying in their responses would be unthinkable.

### *Questionnaire survey*

The questionnaire is the most common way of obtaining survey data (Vaus 2002). It helps “discover respondents’ knowledge of particular facts” (Vaus 2002, p.95). The questionnaire probes people’s attitudes to establish what they think is desirable or undesirable. Thus, it was a useful technique to gather data on what Kurds thought was desirable or undesirable for the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. The questionnaire technique has many advantages. First, it is “probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly” (Babbie 2002, p.240). Second, the questionnaire survey is a good vehicle for measuring opinions and orientations in a large population. Third, this method is easy for the researcher in terms of processing and comparing the respondents’ answers (Bryman 2004).

The questionnaire has, nonetheless, several disadvantages. One is that it can rarely “deal with the context of social life” (Babbie 2002, p272). The researcher seldom “develops a feel for the total

life situation” in which respondents are operating (Babbie 2002, p.272). However, the respondents’ descriptive answers provided an additional explanation to Kurdish self-determination in Iraq. Another weakness is that questionnaires are inflexible because “they require an initial study design which remains unchanged” throughout the fieldwork (Babbie 2002, p.272). Thus, they are “rigidly structured” (Babbie 2002, p.272). However, the researcher was very careful in designing the questionnaire survey to avoid this shortcoming.

The questionnaire survey of this study used the closed ended questions where the respondents were asked to choose an answer from among a list provided by the researcher (Wimmer & Dominick 2011). The questionnaire method was chosen in this study because the data generated from the survey helped to complement the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and gave a fuller picture and insight into attitudes about the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. It was a useful method as it allowed the researcher to survey many respondents and elicited substantial information within a short time.

### *Documents*

Documents are defined as “standardised artifacts” (Wolff 2004, p.284). They can be an “unobtrusive secondary source of information” that can usually be “accessed at times convenient to the researcher” (Cresswell 2003, p.187). The accessibility to documents is classified into closed, restricted and open. First, the access to documents can be closed because certain documents are not accessible to third parties, such as medical documents (Flick 2009). Second, the access to documents can be restricted as certain professions have access to particular kinds of documents, such as judicial reports. Third, the access to documents can be open to the public, such as archival documents (Flick 2009). This technique was essential to trace the political

developments in Kurdish history as documents provided insights for this research into the phenomenon under study (Jennings 2001). Secondary documents used in this study included official treaties, agreements, constitutions and reports, as well as media articles and academic publications.

## **Non-Participant Observation**

Observing is “another everyday skill which is methodologically systematised and applied in qualitative research” (Flick 2009, p.222). Observation has been depicted as “the fundamental base of all research methods” in social sciences (Addler & Addler 1994, p.389). Observation, as Addler & Addler (1994, p.389) suggest, relies on “something researchers can find constant” by which they mean “their own direct knowledge and their own judgment”. In this method, researchers observe both human activities and the physical locations in which these activities occur.

Observation can be participant or non-participant. Non-participant observation means that “simple observers follow the flow of events. Behaviour and interaction continue as they would without the presence of a researcher, uninterrupted by intrusion” (Addler & Addler 1998, p.81). The observer maintains “distance from the observed events in order to avoid influencing them” (Flick 2009, p.223). In this case, non-participant observation is similar to videotaping, and is mainly applied to the observation of public places.

Non-participant observation is mainly useful for descriptive research. It helps the researcher to address the basic question: “What did the research subject(s) do?” (Barner-Barry 1986, p.139). This question cannot be sufficiently answered in survey research where limited numbers of questions can be asked. Thus, the non-participant observation method is viewed to be useful in

increasing the expressiveness of the data gathered. Additionally, non-participant observation enables the researcher to study human behaviour and interaction in natural settings. It has been generally accepted that “the naturalistic observation does not interfere with people or activities under observation” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez 2003, p.108). However, some researchers have admitted the possibility of the observers affecting what they observe. This criticism has been countered by the fact that “careful researchers are supposed to adhere to rigorous standards of objective reporting designed to overcome that potential bias” (Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2003, p.108).

This researcher used the non-participant observational technique for many reasons. First, to understand why the people of Iraqi Kurdistan are dissatisfied with the performance of the KRG, the researcher observed anti-corruption demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil in 2010. Second, to understand how Kurdish nationalism has strengthened among the young generation of Iraqi Kurdistan, the researcher visited Kurdish primary schools in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil to observe the schools’ morning routines, such as singing the Kurdish anthem and flying the Kurdish flag, and investigate how the syllabi have been designed along the nationalist Kurdish line. Moreover, this researcher listened to the song, “We have always been Kurds and we will be so”, on KurdSat TV to understand how Kurds perceive themselves. Third, to observe how Kurdish past persecution has been embodied as a shared history, the researcher visited Amana Soraka<sup>1</sup> Museum in Sulaymaniyah and Halabja Memorial in Halabja town as well as watched “the victims of Anfal campaign and Halabja chemical bombing” programmes. Finally, to

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<sup>1</sup> Amana Soraka is the former Ba’athist security prison where Kurds were tortured due to their affiliation to or support for *Peshmarga*.

observe the current political dynamics, the researcher watched the “Kurdish Debate” programme and President Masud Barazani’s speech on Kurdistan TV.

## **Data Analysis**

For analysing the data produced from the semi-structured interviews the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo was used. In addition, SPSS, a computer programme for statistical analysis, was used in this study to analyse the quantitative data generated from the questionnaire survey of the students of Sulaimani and Salaheldin Universities.

## **Triangulation**

Triangulation means “that researchers take different perspectives on an issue under study or - more generally speaking - in answering research questions” (Flick 2009, p.445). It combines two or more data sources, investigators, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives in a single study (Kimchi et al. 1991). It is used for crosschecking the research results obtained by using different methods such as interviews and survey questionnaires. The benefits of triangulation can contribute to providing a clearer understanding of the problem and producing new and additional insights (Jick 1979). It also contributes to “promoting quality in research” because it produces “knowledge on different levels, which means they go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach” (Flick 2009, p.445). There are several types of triangulation: data sources triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, data analysis triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin 1970). This research used data sources triangulation.

There are three types of data sources: time, space, and person (Denzin 1970). Data sources can differ according to the time the data was collected, the places from which the data was obtained, and from whom the data was obtained (Denzin 1970). This study used person triangulation

where the researchers collect data from more than one type of person working in different organisations ranging from universities and political parties to parliament and mass media. Thus, the findings chapters are presented in accordance with the perspectives from the public sector, non-state sector and universities. Variance in persons interviewed or surveyed enhanced the validity of the study because of the possibility of revealing unique data or the potential for identifying similar patterns, thus increasing assurance in the findings (Fielding & Fielding 1986).

### **Sampling Design of the Field Research**

Ninety-one respondents participated in this research which was conducted in 2010. Sixty were students from the political science schools at the Universities of Salahedin and Sulaimani. They were surveyed using closed ended questions. In addition, there were thirty-one interviewees who participated in semi-structured interviews. They included political science professors from two Kurdish universities (the Universities of Sulaimani and Salahedin), senior officials, parliamentarians, political party members, journalists, businessmen, NGO activists and a military officer. This research chose interviewees from different sections of the population so that it was able to discover whether there were various attitudes towards Kurdish self-determination in Iraq and the reasons for those attitudes.

The sampling methods used in this research were purposive. Purposive sampling is a kind of “non-probability sampling in which persons are selected on the basis of the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Babbie 2002, p.207). The purposive sampling enabled choice of people who were from different institutions and organisations. This included, first, senior officials, parliamentarians, and members of political parties, all of whom had influential positions in the KRG. They were chosen for interview

because their perceptions on the desirability of independence or federalism were of great significance as those perceptions affected their decisions and actions on this matter and could influence other citizens. Second, political science professors were selected for the semi-structured interview as they were intellectual people whose perceptions represented academic approaches to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Third, journalists and NGO activists were chosen to take part in this study as they were aware of daily developments in the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan. Third, businessmen participated in this research as they had economic-oriented approaches towards the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. Finally, an American army officer participated in this study as his perception represented an American approach to Kurdish self-determination in Iraq.

For the quantitative method, the researcher used a questionnaire survey form comprised of 12 questions. It was delivered to 30 students from the University of Salaheldin in Erbil and 30 students from the University of Sulaimani in Sulaymaniyah to obtain their opinions on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan. The reason for selecting this section of the Kurdish community was that these young people would be among the future leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan. Knowing their attitudes would enrich this study with their significant perspectives on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. The content of the questionnaire covered demographic data and the students' attitudes towards the future of the region (see Appendix 4). This method helped the researcher to understand what the students thought was feasible and desirable for the future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

For the qualitative method, there were thirty-one interviewees (see Table 2.1). First, there were nineteen interviewees from different public sector institutions, including academics. Five were members of the Kurdistan Parliament; three were senior members of the Patriotic Union of

**Table 2.1: Selection of interview samples**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Informant</b>	<b>Number of informants</b>
University of Sulaimani	Sulaymaniyah	Professor	2
University of Salahedin	Erbil	Professor	1
Parliament	Erbil	Parliamentarian	5
Security organisation	Sulaymaniyah	Ex-director	1
Military intelligence	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1
US army	Erbil	Major	1
Jamwer News Agency	Erbil	Editor	1
Awene newspaper	Sulaymaniyah	Editor	1
PUK	Sulaymaniyah& Erbil	Member	3
<i>Goran</i>	Sulaymaniyah	Member	2
KDP	Erbil	Member	1
KTP	Erbil	Member	1
Kurdistan Strategic Studies	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1
Sulaymaniyah Governorate	Sulaymaniyah	Council member	1
Kurdish Coalition	Baghdad but interviewed in Erbil	Member	1
Free-lance journalism	Erbil & Sulaymaniyah	Journalist	2
Civil Society Initiative	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1
Kurdish Institute for Elections	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1
Kurdistan Human Rights	Erbil	Director	1
Kurdistan Trading Company	Erbil	Director	1
Sardam Publishing House	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1
Cultural and Awareness Centre	Sulaymaniyah	Director	1

Kurdistan Party (PUK); one was from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP); one was from the Kurdistan Toilers Party (KTP); and two were from the opposition party, called *Goran* (which means ‘change’ in Kurdish). Additional interviewees included one official from the PUK

security organisation; one from the PUK military intelligence organisation; one official from the Sulaymaniyah Governorate; and one from the Kurdish Coalition in Baghdad. Finally, two professors from the University of Sulaimani and one from the University of Salahedin, were interviewed.

Second, there were twelve interviewees from different non-state sector institutions. There were two free-lance journalists, one from Sulaymaniyah and one from Erbil. Two editors-in-chief who were interviewed were from *Awene Newspaper* in Sulaymaniyah and *Jamwer News Agency* in Erbil. In addition, three participants were civil society activists. One was from the Civil Society Initiative in Sulaymaniyah, another was from the Kurdish Institute for Elections in Sulaymaniyah, and another was from the Kurdistan Human Rights Organisation in Erbil. Additional interviewees included one military officer from the US Army stationed in Erbil and one businessman from the Kurdistan Trading Company in Erbil. Finally, three chairmen from the Sardam Publishing House, Kurdistan Strategic Studies, and the Cultural and Awareness Centre were interviewed in Sulaymaniyah.

The study asked eight semi-structured questions to the employees of state and non-state sectors (see Appendix 3). The researcher interviewed the participants in their work places for an hour. The research interviews concentrated on perceptions of the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of these options: federalism or independence.

## **Research Limitations**

Due to time and resource constraints, the primary data collection for this study was restricted to thirty-one interviewees and sixty survey respondents. In addition, Dohok city, one of the three

main Kurdish cities, and territorially disputed areas, such as Kirkuk, were excluded from this research due to resource and distance constraints. Arab participants from Baghdad and Basrah were also excluded from this research due to security issues in Iraq. Thus, this research focused on Kurdish perspectives on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, these perspectives provided a valuable and genuine knowledge on the political future of Kurdistan in Iraq.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter set out the methodological framework of the study of Iraqi Kurdistan. It explained the methodological basis of the research and why it was appropriate for pursuing the research objectives and answering the research questions. A case study approach using mixed methods furnished this study with a wide spectrum of views on federalism and secession as possible political solutions to the Kurdish issue in Iraq. This diversity enhanced the completeness and confirmation of data in the research findings. This enabled triangulation of data to give greater authority to the research findings.

## **Chapter Three: Ethnicity, Nationhood and the Right to Self-determination**

### **Introduction**

In order to understand why Iraqi Kurds have resorted to a struggle for self-determination and what solutions are available to address the Kurdish issue in Iraq, it is necessary to examine the concepts of ethnicity, nationhood and self-determination, and the possible political arrangements which are available to resolve the Kurdish minority issue. Thus, this chapter covers three core subjects that are associated with ethnic groups and self-determination. The first part delineates the concepts of ethnicity and nationalism, and reviews explanations of why ethnic nationalism comes into existence, and why ethnic groups believe they are nations entitled to self-determination. The second part examines the question of self-determination in international law. It elucidates two meanings of self-determination, and discusses whether or not international law legitimises the secession of ethnic minority groups from existing countries. The third part is concerned with the practices of ethnic conflict resolution arrangements, namely, secession, federalism and federacy. It delineates two types of federalism: mononational/integrative and multinational/pluralist. In addition, it also examines the notion of paradiplomacy, which gives an opportunity for ethnic groups to forge relationships with other states and to express their ethnic identity via their representation in the international arena.

## **Ethnic Identity and Nationalism**

### *Ethnic group and identity*

This section explains the conceptual bases for ethnicities grounded on ideology, sociobiology, class conflict, boundary and power. It also delineates factors contributing to ethnic conflicts. To begin discussing ethnic identity, it is crucial to understand what ethnicity is. Ethnicity derives from the Greek *ethnos*, which means a nation or a race that is associated with ethos, the “character and spirit of a people” (Partridge 1983) and custom (Williams 1985). *Ethnos* in its basic sense is “a number of people or animals living together and acting together” especially referring to their cultural similarity (Smith 1986, p.21). The term ethnicity seems convoluted as it does not have one fixed set of indicators. Thus, Horowitz (1985, pp.17-18) observes that “the [ethnic] groups can be defined by ascriptive differences whether the indicium of group identity is colour, appearance, language, religion, some other indicators of common origin, or some combination thereof”. This signifies that ethnic groups possess distinctive characteristics such as cultural, religious or other identifying qualities that mark them out from others (De Vos 1975; Eriksen 1993). Such groups must also have a common solidarity or a sense of preserving the groups’ heritage and traditions (Watts 2002). It can be said that “ethnic groups are often unified by constructions of their past by perception of injustice in the past or in the present and often by hopes of a future unification” (Emberling 1997, p.304).

Others consider the main differentiating characteristic of ethnicity to be an ideology of common descent or history (Wolf 1988). For example, the relatively recent emergence of Native American identity as distinct from previous individual tribal identities has involved emphasising such a common ancestry (Roosens 1989). Ethnicity is, however, not only about ideology but

also about kinship. Thus, sociobiology theory views ethnicity in terms of an extended kinship and a bond of human association throughout history (Van de Berghe 1983). This theory is based on ethnocentrism which views ethnicity as “common descent either real or putative, but, even putative, the myth has to be validated by several generations of common historical experience” (Van de Berghe 1981, p.16). In sociobiology theory, ethnicity is seen as similar to race. In Van de Berghe’s (1983) view race should be seen as a special case of ethnicity. But prior scholars such as Banton (1967) argue that there is a need to distinguish between race and ethnicity because ethnicity is more concerned with the identification of “us”, while racism is more oriented to the categorisation of “them”.

Ethnicity cannot be understood only in terms of ideology or sociobiology, it also can be thought of in terms of class conflict. Thus, neo-Marxist theory views ethnicity as a form of hidden class conflict and focuses on relationships between ethnicity and socio-economic divisions of labour. Such theory sees social life through a conflictual paradigm and presents history as a path of continuous struggle between two classes: workers and owners. The relations between these classes are normally the domination of one class over another in a capitalist society. From such a perspective, it can be argued that it is impossible to interpret ethnic relations in abstraction from class relations because ethnic solidarity can be interpreted as a response of the culturally distinct “periphery” to exploitation by the dominant classes of the “core” and/or their local agents (Hall as quoted in Malesevic 1998). It can be said that status and class may crosscut ethnicity in many societies: thus, members of a certain ethnic group may be high or low status, and upper or lower class (Emberling 1997).

Structural inequality is the main cause of ethnic antagonism in the neo-Marxist model. The cultural division of labour which encompasses inequality in the educational opportunities of ethnic groups, disparities in professional mobility for members of ethnic groups, and monopolisation of political and economic resources by one ethnic group has an influence on the shaping of ethnic solidarity. Hence, ethnic solidarity can be understood mainly as a reaction of an ethnic minority against the discrimination and oppression of a dominant ethnic group or class.

Other scholars such as Barth (1969, p.13) take a different approach by regarding ethnicity as “a social organisation of cultural differences”. Ethnicity is seen as a fundamental means of ordering social life that depends on manipulating cultural traits and ideas about origin so as to communicate difference. Ethnicity comprises “a dichotomisation of the social field - the establishment of a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’- and across this boundary differences between groups are signalled and reproduced through such as clothing and language use” (Verdery 2000, p.44). Being a matter of identity, ethnic group membership should depend on “ascription and self-ascription” (Barth 1969, p.13). Thus, only in so far as “individuals embrace it, are constrained by it, act on it and experience it, will ethnicity make organisational difference” (Barth 2000, p.12). The cultural differentiators of primary significance for ethnicity are those that people use to mark distinction, not necessarily what is most characteristic in their culture (Barth 1969).

Ethnic boundaries do not completely isolate groups from each other. Rather, “there is a continuous flow of information, interaction, and exchange” across the boundaries (Eriksen 1993, p.39). For example, Barth (1969) pointed to the flow of people across the Pathan-Baluch

boundary in north–western Pakistan. Because of differences between “the respective political systems, a male Pathan who lost his position in Pathan society could be assimilated with his entire household as a client of a Baluch chief” (Eriksen 1993, p.39). Although such clientship was scorned among Pathans, it could be honourable enough among the Baluch. Accordingly, ethnic affiliation could be changed to serve the personal interests and circumstances of individuals. Thus, it can be said, Barth (1969, p.15) shifted the focus of the study of ethnic groups to “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses”. Hence he paid little attention to the symbolic aspect of ethnicity/ethnic identity.

But Barth (1969) has critics. Emberling (1997), for example, argues that the term “difference” would be more appropriate than boundary as the latter term is misleading. Boundary may suggest that people in an ethnic group are completely separate from members of other ethnic groups, whereas ethnic identity is only one of many social identities a single person may hold. Membership in status or occupational groups, for instance, may connect members of different ethnic groups (Emberling 1997).

Unlike Barth (1969), Cohen’s (1974a) view on ethnic identities developed in response to functional organisation requirements and has a strongly political focus. He (as quoted in Eriksen 1993, p. 53) defines ethnicity simply as “a particular form of informal political organisation where cultural boundaries are invoked so that the group’s resources can be secured”. In this way, Cohen (1974a) goes even further than Barth in severing the tie between ethnicity and culture, viewing ethnicity as an instrument of power elites, and to be studied in terms of power relations. An ethnic group is depicted as an interest group sharing “a high degree of trust and similar values, whose members speak the same language, respect the same norms and are involved in a

network of primary relationships that are governed by the same values and the same patterns of symbolic behaviour” (Cohen 1974b, p.99). Given this perspective, an ethnic group can organise itself for acquiring and maintaining some power to safeguard and promote its interests.

Cohen (1974a) notes that ethnicity can be used to mobilise the masses to achieve the elite’s aims, namely, to gain or remain in power. The instruments used by the power elite to achieve its goals are emotional appeals to common ethnic ancestry such as ethnic symbols and rituals; these are tools of political interests. Thus, Brass (1991) perceives ethnic identity as a basis for strategies of mobilisation employed by power elites in the pursuit of political goals. This approach starts from the assumption that “ethnicity is politics” (Cole & Wolf as quoted in Malesevic 1998, p.107). It emphasises the rivalry of elites when seeking to control resources and their manipulation of cultural, religious or linguistic symbols for political aims. Cohen (1969, p.200) puts it concisely as follows: “ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon as traditional customs are used only as idioms and as mechanisms for political alignment”.

In Cohen’s model, the creation of ethnicity is bound to political processes involving informal corporate groups. In order to obtain the support of their potential followers, the leaders of these groups use primordial symbols in their political strategy. However, Cohen (1974) has critics. Eriksen (1993) argues that if ethnic identities are created wholly through political processes, then it should be possible to create any identity. For example, it should have been possible to convince members of the Maasai ethnic group in Kenya that they were really Kikuyus (Eriksen 1993). In addition, it is evident that Cohen (1974) fails to discuss the nature of the “stuff” on which ethnic groups feed. It seems the collective identity of the individuals who eventually make an ethnic group is taken for granted in Cohen’s model.

What is most significant is not whether ethnicity is innate and immutable or even contrived, it is whether members of an ethnic group perceive the ethnic group to which they belong to be real (Esman 1994). Such a perception may lead ethnic groups to seek the right to self-determination, especially in countries where ethnic groups comprise minorities that see themselves as politically oppressed. This leads to the question: how do ethnic groups form minorities in some countries? One possible answer lies in the emergence of the nation-state and the expansion of European colonialism generating new and “frequently arbitrary boundaries” (May 1990, p.2). During the process of European colonisation, ethnic communities were often split among two or more states governed by different colonial powers. The post-colonial states “inherited these ethnically arbitrary boundaries” (Esman 1994, p.3). These processes often consolidated the position of dominant ethnic groups, thereby “laying the basis for ethnic minority [conflicts]” (May 1990, p.2). But, what are the factors that cause ethnic conflicts? The factors can be minority grievances, oppressive policies towards minorities, the nature of colonial policy and practice, and inequality and discrimination against ethnic communities.

First, grievances may lead to ethnic conflicts. Such conflicts may occur between majority ethnic groups and minority ethnic groups when the minority has been deemed “an outsider or *de facto* foreigner” by the majority (Danspeckgruber 2005, p.32). Ethnic conflicts arise when the notion of the nation-state cannot accept within the same sovereign borders those who are not part of the same community as the majority in regard to race, language, religion, and culture (Danspeckgruber 2005). Hence, the minority groups within the same boundaries can be regarded as *de facto* foreigners relative to the majority’s culture, language, race and religion. And these minorities can be perceived as elements which weaken and divide nation-states (Musgrave 1997). They may not be allowed to participate in building the national character and culture of

the predominant people, and this may lead to marginalisation and inferiorisation of those minorities.

The second crucial factor resulting in ethnic conflicts is that of governments adopting oppressive policies towards ethnic minorities. Such policies may be predicated on assimilation, namely, that ethnic minorities must be assimilated in the sense that the whole population of the nation-state should belong to one culture and language (Macartney 1934). There have been intensive efforts made to assimilate minorities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, following the partition of Poland by Prussia, Austria, and Russia, the German parliament adopted numerous measures in 1886 to Germanise the state's Polish citizens who made up the largest ethnic minority. Furthermore, there was a prohibition on the public use of the Polish language that encompassed the courts, schools and other institutions (Macartney 1934). Such efforts to achieve a forcible assimilation have usually been counter-productive and awakened the national consciousness of ethnic groups. Thus, Musgrave contends (1997, p.11):

Attempts to assimilate particular ethnic groups often aroused the national consciousness of those groups, so that they became more resistant to the threat to their national identity. Such groups would then develop their own nationalist aspirations, which could be satisfied only through the creation of a separate state.

The third factor contributing to ethnic conflicts is the role of colonial policy and practice in shaping and dividing ethnic groups. Horowitz (1985, p.156) believes that "the relationship between colonialism and ethnicity cannot be captured by sweeping notions of divide and rule". Colonial government policies were often premised on promoting the differential treatment of ethnic groups. For instance, in Sri Lanka the potential for ethnic conflicts was aggravated by the colonial government's actions in promoting the interest of one ethnic group at the expense of another as a means of controlling the political power of a dominant group (Horowitz 1985). This

led the Sinhalese majority to assert their cultural and political dominance, and caused the recent ethnic conflict in this country.

In the Philippines, also, the former colonial power played a substantial part in generating different ethnic groups and engendering ethnic conflicts. While the Spanish were colonising the Philippines during the sixteenth century, they succeeded in converting most lowland Filipinos to Christianity except in the southern islands where Islam had taken hold among a number of polities and linguistic groups more than two centuries before the Spanish occupation (Turner 2008). The Spanish played a role in the creation of a new ethnic group that incorporated all the different Islamic ethnic groups: it was collectively called “Moro after the Islamic Moors who had fought Spain over centuries for control of the Iberian Peninsula” (Turner 2008, p.162). Thus, a Moro identity emerged in the southern islands of Philippines to represent all the Muslim people regardless of linguistic, cultural and historical differences. The Spanish passed on their hostility towards the Moros to lowland Christian Filipinos who formed the overwhelming majority in the post-colonial state (Turner 2008). Hence the Moro ethnic identity came to be perceived negatively among Filipinos, and the Islamic groups have reacted with the creation of a sense of consciousness, a self-perception of difference, that has led to armed struggle for secession or autonomy.

The fourth factor contributing to ethnic conflicts is inequality and discrimination against ethnic communities. It is argued that “every state tends to support particular groups, to distribute privileges unequally, and to differentiate among various categories in the population” (Brass 1985, pp.9 & 29). Inequality and discrimination caused by the state being controlled by a dominant ethnic group may be the greatest predictor of violence in ethnic conflicts (Gurr 1993). Once ethnic parties wield power over the state, they often control the latter’s resources to the

advantage of their group, further aggravating tension (Esman 1994). For such reasons, ethnic minority groups may ask the state for changes in the rules of interaction, more equitable resources distribution, or even demand secession. For instance, the Kurds in Turkey are aspiring for autonomy, but Turkey has not conferred it on them.

It is propounded that inequality and discrimination are grounded on “social cleavages” (Lijphart 1977; Sisk 1996), that is “on divisions within a society based on ethnicity, language, religion, race, region, gender or class” (Sisk 1996, p.120). Social cleavage basically denotes that an ethnic group dominates the state without giving other ethnic groups a fair chance to participate in ruling or to have equitable resources distribution. Such domination leads to a more acute ethnic conflict when in a dual society such as Sri Lanka or Rwanda, where two ethnic groups struggling for power is seen by them as a zero-sum game (Sisk 1996).

To conclude, ethnicity can be seen as a process of identification and differentiation that uses various attributes such as language, culture, religion, race, custom and history. Ethnic groups may maintain their identities because of emotional attachment to the symbols of the group or for political or economic gain. The alienation, assimilation or non-recognition of their identities and their political, economic and cultural rights may cause conflicts. Their ethnic nationalism may consequently be aroused so they fight to obtain their basic rights in the majoritarian community. It is necessary, therefore, to explain the emergence of ethnic nationalism in the next section. It is important to have a full understanding of how and why some ethnic groups have turned to nationalism and demanded their right to self-determination.

## *Ethnic nationalism*

To begin discussing ethnic nationalism, it is crucial to understand what nationalism is.

Nationalism can be defined as Gellner (1983, p.1) has:

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by this fulfilment. A nationalist movement is one articulated by sentiment of this kind.

Nationalism “connotes identification with and loyalty to one’s nation. It does not refer to loyalty to one’s country” (Connor 1994, p.xi). If nationalism refers to fidelity to one’s nation, then what is a nation? Connor (1973, p.3) defines a nation as “a self-conscious ethnic group”. An ethnic group may be readily distinguished by “the outside observer, but until the members are themselves aware of the group’s uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation” (Connor 1994, pp.45&46). Hence Connor (1994, p.42) states:

We can describe a nation as a self-differentiating ethnic group. A prerequisite of nationhood is a popularly held awareness or belief that one’s own group is unique in a most vital sense. In an absence of such a popularly held conviction, there is only an ethnic group.

Any nation can be described in terms of its particular mixture of characteristics, for instance, in terms of their linguistic and religious composition (Connor 1994). It is, nevertheless, “the self-view of one’s group”, rather than the objective characteristics, “that is of essence in determining the existence or nonexistence of a nation” (Connor 1973, p.3). Ethnic consciousness presumes an awareness of other groups. Thus, Connor (1973, p.3) thinks that “the sense of being unique or different requires a referent, that is, the concept of us requires them.”

With awareness among the members of an ethnic group that they share a range of customs, attitudes, and beliefs not shared by others, there is “a psychological bond between them which is characterised by a feeling of sameness and oneness” (Ortiz 1986, p.17). In relation to members

of all other ethnic groups (“them”), “the members of a particular ethnic group are united psychologically in the collective “us”” (Connor 1973, p.3). For instance, the tensions in Northern Ireland may not be grounded only on religion but also on nationality. In Ulster, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British encouraged English and Scottish settlers in Northern Ireland to help tame the natives. The indigenous Catholics did not like these invading Protestants not only because of religious differences but also because they were outsiders with different customs and greater privileges (Connor 1994). Hence, Connor (1994) classifies the Northern Irish nationalism as ethno-nationalism.

Other ethno-national movements can be seen, for instance, in the Basque country, Kurdistan, Palestine and Quebec. The ethno-nationalists are depicted as “a nation without a state” (Connor 1994). Ethno-nationalists have a strong sense of belongingness associated with a particular territory considered to be the homeland of the ethnic group. The concept of homeland is intimately related to the myth of an ancestrally related people and is used in the struggle for independence. When territory is related to symbolic or psychological facets of group solidarity, ethnic conflict over territory can be a “zero-sum game” (Sisk 1996). For instance, the seemingly irreconcilable claims to territory in Jerusalem are premised on deeply rooted beliefs and ancient religious claims of opposing groups. It can be contended that territory frequently is an important component of ethnic identity because territory is associated with the group’s history, shared memories, and character (Wolff 2009). Furthermore, territory may have economic significance for an ethnic group. Thus, Wolff (2010, p.43) argues:

Territory has certain value in and of itself, including natural resources, the goods and services produced and the tax revenue generated from them, and military or strategic advantages in terms of natural boundaries, access to the open sea, and control over transport routes and waterways.

As territory holds political, economic and cultural significance for ethnic groups, their nationalism may push them to demand to rule their territories or establish their own nation states. This leads to the question: how are the concepts of nation and nationalism understood by scholars? “Primordialists” and “constructivists” have interpreted the concepts of nation and nationalism differently. The former regard the nation as ascriptive ties premised on blood, language, religion, culture or race. The latter place emphasis on the historical and sociological processes whereby nations are formed or devised. Constructivism firmly states that the modern character of nationalism is associated with factors such as sociological transformations, capitalist developments and political ideas.

One of the influential constructivist theorists is Anderson (2006, p.6) who defines nation as “an imagined political community”. Anderson's (2006, p.4) theoretical concept is based on “nation-ness” and nationalism that are both “cultural artefact of a particular kind”, and they have emerged and spread to every corner of the world due to the outcome of anomalies formed by European imperialism. Most of the nationalism aroused in the colonial territories of Asia and Africa was in “its origins a response to the new-style global imperialism made possible by the achievements of industrial capitalism” (Anderson 2006, p.139).

The rise of print capitalism has produced imagined communities. Capitalism was significant because the expansion of the book market contributed to the vernacularisation of languages (Anderson 2006). Through the printed word, “the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006, p.6). Thus, Anderson (2006) argues that nationalism creates nations where they do not have any prior existence.

Language created the imagined community intelligentsia through print (Anderson 2006). The bilingual intelligentsia community “came to think of its own language as belonging to... their cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out. Language, therefore, became a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty” (Chatterjee 1993, p.7). Hence it can be said that nations are "imagined communities", or constructs that we use in order to create ourselves against others.

That nations are communities that exist in the imaginations of people's beliefs and sentiments is a necessary condition for developing national identity. Thus, Norman (2006, p.89) suggests that “both nations and national identities exist because of the beliefs, convictions, sentiments and attitudes of individual people”. Anderson (2006) and Norman (2006) fall into not only the constructivist but also the modernist school of nationalism in that they posit that nations and nationalism are the products of modernity and have been generated as vehicles for the achievement of political and economic goals. Anderson's model, nonetheless, fails to provide any convincing explanation for the rise of ethnic nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. He neglects the fact that the rise of ethnic consciousness may be due to the subjugation and oppression of ethnic minorities by the state; ethnic nationalism may be aroused to defend the ethnic identity of the oppressed minorities. In some cases, the state may promote a mode of nationalism which some ethnic communities within its territory reject.

The constructivist school stands in opposition to the primordialists. Thus, Smith (1991), one of the primordialists, whose theory is premised upon “ethno-symbolism”, defines ethnies (the French term for ethnic community) as a “named human population with shared ancestry, myths,

histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity” (Smith 1986, p.32). Thus, Smith (1991, p.29) states that:

Ethnies are constituted, not by lines of physical descent, but by the sense of continuity, shared memory and collective destiny, i.e. by lines of cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values retained by a given cultural unit of population.

In this sense, ethno-symbolism is focused on the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols. Symbols encompass “emblems, hymns, festivals, customs, linguistic codes, and sacred places” which can be “powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture of the ethnic community” (Smith 1991, p.29). Hence, ethno-symbolism is “the sense of cultural affinities rather than physical kinship ties”, embodied in myths and collective historical memories (Smith 1991, p.29). These “cultural affinities” can become the basis of nationalist sentiments which can be mobilised even in modern societies.

Smith (1991) has supporters. For example, Eriksen (1993) contends that nationalism may glorify a tradition shared by the ancestors of the members of the nation but it does not thereby regenerate that tradition. For instance, certain aspects of Norwegian peasant culture such as folk costumes, traditional music and peasant food became national symbols, and were used as evidence that Norwegian culture is distinctive. The Norwegian people, therefore, believed that they should have their own state and leave the union with Sweden which they did in 1905. It can be argued, a link exists between ethnicity and state, and to ethnic ideologies which hold the belief that particular ethnic groups should dominate a state. As such, Eriksen (1993, p.119) refers to the concept of a nation-state “dominated by an ethnic group, whose markers of identity such as language or religion are frequently embedded in its official symbolism and legislation”. Hence, nationality can be in many ways analogous to ethnicity, being premised on a common history and/or notions of relatedness (Emberling 1997). Thus, Smith (1986) thinks that

nationalism and national communities have roots in earlier ethnic communities and that nationalism draws on the pre-existing history of the group and endeavours to shape this history into a sense of common identity and shared history. In this sense, nationalism is about preserving and maintaining the ethnic identity from demise because it represents the individual and collective identities of a particular ethnic group.

Ethnic nationalism can be aroused by the exclusion of ethnic minorities in the nation-building process (Musgrave 1997). For instance, in central and eastern Europe, the notion of nation comprises those who share ethnic, linguistic and religious traits and can form a nation-state; that is, a state whose borders match with the geographical distribution of the nation or ethnic group. Because central and eastern Europe consists of a vast number of ethnic groups intermingled together, the nation-states which have been formed have always not included ethnic minorities in the nation-building process (Musgrave 1997). As result, these ethnic minorities have been counted as “*de facto* foreigners” within the nation-state due to their cultural, linguistic, religious or racial differences. Thus, Scheff (1994, p.281) contends that ethnically based nationalism, “arises out of a sense of alienation, on the one hand, and resentment against unfair exclusion, whether political, economic, or social.” This has induced tension between ethnic majorities and minorities within such states (Musgrave 1997). In some cases, ethnic minorities have broken away from the majority-controlled states, and formed their own nation-states such as in the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. By contrast, in Western Europe and the US such tensions have been less significant but still evident such as in Wales and Scotland.

To sum up this section, the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is complex. Like ethnic ideologies, nationalism may stress the cultural similarity of its adherents and draw

boundaries in relation to others who thereby become outsiders. Nationalism can be a synonym for ethno-nationalism which falls into both primordialism due to the historical, religious or linguistic attributes of ethnic groups, and constructivism due to the emergence of nation-states during and after decolonisation. Ethnic groups can be aware of their uniqueness as a nation, especially when their cultural, economic or political rights have not been granted. Hence, ethno-nationalist movements may resort to the self-determination struggle if they believe that their basic rights are being denied. The concept of self-determination has, nonetheless, different meanings which are delineated in the next section.

### **Self-determination and International Law**

Self-determination can basically be defined as “whenever a people freely determine its own political status” (Musgrave 1997, p.2). It refers to “the right of a group of people who consider themselves separate and distinct from others to determine for themselves the state in which they will live and the form of government it will have” (Plano and Olton as quoted in Connor 1973, p.1). The process of self-determination has been a matter of concern for international law (IL) since the end of the Second World War. However, the relationship between international law and the principle of self-determination is complicated because of the potentially opposing forces of state sovereignty and self-determination. These two conflicting principles in international law are equally important (Watts 2002). The notion of sovereignty has been one of the fundamental concepts in constitutional and international law due to the idea of the indivisibility and absolutism of political authority; that is, the state possesses the absolute power to command. The UN General Assembly in 1970 determined that “the territorial integrity and political independence of the state are inviolable” (Lapidoth 1992, p.329).

The concept of inviolable sovereignty has been challenged by scholars of international law. Thus, Groarke (2004, p.56) suggests that any question concerned with “the validity of the state’s title to sovereign power can only be decided politically”. It is solely the people who have the right to determine, outside the constitutional order, the validity of the political authority of the state. Similarly, Locke (as quoted in Groarke 2004), the old English political philosopher, locates the source of political power in the people and argues against Filmer’s view which explains political authority that is premised upon the relationship between a father and his children. Filmer’s view suggests that “people are never free and have no right to choose a government” (Groarke 2004, p.52). However, Locke’s argument is not applicable everywhere because not all countries are democratic and liberal to allow a group of people to determine their political status within these countries.

Self-determination was recognised as a rule of law in 1976 in two UN covenants on civil and political rights, and on economic, social and cultural rights. But there is ambiguity in how it can be interpreted. The first article of each of these UN covenants provides that “all peoples have the right to self-determination, by the virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Lapidoth 1992, p.338). The ambiguity of the right to self-determination concerns who is entitled as in this first article there is “lack of a generally accepted definition of peoples” (Lapidoth 1992, p.338). Because the right of self-determination is the right of peoples, this raises a complex question of what collectivities make up a people who are entitled to such a right. This question has provoked different and opposing viewpoints. For instance, Emerson (as quoted in Raic 2002) contends that the concept of a people in sociology and anthropology mainly refers to a distinct ethnic group. By contrast, Vukas (as quoted in Raic 2002) believes that after the foundation of the UN, the right of self-

determination was mainly applied to whole populations of dependent territories in spite of the heterogeneous ethnic composition of the societies. Hence, in this context, ethnic identity was regarded as irrelevant. It is clear that at that time, the entire population of a colony or other dependent territory was considered a people using a strictly legal definition.

The second ambiguity in the right to self-determination lies in whether self-determination applies only to the decolonisation context or whether peoples within existing independent states may also claim it to legitimate the right of secession. Historically, the right to self-determination sanctioned the formation of nation-states in order to dismantle colonial empires. For instance, the Declaration on Colonial Countries “[s]olemnly proclaims the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end to colonialism in all its forms and manifestations” and declares that “[a]ll peoples have the right to self-determination: by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Hannum 1990, p.34). However, the recent practices of self-determination have made such a right ambiguous in the scope of its application because the birth of states such as East Timor, Kosovo and Montenegro has indicated that the application of self-determination has not been restricted to the decolonisation process.

The right to self-determination does not only mean independent statehood (Knop 2002). Thus, Raic (2002, p.242) argues that dispute over the meaning of the term peoples has been caused by “the incorrect equation of the right of self-determination with an absolute right to attain statehood”. Such an interpretation is a fallacious equation of self-determination with one way of implementing it because the right to self-determination has another interpretation, namely, internal self-determination (Raic 2002). Internal self-determination involves working within the

existing structures and boundaries of the state. In this sense, sovereignty can be divisible in a way that “two or several authorities may have limited, relative, ....sovereignty over certain areas, groups or resources” (Lapidoth 1992, p.334). This means that ethnic minorities can have options other than secession to determine their political status as the emerging consensus in international law suggests that the right to self-determination may signify other things in different context, such as internal arrangements of autonomy and federalism (Frey 2002).

Internal self-determination also refers to a representative government, which is mentioned in Article 21 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that each citizen has the right to participate in the government of the country through freely selected representatives. Similarly, the UN Friendly Relations Declaration of 1970 states in the penultimate paragraph of precept V that a state conducts itself in compliance with the right of self-determination if it has “a government representing the whole people to the territory...without distinction as to race, creed or colour” (Raic 2002, p.24). This demonstrates that the right of self-determination has an internal dimension, implying two facets, namely, “the protection of life and property and protection against any form of state-sponsored discrimination, and secondly, the right of participation” (Frey 2002, p.1428).

The international community seems to support internal self-determination through “...resolutions and declarations of international organisations and conference, as well as state practice, jurisprudence and doctrine [that] clearly point to the continuing character of self-determination beyond the traditional colonial context” (Raic 2002, p.228). It stands against the external self-determination or secession, as shown by the UN resolution 1514 (XV) condemning “any attempt aimed at any partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a

country” (Lalonde 2002, p.154). This is because first, as the international community is composed of states whose interests are to maintain themselves, the precepts of territorial integrity and national unity have been almost always followed (Hannum 1990). Precepts that maintain the territorial integrity have been determined to be more fundamental than those of self-determination. Thus, Makonnen (1983, p.462) argues, “[t]he idea of ethnic self-determination or the creation of new nations out of the existing states was rejected” in the international community. Second, the international community does not support ethnic secession because such secession may set a precedent for promoting ethnic secession all over the world (Danspeckgruber 2005).

Ethnic secession may have extensive negative ramifications. As Horowitz (1985, p.279) explains in his theory of reciprocal separatism the first ramification of ethnic secession is that “what will placate one group may be precisely what is required to inflame another”. In this sense, the separation of one region can induce the separation of another which can destabilise countries, regions and even the world, and thus can be a threat to international peace and order.

Another negative ramification is that break-away states can be more ethnically homogeneous and less pluralist signifying that they may, therefore, lack the sociological bases of democracy. Those states may design societies that are “sociologically monolithic” and may display intolerance toward ethnic minority groups and thus heightening ethnic polarisation (Etzioni 1992). Thus, Etzioni (1992) claims that when there is no tolerance in multi-ethnic countries, the tendency toward further breakup is strong.

It is also the case that economic losses may occur following the ethnic breakaway. Thus, Etzioni (1992) argues that the way to welfare is not breakup but its opposite: community. For instance,

European countries have found it economically beneficial to join the European Union to boost their economies. The critics of ethnic self-determination argue also that the right to secession for ethnic groups should be “denied when the group is too small, or the territory too limited, or the possibility of maintaining a viable economy too remote” (Connor 1994, p.19). Instead, “all people must develop more tolerance for those with different backgrounds and cultures; with compromise, ethnic identities can be expressed within existing national entities without threatening national unity” (Etzioni 1992, p.1). Thus, Etzioni (1992) propounds that states should offer federalism or autonomy arrangements to their ethnic groups in conflict. Etzioni (1992) has not, however, proposed a formula on how to implant tolerance in an intolerant society. In addition, his proposition on federal and autonomous arrangements may not be plausible everywhere as ethnic dominant majorities may not be willing to share power with ethnic minorities on the grounds that federal or autonomous arrangements may lead to schisms within their countries.

To sum up, the right to self-determination can be a goal for ethnic groups to achieve. However, such a goal need not be attained through secession; it can also be attained through internal arrangements such as by means of federalism and/or autonomy. Internal self-determination is favoured by the international community because it is less likely to create instability. However, some ethnic groups may resort to an external self-determination struggle because their governments may not confer on them the right to internal self-determination or simply because their history is full of struggles for independence. The main question is thus, whether secession from existing states is legally permitted in the post-colonial period? And what are the other political arrangements available for ethnic groups if secession is not achievable? The following section answers these questions.

## **Practices of Ethnic Conflict Resolution Arrangements**

Ethnic groups in ethnically divided societies may demand either secession or some of the state's power. Ethno-nationalism indicates that ethnic groups should be self-governing within a separate territorially defined state as either as a federal/autonomous entity within a larger state or a sovereign state (Gellner 1983). Ethno-political conflict can challenge the existing distribution of decision rights between ethnic groups and the government of a state. The escalation of conflict may lead to changes not only in the government or the regime but also in boundaries of the state itself. Thus, secession is discussed as a practice of ethnic conflict resolution in this section, and its alternatives such as federalism and federacy are elucidated. Federalism is, however, discussed in detail as it is of a special concern in this thesis as a possible political arrangement for ethnic groups, especially as an alternative to secession for Iraqi Kurds.

### **Secession**

Secession is one of the ethnic conflict resolution arrangements and the ultimate form of self-determination involving an ethnic group with a defined territory detaching from direct control of the state it belongs to and forming a new state (James 1998). There are currently many secessionist movements such as in Quebec in Canada, Corsica in France, the Basque region in Spain and Kashmir in India. A right of self-determination has become a recognised precept of international law since the Second World War, but this right has mainly been used to justify decolonisation rather than secession as there are no United Nations documents that specifically recognise a right of secession springing from the concept of self-determination (Christopher 2011). Hence, the recognition of a right of colonial peoples to strive for independence under the principle of self-determination has not been complemented by a recognition of a right of groups within existing states to secede (Eastwood 1993). There is in fact ongoing tension in

international law between the establishment of a right of secession of minority groups within sovereign states and the goal of maintaining international order.

Recognition of a right of secession under international law has historically been disapproved of by the international community (Hannum 1990). States that have achieved independence from colonial powers are against legitimising secession because of concerns that any recognition that secession is legitimate could encourage secession within the newly independent states (Eastwood 1993). Thus, fears among states of a flood of separatist claims have led to the espousal of the principle of self-determination as a justification for achieving independence from colonial powers, but not as a legitimate basis for seceding from an independent postcolonial state.

Colonial powers played a major role in increasing the number of secessionist movements throughout the world. For instance, France and Britain were responsible for carving-up the Middle East and Africa along arbitrary boundaries that divided ethnic groups by countries' boundaries and lumped these parts of ethnic groups with other different groups (Lippman 1994). Thus, Demissie (1996, p.175) argues, "many resurgent nationalist movements lay the foundation of their claims on that historical fact", and are likely to strive for independence based upon tribal, linguistic, or religious differences (Aschenbach 1993). The International Court of Justice has, however, adopted the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris*<sup>2</sup> to safeguard the territorial sovereignty of newly independent states by rejecting overlapping claims of title grounded on ethnic kinship and cultural bonds.

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<sup>2</sup> *Uti possidetis juris* stands for the legal validity of post-colonial borders.

The international community has frequently stood against secessionist efforts to protect the sovereignty of states. For instance, during the attempted secession of Katanga from the newly independent Congo in August 1960, the reaction of the international community to the dispute evolved from initial efforts to maintain neutrality into outright opposition to secession. The United Nations troops eventually intervened and became involved in heavy fighting in Katanga, especially during late 1961 to bring the situation under control.

In November 1961, the Security Council adopted a resolution which declared that one reason for the involvement of the United Nations in Katanga was "[t]o maintain the territorial integrity and the political independence of the Republic of the Congo.." (as quoted in Christopher 2011, p.306). Paragraph 8 of the resolution stated that all secessionist activities conducted against the Congolese government were contrary to both the Congolese Constitution and Security Council resolutions, and demanded that secessionist activities in Katanga stop. The unwillingness of most members of the international community to recognise the Katangan state may have stemmed from concerns in the international community over whether recognition of the secessionists might encourage a large number of similar secession efforts elsewhere which would threaten the principle of *Uti possidetis juris*. Other factors, especially political self-interests, may also explain why this secession effort was not supported (Christopher 2011).

The reactions of states to particular secession efforts have historically been based upon the states' own political interests. States that stand to benefit from a successful secession "by weakening a rival or creating a potential new ally in the newly independent territory are prone to take a more permissive view toward particular secession efforts" (Christopher 2011, p.330). Such states will

likely oppose similar secession efforts in areas “outside of their spheres of influence that could be used as precedents for potential separatist claims within those states' own borders” (Christopher 2011, p.330). For instance, China's competition with the Soviet Union in 1970s resulted in the Chinese government criticism of India, a Soviet ally, for its military support of Bangladesh to secede from Pakistan. Another instance was the Soviet opposition to the attempted secession of Katanga from the Congo in the 1960s. It mirrored the Soviet government's aspiration to spread its influence in Africa while weakening the positions of the Western colonial powers. Even the United States' backing for the secessions of the Baltic states and its recognition of seceding Yugoslav republics can be explained partially by its own political interests in weakening the power of its former communist rivals (Christopher 2011). In addition, it has been argued the United States, which supported South Sudan's secessionist movement, persuaded African and international opinion into accepting the dismemberment of Sudan because it wanted the South Sudanese oil (Collins 2012). These instances demonstrate that foreign patronage can be an important element in the success of secessionist endeavours and the creation of new states.

With foreign patronage, secessionist groups can even obtain secession unilaterally. Unilateral secession is unsanctioned secession when the secessionists declare their independence without the consent of the state. For instance, the unilateral secession of Kosovo demonstrates how fragile international law is when the superpower, namely the US, supported the independence of Kosovo (Kim and Woehrel 2008). Thus, the advisory ruling on Kosovo to the United Nations by the International Court of Justice in the Hague in 2010 stated that “the declaration of independence adopted on 17 February 2008 did not violate international law” which opens the way for the international recognition of other unilateral announcements of independence (Christopher 2011, p.126). The potential for unilateral secessionist movements has continued to

be high, but their success in effecting state dissolution and gaining international recognition is reliant on foreign patronage and/or limited owing to the obstacles raised by the body of established international law (Wellman 1995).

In contrast to unilateral secession, consensual secession results either from a negotiated agreement between the state and the secessionists or through constitutional processes. Constitutionally authorised secession is achieved either by the exercise of an explicit constitutional right to secede or by constitutional amendment. For instance, Ethiopia launched an initiative that its leaders insist would control ethnic conflict in the country and guarantee the equal protection of the rights of ethnic minorities (Buckle 1995). Thus, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia led a campaign to include Article 39 in the constitution that guarantees peoples' unconditional right to self-determination including secession (Demissie 1996). It requires a two-thirds majority in both the House of Federation and the House of the People's Representatives in favour of secession, and a waiting period for the referendum to be held three years after the national parliament approval of the demand for secession (Meles 2008).

Another example of constitutional and agreed secession is Southern Sudan. The 2005 Nairobi agreement provided for a six-year "interim period", during which the institutions and monitoring mechanisms would work: "to make "the unity of Sudan" attractive to the people of Southern Sudan" (Murray & Maywald 2006, p.1207). At the end of this period, the people of the Southern Sudan would hold a referendum either to confirm the unity of the Sudan or to vote for secession. The implementation of the agreement was supervised by the United Nations Mission in Sudan and the African Union. Finally, the referendum in the Southern Sudan held under United Nations and African Union supervision in January 2011 illustrated that the central government had failed

“to make the “unity of Sudan” attractive to the people of Southern Sudan” (Murray and Maywald 2006, p.1207). The vote against unity and in favour of secession and independence for the Southern Sudan was an overwhelming 98.8 per cent (Christopher 2011). The constitutional declaration of the independence of South Sudan was on 9 July 2011, with the attendance of foreign heads of state. The United Nations and African Union presence at the independence celebrations in Juba guaranteed full international recognition, beginning with that of the Republic of Sudan.

As noted above for South Sudan, referendum has been used as a mechanism to reflect the Southern Sudanese people’s attitudes towards secession. Scholars who support secession usually argue in favour of referendum as the best means for the expression of voters’ opinion about secession. For instance, scholars like Buchanan (1991) thinks that a three-quarters majority should be required to legitimate secession; Weinstock (2001) supports the idea of a supermajority without specifying the required percentage to support secession. Antic (2007) believes that the best procedure is to demand a two-thirds majority of all the voters for the following reason: modern democracies require supermajorities to change their constitutions. Since secession of a territory entails changes in the constitution, it is absolutely justified to demand a supermajority. Antic (2007) would thus support the legitimacy of secession in Croatia as 88.2 per cent of all the eligible voters supported independence. The figure in Slovenia was 86 per cent and that in Macedonia was 74 per cent (Cohen 1996). These data demonstrate that secession of these republics was not only legal but also legitimate.

To sum up, there is no recognised and lucid right of secession under existing international law. It seems that there is inadequate support of a right of secession under existing international agreements or declarations of multinational organisations because there are no international

conventions or treaties that have established an acceptance of a right of secession among their signatories. Secession is not internationally regarded as a viable solution for ethnic conflict as the large number of ethnic minority groups in the world and the heterogeneous ethnic traits of the populations of most territories in which ethnic conflicts occur would entail a redrawing of national borders should secession be internationally sanctioned. A secession right grounded on the concept that ethnic or minority groups are automatically entitled to their own territory would threaten the stability of many states, lead to the internationalisation of many domestic group conflicts and could create new conflicts. Thus, the process of establishing secession as a recognised right in international law will not occur in the foreseeable future due to states' concerns that secession will threaten their sovereignty and international stability.

## **Federalism**

Another form of ethnic conflict resolution is federalism, an arrangement which is of particular concern in this thesis. The term federalism originates from the Latin word *foedus* meaning compact. Historically the term represented a political compact between groups which had come together in an association (Erk 2008). Today, federalism is viewed as one kind of devolution of power, “one in which there is a division of powers between one general and several regional authorities, each of which, in its own sphere, is coordinated with the others and each of which acts directly on the people through its administrative agencies” (Burgess 2006, p.33). Thus, it can be said that federalism is a combination of shared-rule and self-rule (Watts as quoted in Burgess 2006).

Federalism is defined by various scholars. For Elazar (1987), federalism means covenant. A polity comes together is through a covenant, understood as choice. It “emphasises the deliberate

coming together of humans as equals to establish bodies politic in such a way that all re-affirm their fundamental equality and retain their basic rights” (Elazar 1987, p.4). A federal arrangement constitutes a “partnership established and regulated by a covenant, whose internal relationships reflect the special kind of sharing that must prevail among the partners, based on a mutual recognition of the integrity of each partner and the attempt to foster a special unity among them” (Elazar 1987, p.5). For Burgess and Gagnon (1993, p.15), federalism “is a political device for establishing viable institutions and flexible relationships capable of facilitating inner-state relation and inter-community co-operation”. It is principally “an expression of practices which encourages autonomy within regions” (Burgess and Gagnon 1993, p.16). There is a consensus among scholars that federalism is a political system where there are at least two levels of government, and responsibilities, powers and jurisdiction are drawn, divided, and ingrained in a constitution. Scholars, however, vary on how power should be shared, the degree of autonomy to be assigned to the regional/constituent units, the degree of centralisation<sup>3</sup> and decentralisation and finally, why a country selects a federal form of governance over other forms.

There are four approaches to the understanding of federalism as Lalande (1978) proposes: one, institutional or constitutional; two, sociological or functional; three, developmental or federalism as a process; and four, political or federalism as a bargain. First, understanding federalism as the institutional or constitutional method is about the system of government. It is focused on the institutional make-up of a country: the division of powers between the central government and

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<sup>3</sup> Centralisation is understood as power concentrated within the central government; whereas decentralisation proposes the transference of powers to the provinces.

the constituent units, and the constitutional guarantee that the two tiers of government are coordinate and independent.

Second, understanding federalism as the sociological or functional method emphasises the role of the social make-up of a country and the diversities within it (Lalande 1978). Federalism is seen as a tool for handling diversity and safeguarding the self-expression or the autonomy of a unit. Hence Stein (1971) argues, federalism is not only the formal division of power between the centre and sub-state units (provinces, states, regions or cantons) but is also a societal phenomenon. One could have a federal society “where a society is constituted of territorially based communities which are clearly differentiated by language and ethnicity” (Stein 1971, p.34). Accordingly, a federal society can be organised in terms of societal differences like ethnicity and language when they are territorially based (Erk 2008). Federalism can thus organise ethnic relations in order to preserve, promote and generally accommodate viable distinct identities that coexist in peaceful neighbourly association.

Third, understanding federalism as a process or as a developmental method is focused on the communication and transactions between the two tiers of government so as to resolve problems (Lalande 1978). Problems are understood as the tensions produced by the diversity of society and/or of the constituent units. Hence, federalism is “much more than a system of government. It is also a process of ongoing negotiations, an art of resolving conflicts, an approach based on compromise and cooperation” (Auclair 2005, p.5). In such an approach, solutions to problems must be negotiated among constitutional partners rather than imposed by a single central authority.

Fourth, understanding federalism as a bargain is focused on political and legalistic methods to study federalism (Lalande 1978). Similar to the institutional approach, federalism, under this fourth category, concentrates on the division of powers between at least two tiers of government, where each level of government safeguards autonomy within its sphere of jurisdiction. The end product of the political bargain is manifested in the division of powers which is defined in a written constitution.

In addition to Lalande's (1978) classification of approaches to federalism, one can also look at the purposes federalism can fulfil in divided societies. First, it allows party proliferation that is conducive to intersegmental compromise and coalition building (Erk 2008). Second, it enables political leaders to form intergroup ties at the electorate level before they contest issues at the higher level of central government. Third, federalism defuses conflicts at the central level by solving some issues at subnational level (Erk 2008). Finally, federalism generates difficulties for any parties aspiring to get hegemonic control over the whole country.

Federalism and federation are common concepts in scholarly debates, but do they have the same meaning? In fact, federalism and federation are two distinct concepts. For Watts (1996), federalism is a normative term, whereas federation is a descriptive one. Normatively, federalism basically represents the idea of self-rule and shared-rule between at least two tiers of government. It is "the perpetuation of both union and non-centralisation at the same time" (Watts 1996, p.6). Federation on the other hand, is a descriptive term denoting the institutional character of the federal nation. It represents such principles as the division of powers, a written constitution, regional representation at the centre, equality of both central and regional governments, and regional autonomy. Where a federation differs from other forms of governance is in the constitutional entrenchment of the autonomy of the constituent units and regional

representation at the centre. As Burgess (1993, p.6) suggests, the autonomy of the units becomes of extreme importance as it is the “guarantee of their very survival as states within a larger state”. Watts (1996, p.7) also highlights the importance of the constitutional autonomy of the constituent units, in which each has “sovereign powers derived from the constitution, rather than another level of government”. The autonomy of constituent units differs from one country to another because each country adopts a different kind of federation. The question is posed: what are the kinds of federation/federalism? In fact, there are two main kinds of federation/federalism: mononational/integrative and multinational/pluralist. They are discussed in the following sections.

### *Mononational/integrative federation/federalism*

Mononational/integrative federalism is understood as hierarchy among the levels of governments, and as a group of societies which are sovereign yet are subordinate to the union government to safeguard homogeneity of the nation and a united federation based on stability and order (Lalande 1978). Stability and order are safeguarded with an effective political system which is seen as best secured with a centralised form of federalism. The mononational federalism can also be understood as:

A federal system of government is one in which the constitutional authority to make laws and to tax is divided between a national government and some number of regional governments. Neither the national government acting alone nor the regional governments acting together have the authority to alter the powers of the other level of government. They are co-ordinate and independent in their separate constitutional spheres (Brooks 1996, p.119).

Brooks (1996, p.121) further argues that mononational/integrative federalism, “involves agreement among regional components of the federal state that have benefits of being part of the union which exceed whatever costs membership may impose”. Federalism, thus, is premised on

a consensus among regions. The willingness of every party to engage in a federal bargain is an important condition (Brooks 1996). One of the aims of mononational/integrative federalism is to “bring together political units, that were apart, into a single body politic” (Gagnon 2001, p.323). Another aim is to control diversity to preserve order. Diversity in mononational/integrative federations is different from that in multinational federations as it is understood in strictly economic terms through such things as tax cuts and social spending (Lalande 1978). By contrast, diversity in multinational federations is based on the recognition, preservation and flourishing of cultural and social differences.

Mononational/integrative federalism is essentially about one nation. Hence the mononational/integrative federation can be nationally or ethnically or predominantly homogeneous; they are organised deliberately not to recognise more than one official nationality (O’Leary 2008). The rationale behind mononational/integrative federation is nation-building through the elimination of internal national or ethnic differences. This type of federation can work with a homogenised society or an overwhelmingly dominant ethnic group. However, it may not work with multi-ethnic countries or where there are rival homeland self-determination claims. Hence, mononational/integrative federation is an unlikely prescription for Iraq where significant different ethnic and religious groups are to be found. Examples of mononational/integrative federations are Australia, Germany, Austria and the United States.

Another feature of mononational/integrative is centralisation. The federal government and judiciary “have significant powers over citizens and over the member units of the federation. It facilitates a strong majoritarian federal government in the executive or legislature or both” (O’Leary 2008, p.57). Moreover, mononational/integrative federations build on the liberal logic of dividing power and organising competition for power (O’Leary 2008). Three mechanisms

have been identified as pivotal to power-dividing: civil liberties, multiple majorities, and checks and balances. The first, civil liberties, involves constitutional allocation of decision rights. Some decision-making is placed in the hands of civil society (Rothchild & Roeder 2005). For instance, in sponsoring the American Bill of Rights, Madison (as quoted in Rothchild & Roeder 2005) recognised that limits on the decision-making rights of government are as significant as limits on any single majority within the government. He sought to take religion, which was one of the most divisive cultural issues of his day, out of the hands of government with a constitutional provision that forbids any laws breaching the free exercise of religion.

The second mechanism of power-dividing is that of multiple majorities which are concerned with the organs of government which make decisions within a narrow realm of policy issues, such as setting interest rates or establishing higher education standards. These organs represent the public interest in different alignments of majorities and minorities. Thus, this mechanism can increase the likelihood “that members of ethnic minorities will be a part of political majorities on some issues and many members of any ethnic majorities will be members of political minorities on some issues” (Rothchild & Roeder 2005, p.16).

The third mechanism is checks and balances which is the separation of powers at all levels of government among independent branches of government which “makes it more difficult to form consensus to encroach on the rights of minorities...” (Rothchild & Roeder 2005, p.17). In power-dividing, presidentialism with a balance of powers between executive and legislature is preferred to parliamentarianism in safeguarding democracy and human rights.

While power-dividing has strengths in creating stable and prosperous federations, there are also flaws. Firstly, the power-dividing theorists advocate the concept of "nation-state stewardship"

that is premised on a shared sense of nationhood. Such a concept may not be applicable to all multi-ethnic countries, as component ethnic groups may perceive themselves as distinct nations rather than as sub-groups melted into one nation. Secondly, power-dividing advocates presidentialism. Linz (as quoted in Lijphart 2008, p.80), for example, argues that “perhaps the most important implication of presidentialism is that it introduces a strong element of zero-sum game into democratic politics with rules that tend towards a ‘winner-take-all’ outcome”. In the case of ethnically divided societies, it means that one ethnic group can be perceived to have an upper hand in running the state through the president being from that group. This may exacerbate ethnic conflicts rather than resolve them.

The third flaw is that presidential election campaigns can encourage the politics of personality and overshadow the politics of competing parties (Lijphart 2008). In ethnically divided societies, parties are crucial in voicing the interests of ethnic groups, and ethnic minorities may not be willing to accept a system which does not offer them the chance to be represented by their ethnic leaders. Because of these flaws in the power-dividing model which is built into mononational/integrative federations, multinational federations have been viewed as a more plausible and effective in dealing with ethnic conflicts.

### *Multinational/pluralist federation/federalism*

Multinational/pluralist federalism is understood as “the co-existence of multiple loyalties and identities and about shared and divided authority” (Simeon & Robinson 1995, p.368). The main aim of multinational federations “is to hold together political units of different language groups, religious communities, cultural groups or national components” (Gagnon 2001, p.323). Another aim of multinational/pluralist federations is “to express, institutionalise, and protect at least two

national or ethnic cultures, on a durable and often on a permanent basis” (McGarry and O’Leary 2007, p.10). Thus, Althusius (as quoted in Hueglin 1999) suggests, the essence of multinational federation is to recognise, respect and manage diversity. Similarly, Burgess and Gagnon (1993) see multinational federations as an instrument to manage diversity and accommodate, maintain and promote distinctive identities at the sub-national level.

In multinational federations, the borders of the internal units are usually demarcated in such a way that some of them are controlled by national or ethnic minorities to guarantee that each national/ethnic community is able to keep itself as a distinctive and self-governing society and culture (McGarry & O’Leary 2007). Thus, a multinational/pluralist federation is suited to deeply divided societies (O’Leary et al. 2005). It is based on the liberal logic of dividing power and organising competition for power as well as on the merits of power-sharing. It recognises more than one ethnic community. Thus, diverse ethnic communities are recognised as nations with the right to self-determination demonstrated in a government, other than the central government, representing the nation. This kind of federation can be called ethno-federalism which means a federal state in which at least one constituent territorial governance unit is intentionally associated with a specific ethnic category (Hale 2004).

A multinational/pluralist federation is decentralised: “the member-states have significant policy-making and legal powers and can resist encroachments by the federal branches of government” (O’Leary 2008, p.57). The federal judiciary is “cautious about interfering in the self-government of the member-states” (O’Leary 2008, p.57). For instance, for Robinson and Simeon (1995, p.366), “what makes Canada distinct is the highly decentralised character of its federal system”. The Canadian federation has developed over the years from originally a centralised state to a decentralised state. This change in the Canadian federation began with the provincial rights’

movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the political leaders of the provinces started to demand constitutional equality. Their main aim became to “resist and overcome a hierarchical version of Canadian federalism” (Russell 1993, p.37). The idea that “the provinces are not subordinate but coordinate with the federal government [soon became] the dominant conception of Canadian federalism” (Russell 1993, p.39).

Multinational/pluralist federations are prone to be what is termed “consociational” in federal executive, legislature and judiciary. There are four key mechanisms of consociationalism, namely, a grand coalition government (between parties from various segments of society); segmental autonomy; proportionality (in the voting system); and minority veto (Lijphart 1977). First, the grand coalition is when all the political leaders of different societal segments cooperate together to rule the country. The role of political elites is vital to consociational democracy as cooperation and consensus among the elites can successfully surmount the problems of traditional decision-making by the majority. Thus, the consociationalists prescribe an antidote to majority rule in multi-ethnic countries through the mode of consensus among various ethnic elites. Accordingly, Lijphart (1999, p.33) argues:

Majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy. What such regimes need is a democratic regime that emphasises consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximise the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with being a bare majority.

Lijphart (1968) believes that the elite need to have the ability to accommodate the divergent interests and demands of their ethnic communities; to transcend cleavage to create common interests; to commit to maintain and improve the political system and to have a prudent appreciation of the perils of fragmentation.

The second mechanism of consociationalism is segmental autonomy which means “rule by the minority over itself in the areas of the minority’s exclusive concerns” (Lijphart 1977, p. 41). This mechanism assigns power to the elite of each group in its own sphere of influence. The segmental autonomy or the territorial self-governance can, however, be seen as an incentive for ethnic secession, but such a contention lacks support as there is no empirical evidence of separatism being encouraged more by consociationalism than by a unitary polity (Lijphart 1977).

The consociationalists favour arrangements in which there are more than two or three self-governing entities within a state, arguing that this is conducive to state survival (Lijphart 1977). For instance, the Iraqi governorate of Kirkuk can choose to join the KRG if its people want. Governorates in other parts of Iraq are allowed to merge into constituting regions if there is democratic support for that (Wolff 2009). They can form federal regions through a vote within a governorate’s assembly and a plebiscite (Final Draft of Iraqi Constitution 2005). Furthermore, the consociationalists support the precept of asymmetric devolution of power, namely, the possibility of some self-governing regions enjoying more competences than others (McGarry 2007).

The third mechanism of consociationalism is proportionality meaning “all groups influence a decision in proportion to their numerical strength” (Streiner as quoted in Lijphart 1977, p.39). This mechanism involves the inclusion of representatives of all segments in the decision-making process. Fourth, a minority veto is necessary to avoid being outvoted by the majority against the political interests of the minority (Lijphart 1977). Hence, this mechanism is essential to safeguard these minority interests.

In multinational/pluralist federations, the federal bargain is understood as a compromise and a balance of interests. As such, multinational federalism is “a process of organising the plurality of interests in a co-operative and mutually agreeable way - on the basis of consent and solidarity” (Althusius as quoted in Hueglin 1999, p.11). The onus of multinational federalism is not on stability and order, but justice for minority communities. From this justice follows stability and order, secured through the recognition and management of diversity. Respecting and safeguarding diversity and encouraging them to flourish are vital to multinational federalism (Burgess & Gagnon 1993).

The multinational federation is attractive for minority communities because it is based on self-government and partnership which are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the latter is dependent on the former. The concept of partnership is fundamental to multinational federations as from partnership emerges the concept of equality between the tiers of government and not the subordination of one tier by another. There are two principles of partnership: subsidiary and non-subordination. The former ensures that only those matters that cannot be handled at the local level are given to the federal government. The latter guarantees that each tier of government is equal to another (Burgess & Gagnon 1993).

Belgium, Switzerland and Canada resemble the multinational/pluralist model. These countries are multilingual, multicultural and are defined as nations within a nation with competing values. The multinational/pluralist federation is regarded as being able to peacefully accommodate diverse interests and reduce conflict (Lijphart 1977; Gurr 2000). Countries like India and Nigeria demonstrate how the territorial devolution of power on the basis of ethnicity can provide a relatively stable political system. However, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia are two instances where the state's multinational federal structure did not prove to be stable but

possibly conflict-fuelling, leading ultimately to secession and complete state-breakup. Clearly, the multinational federation can be a double-edged sword because it may either enhance peace or lead to further ethnic conflict.

Some critics of multinational/pluralist federations claim that such federations are dangerous, being recipes for the break-up of states. Eight reasons have been put forward to explain why multinational/pluralist federations can be difficult to hold together and may be prone to secession. First, they are more likely to break down if they are forcibly put together such as was the case with the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (Deiwiks 2009). Federations need to be built as voluntary unions to prevent such break-ups. Second, the centralisers who threaten the foundation pact of federations can later endanger stability as component entities become concerned about attacks on their authorities (Deiwiks 2009). Third, the recognition of ethnicity may be seen as a prelude to secession. Thus, Deiwiks (2009) argues, the risk for secession might be relatively higher in multinational federal states because administrative boundaries tend to match with ethnic group boundaries creating “latent states” for groups. That may give reason and opportunity for ethnic groups to eventually fight for secession.

Fourth, the maltreatment of minorities, especially the territorially concentrated minorities, can be an incitement to break-up. Fifth, a multinational/pluralist federation will break down if severe disruptive conflicts arise over natural and fiscal resources, although they may survive if those conflicts are managed equitably (Deiwiks 2009). Sixth, the preconditions of a successful pluralist federation are not only domestic but also regional. Thus, Deiwiks (2009) argues, pluralist federations will do better if they do not have interventionist neighbours.

Seventh, regional autonomy arrangements short of complete breakup may “harden” ethnic identities because these identities can be forged, “politicised” and attached to the territory (Chapman and Roeder 2007). The propensity for secessionist conflict is thus increased (Sisk 1996). Eighth, the decentralisation that characterises multinational/pluralist federations may strengthen regional parties, which can increase the mobilisation capacity for secessionist agendas in the future (Brancati 2006). The existence of state institutions at the regional level provides ethnic groups with the resources to make secession feasible and even legitimate for the international community (Deiwiks 2009). Despite these criticisms, multinational federations are perceived as more desirable by ethnic/national minorities, especially those whose history is seen in terms of self-determination struggles. This is because multinational federations provide such minorities with a self-government arrangement, the recognition of their distinctive identity and, sometimes, the asymmetric devolution of power. This latter point raises the issue that federations in general can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical. The following two sections discuss these arrangements.

### *Symmetry*

Federal symmetry denotes “the uniformity among member states in the pattern of their relationships within a federal system” (Watts 2005, p.2). Thus, symmetry is about the regions of federations which are “equal in their relationships with the centre and each other” (McGarry 2007, p.105). For Tarlton (1965, p.867), symmetry can be defined as “the level of conformity and commonality in relations of each separate political unit of the system to both the system as a whole and to the other component units”. Hence, Tarlton (1965) believes that the more symmetrical a federation, the more harmonious and unified it will be.

Symmetry in federal arrangements is classified into four categories: “symmetrical autonomy based on majority-dominated regions”; “symmetrical autonomy based on partitioned minority regions”; “symmetrical autonomy based on nationalities and regions of the *Staatsvolk*”; and “symmetrical autonomy based on nations” (McGarry 2007). First, in the symmetrical autonomy based on majority-dominated regions, states are decentralised but demarcate, or re-demarcate, their internal borders in a way that their *Staatsvolk*<sup>4</sup> is a majority within each region. The internal borders of federations have intentionally been demarcated to achieve this result, such as in the case of the United States. The goal of such internal border construction is “nation-building, incorporating such nationalities<sup>5</sup> as exist into the dominant national identity” (McGarry 2007, p.106). This kind of symmetry has, nonetheless, been criticised because the minority can be dominated by particularly authoritarian regional majorities, as has happened to indigenous minorities in several regions of Brazil. In addition, it denies minorities from having any form of self-government (McGarry 2007).

Second, in the symmetrical autonomy based on partitioned minority regions a state can demarcate its internal borders in a way that a minority (or a nationality) and its homeland are “divided among various symmetrically autonomous regions even though members of the nationality may have majority status within some of these” (McGarry 2007, p.107). This kind of symmetry has been preferred by nation-builders. For instance, nation-builders in Nigeria responded to Biafra's civil war by dividing its large Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani regions into multiple smaller regions. The supporters of this kind of symmetry such as Wimmer (2003), and

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<sup>4</sup> *Staatsvolk* is a term used by O’Leary (2001) which means a nation that dominates the state and is a large majority within it.

<sup>5</sup> A nationality, as used by McGarry (2007), refers to a nation which is a minority within a state.

Dawisha & Dawisha (2003) hoped that such an arrangement would open up intra-ethnic partitions, encourage inter-ethnic alliances, and enable the construction of an identity grounded on the nation-state. There are cases where minorities are satisfied with such an arrangement, but mobilised minorities will generally avoid the idea of such divided autonomy, especially when they already enjoy autonomy within an unpartitioned homeland (McGarry 2007).

Third, the symmetrical autonomy based on nationalities and regions of the *Staatsvolk* includes collective autonomy for at least one nationality or minority within a federation. In this arrangement, the *Staatsvolk* is divided into several regions. This kind of symmetry approximates the situation in Russia and Spain (McGarry 2007). There is, however, a number of difficulties. One is that the degree of autonomy involved may fall considerably short of what mobilised nationalities or minorities aspire to. For instance, in Spain and Russia nationalities or minorities seek more autonomy than the state has been prepared to give (McGarry 2007). Another problem is that symmetrical autonomy does not address the aspiration of mobilised nationalities or minorities “for symbolic constitutional recognition of their national claims” (Kymlicka 1998, p.160). Nationalities are likely to recoil at such an institutional arrangement that puts their national homeland on a par with regional sub-components of the majority nation, even though this arrangement allows them to be collectively self-governing in their homeland. Hence, while the Spanish state aims to achieve uniformity, “Spain's stateless nations insist on their distinctiveness” (Keating 2001, p.114).

Fourth, symmetrical autonomy is based on nations and multinational federations of this kind are favoured by nationalities or minorities because they stress the equality of nations (McGarry 2007). In Canada, Quebec nationalists seek institutional arrangements that stress dualism between Quebec and English-Canada. Similarly, Turkish-Cypriots “have insisted on a bi-

communal bi-zonal federation in which they and Greek Cypriots are partners”(McGarry 2007, p.111). Such an apparently equitable arrangement, nevertheless, may face difficulties. One is that many states have a *Staatsvolk* and one or more smaller nationalities or minorities. The numerically dominant *Staatsvolk* may recoil from a symmetrical arrangement because its homeland has formal constitutional equality with those of the minority or minorities (McGarry 2007).

Another difficulty is that this kind of symmetry suggests not just separate nations but separate notions of the national homeland. *Staatsvolks* usually identify with the territory of the whole state rather than just the part of it. As a result, they may be unwilling to accept an institutional arrangement that relates them to just part of their homeland. For example, when Quebec nationalists propose a dualist institutional arrangement involving them and English-Canada, Canadian nationalists answer by saying that there is no such place as English-Canada and by asserting their loyalty to Canada as a whole. The last difficulty related to this institutional arrangement is that it is erroneous to presume all nations will want the same degree and kind of autonomy. This criticism proposes that symmetrical autonomy may work unproblematically only in states that are nationally homogeneous. In such states, there is little basis for one segment of the people to seek a degree of autonomy that is more extensive than others. By contrast, in multinational states minorities may demand more autonomy than the *Staatsvolk*, and perhaps recognition of their distinctive status. Thus, asymmetry can be more attractive to minorities in multinational states.

## *Asymmetry*

Asymmetry is about “differentiation in the degrees of autonomy and power among the constituent units” (Watts 2005, p.2) . It refers to the diversity among member states which is “articulated politically through component units possessing varying degrees of autonomy and power” (Tarlton 1965, p. 869). That is to say, it is the “extent to which component states do not share in the conditions and concerns common to the federal system as a whole” (Burgess 2006, p.213). Thus, asymmetry is about the regions of federations which “are unequal with each other and with the system as a whole” (McGarry 2007, p.105). Asymmetry occurs because “cultural, economic, social and political factors in combination have in all federations produced asymmetrical variations in the power and influence of different constituent units” (Watts as quoted in Funk 2010, p.8). Asymmetry is either an answer to a mobilised nationality’s demand for a distinctive degree of autonomy<sup>6</sup>, or “when an independent entity is granted special self-governing privileges in return for joining a state” (McGarry 2007, p.105). An example of this approach was the concessions made to the two Borneo states, Sabah and Sarawak, when they joined the Malaysian federation in 1963. As Watts (2005, p. 4) put it, “certain matters which elsewhere in the federation were matters of federal jurisdiction become matters of exclusive state or concurrent jurisdiction in these two states”.

Asymmetry can be either *de jure* or *de facto*. The former denotes to asymmetry “embedded in constitutional and legal processes, where constituent units are treated differently under the law” (Watts 1996, p.127). Hence Watts (1996, p.127) argues, “asymmetry that is constitutionally entrenched; it is the extent to which the constitution grants non-identical powers to regions”. *De*

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<sup>6</sup> A mobilised nationality is defined as a stateless or minority nation.

*jure* asymmetry officially recognises the differences among constituent units: territorial size, population, social and cultural character and economic situation (Watts 1996).

One kind of *de jure* asymmetry is the way a federation's constitution defines constituent units. It happens when "constituent unit boundaries are made along linguistic or cultural lines creating units of varying size and distinct populations" (Watts 1999, p.34). For instance, the Belgian federalisation of the period 1970-93 involved the delineation of asymmetrical constituent units: the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Regions and the Flemish, French and German Communities (Watts 2005). Another kind of *de jure* asymmetry can be exhibited in "constitutional provisions or in differential intergovernmental policies and formal agreements" (Watts 2005, p.2). For instance, federal asymmetry is embodied in Canada through using provision for different systems of law within particular constituent units. A typical example is Quebec's distinct civil law whereas the other nine Canadian provinces have legal systems grounded on common law (Watts 2005).

*De facto* asymmetry denotes "the actual practices or relationships arising from the impact of cultural, social and economic differences among constituent units within a federation" (Watts 2005, p.2). That is to say, constituent units may work differently or have different degrees of power within a federation because of factors such as population, territorial size, economic character and cultural or social variances. A *de facto* asymmetry may occur in several situations. First, when a federal constitution has no bill of fundamental rights, certain constituent units may decide to set up their own bill of rights (Funk 2010). Relying on how much *de jure* asymmetry is granted by the federal constitution on constituent unit constitutions, units may have a certain amount of freedom to write their constitutions to their own liking. For instance, if the federal

constitution does not stipulate otherwise, a constituent unit may have the chance to select its own executive structure or electoral system.

Second, *de facto* asymmetry occurs when there is fiscal autonomy which is closely related to the population size of a constituent unit. For example, a larger prosperous unit may have the resources and political influence to be able to keep a degree of relative autonomy in the federation (Burgess 2006). With more resources its capability to exercise constitutionally allocated powers is increased and it might come to rely little on federal transfers (Watts 1996). Third, *de facto* asymmetry also happens when the constituent unit may not be equally represented in the federal institutions such as the federal second legislative chamber.

Multinational federations are *de facto* highly asymmetric as one or more constituent unit will be national-based with the majority of its population consisting of a national minority (Funk 2010). This produces cultural and linguistic asymmetry between the constituent units. To safeguard its culture, language and other customs in a federation ruled by the national majority, a national minority may demand constitutional recognition of its distinctive identity or may seek an increase in autonomy. For this reason, asymmetrical federalism has been criticised for strengthening the possibility of secession as there is recognition of the minorities' peoplehood, which marks the specified region as a place apart, and may encourage secessionism. Thus, Papillon (2008, p.131) sees asymmetrical federalism:

As yet another element reinforcing the minority's identity to the detriment of the principle of shared citizenship thus weakening the ties between the majority and the minority groups...[Such asymmetry can be] considered as a "slippery slope" towards an eventual fragmentation of the polity.

From this perspective, asymmetry acts to highlight and deepen the already existing divisions leading to an ultimate break-up of the federal state. Similarly, Kymlicka (2005, p.286) suggests

that asymmetrical federalism “only serves to entrench difference, solidifying division and encouraging secession”. As Kymlicka (2005, p.286) describes,

The very success of federalism in accommodating self-government may simply encourage national minorities to seek secessions...where national minorities become politically mobilised..., secession becomes more feasible, even with the best-designed federal institutions.

Granting more autonomy to national minorities does not necessarily bring stability because asymmetry suggests terms like difference, imbalance and inequality (Funk 2010). In addition, asymmetry proposes that the region's government has “a special responsibility for its people”, not shared by other regional governments, and that “the state's central or federal government has less responsibility for this region's people than it has for the rest of its citizens” (McGarry 2007, p.113). Other scholars such as Tarlton (1965, p.874) have concerns related to the granting of too much asymmetry to specific national minorities. Thus, Tarlton (1965, p.874) argues that that a central authority is essential for achieving unity in the presence of highly diverse components, but too much asymmetry without centralisation would generate great “secession potential”. There have been cases in which asymmetries were major contributing factors in the disintegration of federations. Such cases occurred in the West Indies (1962), Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1963), Yugoslavia (1991), the USSR (1991), Pakistan (1971) and Czechoslovakia (1992), and the expulsion of Singapore from the Malaysian Federation (1965) (Watts 2005).

Despite the examples of failures of these asymmetries, asymmetry has advantages. First, some federations have realised that in their specific circumstances, the only way to accommodate differential forces for autonomy and to preserve the federation has been to incorporate some permanent constitutional or political (*de facto*) asymmetry in the relationship of the constituent

units to the polity (Watts 2005). Such cases have been India, Malaysia, Belgium and Canada. Hence, asymmetry can be necessary for the survival of a federation where deep diversity exists. Second, asymmetry is seen as an instrument to effectively recognise and accommodate difference so as to increase the stability of a federation (Burgess & Gress 1999). Thus, Burgess and Gress (1999, p. 54) suggest that asymmetrical federalism is not a secession generating device but rather a tool for “accommodating difference in a way which adds to the overall political stability of federations”. Otherwise, if symmetry is imposed on the federation, national minorities whose demands for recognition or more autonomy are being denied may seek to secede (Watts 2005, p.6). Hence, the conferring of distinctive powers on some ethnic/national minorities may cause greater social and political peace (Auclair 2005). These minorities may also seek “a role in federal foreign policy, or to be directly represented in international organisations” (McGarry & O’Leary 2007, p.11). The following section discusses the involvement of regional governments/constituent units of federations in international relations.

### *Paradiplomacy*

In the process of resolving ethnic conflicts and consolidating federal arrangements, ethnic groups or subnational governments often seek a presence beyond the borders of the states in which they are located. This has led to the practice of “paradiplomacy” which can be defined as the “foreign policy capacity of sub-state entities, their participation, independent of their metropolitan state, in the international arena in pursuit of their own specific international interests” (Wolff 2007, p.1). It can be said that these sub-state entities are new actors, which constitute the “third world” of international politics (as distinct from state and non-state actors) and represent a new trend in international relations.

The orthodox viewpoint of the relationship between two sovereign nation-states is that diplomats for the national governments serve as “the primary interface, with politicians showing up to close deals and shake hands in front of the cameras” (Mingus 2006, p.578). However, this view has dramatically changed with the rise of subnational governments. These governments are nowadays negotiating, signing international accords, developing representation overseas, conducting trade missions, seeking foreign investment and entering into bilateral and multilateral relations with states or other subnational territories (Lecours 2002). There are imperatives which push federal regions to international politics such as free-trade agreements. The development of free-trade agreements has made federal regions *de facto* and legitimate units in the global economy (Lecours 2002).

Scholars are questioning whether national sovereignty has diminished or democracy has been accrued through the subnational units’ participation in the international arena (Forrest 2003). In this regard, Lecours (2002) answers this question by arguing that the participation of regional government may cause state sovereignty to diminish. Thus, he contends, it is not favourable for subnational governments to have an international presence. Such involvement is viewed as generating a “crack” in the international order which formerly prevented regional governments from acquiring international presence (Lecours 2002).

There are others who see positive results deriving from paradiplomacy. Wolff (2007) believes that the participation of subnational governments in international relations does not pose any menace to states’ sovereignty, but rather helps resolve self-determination conflicts. The involvement of federal entities in the international arena is “a function of the competences that they acquire through a specific [federal] arrangement and need to be treated as a logical extension thereof in order to make the overall conflict settlement viable and attractive” (Wolff

2007, p.12). Denying a federal entity's participation in the international arena may actually undercut the federal polity and may hence "endanger the conflict settlement" (Wolff 2007, p.11).

Others have pointed to the specialised, especially economic, nature of paradiplomacy. Hocking (1993) suggests that the participation of federal regions in international relations does not threaten state sovereignty because the international interests of federal governments have a more restricted-scope and are more economic-orientated than those of national governments. For this reason, subnational governments are counted as second-order actors in the international sphere. Such a view is substantiated by other scholars. For example, Wolff (2007) believes that federal regions do not get involved in orthodox foreign policy but possess restricted capacities for pursuing policies in the international arena.

Federal regions take part in the international arena in domains where they possess "substantive policy competence" or interest (Wolff 2007). This includes both policy areas that are important for maintaining and articulating an ethnic group's identity, and also areas within the general limits of territorial governments, such as economy, environment and social policy. For instance, the Belgian region of Wallonia has developed an international presence through offices and centres overseas (Wolff 2007). Three governmental organisations have been established to explain and supervise Wallonia's foreign policy: a department of international relations which runs the region's foreign relations; an export agency in order to facilitate trade opportunities abroad; and an office of foreign investors.

The division of power in the Belgian federal system tends to leave some matters that can be the subject of international negotiation to regional governments, such as economy and culture (Wolff 2007). Hence the constitutional recognition for Wallonia in the areas of international affairs

greatly facilitates its access to the international sphere, and enables its government to negotiate and sign agreements with foreign governments. It can be said that Wallonia is state-like in the sense it is empowered to act in different areas involving foreign affairs.

To sum up, the idea of paradiplomacy is the attempt by federal regions to promote their development as well as secure international recognition. The participation of these regions in the international arena can be viewed negatively by their national governments. Such participation is usually restricted in its scope and nature, but it can contribute to ethnic conflict resolution. This is because the international presence of these federal entities indicates that their ethnic region and identity is internationally and nationally recognised. Hence, paradiplomacy can contribute to the management and resolution of protracted self-determination conflicts.

## **Federacy**

Federacy is an ethnic conflict resolution arrangements. Federacy is a “response to the problems of “holding together” a unitary state while also responding to the claims of the minority nation principle within that state” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.255). A unitary state may have a territorially concentrated minority that does not identify with the history and culture of the unitary state. Its different identity may spring from: “a previous self-governing tradition it wants to restore or expand; linguistic or religious difference; or a history of warfare with or coercive repression by the unitary state within which it is located” (Stepan, et al. 2010, p.203). A territorially concentrated minority may not be satisfied with the status quo. Thus, they may demand more autonomy and self-governing arrangements that recognise their culture and assist in its developments. Sometimes they may demand an independent state.

Seceding from the unitary state of the territorially concentrated minority is unlikely at least for the predictable future due to one or more of the following factors (Stepan et al. 2010, p.204): strong attitudes in the unitary state opposing such secession and the military capability to support such policy preferences; geopolitical opposition by many adjacent states to the establishment of a new small and perhaps weak independent state in the region; and “divided sentiments in the minority population about the political and financial costs of independence”. If secession is not feasible, then an alternative should be found to satisfy both the ethnic majority who do not want to depart from what they view as a well-functioning unitary state and ethnic minority who want to obtain their political, economic and cultural rights. Thus, federacy has emerged to be a potentially effective instrument to satisfy both states who fear territorial break-up and ethnic minorities that fear political assimilation into a territory with an ethnic majority. Federacy can be defined as follows (O’Leary 2003, p.20):

[A] federal arrangement that is not part of a system-wide federation . . . it creates a division of powers between the federacy and the central government that is constitutionally entrenched, that cannot be unilaterally altered by either side, and which has arbitration mechanisms, domestic and international, to deal with difficulties that might arise from or between the federacy and the central government.

Or as Stepan defines it (2010, p.204):

A political administrative unit in an independent unitary state with exclusive power in certain areas including some legislative power constitutionally or quasi-constitutionally embedded that cannot be changed unilaterally and whose inhabitants have full citizenship rights in the otherwise unitary state.

Federacy is, accordingly, “not a part, or, better, not an identical part of the systemwide federation; it creates a semi-sovereign territory different in its institutions and constitutional competencies from the rest of the state” (O’Leary 2005b, p.79). The division of powers between the federacy and the unitary government is (quasi) constitutionally ingrained, cannot be unilaterally changed by either the unitary state or the federacy, and has established adjudication

mechanisms, domestic or international, to deal with difficulties that might occur between the federacy and the unitary government. Federacies usually exist in unitary states. Occasionally, nevertheless, they also exist in federal states.

From these definitions, federacy has many characteristics which distinguish it from other political arrangements. First, the territorially concentrated ethnic minority would have a constitutionally or quasi constitutionally entrenched “degree of political autonomy well beyond that found in any other part of the unitary state” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.205). The legislatures of the unitary state and the newly established federacy would both approve the new autonomy arrangements with a proviso that the act of federacy agreement would not be unilaterally changed without significant supermajorities on both sides. Thus, Stepan et al (2010, p.206) believed that “legally, politically and often internationally federacy arrangements would be much more binding on the central government of the unitary state than devolution or decentralisation” as the latter two arrangements might be unilaterally altered by parliamentary majorities.

The second characteristic of federacy is that in such an arrangement, “explicit powers fall in the exclusive domain of the federacy; powers remain in the domain of the centre; and powers that might be shared or even remain with the centre but that can be progressively transferred permanently to the federacy” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.205). Powers in the exclusive domain of the federacy are the essential culture-making and culture-reserving powers such as the right to establish the ethnic minority language as an official language of the federacy (Stepan, Linz et al. 2010). Thus, federacy has a variety of privileges not found in any other part of the unitary state, such as the legal right to establish a restrictive immigration policy in the federacy and to disallow the citizens of the unitary state who are not also citizens of the federacy from purchasing land or

setting up commercial enterprises. The federacy also has the right to establish its rules administering the federacy's legislature and executive and have far-reaching control over local development policies (Stepan et al. 2010).

Other powers such as foreign affairs, defence and finances would generally be within the sphere of the centre. While federacies do not have foreign relations powers like states, many federacies such as Tatarstan and the Marshall Islands, do have official representatives in other countries that deal mostly with economic issues related to their territories. Some federacies also are members of international organisations such as Greenland is a member of the Nordic Council.

The third characteristic of federacy is the presence of conflict resolution measures. The federacy and the state as part of the agreement would have conflict resolution measures about their respective powers and rights such as the state's highest court, and "this court would be able to make binding decisions for the entire polity only as long as it does not in any way violate the constitutionally embedded autonomy agreement" (Stepan et al. 2010, p.206). Sometimes international adjudicators, as part of the federacy agreement, are involved in resolving the disputes between the unitary state and the federacy. For instance, the International Court of Justice adjudicates any disputes related to the powers and the rights of South Tyrol if these disputes occur between the federacy and Italy (Anderson & Stansfield 2010). The case of South Tyrol demonstrates the value of "hard international guarantees" in protecting and organising federacy arrangements in case of ethnic conflict. This is of great importance to the weaker party, which "may legitimately question the future integrity of the stronger party's commitment to abide by the terms of an established arrangement" (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.231). In

addition, Wolff (2008, p.346) suggests, “such guarantees are also useful for states in that they commit all parties to an agreed structure”.

The fourth characteristic of federacy is the mutual representation between the unitary state and the federacy. The citizens of the autonomous unit have “representatives in the parliament of the state, and the centre would have an official representative in the federacy who would also help coordinate those activities in the federacy that fall under central state powers” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.206) .

The fifth characteristic of the federacy is that it is “part of an internationally recognised independent state” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.206). The federacy agreement would be an internal law of the unitary state, but such an agreement might be derived from international treaties. These treaties attempt to further engrain federacy powers. Thus, O’Leary (2003) suggests that the status and powers of a federacy should be “internationally protected in a treaty”. In addition, the role of international patrons in the federacy agreement is regarded as a facilitating factor in conflict resolution. Neighbouring states and international organisations can, thus, be involved in the establishment of federacy arrangement (Stepan et al. 2010).

The successful cases of federacy include the Aland Islands (Finland) and Greenland (Denmark). Aland is viewed by many scholars as one of the viable examples of federacy (Jakobson 2005; Anderson and Stansfield 2010; Stepan et al. 2010). For more than 90 years the Aland Islands have enjoyed a peaceful, democratic and thriving life in the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Finland (Jakobson 2005). The Aland Islands are home to “a group of ethnically Swedish [people] and ... have a strong local identity that sets them apart from the mainland Finnish identity”

(Jakobson 2005, p.29). In 1917, over 90% of the Alanders voted to split from Finland and reintegrate into Sweden (Anderson & Stansfield 2010). The islands were the root of a contentious sovereignty dispute between Sweden and Finland that was eventually resolved under the auspices of the League of Nations in the Aland agreement of 1921 between Finland and Sweden. The outcome was to place the Aland Islands formally under Finnish sovereignty but with the restrictions of a federacy arrangement on the Finnish unitary state. Many “self-determination of peoples” precepts were incorporated into the Aland agreement of 1921 (Stepan et al. 2010). In 1922, a separate Aland Guarantee Act integrated the agreement into the Finnish legal system, stipulating broad provisions safeguarding Alanders’ rights concerning language, provincial citizenship, and land ownership.

Experts have different opinions on the issue of whether the agreement of 1921 between Finland and Sweden reached the level of a binding international treaty. There is, however, a broad consensus “that the international status of Aland has won general recognition within the international community”, and that Aland’s federacy is “deeply rooted in international customary law” (Hannikainen 1997, p.78). During negotiations over Finland’s accession to the EU, for example, the Finnish government denoted the “internationally recognised status” of Aland’s federacy and demanded that the terms of the Accession Treaty not be applied to the islands without the approval of the islanders in a referendum. Thus, the EU’s “common position” on the issue recognised the “special status that the Aland Islands enjoy under international law”, and agreed that the terms of the treaty would not apply without the approval of the islands’ population (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.231). Both Finland and the Aland Islands voted for accession to the EU in 1995.

Aland's consent is required to enter any organisation or sign an agreement which is one of the privileges that the federacy enjoys. Other privileges are that Aland has its flag, its postal stamps, and Alanders holding the separate Aland regional citizenship have Finnish/EU passports marked with the word "Aland" (Jakobson 2005). In addition, it has its parliament, legislation, and tax laws. Although Finland is responsible for Aland's foreign affairs, the Aland Islands are represented "separately in the Nordic Council, a forum for interparliamentary cooperation among Nordic countries" (Jakobson 2005, p.29).

To sum up, federacy is an instrument to protect rights and powers for ethnic minorities who are seeking self-determination when secession or full assimilation is not possible. In such an arrangement, the minorities enjoy political, economic and cultural privileges that other parts of the unitary state do not have. Sometimes, the federacy attains international recognition especially when the federacy agreement is concluded between countries and with the involvement of international organisations/actors.

## **Conclusion**

This research uses certain concepts and theories discussed in this chapter in order to test their relevance and explanatory power in relation to the Kurdish perceptions of ethnicity, nationhood, self-determination, federalism and secession presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. There is a variety of theories that explain ethnicity in terms of culture, power, boundary, class conflict and kinship. As ethnicity is a complicated term, is Kurdish identity perceived as ethnic? If so, is Kurdish ethnic identity understood, for instance, in terms of power or culture and/or all aforementioned categories? If Kurdish identity is not ethnic, are Kurds perceived as a nation

rather than an ethnic group? If so, which theory explains the perceived Kurdish nationhood best? To answer these questions, the theories of ethnicity and nationhood will be tested against the research participants' perceptions of Kurdish identity to ascertain which theories have more explanatory power for understanding Kurdish identity.

The literature review has delineated different factors that lead to ethnic conflict. It has set the scene for enquiry into which factors have caused Kurds to resort to self-determination struggle in Iraq? And are Kurds perceived to be entitled to such a right? If so, the right to self-determination has two dimensions, internal and external. Which approach is perceived to be more feasible and plausible to address the Kurdish issue in Iraq? If the internal self-determination approach is viewed to be the best way to resolve this issue, then which type of federation is seen as a sustainable solution for Kurds in Iraq? The literature has elucidated two kinds of federations: mononational/integrative and multinational/pluralist. These federations will be tested against the research data to ascertain which feasible and sustainable federalism will most likely meet the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds' demands.

If the external self-determination settlement is seen by Kurds as more feasible than the internal one, then what are the perceived reasons for the Kurds of Iraq to be entitled to independence? Finally, ethnic groups may not only demand statehood or federalism, but also involvement in international relations. Such an involvement is viewed as an attractive element of ethnic conflict settlement. The question is whether or not Iraqi Kurdistan enjoys paradiplomacy? Does the Iraqi constitution of 2005 confer this foreign policy capacity on Kurds? All these questions will be addressed and analysed in Chapter Five, Six, Seven and Eight.

## **Chapter Four: Iraqi Kurdistan from 1918 to 2009**

### **Introduction**

In order to understand the present-day political dynamics of Iraqi Kurdistan it is necessary to contextualise them historically. Thus, this chapter presents the historical background of Iraqi Kurdistan from 1918 to 2009, paying particular attention to why the Kurds of Iraq fought for the right to self-determination and failed to achieve the political goals of their revolts during this time. The periodic Kurdish revolts in Iraq and their consequences are presented in chronological order. Hence this chapter is divided into eight sections, namely, Iraqi Kurdistan profile; the British occupation in 1918 and Sheikh Mahmud's Revolt; the Sevres Treaty 1920 and the Mosul Problem; the Kurds and the Republican Regime 1958-1968; the Kurds and the Ba'ath regime 1968-1990; the Gulf War and the Kurdistan Regional Government 1990-2003; Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Kurds 2003-2009; the US policy towards the Kurds in post Saddam Iraq; and the Turkish policy towards the Iraqi Kurds.

The reason for choosing 1918 as a starting point to delineate the Kurdish modern history is that Southern Kurdistan (now Iraqi Kurdistan) was occupied by the British army and incorporated into Iraq later. The rationale behind selecting 2009 as the cut-off point for discussing the Iraqi Kurdish political history is the emergence of the Kurdish opposition party that has altered the Kurdish political dynamics in the region. Before delineating the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movements, a brief profile of Iraqi Kurdistan is presented.

## Iraqi Kurdistan Profile

Kurdistan literally means the land of Kurds. It can be described as a geo-cultural region in which Kurds comprise a prominent majority population, and where Kurdish culture, language, and national identity have historically been centred. The Kurds are ethnically Aryan and claim descent from the Medes (Elis 2004; Natali 2005). Thus, Kurds have ethnically been easily distinguished from their neighbours. They are identified as one of the largest stateless nations in the world as there are between 25 and 40 million Kurds living in Greater Kurdistan, depending on the reliability of the source (McDowall 2004).

Greater Kurdistan mainly covers south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and northern Syria (see Figure 4.1). It also covers small portions of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Greater Kurdistan was never a state by itself, and most times it was divided between two or more adjacent states (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008).

**Figure 4.1: Map showing Greater Kurdistan**



**Source:** Kurdistan Regional Government website: [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org)

Greater Kurdistan covers 392,000 km<sup>2</sup> in total and in Iraq it covers 65,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Meho 1997). Iraqi Kurdistan is located in the South of Greater Kurdistan. Thus, it is called Southern Kurdistan by Kurds. The Iraqi Kurds speak Kurdish which is an Indo-European language, and their dialects are akin to Persian (Jwaideh 2006). These dialects are Sorani and Bahdinani. There are no accurate figures for the number of Kurds living in Iraq because previous Iraqi political systems downplayed their numbers (Aziz 2011). According to Muller and Linzey (2007) there are more than 4 million Kurds in Iraq. The Kurds are thought to comprise at least one-fifth of the Iraqi population (Bengio 2005). The majority of Kurds are Sunnis, and the rest of them are Christians, Jewish and Yezidis (Zoroastrian). Before the introduction of Islam, Kurds were Zoroastrians. There are small ethnic minorities which coexist with Kurds such as Assyrians and Turkmen in Southern Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan is a federally<sup>7</sup> recognised, political, ethnic and economic region of Iraq. It borders Iran to the east, Turkey to the north, and Syria to the west and the rest of Iraq to the South. Its capital is the city of Erbil, known in Kurdish as Hewler. Iraqi Kurdistan exercises executive, legislative and judicial authority in accordance with article 121 of the Iraqi constitution of 2005. It is responsible for all the administrative requirements of the region including service delivery. In addition, it has established its own diplomatic offices abroad in accordance with Article 121 (4) of the Iraqi constitution 2005. Iraqi Kurdistan has a president and a prime minister who are Masud Barzani and Barham Salih respectively.

There are three cities in Iraqi Kurdistan (see Figure 4.2). The first city is Erbil which is controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The second one is Sulaymaniyah which is

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<sup>7</sup> Article 117 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution delineates Iraqi Kurdistan as a federal region although federalism has not been implemented in Iraq yet.

controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The third city is Dohok, close to Turkey, controlled by the KDP. In addition, the PUK controls small towns close to Kirkuk city. The PUK and KDP are the ruling parties in this region. The recent elections in 2009 have, however, led to the emergence of a new opposition party bloc headed by *Goran* (Change) party.

**Figure 4.2: Map of Iraqi Kurdistan**



**Source:** Kurdistan Regional Government website: [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org)

The economy of the Kurdistan region is dominated by the oil sector, agriculture and tourism. Since the foundation of the kingdom of Iraq in 1921 until 1990s, the Kurds never controlled their economy as it was always under the Baghdad government's hegemony (Aziz 2011). It can be said that before the 1990s Iraqi governments' policies towards the Kurdish region were to marginalise the economy and deliberately neglect its infrastructure.

In the 1990s, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) received 13% of the oil revenues from the oil-for-food programme under the UN Security Council resolution 986. This resolution was aimed to provide some sort of humanitarian relief for civilians when sanctions on Iraq were first imposed (Teglund 2007). Since the downfall of the Ba'athist regime, the KRG has been receiving 17% of Iraq's oil export revenues, which constitutes 97% of its budget (UNDP 2009). The KRG depends almost entirely on oil revenues distributed by Baghdad to cover its expenses

(Pollock 2008). The KRG relies on a month to month cash flow, and until the cash is received from Baghdad in hand, officials in the region do not get paid (Pollock 2008).

The three Kurdish cities under the KRGs control are the only ones in Iraq ranked “secure” by the US military. The relative security and stability of the Kurdistan region has allowed it to achieve a higher level of development than other regions in Iraq. In 2004, “the Kurdish per capita income was 25 per cent higher than in the rest of Iraq” (Aziz 2011, p.13). Iraqi Kurdistan is rich in oil. In 2006, the first new oil well was drilled in the Kurdistan region by the company Det Norske Oljeselskap International. It is estimated that the oil field contains at least 100 million barrels of oil and can be expected to regularly pump 5000 barrels per day (Aziz 2011). The KRG has recently signed exploration agreements with two other oil companies, namely, Canada’s Western Oil Sands and the UK’s Sterling Energy. The prospects for economic development in Iraqi Kurdistan are relatively good compared with the rest of Iraq (Aziz 2011).

### **The British Occupation in 1918 and Sheikh Mahmud’s Revolt**

In 1918, the British occupied the *vilayet*<sup>8</sup> of Mosul, populated by a very clear majority of Kurds. During this period the British promised to confer autonomy and independence on the Kurds as in November 1918 the British and French declared their shared goal of the liberation of the Kurds, “who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks” (as quoted in McDowall 1996, p.153). The opinion of the British administration on the most appropriate future status of Kurdistan was, nonetheless, divided into two camps. Sir Percy Cox (the High Commissioner) with Miss Gertrude Bell (the British Oriental Secretary) believed that Southern Kurdistan should be annexed to Iraq. The second camp, comprised of Major E. Noel and Major B. Young, suggested

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<sup>8</sup> *Vilayet* means province in Turkish. The province of Mosul included Iraqi Kurdistan and the Mosul governorate.

the creation of a Kurdish state covering all the areas above a line from Mosul to south of Khanaqin<sup>9</sup> (Korn 2007). The British India Office suggested that it was ineffective to limit the Kurds to a single state because of geographical difficulties as Kurds inhabit four countries (O'Shea 2004).

Despite these differences the British were generally sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations, and wanted to establish one or more autonomous Kurdish provinces within Mesopotamia which consisted of Baghdad and Basrah provinces (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The British authorities in Mesopotamia decided to forge relations with the main Kurdish chieftains in the region, and delegated substantial powers to some of them. The most significant of them was Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji, the head of the most powerful family of religious leaders in Southern Kurdistan. He was appointed governor of the Sulaymaniyah region in 1918 (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The British authorities encouraged Sheikh Mahmud to run a Kurdish government and “hoped to use his unique societal status to legitimise their rule” (Chorev 2007, p.26). But, Meiselas and van Bruinessen (2008, p.64) suggest that Sheikh Mahmud “nonetheless, had a different conception of the nature of his office than the British high commissioner in Baghdad had, and he set up his own, traditional style administration”.

Sheikh Mahmud's ambition was far greater than what was offered by the British (Bengio 2005). He asked the British to form a Kurdish state to cover Southern Kurdistan and some parts of Northern Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Turkey), under the British mandate. The British policy of undermining the Kurdish fledgling government left no choice to Sheikh Mahmud but to revolt (Eskander 2000). What led Britain to undermine this government in Southern Kurdistan was its

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<sup>9</sup> Khanaqin is a small town populated by a Kurdish majority and is one of the territorially disputed areas between Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

“vested interests in this oil-rich region”, and so Britain put all its weight behind the annexation of the Kurdish region to Iraq (Bengio 2005, p.173).

By early 1919, Sheikh Mahmud had declared himself the “king” of all of Kurdistan and undertook armed resistance when the British decided to curtail his power (Jwaideh 2006). Hence, the Sheikh was declared a rebel by the British. In April 1919, Sheikh Mahmud ordered his forces to deport the British representatives in Sulaymaniyah and surrounding areas. When Sheikh Mahmud’s forces assumed control of Sulaymaniyah city on 20 April 1919, they lowered the British flag and raised the Kurdistan flag<sup>10</sup> as that of the first Kurdish government (Jwaideh 2006). Despite the tribal character of Sheikh Mahmud’s revolt, he paid particular attention to the media, and he sought the advice of many Kurdish intellectuals. The intellectuals were actively involved in producing publications. They published four newspapers, *Bangi Kurdistan* (the Proclamation of Kurdistan), *Roji Kurdistan* (the Sun of Kurdistan), *Bangi Haq* (the Proclamation of Justice) and *Umedi Istiqlal* (the Hope of Independence) (Kirmanj 2010). These newspapers played a significant role in the construction of Kurdish nationhood. Thus, Kirmanj (2010, p.51) believes that these newspapers “have had a significant impact on the ideas and attitudes of Kurds to this day”.

When the British forces reorganised they launched a counter attack and defeated Sheikh Mahmud’s forces. On 9 June 1919, Sheikh Mahmud was captured and charged with armed rebellion, bloodshed, lowering the British flag and raising the Kurdistan flag. Consequently, he was exiled to India in mid-1919 (McDowall 1996).

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<sup>10</sup> The Islamic crescent in the Kurdistan flag raised by Sheikh Mahmud shows the religious orientation of his revolt rather than the nationalist one.

The Sheikh's revolt was seen as "fragmented due to the tribal and religious leadership on the one hand, and the underdeveloped rural structure of Kurdish society on the other" (Aziz 2011, p.62). The Kurdish society was typically peasant and tribal: the Kurds pledged their allegiance to their tribes rather than to their nation as a whole (Jwaideh 2006). Each Kurdish tribe had a rich chieftain who had authority over his tribe's members, and there were rivalries among tribes to wield power at the expense of others. Hence, the Kurdish society was fragmented along tribal lines, and it lacked a sense of nationalism. Hence, Sheikh Mahmud's revolt was not an exercise of Kurdish nationalism, but could be interpreted as "a tool to advance his own interests" (Chorev 2007, p.26). McDowall (1996, p.156) also suggested that the Sheikh's motives were based on self-interest:

He used the British subsidy, provided for salaries and to assist recovery from the ravages of war, in order to consolidate his power base, buying the loyalty of chieftains and, to fill every post with his own relations regardless of their character or capability, and to exclude all whom he did not consider personal adherents.

On the motives of Sheikh Mahmud, Arnold Wilson, the civil commissioner for Iraq, observed (as quoted in McDowall 1996, p.158):

It is tempting retrospectively to clothe *Sheikh* Mahmud in the garb of modern nationalist ideas...it is significant that *Sheikh* Mahmud did not waste his time appealing to nationalist sentiment. He was a *sayyid*<sup>11</sup> and the language his constituency understood was the language of Islam. In 1919 he appealed for a *jihad* not a national liberation struggle. Furthermore his style was to use kin and tribal allies and his aim was the establishment of a personal fiefdom. *Sheikh* Mahmud offered Kurds liberation from British rule but not from himself.

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<sup>11</sup> As an honorific title, *sayyid* denotes males accepted as descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad through his grandsons, Hasan ibn Ali and Husain ibn Ali, sons of the prophet's daughter Fatima Zahra and his son-in-law Ali Ibn Abi Talib.

In addition, Chorev (2007) suggests that the power of the sheikhs stemmed not only from their charismatic talents but also from their personal wealth and the regional land base, secured under the 1858 Ottoman Land Code. While Sheikh Mahmud expressed his demands in terms of legitimacy and protection for the Kurdish nation, he was frequently concerned with securing or preserving the legitimacy and protection of his own regional power base (Chorev 2007).

It became obvious that the idea of an independent Southern Kurdistan would face challenges, “owing to the underdeveloped state of the country... and the dissension of the tribes” (Wilson as quoted in McDowall 1996, p.153). Arnold Wilson, the civil commissioner for Iraq, informed London that 75% of the population of Iraq was tribal, “with no previous tradition of obedience to any government” (as quoted in Fromkin 2001, p.450). By 1919, the British began to retreat from their aspiration for an independent southern Kurdish state. As Major E.M. Noel noted, “it is difficult to construct such a state when societal solidarity was still primarily clannish rather than nationalist” (as quoted in McDowall 1996, p.164).

### **Sevres Treaty of 1920 and the Mosul Problem**

In 1920, Great Britain was recognised as the mandate power over Iraq by the League of Nations. At the time, the victors of the First World War signed a treaty with the Ottoman Sultanate, known as the Treaty of Sevres. Articles 62, 63 and 64 of the Treaty were designed specifically to address the Kurdish issue in both Iraq and Turkey (for more detail, please see Appendix 1). Article 64 specified that if a majority of the population of the Kurds, residing in “areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may hereafter be determined and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia”, wanted independence from Turkey and if the League of Nations considered that these peoples were capable of such independence, it should be granted to them (Aziz 2011, p.165). Article 64 further specified that if

an independent Kurdish state were to materialise, the principal Allied powers should facilitate the voluntary unification of the Mosul province with the proposed Kurdish state.

But there were significant political changes in Turkey where “the humiliating conditions of the 1920 treaty combined with continued encroachments on Turkish sovereignty after the war, led to Ataturk’s overthrowing the Turkish administration that signed the treaty” (Aziz 2011, p.61). In 1922, the newly established Grand National Assembly abolished the Ottoman Sultanate and established the modern Turkish republic (McDowall 1996). The conception of an independent Kurdistan stipulated in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres became impractical as the Kemalist<sup>12</sup> movement in Anatolia gained strength. Thus, Meiselas and van Bruinessen (2008, p.64) have suggested that “the Kemalists’ aim was to keep all Turkish and Kurdish inhabited territory together including the parts that were under British control”.

Karsh (2003) has suggested that the Kurds were cheated by political dealings among powerful countries as the Treaty of Sevres was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne signed between Turkey and the victorious Allies in 1923. In this treaty, the republic of Turkey was recognised and the notion of establishing a Kurdish national state was abandoned (O’Shea 2004). Hence “the question of Kurdish autonomy was no longer an agenda item” (McDowall 1996, p.142). As Meiselas and van Bruinessen (2008, p.64) have noted, “only the former province of Mosul, i.e., southern Kurdistan, remained contested but it was agreed upon that the League of Nations would, after consulting the population, determine its future status”.

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<sup>12</sup> Kemalist ideology is the principle that defines the basic characteristics of the Republic of Turkey. It was developed by the Turkish national movement and its leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

In 1921 the Iraqi state was established. The British mandate believed monarchy to be a more appropriate form of government for Iraq than a republic, but could not find a local person to their liking to become king (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). Thus, the British authorities invited Amir Faisal from Syria and crowned him King of Iraq<sup>13</sup>. It can be said that the British government imposed a foreign Sunni<sup>14</sup> ruler, Faisal, on a predominantly Shiite<sup>15</sup> population in Iraq (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). Hence, the Iraqi government was dominated by Sunni Muslim Arabs who comprised a minority in the country. The British introduced the politics of ethnicity in Iraq by heightening ethnic and religious differences through elevating Sunni Arabs to high positions of power in the government. Such preferential treatment given to Sunni Arabs antagonised the Kurds and Shiites (Natali 2005).

From 1918-1923, the British government did not have a well-defined policy towards Southern Kurdistan, leaving its fate to British civil and military officials on the ground (Eskander 2000). This has led many observers to identify British policy in Southern Kurdistan as being ambiguous and amorphous. For example, Aziz (2011, p.59) has noted that “British policy was not only fluid but it also varied according to the perceptions and interests of decision makers”.

The indecisive, vague and inconsistent policies of the British and the conflict between Turkey and Iraq over the inclusion of the Mosul Province in their respective states enabled the Kurds to enjoy *de facto* autonomy until the end of 1925 (Bengio 2005). However, this should not be construed as British support for Kurdistan as Britain had become enmeshed in the imperial politics of oil (Bengio 2005). Thus, the British authorities declared that “it forms no part of the

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<sup>13</sup> Faisal, the son of Mecca’s ruler, Amir Husain, had allied himself with the British during World War One and had conquered Syria, but because of an earlier agreement the British had to cede Syria to the French.

<sup>14</sup> Sunni is the first largest denomination of Islam in terms of numbers of adherents.

<sup>15</sup> Shiite is the second largest denomination of Islam in terms of adherents.

policy of his majesty's government to encourage or accept any responsibility for the formation of any autonomous or independent Kurdish state" (Romano 2006, p.36). In addition, King Faisal warned the British of the inherent dangers of allowing Iraq's Kurdistan to secede because it might be seen as a precedent for the Shiites in Basra (Al-Bayatti 2005).

Between January and March 1925, a committee, appointed by the League of Nations, conducted a survey to determine the will of the people in the Mosul Province. Most Kurds voted in favour of Iraq rather than Turkey (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The main reason for the Kurd's preference to join Iraq was grounded on previous promises given them by the British and Iraqis, especially their joint statement about the provision of a form of self-rule inside Iraq (Meiselas and van Bruinessen 2008). The second reason was the still-fresh memories of the brutal suppression of the Kurdish rebellion of 1925 in Turkey by Turkish troops (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008).

In December 1925, the League of Nations recommended that Mosul province be included in Iraq provided that its non-Arab character be recognised and the status of the Kurdish language safeguarded. Britain's mandate was to be extended for 25 years to protect the integration of the province of Mosul into Iraq. Consequently, the province was, in July 1926, added to Iraq. "Kurds hoped for more and were disappointed with the League for not endorsing autonomy, which had in 1922 explicitly been promised them by the British government" (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008, p.152). The people of the province considered their inclusion in the new state as a betrayal by the great powers which had promised Kurdish independence in the Treaty of Sevres.

Three reasons why the Kurds were not granted an independent state have been identified by Anderson and Stansfield (2004). First, politically the British wanted Iraq to be dominated by Sunnis, and thus they incorporated Kurds into Iraq to add more Sunnis to the Sunni Arab minority. Second, militarily, the use of the Kurdish mountain range in the north was seen as a useful natural barrier to any threats on Iraq coming from adjacent countries. Third, economically, the discovery of large oil reserves in the Kurdish region made the British keen to annex it to Iraq. The Iraqi monarchy, under the Anglo Iraqi treaty of 1930, was granted independence but ignored the question of Kurdish autonomy and barely tolerated Kurdish interests (Aziz 2011). This led to demonstrations and strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan to protest the regime's treatment of the Kurds (Aziz 2011). An influential Kurdish leader to emerge from the turmoil of the 1930s was Mustafa Barzani. By the mid-1940s, he had influence over a relatively large area of Kurdistan and became the leader of the Kurdish nationalist movement which demanded autonomy for Kurdistan. In 1946, the Kurdish Democratic Party was established in Baghdad, and at its first congress Barzani was chosen as its president. At its third congress in 1953, the party's name was changed to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Stansfield 2003a). At that time, there was a coherent organised manifestation of Kurdish nationalism as the Kurds rallied under Barzani's banner.

### **The Kurds and the Republican Regime 1958-1968**

In July 1958, a military coup led by left-wing officers overthrew the Iraqi monarchy and established a republic (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The coup leader, Abd al-Karim Qasim, decided to call Barzani and his men to Iraq with the aim of achieving reconciliation (Bengio 2005). He promised the Kurds cultural and political rights (Bengio 2005). Accordingly, the Kurds were allowed to broadcast in Kurdish and to publish books and periodicals in the Kurdish

language. Qasim's political system recognised Kurdish ethnic and national identity and avowed partnership between the Kurds and Arabs (Eppel 2004). Article III of the Qasim regime's provisional constitution stated that, "Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognised within the Iraqi entity" (Jawad 1981, p.38).

By 1960, concessions to the Kurds had been withdrawn as Qasim feared that the Kurdish demand for autonomy would lead to secession (Eppel 2004). In addition, the relationship between Qasim and Barzani worsened as the latter developed a strong independent power base in the north of the country (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). To keep Barzani in check, Qasim decided to fund and arm some of Barzani's tribal rivals (Chorev 2007). Qasim also bought off unemployed Kurds to fight for the government against their co-ethnics (McDowall 1996). His Kurdish pro-government forces, known as *Fursan*<sup>16</sup> or *Jash*<sup>17</sup> numbered 10,000 at the early stages of the insurgence (McDowall 1996). The ability to stimulate inter-tribal conflict was a crucial factor in containing the resurgence.

During 1960, there was a split in the Kurdish nationalist movement. The split was defined by, "a contest between the religious and the secular, the primordial and the nationalist, tradition versus atheistic Marxism" (McDowall 1996, p.316). There were different ideologies among the KDP members. The KDP leader, Barzani, was tribal and religious, whereas his followers, Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad<sup>18</sup>, were urban intelligentsia, secular and Marxist (Lawrence 2008). This emerging rift played a key role in undermining the Kurdish national struggle because such a

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<sup>16</sup> *Fursan* means knights in Arabic. This title was given by the Iraqi government to its Kurdish supporters.

<sup>17</sup> *Jash* means a little donkey in Kurdish. This title was used by Kurds to describe other Kurds who were pro-Iraqi government.

<sup>18</sup> Ibrahim Ahmed was Talabani's father-in-law and a leading member in KDP.

rift was used by former Iraqi regimes to undermine and contain the Kurdish nationalist movement (McDowall 1996).

Fully aware of the division between some KDP members and Barzani, Adul Salam Arif<sup>19</sup>, the president of Iraq between 1963 and 1966, saw an opportunity to exploit the split and to challenge the Kurdish cause by dividing the Kurdish movement (Chorev 2007). Arif invited Barzani to sign a peace agreement with him in his personal capacity rather than as that of a leader of KDP. The Talabani-Ahmad group was quick to point out that this agreement would abandon any mention of Kurdish autonomy (Chorev 2007). Barzani and Arif did not reach any peace agreement due to Arif's rejection of autonomy for Kurds. Instead, they prepared for war. Talabani and Ahmad helped Barzani in the first stage of the assault on the Iraqi army in 1965, but they broke with him less than a year later and accepted arms and monetary assistance from Baghdad and fought against his forces (McDowall 1996). During the war, Arif was killed in a helicopter accident, and a struggle for power took place in Baghdad. Consequently, the war came to a halt.

Arif the Second assumed power between 1966 and 1968. His new cabinet had a moderate civilian prime minister, Abdel Rahman Al-Bazzaz<sup>20</sup>, who attempted to establish peace with the Kurds within a democratic system in Iraq (Aziz 2011). Following two weeks of negotiations with the Kurds, "Al-Bazzaz reached an agreement known as the June 1966 Accord, or the Al-Bazzaz Declaration" (Aziz 2011, p.70). This declaration included a fifteen-point offer to solve the Kurdish demands for autonomy and national recognition of their rights. The Ba'athists and the

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<sup>19</sup> Abdul Salam Arif, the figurehead of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council, and the Iraqi army conducted a coup against Qasim in 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Bazzaz was a British-educated academic and lawyer.

communists rejected the agreement. In 1968 the Ba'ath and the Iraqi army mounted a successful coup against Arif.

## **The Kurds and the Ba'ath Regime 1968-1990**

### *The autonomy agreement of 1970*

When the Ba'ath regime came to power in 1968 it backed the Ahmad-Talabani group against Barzani who was receiving aid and support from Iran, a development that disturbed the Ba'ath leaders (Chorev 2007). This eventually led the Ba'ath to send its representative, Saddam Hussein, to the north to negotiate an autonomy agreement with Barzani in order to wrest the Kurds from the embrace of the emerging regional power, Iran (Bengio 2005). Saddam Hussein offered, for the first time in Iraq's history, a territorial autonomy for the Kurds in March 1970, a development that alarmed neighbouring countries with Kurdish populations (Bengio 2005). As Bengio (2005, p.174) states, "this daring move shocked neighbouring Syria, Turkey and Iran which feared spill over effects on their own Kurdish populations".

The autonomy agreement was known as the March 11 Manifesto. The Manifesto established the foundation for autonomy in the Kurdistan region to be implemented within four years. It guaranteed proportional representation for the Kurds in the Iraqi National Assembly and a share of Iraq's oil revenues proportional to the size of the Kurdish population (Kirmanj 2010). Kurdish was recognised as the official language in the autonomous region and a census and plebiscite were promised to determine the status of Kirkuk as it was regarded by Kurds as the heart of the autonomous region of Kurdistan (for more details see appendix 2).

The census was never conducted because of the frictions over the Kirkuk region and its demography in which the Kurds constituted a majority of citizens (Aziz 2011). The Iraqi

government declined to consider Kirkuk's inclusion in the territory of the Kurdish region. Meanwhile, the regime conducted an Arabisation policy in the governorates of Mosul, Kirkuk and Khanaqin by migrating or displacing Kurds and introducing Arabs from the surrounding tribes of Mosul and Shiites from the south (Marr 2004). Arabisation was, thus, a deliberate political strategy for changing the identity of target areas and cities by expelling the Kurds and settling the Arabs (Kirmanj 2010).

The Kurds referred to the March Manifesto as an agreement, whereas the Iraqi government's media deliberately called it a "proclamation" to demonstrate that it was an offer from a sovereign state to some of its subjects, not an agreement between equals (Aziz 2011). This distinction was crucial because, for the Kurds, the assurance of protection within the Iraqi state relied on the recognition of equality with the Arabs (Aziz 2011). However, this agreement turned out to be a tactical manoeuvre by the Ba'ath government to gain time to consolidate its power. As McDowall writes (2005, p.332), "the Ba'ath wanted Kurdish co-operation but was unwilling to share control".

The Ba'ath government in Baghdad broke several promises. First, Kurds were expelled from the oil-producing Kirkuk and Khanaqin districts so that these would remain outside the autonomous region (Meiselas and van Bruinessen 2008). Second, there was a failed attempt on the life of Barzani in September 1971 planned by Saddam Hussein (Bengio 2005). Eventually, Baghdad unilaterally decreed an autonomy law in 1974 for Kurdistan that excluded the strategic places like Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Akra and Sinjar from the autonomous region.

According to this 1974 law, the autonomous region consisted of the three governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk. This was less than half the territory which the Kurds considered as

rightfully theirs and one of the reasons for Barzani's rejection of the autonomy deal offered by the Ba'athists (Mina 1999). As Stansfield (2003a, p.76) writes, "Barzani overconfident and miscalculating Iranian and US support rejected the offer and demanded a larger territorial area as well as a share of Iraq's oil revenues proportionate to the size of the Kurdish population." The Kurdish rejection of the government proposal led to war in April 1974, a war between the Kurds and the Iraqi government which lasted for one year (Bengio 2005). Iran stopped its support for the Kurds of Iraq when the two rivals, Reza Pahlavi and Saddam Hussein reached an agreement in 1975.

### *The Algiers Agreement of 1975*

The Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein concluded the Algiers Agreement<sup>21</sup> by which Iran terminated its support for the Kurds in exchange for border concessions. Iraq agreed to demarcate the border in the Shatt-al-Arab region in accordance with Iranian demands (Bengio 2005). Simultaneously, the United States terminated its aid to the Kurds. Henry Kissinger<sup>22</sup> explained the end of United States support for the Kurds, saying that "covert action should not be confused with missionary work" (as quoted in Galbraith 2006, p.147).

This pact caused the collapse of the Kurdish revolt in September 1975 and the flight of many Kurds from Iraq to Iran and other countries (Lawrence 2008). A new Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was established and led by Jalal Talabani who had long been critical of Barzani. He proposed to replace Barzani with a secular leftist movement with roots among the urban intellectuals (Lawrence 2008). Talabani disagreed with Barzani who believed that the

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<sup>21</sup> The agreement was made at the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) conference in Algiers in March 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Kissinger was the United States Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977.

continuing resistance against the Iraqi government would be unsuccessful (Lawrence 2008). Instead, the PUK carried on insurgent activity from headquarters inside Iraq near Sulaymaniyah. At the same time in Iran, Barzani's sons, Masud and Idris, reformed the KDP which established a presence close to the Turkey-Iraq border. They condemned the PUK as "a usurper of the Kurdish revolution" (Lawrence 2008, p.30).

Talabani (as quoted in Stansfield 2003a, p.79) noted that one of the main factors behind Barzani's decision to terminate the Kurdish revolt was, as with former Kurdish leaders, because of tribal interests:

The feudal leadership [the Barzanis] surrendered because of the lack of support from the West. They [the Barzanis] still had thousands of people under arms, at least U.S. \$150 million, and stores of weapons and ammunition. He finished the revolution because of his position of leader of the tribe...he wanted the money.

The failed Kurdish revolt led to the division of the Kurdish national movement (Stansfield 2003a). It also showed that the Kurdish cause could be used by a regional power to achieve its policy goals. Thus, the Shah of Iran used the Kurdish issue as leverage to secure a favourable formal settlement with Saddam Hussein in Algiers (Galbraith 2006).

### *The Anfal campaign and chemical bombing*

Following the 1975 defeat of the Kurds, the Iraqi regime declared a forbidden military zone along the Iranian and Turkish borders (Kirmanj 2010). The regime commenced a comprehensive programme of Arabisation, displacement and deportation. The displacement and deportation specifically targeted the forbidden zone, whereas the Arabisation process aimed at the rich-oil city of Kirkuk and its surrounding districts (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The reason for the Arabisation of this city with its surrounding areas was the historical disagreement between the

Kurds and the Iraqi authorities over the fate of Kirkuk (Kirmanj 2010). The Kurds had always claimed that Kirkuk with its surrounding areas were historically part of Kurdistan and must be part of any new autonomous or federal region of Kurdistan (Kirmanj 2010).

Successive Iraqi governments have, nevertheless, believed that Kirkuk's inclusion in Kurdistan would lead to its separation from Iraq, a situation they wished to avoid owing to Kirkuk's oil wealth. In an interview in the late 1990s, Tariq Aziz, former Iraqi foreign minister, summed up the longstanding Iraqi view that "Kirkuk must not be part of the Kurdish autonomous area because if it is incorporated, it will be the first step towards [Kurdish] secession" (as quoted in Na'na' 2000, p.163).

Anti-government insurgent activity ensued in 1978 as 872 villages in the border zones were razed to the ground (McDowall 2004). When the Iraq-Iran war broke out in 1980, the KDP and the PUK cooperated with Iranian troops against Iraq. In 1987, both parties joined with other smaller Kurdish parties to become the Kurdistan National Front<sup>23</sup> that liberated considerable areas from the weak Iraqi army (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008).

Meanwhile the Iraqi government recruited large Kurdish tribes into militia units called *Fursan* to police their own districts and to fight the Kurdish opposition parties in the Kurdistan National Front (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). In order to cut off the Kurdish guerrillas from the civilian population, government forces razed ever more villages (Kirmanj 2010). The Ba'athist regime destroyed over 5000 Kurdish villages, and they also resorted to horrific measures to subdue Kurdish opposition (Aziz 2011). As Meiselas and van Bruinessen (2008, p.308) wrote,

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<sup>23</sup> The Kurdistan National Front consisted of PUK, KDP, Kurdish Socialist Party, Kurdish Toilers' Party, Kurdish Communist Party and Kurdish Islamic Movement Party.

“in March 1988, the Iraqi town of Halabja<sup>24</sup> captured by Iranian troops aided by *Peshmarga* was bombed by chemicals, killing some five thousand mostly civilians”. This was followed by the Anfal<sup>25</sup> campaign in which the Iraqi army units and *Jash* attacked, looted and destroyed the villages as well as seized the residents and dumped the women and children into camps without facilities (Kirmanj 2010). Most of the men, about 100,000 or more, were taken away, and years later their bodies were found in mass graves in the desert (Meiselas and van Bruinessen 2008). The rationale behind the Anfal process was to contain the Kurdish guerrillas, led by Talabani, that were cooperating with Iran and demolish their bases in the Kurdish areas (Meiselas and van Bruinessen 2008). This process intensified the feelings of shared history of grievance among Kurds.

### **The Gulf War and the Kurdistan Regional Government 1990-2003**

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 gave a chance for Kurds to revolt against the Ba’athist regime and establish their own government for the first time in the modern history of Iraqi Kurdistan. This was a turning point in the political dynamics of Iraqi Kurdistan that changed the political scene in Iraq. This section is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the creation of the No Fly Zone and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) after the Second Gulf War. The second part discusses the Kurdish internal war of 1994-1996 and its ramifications for the division of the Kurdish leadership.

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<sup>24</sup> Halabja is an Iraqi Kurdish town close to Sulaymaniyah.

<sup>25</sup> Anfal means ‘the spoils’ derived from the eighth chapter of the Quran. This word was also used by the Iraqi government to denote a series of military actions against the Kurds between 1986 and 1989. Ali Hassan Al-Majid (Chemical Ali) was the Secretary General of the Northern Bureau of the Ba’athist Party who headed this operation.

## *The no-fly zone and the Kurdistan Regional Government*

In February 1991, the United States and its coalition allies conquered Iraq after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. The Kurds including *Peshmarga* and *Jash* were encouraged by President George Bush's appeal to Iraqis to rise up to defeat Saddam Hussein on 15 February, 1991 (as quoted in Sifry & Cerf 1991, p.343):

And there's another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside and then comply with the United Nations resolutions and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.

The Kurds responded vigorously and attacked the offices of the feared state security police and disabled the Baghdad regime in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohok and Kirkuk (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). The KDP and PUK succeeded in taking the reins of the uprising. On 21 March 1991 the city of Kirkuk came under control of the Kurdistan National Front forces. On 29 March, Saddam ordered his Republican Guards to retake Kirkuk and the Kurdish region which they did, and on 30 March all the major Kurdish cities were back under Saddam's control (McDowall 2005). Brutal retaliations and fear of a repetition of the 1988 chemical bombardments drove the entire population in panic toward the Turkish and Iranian borders (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). Turkey, fearing serious destabilisation, refused to admit them, so hundreds of thousands spent weeks in the border exposed to the elements.

To avoid a permanent displacement of the Kurds from their homeland, the Kurdish political leadership began to negotiate with the Iraqi regime in April 1991 (Gunter 1992). The negotiation focused on four key points: mutual trust, democratisation, Kurdish national rights and Iraq's national unity. In common with previous negotiations, the fate of Kirkuk and determining the borders of the Kurdish autonomous region became the main stumbling blocks. There appear to

have been two issues (Gunter 1992). The Iraqi government still rejected any kind of compromise with the Kurds on these issues. It insisted on maintaining the unilaterally-demarcated borders for the Kurdistan region, proposed in 1974. The Kurds also persisted with their old-age proposal that historical, geographical and ethnographic factors should be the basis for demarcating the frontiers of an autonomous Kurdistan (Gunter 1992). Saddam Hussein stated that “[the Kurds] insistence on Kirkuk’s inclusion in the autonomous region is indicative of the wish for separation” (as quoted in Gunter 1992, p.70). Moreover, the Kurds rejected the government’s demands to disarm the *Peshmarga* forces and cut their international links. As a result, the negotiations ended in a deadlock.

Public opinion in the West mobilised by television images of the Kurdish exodus persuaded the United States and its allies to launch a humanitarian intervention and establish a safe haven for the displaced Kurds in the northern Iraq by pushing the Iraqi troops southward (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). To accomplish this, the United States and Britain declared a “no fly” zone in northern (and southern) Iraq (Stansfield 2003a). This was formalised in the UN Security Council Resolution 688 on 5 April 1991. This resolution stated that the area of Iraq above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel including Erbil, Mosul, Zakho and Dohok was a no fly zone (see Figure 4.3). Any Iraqi plane flying above the parallel would be subject to being shot down (Marr 2004). This was a historic resolution as it was the first time the Kurds were ever mentioned by name in the UN (Stansfield 2003a).

On 8 April 1991, at a European community meeting in Luxembourg, Britain’s former Prime Minister, John Major, presented a proposal for a protected Kurdish enclave (Stansfield 2003a). The European leaders and the United States endorsed the plan. Operation Provide Comfort was

**Figure 4.3: The No-fly Zone in Iraq**



**Source:**Kurdistan Regional Government Website

the name given to the “safe haven” for the Kurds implemented by the United States and its allies in 1991 (Marr 2004). Under this operation the western troops convinced the Kurds to descend from the mountains into the plains where camps were set up with relief supplies as an added inducement. In addition, these troops were sent into Dohok so that the Kurdish refugees could go back to their homes. The Kurdish refugees started returning to their towns and cities in May 1991. In July, the western troops withdrew from northern Iraq to bases in Silopi just across the South-eastern Turkish border.

The “no fly” zone was regularly patrolled by aircraft from the United States, Britain, France and Turkey. The purpose of the safe haven or “no fly” zone was to protect Kurds (and southern Shiites) from attacks by Saddam’s army (Marr 2004). By the summer of 1991, a large part of

Iraqi Kurdistan was again controlled by Kurds under international protection. The various tribes from which the former *Jash* had been drawn established alliances with either the PUK or KDP while some of the *Jash* chieftains became independent warlords (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008).

This shift in power eventually led the Kurdistan National Front to form an elected government to fill the political vacuum after the Kurdish uprising of 1991 (Chorev 2007). In May 1992, the Kurds held elections for a regional parliament in Erbil. The KDP and the PUK won 50.22 and 49.78 per cent of the vote respectively (Aziz 2011). This extraordinarily close result led to a power-sharing agreement between the two parties, “which resulted in the executive organs of the government being dominated throughout by the KDP and PUK in a structure which exhibited stability for only as long as the two main parties refrained from fighting” (Stansfield 2003a, p.96). The London based Electoral Reform Society pronounced the elections free and fair with no evidence of substantial fraud that would have significantly affected the result (Romano 2006).

The Kurdish National Assembly was established with the PUK and KDP, the two major parties, sharing power. This was called the “50/50” power sharing system”; the PUK and KDP won 49 and 51 respectively out of 105 seats (Aziz 2011). The remaining five seats were allocated to the Christian Assyrians and Islamic Movement representatives. The KDP and PUK agreed to divide all government positions equally and to have each minister allocated a deputy from the other party. The Kurdish region was founded on a political framework that functioned independently of the Ba’athist regime. The framework involved “the management of local government in different parts of Kurdistan by Kurdish officials not appointed by the Ba’athists” (Bengio 2005, p.177). It can be said that the establishment of KRG gave the Kurds the sense that they were masters of their house (Bengio 2005).

In October 1992, the Kurdistan National Assembly gave a unanimous commitment “to determine its fate and define its legal relationship with the central authority at this stage of history on the basis of a federation within a democratic parliamentary Iraq” (Bengio 2005, p.178). Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi government did not recognise the election or federalism because “Iraqi Arab leaders feared that Kurdish demands for a federation masked a quest for independence; a concern shared by neighbouring states with large Kurdish populations” (Aziz 2011, p.85).

These adjacent countries were concerned that the Kurds were insisting on the right to self-determination. The governments in Turkey, Syria and Iran presumed that the Kurds were acting to create an independent Kurdish state (Bengio 2005). Gains by the Kurds of Iraq contrasted with those of the Kurds in other countries. In no other state did the Kurds enjoy such cultural or political autonomy. The precedent set by the Kurds of Iraq appeared so threatening to the adjacent states that they regularly swore to fight the formation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq lest the contagion spread to their own Kurds (Bengio 2005). Hence, in 1992, Turkey, Iran, and Syria announced their joint commitment to uphold the territorial integrity of Iraq (McDowall 2005).

### *The internal Kurdish war*

In spite of the international sanctions<sup>26</sup> on Iraq and Saddam’s embargo<sup>27</sup> on Kurdistan, the Kurds reconstructed and revived the demolished villages infrastructure and economy of their region

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<sup>26</sup> The international sanctions levied on the government of Iraq by the UN Security Council Resolution 687 caused severe hardships for Iraqi people.

<sup>27</sup> Saddam Hussein banned essential commodities from the south and centre of the country from being imported into the north, and stopped paying salaries to civil servants including teachers, police, and other government employees in Iraqi Kurdistan.

with the aid of mostly European NGOs<sup>28</sup> (Natali 2010). The process of reconstruction and economic development was not, however, mirrored in the internal politics of Kurdistan. The 1992 elections had confirmed the political-geographic landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan (Chorev 2007). Iraqi Kurdistan had developed into two “statelets”. As McDowall observed (2005, p. 385):

The dead heat between the KDP and the PUK merely underlined the manifold and overlapping antagonisms between the two parties: personal between the two leaders, geographical between Bahdinan and Suran, linguistic between Kurmanji and Surani, and ideological between ‘traditionist’ and ‘progressive’ cultures. The geographical pattern had been confirmed in the vote, with the KDP’s overwhelming sway in Dohuk, and the PUK’s supremacy in Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk provinces.

The Kurdish national movement was losing any cohesiveness it might have had, and tribal and sectional interests were coming to overshadow national ones (Van Bruinessen 2003). Each party fostered support from tribes and regional areas. The freedom fighters or Kurdish guerrilla, *Peshmarga*, descended from the mountains and entered the halls of parliament, yet their guerrilla style of rule remained (Chorev 2007). Similar to Sheikh Mahmud’s approach of nepotism and the cult of personality, Talabani and Barzani filled their ranks with people loyal to them rather than on meritocratic principles. Each leader had his people that had supported the armed struggle (Chorev 2007). Each party wanted the spoils of victory and the leadership of the Kurdish movement. Masud Barzani confirmed this fact when he admitted that the competition with the PUK had to do with, “the question of hegemony” (as quoted in Gunter 1999, p.134).

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<sup>28</sup> In addition, UNSCR 986, or the Oil for Food Program (OFFP), administered by the UN from 1996-2003 injected between \$4.1-6.1 billion worth of humanitarian goods into Iraqi Kurdistan, but did not attempt to reform the mechanisms of governance in Iraqi Kurdistan. OFFP, nevertheless, played a key role in ensuring the survival of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The political competition between the KDP and the PUK that lasted for more than two years from May 1994 until October 1996 eventually erupted into armed conflict. The causes of the fighting were various, including: historical enmity between the parties' leaders dating from the time when the KDP was headed by Barzani (Bengio 2005; Romano 2006); local land disputes; "disagreements over the division of tolls and custom fees levied at the Turkish and Iranian borders" (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008, p.308), which were controlled by the KDP; and "dissatisfaction of both parties over the power-sharing formula in the parliament and cabinet established in 1992" (Aziz 2011, p.87).

During 1994 attempts at mediation by the US, France and Iran led to a temporary ceasefires but did not prevent an overall escalation of the conflict. In August 1996, Barzani's *Peshmerga* joined the Iraqi army in a surprise offensive against the PUK that controlled Erbil, the regional capital of Iraqi Kurdistan (Romano 2006). For the first time since the creation of the safe haven, Saddam Hussein's troops occupied a city that was under international protection (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). Barzani, "hoping to destroy his rival Talabani through this alliance with Baghdad, lost much of his remaining credibility among the whole Kurdish population and the international community" (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008, p.308). Romano (2006, p.210) describes this event as, "one of the worst incidences in the Kurdish nationalist collective memory."

The fighting resulted in a high number of Kurdish casualties 1000 to 2000 dead (Bengio 2005). The aftermath of the internal war was that the KRG region was divided into two rival entities: the KDP governed "Barzanistan"<sup>29</sup> with its yellow flag, while the PUK governed "Talabanistan"

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<sup>29</sup> The KDP controlled Erbil and Dohok, whereas the PUK controlled Sulaymaniyah and some towns belonging to Kirkuk. The terms "Barzanistan" and "Talabanistan" were satirical and facetious names that colloquially referred to the lands controlled by Barzani and Talabani.

with its green flag (see Figure 4.4) (Stansfield 2003b). Kurdistan had two executive jurisdictions, two premiers, two cabinets and two *Peshmarga*. As Bengio (2005, p.180) observed, “the unique window of opportunity for a unified autonomous region seemed to have been lost because of the Kurds themselves, not because of any external force”. This fighting severely damaged the prospects for Kurdish unity as Kurdish society became divided politically, economically, geographically and even intellectually into two blocks. Moreover, Kurdistan fragmented within the two blocks in accordance to tribal locality and party affiliations (Stansfield 2003b).

**Figure 4.4: The division of Iraqi Kurdistan’s administration after 1996**



Source: Wikipedia website: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

There were serious ramifications deriving from the internal Kurdish conflict, notably the question of whether Kurdistan was a viable political entity. As Romano (2006, p.211) explained:

This period of internecine warfare cost Iraqi Kurds dearly, as framing their Kurdish nationalist movement as a unified force capable of running its own affairs remains essential to garnering outside support and mobilising Kurdish nationalists in the region. Opponents of Kurdish autonomy in turn never fail to frame the Kurdish movement in Iraq as pre-modern, divided, tribal, and hence incapable of representing Iraqi Kurdistan in any kind of institutionally enshrined autonomy or political self-determination.

The achievement of peace between the two parties required the mediation of the United States. The PUK and KDP signed a cease-fire agreement called the “Washington Pact” in September 1998. Both parties agreed to a power-sharing arrangement that “would foster a sense of security and peace” in a way that “would make the return to armed conflict less likely” (Aziz 2011, p.87).

In addition, the pact called for the return of the elected members of the National Assembly and the government of 1992 and the reunification of the KDP and PUK administrations. Following the Washington Pact, the two parties gradually increased cooperation and both fully participated in the re-opening of the National Assembly in October 2002 (Aziz 2011).

Despite all the political crises, armed conflict and fragmentation, the Kurds still viewed Iraqi Kurdistan as a single entity (Aziz 2011). The new generation of Kurds viewed themselves as Kurdistani rather than Iraqi. It was most clearly manifested in the post-1990s notion of “Kurdistanism” (Aziz 2011). The term was “the promotion of Kurdistan in its civic and traditional ethnic conceptions. It also meant sharing the experience of the non-Kurdish minorities with the Kurds during the 1990s era” (Aziz 2011, p.81). Kurdistanism appeared as an alternative identity to that of Iraqi Kurds (Aziz 2011). The self-rule experiment produced a generation of Kurds who had minimal contact with the Arab Iraqis. This new generation had only limited Arabic language skills in contrast to the previous generation (Kirmanj 2010). The young Kurds were also introduced to a school curriculum which emphasised the sense of belonging to Kurdistan rather than to Iraq (KRG-ME 2006). They were taught the geography of Kurdistan that was encompassed in the three Kurdish governorates as well as all other areas where the Kurds constituted the majority.

What further strengthened the sense of Kurdistanism was that the KDP and PUK flew the Kurdish/Kurdistani flag and adopted the new Kurdish national anthem played during official ceremonies and daily school assemblies (Kirmanj 2010). Furthermore, to commemorate the Anfal and chemical attacks and embed them in the collective historical memory, the Kurds constructed several museums and monuments. As part of the Kurdish nation-building effort, two satellite television channels, the Kurdistan TV and the Kurdsat were launched in 1998 and 2000

respectively; two police academies were established; and Kurdistan stamps were issued (Kirmanj 2010). In addition, the Iraqi Kurds were allowed to set up paradiplomatic representation in Turkey, Iran, France, Britain, and the United States (Bengio 2005).

### **Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Kurds 2003-2009**

In 2003, the Kurds had given approval for the Americans to use Kurdistan as a base from which to topple the Ba'athist regime during Operation Iraqi Freedom (Lawrence 2008). In addition, the Kurds fought side-by-side with the Americans to eliminate the regime (Lawrence 2008). The downfall of the Iraqi regime in 2003 heralded a new period for the Kurds because, in contrast to the previous periods when the KRG was estranged from the central government, the Kurds gained important representation in Baghdad. As Aziz (2011, p.87) observed, "the Kurds entered post-Saddam national politics on an equal footing with Iraqi Arabs for the first time by participating in a US-led administration, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)". Thus, the Kurds were given five out of 25 seats on an advisory Iraq governing council that was appointed in July 2003.

The Kurds also acquired several ministerial positions. The female Kurdish politician, Nasreen Barware, became the Minister of Public Works, Barham Salih was the Minister of Planning and Vice Prime Minister, and Jalal Talabani became the new Iraq's president. In addition, the Kurdish politician, Hoshyar Zebari, became the new Iraqi Foreign Minister in the ensuing transitional government that assumed authority in June 2004. This government functioned under the 8 March 2004 Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) that was a provisional constitution laying out a political transition process as well as citizens' rights in this constitution (Aziz 2011). The Kurds maintained their autonomous KRG.

While the Kurds and their political leaders celebrated their incorporation into the national body on equal footing with other groups, the repressive Ba'ath regime gave new and powerful momentum to the separatist cause (Galbraith 2005). During 2004, there was a referendum movement in Kurdistan that collected 1,700,000 signatures (two thirds of Kurdish adults) who demanded independence for Kurdistan (Galbraith 2005). The movement submitted the result of this unofficial referendum to the UN headquarters in New York, but it was ignored. The US also overlooked the referendum and focused its attentions on a united Iraq (Chorev 2007).

Plans were made for a national election and a permanent Iraqi government was elected in October 2005 (Galbraith 2005). The Kurdistan Alliance slate won about 26% of the vote, earning 75 out of 275 seats in the Iraqi National Assembly. Under the Iraqi constitution 2005, Article 117 recognised the Kurdistan region as an integral component of a federal Iraq with both Kurdish and Arabic as the official languages (Barkey 2009, pp.11-12). The devolution of power<sup>30</sup> to the regions “expanded the Kurdistan Regional Government’s internal sovereignty within its official territorial boundaries” (Natali 2010, p.80). The KRG was awarded a large degree of political autonomy within its regional borders including legislative, budgetary and administrative authority.

The federal structures prescribed in the constitution gave the KRG the authority to change Iraqi laws, “not relating to foreign policy; national security or financial issues; to control its own police and security forces; and to manage natural resources in the region including the rights to exploit and administer certain petroleum fields” (Katzman 2005, p.5). The federal structure also

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<sup>30</sup> Decentralisation entrenched in Article 56 of the TAL established instruments for power-sharing between the central and regional governments including the foundation of provincial councils as legitimate centres in which political decisions, resource allocations and administrative appointments could be made.

founded new administrative and financial linkages with Baghdad. For instance, the 2005 Iraqi constitution granted the KRG an annual capital investment budget of 17% of the federal budget (Natali 2010). Accordingly, the KRG's condition of economic dependency on Baghdad and its related economic benefits created important incentives and demands for the Kurdish region to remain part of Iraq (Natali 2010).

Federalism is constitutionally stipulated as the political system of Iraq, but a mutual commitment to it among Iraqi parties has not occurred. The KRG supports the 2005 constitution that stipulates in Article 1 that the political system of Iraq is federal, while most Sunni and Shiite groups do not recognise its validity and seek to change it (Natali 2010). This is because there has been a strengthening of Arab nationalism and a centralising trend under former and current Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki (Natali 2010). The recent polls such as the one conducted by YouGov in April 2009 confirm this trend. In this poll, the people outside the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk were asked to choose between "a system whereby all regions accept the authority of the government in Baghdad" and "a system whereby each region, or group of regions, is largely self-governing" (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.223). High percentages in all Sunni Arab and Shi'a Arab areas supported a centralised polity ranging from a low of 74% in Nasariyah, Basra and Amara to a high of 84% in Kut and Babylon.

The non-commitment to federalism among Iraqi people and parties led Kurdish officials to unify the PUK and KDP administrations to address the "serious issues ahead" and to mobilise local populations in the Kurdistan region (Natali 2010). These serious issues included the fate of Kirkuk city and other territorially disputed areas as well as the implementation of federalism in Iraq as a whole. In January 2006, the Kurdistan President, Masud Barzani, and Jalal Talabani

signed the unification agreement that founded the framework in which the two parties could co-govern the region once again. In May 2006, the KDP and PUK amalgamated their administrations into one regional government and created the institutional mechanisms which allowed them to share and separate power among themselves in the similar way they tried to do in 1992 under the “50-50 spilt” (Natali 2010). However, the unification of the KRG has not been completed yet as the ministries of finance and *Peshmarga* have not been amalgamated.

Despite the economic dependency of the Kurdish region on Iraq, institutional ties between the KRG and the rest of Iraq remain virtually non-existent (Natali 2010). Although there is Kurdish representation in Baghdad, there is no real cooperation between KRG ministries and Baghdad ministries as there are no joint committees or collaboration systematically maintained between ministries and sectors such as health and education (Natali 2010). This has resulted in the emergence of different systems of administration in Erbil and Baghdad (Natali 2010). The lack of contact between Erbil and Baghdad has led to the existence of “two systems and one country” (Natali 2010).

In July 2009, the second Iraqi Kurdistan legislative elections were held. According to the Kurdish Institute for Elections (KIE 2009), a local NGO, the Kurdistan List, comprised of the PUK and KDP, won 59 out of 111 seats, whereas the opposition List, comprised of the *Goran* party, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan and the Service and Reform, won 40 seats (KIE 2009; IISS 2011). The opposition list won significant numbers of votes because their agenda was based on fighting corruption and social injustice (IISS 2011). In spite of some electoral fraud (KIE 2009), the result of elections marked a departure from total dominance by two parties as a new opposition party achieved considerable success (IISS 2011). Since Iraqi Kurdistan has been suffering from rampant corruption (Donovan 2006; Rubin 2008), the outcome of the elections is

viewed by many Kurds (as the researcher noticed from the local Kurdish newspapers and Kurdish TV channels) as a step forward because the opposition party can act as a watchdog over the Kurdish ruling parties. The emergence of the opposition party is also viewed as a matter of great significance, a step toward the institutionalisation of the KRG and its liberation from tribalism.

The future of Iraqi Kurdistan is not only reliant on the local political dynamics but also on the regional and international policies towards this region. The US, as the superpower and an international actor, and Turkey, as a regional actor, play key roles in determining the political trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, the following sections discuss these two main players' roles in the political future of the Kurdish region of Iraq.

### **US Policy Towards the Kurds in the Post-Saddam Iraq**

The role of the US is one of the crucial factors in determining the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. As a minority in Iraq, Kurds have been aiming and demanding to establish a federal system in Iraq which would constitutionally guarantee their rights. The US has been supporting this demand. For instance, Paul Bremer, the US Administrator of Iraq from May 2003 to June 2004, visited Talabani at his headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan on 25 June 2003 and promised him that the US was committed to creating a federal Iraq. Thus, Talabani “was pleased that the US was accommodating this Kurdish objective” (Bremer and McConnell 2006, p.83). This was in accord with the Coalition Provisional Authority’s (CPA) view that Iraqi territorial unity should be maintained. For instance, Bremer (2006, p.269) said to Tony Blair that he told the Kurds that the CPA “would not tolerate actions that provoked the breakup of Iraq”. This indicates that the US had interests in keeping Iraq as a single polity albeit a federal one.

The CPA wanted a strong central government in Baghdad, a development that could be interpreted as being against the Kurdish demand for less central control. On 27 January 2004, Bremer suggested a framework for Kurdistan: it would be recognised as a federal unit, but the central government would have power over Kurdistan's security, natural resources, and borders (Galbraith 2005). On 6 February 2004, Bremer informed the Kurdish leadership that the Kurdistan Region would not be mentioned in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), and that the Iraqi federal structure would be based on the eighteen governorates rather than on the Kurdish, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab territories (Galbraith 2006). Galbraith (2006) argues that this demonstrated the US desire to dismantle the KRG to create an Iraq grounded on geographical units, replicating the non-ethnic structure of US federalism. Turkey might have been influential, as well, in forming this policy. Thus, Gunter (2005, p.226) argues that the Turkish officials wanted a form of geographic federalism "based on the previously drawn boundaries of the eighteen governorates of Iraq. This was to dilute the ethnic composition as well as to break up the Kurdish region, and subsequently create a non-ethnic provincial identity". The Kurds with their Kurdish leadership were against Bremer's proposition, and their suggestion for inclusion of a Kurdistan chapter in the TAL was accepted with uneasiness by the CPA because it saw the Kurdish request as opposing the US desire for a united Iraq (Galbraith 2005).

The Kurds were seen by the US as having no significant national role beyond the boundaries of northern Iraq (Feith 2008). During the drafting of the permanent Iraqi Constitution in 2005, the Kurds were trying to pursue their agenda of maximum autonomy, but America was seen to be against Kurdish this. O'Leary (as quoted in Shareef 2010, p.215) has suggested that "the US was actually working against Kurdish interests in Baghdad". The US did not want oil rich Kirkuk to

be incorporated into the KRG because it thought that this would lead to Kurdish independence. Thus, Shareef (2010, p.215) argued that the US did not support “Kurdish independence because it supports Turkish integrity and believes that a Kurdish declaration of independence will cause a war in the region”. In addition, “there would be blowback in Turkey among its large Kurdish population, leading to the destabilisation of the country” (Shareef 2010, p.215). Turkey’s views matter to the US because Turkey is an important North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally of key strategic significance. Accordingly, it can be said that the US policy of keeping Iraq as one country has been aligned with the Turkish policy. Thus, Mack (as quoted in Shareef 2010, p.219) stated that “the US essentially supported the rights of Kurds to have the rights that all Iraqis should have at managing their own political affairs and having a greater say how their country was run, but we do not support a Kurdish state”. In that context, the independence of Kurdistan was not considered in Washington. For instance, Pillar (as quoted in Shareef 2010, p.219) noted that, “you won’t find anything in US policy to declare itself in support of an independent Kurdistan”. Hence, it can be said that the US policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan has been part of American policy towards Iraq and of its relationship with Turkey and this has involved not supporting Kurdish nationalist aspirations.

The US sees the Kurds of Iraq within the scope of the overall structural arrangement of Iraq (Shareef 2010). The US is strictly committed to the maintenance of the prevailing territorial arrangements in the region. Hence, the adjustment of the geographical boundaries of the region’s countries is regarded as risky and undesirable because it would set a precedent for other ethnic groups who are striving for statehood in the Middle East. In addition, the US is reluctant to safeguard the Kurds if their leaders declared independence as it could well precipitate an Iranian or Turkish invasion. As the US public does not have awareness of, or interest in, the Kurdish

question there would be little domestic pressure in the US to rush to the aid of the Kurds (Shareef 2010). Accordingly, the US government would find it hard to justify committing American military resources and budget to such a venture.

To sum up, the Kurds are seen as an integral component of Iraq in the US policy towards the country. They have been looked at in the light of the US commitment to Iraqi unity and to avoid problems with Turkey. Thus, the US policy towards Kurdistan has been to support federalism, and to ensure Kurdistan stays within Iraq. Since the formal recognition of federalism in the Iraqi constitution in October 2005, the US has dealt with Kurdistan as an “established entity” (Shareef 2010). The KRG has sustained its friendship and partnership with the US as it realises the strategic importance of US support for the protection and survival of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, the US view of this partnership comprises a part of the superpower’s larger strategic interests in the region, and these interests do not include independence or higher levels of autonomy for the Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan.

## **Turkey and the Kurds**

Turkey, as an important regional actor and US strategic ally, plays a vital role in the political dynamics of Iraqi Kurdistan. Any political development in the Iraqi Kurdish region will affect Turkey as it has the largest number of Kurds, according to some estimates consisting of 20% of the Turkish population (around 16 million Kurds), residing in the south-east of the country (Balci 2008). The issue of Iraqi Kurdistan independence greatly concerns Turkey as it feels that the creation of such a state “would serve as a magnet or model for Turkey’s own Kurdish population” (ICG 2005, p.1). Thus, the Kurdish issue is perceived by the Turkish government as a national threat to the national integrity. To understand why this issue has been seen by Turkey

as a significant threat, it is vital to contextualise it in terms of the modern Kurdish history in Turkey and how the Turkish authorities have dealt with this issue.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson encouraged Kurds to seek autonomy. One of his fourteen points (point 12) stated that the non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman empire should be given the right of “autonomous development.” After the downfall of the empire, Article 62 of the Treaty of Sevres provided for “local autonomy for the predominately Kurdish areas” and Article 64 even looked forward to the possibility that “the Kurdish peoples” might be granted “independence from Turkey” (as quoted in Gunter 2004, p.199). Turkey under Ataturk’s rule (1923-1938) changed the entire situation. Thus, the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 “recognised the modern republic of Turkey without any special provisions for Turkish Kurds” (Gunter 2004, p.199).

Ataturk’s formation of a secular and purely Turkish state roused Kurdish nationalism and led to the first of three Kurdish revolts and the uprising of Sheikh Said<sup>31</sup> in 1925. After initial successes he was defeated and hanged (Olson 1989). In 1927, *Khoyboun* (independence), a transnational Kurdish party, established in Lebanon helped launch another major uprising that was routed (Barkey and Fuller 1998). Finally, the Dersim rebellion, led by Sheikh Sayyid Riza from 1936 to 1938 also ended in a total Kurdish defeat. Then, Turkish authorities “decided to eliminate anything that might suggest a separate Kurdish nation such as language and personal Kurdish names” (Gunter 2004, p.200). Many social and constitutional procedures were employed to achieve this goal. Sometimes pseudo-theoretical excuses were given to defend the actions. Thus,

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<sup>31</sup> Skeikh Said was the hereditary chief of the powerful Naqshbandi Sufi Islamic order.

“the so-called Sun Theory taught that all languages derived from one original Turkic language in central Asia” (Gunter 2004, p.200). In addition, the pejorative classification of “mountain Turks” was used by Turks to refer to the Turkish Kurds and was used to justify the assimilation policy.

Everything that evoked a separate Kurdish identity was to be eliminated including language, clothing and names (Gunter 2004). The present Turkish constitution adopted in 1982 contains a number of specific provisions that seek to limit speaking and writing in Kurdish. For instance, its preamble stipulates “[t]he determination that no protection shall be afforded to thoughts or opinions contrary to Turkish national interests, the principle of the existence of Turkey as an indivisible entity” (Gunter 2004, p.200). Although restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language were eased in 1991, Article 8 of a new anti-terrorism law approved in 1991 made it possible to regard academics, intellectuals and journalists who spoke peacefully for Kurdish rights as engaging in terrorist acts. Similarly, Article 312 of the Turkish penal code stated that one could be charged with “provoking hatred or animosity between groups of different race, religion, region or social class” simply through oral or written support for Kurdish rights (Gunter 2004).

During the 1970s, an increasingly significant number of the Turkish population of Kurds actively demanded cultural, linguistic and political rights as Kurds (Kirisci & Winrow 1997). The government repressed these demands ruthlessly for fear that they would lead to the disintegration of the state. This official refusal to tolerate any moderate Kurdish opposition helped encourage extremism and the establishment of the PKK or Kurdistan Workers Party, led by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 (Kirisci & Winrow 1997). The PKK has since been leading an armed struggle

against the Turks for 28 years. Their agenda has been independence from Turkey and possible unification with other Kurdish-populated areas in Iran, Iraq and Syria (Weinstock 2011). In 1984, the PKK officially launched its insurgency which, “by the beginning of 2000, resulted in more than thirty-seven thousands deaths, the partial or complete destruction of as many as three thousand villages and the internal displacement of some three million people” (Gunter 2004, p.200).

In the 1990s, Ocalan seemed close to achieving a certain degree of military success. However, his ill-advised decision in 1995 to attack Masud Barzani, President of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, in Iraqi Kurdistan because of his support for Turkey weakened his strength (Barkey & Fuller 1998). In 1998, Turkey threatened to go to war with Syria unless Damascus expelled Ocalan from his long-time refuge in that country. Ocalan escaped to Italy where US pressure on behalf of its NATO ally, Turkey, forced Italy to classify Ocalan as a terrorist unworthy of political asylum or negotiation (White 2000). Ocalan was finally arrested in Kenya in 1999, extradited to Turkey for a trial and sentenced to death for treason. Instead of making a hard-line call for renewed struggle during his trial, Ocalan issued a notable statement that appealed for the implementation of true democracy to resolve the Kurdish problem within the existing borders of a united Turkey (White 2000). At that time Harold Koh (as quoted in Gunter 2004, p.201), the US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, visited Turkey and met with Turkish officials, and stated, “far from hurting Turkey’s territorial integrity, now that the PKK’s military threat had been defeated an inclusive policy that acknowledged human rights would strengthen the Turkish state by giving its Kurdish ethnic community a genuine stake in Turkey’s future”.

In 1999, the European Union finally accepted Turkey as a candidature member, but its membership is reliant upon the implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria of minority rights for its Kurdish ethnic population (Gunter 2004). Although there has been a willingness to seek new approaches to addressing the Kurdish issue, there have still been “powerful forces in Turkey that do not want further democratisation because they fear it would threaten their privileged positions and Turkey’s territorial integrity” (Gunter 2004, p.201). Thus, reform legislation in 2002 that granted significant Kurdish cultural rights in theory and, in the same year, the commutation of Ocalan’s death sentence to life imprisonment have not resolved the continuing Kurdish “problem” in Turkey. The followers of Ocalan have been fighting Turkey and have taken to the Iraqi Kurdistan Qandil Mountains as their sanctuary. In October 2011, Turkish forces launched operations in Qandil Mountains in response to attacks by the PKK in southeastern Turkey that killed 26 Turkish soldiers (AlJazeera 2011). Both the Iraqi central government and the KRG have denounced the Turkish raids as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.

The PKK is branded a terrorist organisation by the US and the European Union for its violent actions such as the suicide bombing in Ankara in 2007. However, Marcus (2007) argues that the PKK rebels would stop fighting if offered amnesty and certain liberties for Turkey’s Kurdish population. He believes that Turkey needs an inclusive policy that guarantees the political, economic and social rights of Kurds as the practical approach to resolving the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

To sum up, the Kurdish question is a very sensitive issue in Turkey as it has been viewed by Turks as a threat to the Turkish state's territorial integrity. The historical Kurdish revolts and insurgency against the Turkish authorities have indicated Kurdish dissatisfaction with the Turkish assimilation policy which ignored minority rights. This policy has aimed to keep Turkey in unison under duress. Iraqi Kurds' demands for federalism or independence have unnerved Turkey as it believes that such demands will encourage its Kurds to follow in the steps of the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, Turkey's regional policy has always aimed to preserve the unity of the neighbouring countries.

## **Conclusion**

This historical review has presented a historical analysis of Iraqi Kurdistan that explains the current situation in Kurdistan and Iraq as a whole. First, there is no united front among Kurds as they have regularly demonstrated the capacity to fragment easily once there is a clash of interests between ruling parties. For instance, the 1996 internecine conflicts in Iraqi Kurdistan were due to the conflict between the Kurdish ruling parties over revenues. This conflict prevented the proper maturation of the KRG towards either a fully autonomous or independent region during the 1990s and widened the rift between the ruling political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan. Another instance is that the previous Iraqi regimes used either the PUK or KDP to fight each other to weaken Kurdish unity. The Kurdish political elites have used the Kurdish cause to pursue their personal interests at the expense of nationalist ones. Thus, it was easy for the Shah of Iran to use Barzani as a pawn to obtain border concessions from Saddam Hussein.

Second, there is no agreement on an institutional design between Arabs and Kurds. Former Iraqi regimes were reluctant to accommodate Kurds as they believed that conferring any political arrangement on Kurds would encourage them to secede from Iraq. And the Kurdish insistence on

the inclusion of Kirkuk city in any political arrangement has always frightened Arabs as this city is rich in oil and would help Kurds to secede from Iraq. Third, Iraqi Kurdistan's future has been moulded by the interplay of international actors, namely US and Britain. For instance, the refusal of the World War One victors, especially Britain, to support the Treaty of Sevres led to the collapse of moves to establish a Kurdish state. In addition, the regional actors, such as Turkey, have always played key roles in influencing policy on the Kurdish issue in Iraq. Turkey has always been opposed to any political arrangement granting independence or even autonomy to the Kurds in Iraq. This is because such actions would have far-reaching implications for Turkey's own large Kurdish population. Thus, Turkey has always played an active role in Iraqi affairs to ensure the unity of the country.

Fourth, the personal interests of the Kurdish elite have superseded the national interests of Kurds. For instance, the Kurdish nationalist mottos were used to cloak the religious and tribal ambitions of Sheikh Mahmud. This discouraged the British colonial administration from supporting Kurdish autonomy and only fortified those voices advocating for consolidation of Sunni Arab minority rule. In addition, the British mandate played a crucial role in polarising the Iraqi multi-ethnic society by giving special preferences for Arab Sunni rule in Iraq for more than 80 years. This policy led to the denial of political, economic and cultural rights for Kurds (and Shiites). The denial of Kurdish rights and the persecution of Kurds by former Iraqi regimes made the Kurds of Iraq believe that secession was their only course of action to resolve the Kurdish issue in Iraq. The Kurdish leaders exploited this denial of rights to mobilise the Iraqi Kurds for decades. It can be said that all Kurdish revolts can be characterised as either religious, tribal or

political elite-orientated. The Kurdish tragedy lies in the lack of a charismatic nationalist leadership that has led to the failure of many Kurdish uprisings.

Fifth, there has been a shared history of discrimination and oppression of Kurds by former ruling Iraqi regimes. For instance, there was extensive use of chemical weapons which left a legacy of deep hatred among Iraqi Kurds and led to distrust Arabs. Sixth, after World War One, the Kurds were brought under the political orbit of a newly-formed Arab-dominated government in Baghdad. The Arab policy of centralisation was the basis for the former Iraqi governments' dealing with the Kurdish region but was rejected by the Kurds through rebellions against these governments. The legacy of the centralised policy of the Iraqi government still prevails as such a policy has been viewed to keep the unity of the country.

Eighth, promises of Kurdish autonomy have frequently not been kept. , Thus, there was a failure to achieve democracy and draft a permanent constitution that would guarantee the political, economic and cultural rights of the Kurds during the former Iraqi regimes. This indicated that there has been no serious attempt by successive governments to resolve the Kurdish question in Iraq. This has led to lack of confidence or trust between the Kurds and the Arabs. Accordingly, it can be said that the Kurds of Iraq would be highly suspicious of any internal political arrangement granted by the Arabs.

Ninth, the Kurdish region of Iraq has historically been of strategic, political, economic and geopolitical importance, especially with the presence of oil. Thus, Iraq is unwilling to relinquish this region to Kurds through secession. Tenth, the creation of a safe haven in the north of Iraq has isolated the Kurds from the rest of Iraq for twelve years. This has severed any sense of

Kurdish belongingness to Iraq and created a new Kurdistan identity which can be a contributing factor in the Kurdish populations' quest for independence.

Finally, the economic dependency of Kurdistan on Iraq has restrained Kurds from secession. Since the 2005 Iraqi constitution (Article 117) provided the KRG with recognition rights and revenues as a distinct regional entity, the Kurds have moved to demanding federation with the rest of Iraq. Federalism was stipulated in the Iraqi constitution of 2005 but has not been implemented yet. This study, then, focuses on which direction Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards: whether federalism or secession. And, why has federalism not been implemented in Iraq? What are the impediments that the KRG should overcome to have federalism implemented in Kurdistan and Iraq as a whole? In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, the findings of the empirical research on these issues will be delineated and analysed with special concern as to which political arrangement (i.e., federalism or secession) is the more feasible.

## **Chapter Five: Federalism or Secession as a Remedy for the Kurdish Question in Iraq: Perspectives from the Public Sector**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to explore selected public sector officials' attitudes towards federalism and secession as solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Knowing these attitudes assists in understanding the political dynamics and future direction of the Kurdistan polity. The information from politicians and academics has provided this study with insight into public sector thinking on the political trajectory of contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. The data were obtained as a result of interviews carried out in 2010 using the eight semi-structured questions listed in Appendix 3.

The findings are presented using key themes, which are federalism and secession as potential remedies to the Kurdish question in Iraq. The chapter begins with the data derived from senior officials and academics concerned with expert knowledge on the question of federalism or secession as a solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. There were nineteen interviewees of personnel from different public sector institutions, including academics. Five were members of the Kurdistan Parliament; three participants were senior members of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party (PUK); one participant was from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP); another participant was from the Kurdistan Toilers Party (KTP), and two participants were from the Opposition Party called *Goran*. Additional interviewees included one official from the PUK Security Organisation; one from the PUK Military Intelligence Organisation; one official from the Sulaymaniyah Governorate; and one from the Kurdish Coalition in Baghdad. Finally, two professors from the University of Sulaimani and one from the University of Salahedin were

interviewed. The interviews concentrated on the concept of Kurdish nationhood and federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan; federalism as a potentially stabilising factor for Kurdistan and Iraq; the Iraqi government's position on federalism; secession as a solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq; the internal and external impediments to the creation of a Kurdish State; the American role in the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination; and the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The public sector interviewees were chosen to take part in this research for two reasons. First, the perceptions of senior officials on the desirability of independence or federalism were of great significance as those perceptions affected their decisions and actions on this matter. Second, the perceptions of professors represented academic approaches to the Kurdish question in Iraq. There were two further reasons for asking participants about two possible political solutions for the Kurdish question in Iraq, namely, federalism and secession. First, these two political arrangements feature most prominently in the popular discourse of Kurds in the Iraqi Kurdistan media and on the. Kurds see the choice of one of these political arrangements as a possible political future for Kurdistan. Second, as Iraqi Kurdistan enjoys federacy status (a high degree of regional autonomy with some limited power sharing at the centre), federalism rather than any other internal political arrangements to the state was selected as one of plausible political arrangements which can satisfy the Kurds of Iraq, especially as federalism is stipulated in the Iraqi Constitution of 2005. Secession was chosen as the other possible political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because it is deeply embedded in the Kurdish psyche as the Kurds have historically been struggling for achieving their "dream" of an independent state. Probing the views of the participants facilitates understanding of whether the Kurds of today are still pursuing this "dream" as the ultimate solution for the Kurdish question in Iraq.

## **Kurds as a Nation or an Ethnic Group?**

The first question asked was: *Do you think Kurds are a nation or an ethnic group?* This question was aimed at exploring the interviewees' perception of themselves as a nation or an ethnic group. All of the nineteen participants (100%) believed that Kurds were a nation rather than an ethnic group, presenting various reasons. These reasons can be grouped into three categories: ethnic characteristics; shared symbols; and the imperialist factor.

In the first category, ethnic characteristics, fifteen out of nineteen interviewees (80%) believed that Kurds were a distinctive nation because of their ethnic traits. Fourteen interviewees (75%) used ethnic differences, such as language and culture, to mark their unique national identity. A typical response was as follows:

Kurds are a nation, different from Arabs, Persians and Turks. For instance, we have a different language, different traditional clothes, and different traditional celebration. Being a distinctive nation qualifies us to seek the right to self-determination like any nation in this world.

However, there was one interviewee (5%) who highlighted the historical and ancestral aspect of the origin of Kurdish nationhood:

Kurds are a nation because we have our own history full of oppression, struggle, genocide and injustice. In addition, Kurds are an ancient people who built the Median civilisation in the Middle East.

The first quote showed that the Kurds had a different language and a different culture which united them as a nation and set them apart. In the second quote, the interviewee mentioned history and lineage (being the descendent of Medes) to express the Kurds' unique nationhood. All these reasons were given as to why Kurds believe they are a nation rather than an ethnic group.

In the second category, shared symbols, two interviewees (10%) used certain shared symbols, such as historical events, memories and festivals, to express their nationhood. An interviewee stated:

We never forget that we are a nation as we celebrate Nawroz, wearing our traditional clothes every year and commemorate Anfal and Halabja chemical bombing events every year as well.

This perception reflected that Kurds had shared symbols such as traditional celebration of the Kurdish New Year (Nawroz), and horrific events (Anfal and chemical bombing) to express their distinctive nationhood and remind them of who they were.

In the final category, imperialism, two interviewees (10%) gave this as a reason for Kurds to construct and raise their sense of nationhood and/or nationalism. An interviewee stated:

After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of nation states, we, as for any other nation, should have had a nation state, but the annulment of the Sevres Treaty announced the end of the Kurdish national project. Kurds were against the British annexation of Southern Kurdistan to Iraq. This annexation caused the Kurdish national movements to revolt against the British and Iraqis and to demand the independence of Kurdistan.

This statement illustrated that the Kurdish nationhood movement was a reaction to imperialism as Kurdistan was occupied by the British who then attached it to Iraq. Thus, the Kurds were fighting for independence as the interviewees believed that Kurds, as a nation, had the right to establish a nation state. It was noticed that there was a quantitatively significant contrast between the responses of the first category (80%) and those from the second and third categories (10% each). This suggested that the ethnic attributes of the Kurdish nationhood were, according to the overwhelming majority of participants, the primary reference points for establishing the Kurdish identity. Thus, it could be said the Kurdish nationhood sprang from primordialist traits which supported the claim that every nation had the right to statehood.

## **Federalism as an Acceptable Political Arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan**

The second question asked was: *Do you think federalism is an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan?* This question was designed to explore the interviewees' attitudes towards federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. There were diverse responses to this question. They can be grouped into two categories: yes and no. Fifteen out of nineteen interviewees (79%) agreed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The yes answer was, however, classified into three subcategories. The first subcategory was the temporary yes, namely, that federalism is a temporarily acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The second subcategory was the permanent yes which meant that federalism was a permanently acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The third subcategory was the conditional yes which signified that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement if specific conditions were met.

In the first yes category, four participants out of fifteen believed that federalism was an acceptable temporary political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. They stated various rationales for such a response. Three out of four interviewees stated that the reason for regarding federalism as a temporary political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan was that the creation of a Kurdish state is not feasible at this stage due to the hostility of contiguous countries. An interviewee stated:

After World War One, Greater Kurdistan was carved up into four parts. The independence of Southern Kurdistan [namely, Iraqi Kurdistan] is not feasible now due to the opposition of the neighbouring countries. Thus, federalism is temporarily an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan at this stage.

Another interviewee expressed the same sentiment:

Federalism is temporarily an acceptable political settlement for Iraqi Kurdistan because our regional enemies [namely, neighbouring countries] will destroy the Kurdish state if established now.

The infeasibility of creating an independent Kurdish state at that time were clearly recognised in these answers. It was acknowledged that such a state would fail due to the antagonism of the adjacent countries. Thus, the interviewees believed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan at this stage. This did not mean that the idea of an independent Kurdish state had been abandoned. Rather, it was postponed. One of the four interviewees did not provide any reason for his response.

In the second and largest yes category, nine out of fifteen interviewees believed that federalism was permanently an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. They stated a wide range of rationales for such a belief. These rationales can be classified into several categories: (a) federalism as the only realistic solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq; (b) partial sovereignty; (c) economic advantages; (d) diplomatic advantages; (e) equality of all ethnicities; (f) federalism as a democratising factor; and (g) federalism as the protector of Kurdish identity in Iraq.

**Federalism as a realistic solution:** Five out of nine interviewees believed that federalism was permanently an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because it was the only realistic solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. They thought that the creation of a Kurdish state was not feasible and plausible as it was not internationally and regionally supported. Thus, one interviewee remarked:

The Kurdish question will only be solved within the federal framework of Iraq. However, Kurds want a state. The creation of a Kurdish state is not possible due to external impediments, namely the US foreign policy for the unity of Iraq, and the hostility of the neighbouring countries towards the creation of a Kurdish state.

These interviewees had a realistic approach to the Kurdish question in Iraq. They accepted federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because they saw this as the only viable

solution. They believed that there were insurmountable external impediments to the establishment of the Kurdish state in the Middle East. Thus, they regarded federalism as a realistic approach to the Kurdish issue in Iraq, the best that one could hope for.

**Partial sovereignty:** Four out of nine interviewees believed that federalism was a permanently acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because federalism would give partial sovereignty to Kurdistan. That is to say, federalism would enable Kurds to rule Kurdistan and hold the regional legislative, executive and judiciary authorities within the federal boundaries of Kurdistan. The Kurds would even be allowed to have their own army in accordance with the Iraqi constitution. A typical response was:

Federalism, according to the Iraqi constitution, does not only give regional legislative, executive and judiciary authorities to Kurdistan but also gives the right for the Kurdish region to have its regional guards. In this case, *Peshmarga*<sup>32</sup> are the regional guards. This means that Kurds are entitled to have their own army. Such a right is given to the central government in other federal countries.

Another interviewee shared the same sentiment and said:

With federalism, the Kurds have gained a kind of independence to administer their region. The Arabs do not interfere in the executive, judiciary and legislative authorities of the Kurdish government except in the areas where Arabic interests intersect with the Kurdish interests.

The interviewees believed that there were many political advantages for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq. These advantages included having a Kurdish parliament, a Kurdish regional government, a Kurdish regional court and a Kurdish army. All these institutions would enable the Kurds to have partial sovereignty in the form of internal sovereignty.

**Economic advantages:** Two out of nine interviewees believed that federalism held economic advantages for Kurds because it helped Kurdistan administer its oil production and facilitate

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<sup>32</sup> *Peshmarga* are the Kurdish soldiers. This word means ‘those who face death because they fought the Ba’athist regime’.

investment in its oil. Furthermore, Kurdistan would benefit from the national Iraqi oil revenues.

An interviewee stated:

Federalism enables Kurdistan to administer its oil wells under the supervision of the Iraqi government.

Another interviewee added:

Kurdistan benefits from the resources of the Iraqi state in terms of oil revenues and other natural resources.

These interviewees realised that Kurdistan would benefit economically from being a federal part of Iraq. This was because federalism, in accordance with the Iraqi constitution Article 113, allows Kurdistan to undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from its wells under the supervision of the Iraqi Federal Government. In addition, Kurdistan had its allocated share of Iraqi oil revenues.

**Diplomatic advantages:** Two out of nine interviewees believed that federalism would enable Kurdistan to engage in paradiplomacy and forge diplomatic relations with the world. In the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan, as a federal region, is allowed to open offices overseas, but under the umbrella of the Iraqi embassies. An interviewee remarked:

The federal regions, according to the Iraqi constitution, are entitled to have their offices under the umbrella of the Iraqi Embassy. These offices are for social, cultural, and development affairs.

Another interviewee shared the same sentiment and remarked:

Within a federal system, Kurdistan would have an opportunity to forge relationships with Europe and the rest of the world.

The interviewees thought that there were diplomatic advantages for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq as the Iraqi constitution allowed it to be engaged in paradiplomacy. Thus, Kurdistan was perceived to be able to establish social, economic and cultural relations with the world which would be of benefit to Kurdistan.

**Equality of all ethnic groups:** Four out of nine interviewees believed that federalism would give equal citizenship to all ethnic groups in Iraq because the former Iraqi central regime discriminated against the Kurds and regarded them as second class citizens. Thus, the interviewees thought that there would be no discrimination against any ethnic group in a federal system. An interviewee commented:

Federalism gives equal citizenship to all ethnic groups. Thus, there is not the concept of citizen class two or four in this political system.

Another interviewee had the same opinion and stated:

In federalism, there is equality between Kurds and Arabs in being citizens of Iraq.

The interviewees believed that federalism would promote and ensure the equality of all ethnic groups in Iraq as compared to the discriminatory policy against minorities under the former regime. The Kurds wanted federalism so that they would be treated equally and would not be regarded as second class citizens again.

**Federalism as a democratising factor:** Four out of nine interviewees believed that federalism was a permanently acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because federalism would not severely limit the chances for a dictator to emerge and would help democratise Kurdistan, and Iraq as a whole. Thus, one interviewee stated:

The Kurds had a bad experience with the Arabic central system. After World War One, the Arabic Sunnis had been controlling Iraq through central totalitarianism for eighty years. But federalism is the best system that will not create a dictator.

The interviewees wanted federalism to replace the centralism of the former regime. This was because federalism would not allow a dictator to emerge due to the devolution of power to the regions. Consequently, this would help democratise the country.

**Federalism as protector of Kurdish identity in Iraq:** One out of nine interviewees believed that federalism would protect Kurdish cultural identity in Iraq. Thus, he accepted federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. He commented:

Federalism protects the cultural identity of the Kurds in Iraq

The interviewee believed that one of the advantages of federalism was that each ethnic group's cultural identity would be safeguarded and recognised. This would ensure that the Kurdish culture would not be denied or subject to assimilation again. Thus, there would be no Arabic cultural imperialism over ethnic minorities in Iraq.

In the third yes category, two out of fifteen interviewees believed federalism was an acceptable political arrangement if federalism is accepted by both the Arabs and the Kurds. They thought that the Arabs did not want to implement federalism in Iraq because the Arabs saw such a system as spurring on the Kurds to secede. In addition, the respondents thought Arabs perceived federalism as losing their supremacy over the Kurdish region. By contrast, the interviewees acknowledged that the Kurds wanted to have their own state so that they would not be oppressed and discriminated against by the Arabs again. The interviewee remarked:

On the one hand, Arabs don't want federalism because they think it is a disintegrative system. In addition, the Arabs regard themselves as big brothers and Kurds as small brothers. In federalism, there is not such a concept. It is based on the equality of all ethnic groups. The Arabs should get rid of such a chauvinist nationalistic mentality. On the other hand, Kurds have an inferiority complex as a result of having been treated as second class citizens in the past. Thus they aspire to establish a Kurdish state. Both Arabs and Kurds should get rid of these mentalities to achieve federalism successfully.

The interviewee acknowledged the complexity of implementing federalism in Iraq and Kurdistan. He thought that the Iraqi Arabs did not want federalism because this system would lead to the division of Iraq involving a loss of Arab power. In addition, the interviewee believed Arabs had a sense of superiority over Kurds as they had been ruling Iraq under a centralised

system. Now it would be unacceptable for them to share power with the Kurds who were always marginalised and discriminated against. The interviewee believed that the Kurds did not want federalism because they did not want to share power with Arabs due to the past oppression of Kurds by Arabs. The Kurds wanted to have their own state where there were no Arabs to oppress them again.

The no category comprised four out of nineteen interviewees (21%) who did not believe that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan for many reasons. These reasons could be grouped into the following categories: (a) Kurds as a nation; (b) Kurdistan as a country; (c) intolerant Arabic culture towards other ethnicities; and (d) a crisis of trust. It was obvious that there was a considerable difference between the positive responses of interviewees on federalism (79%) and the negative answers of the rest (21%). These results indicated that federalism was by far the most popular acceptable political arrangement in Iraqi Kurdistan, whereas the support for secession was in decline at least in the foreseeable future.

**Kurds as a nation:** Three out of the four interviewees who believed that federalism was not an acceptable political arrangement based their views on the belief that Kurds were a nation which was entitled to the right to self-determination in accordance with the international covenant on the right to self-determination. They thought that Kurds, who were ethnically different from Arabs, had the right to form their own state. One interviewee stated:

Federalism is an unacceptable political settlement for Iraqi Kurdistan because Kurds are a nation. According to the UN charter, every nation has the right to self-determination.

Another interviewee shared the same sentiment and remarked:

Kurds, as a nation, have a different culture and history. Thus, they have the right to form their own state.

These interviewees rejected federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because they believed that Kurds, like any other nation, were entitled to establish their own state. This meant that federalism was not an acceptable substitute for statehood. This sprang from the Kurdish conviction of being a nation which was ethnically distinct from the Arabs.

**Kurdistan as a country:** One of the four interviewees believed that Kurdistan had all the characteristics of a country, namely, nation, territory and state. Thus, he disagreed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. Secession was the only remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq. He stated:

The Kurds have all the characteristics of a country, namely, nation, land and state. The creation of modern Iraq was imposed on Kurds by the British. This country had a long history of discrimination against Kurds. Thus, statehood is the only solution for us.

As the interviewee thought Kurdistan had all the traits of country, he argued that the Kurds should not make concessions to Arabs by accepting federalism as a political arrangement. It was clear that the interviewee had never felt that Iraq was his country because he, like most Kurds, had been discriminated against by Iraqi Arabs for seventy years, and the Kurds were unwillingly incorporated into Iraq in 1926. In his opinion, the only solution for the Kurdish question in Iraq was to secede and establish a Kurdish state in Southern Kurdistan<sup>33</sup>.

**Intolerant Arabic culture:** One of the four interviewees disagreed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because federalism was destined to fail in Iraq due to the intolerant Arabic culture. This culture could not accept other ethnicities on an equal footing and recognise their rights. He stated:

Federalism failed to be implemented because of different cultures in Iraq. In Kurdistan, the tolerant Kurdish culture embraces all diversities of religions and ethnicities. Whereas, in the

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<sup>33</sup> Iraqi Kurdistan is also called Southern Kurdistan because its location is in the south of Greater Kurdistan.

Middle and South of Iraq, there is one culture based on a religious ideology that cannot accept and tolerate others [other religions and ethnicities].

The interviewee had a strong conviction that federalism would not work in Iraq because of Arabic cultural supremacy. He believed that the Arabic nationalistic religious ideology was ingrained in the Arab mentality. Thus, the Arabs ended up being intolerant of other ethnicities. They would not respect and recognise other ethnicities' rights and would not share power with these ethnicities.

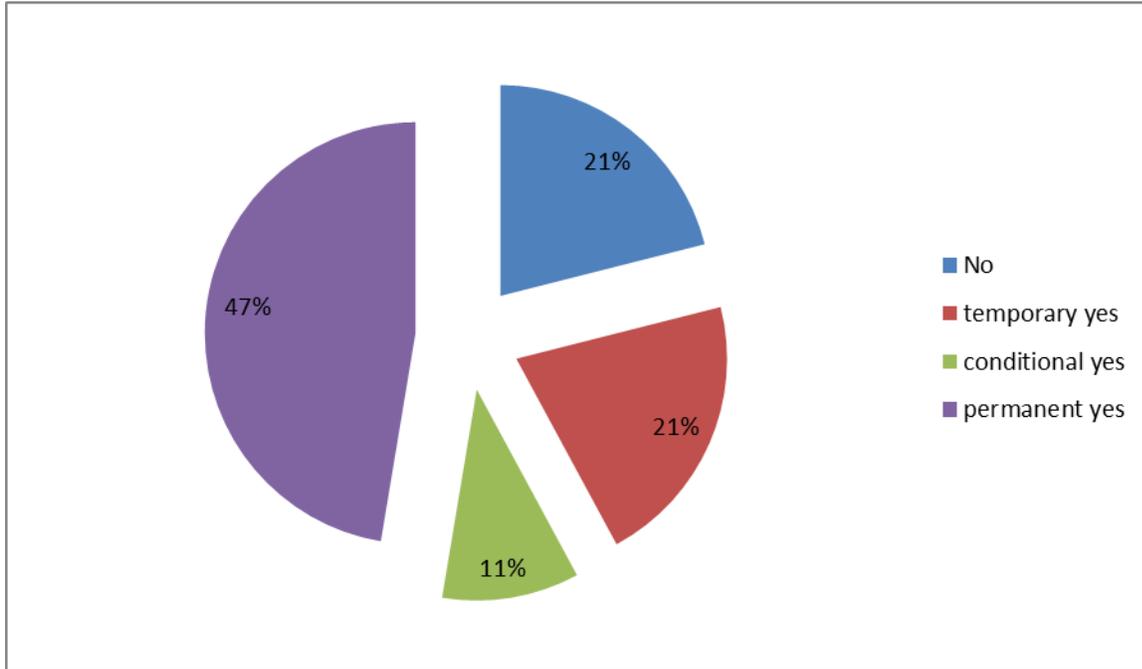
**A crisis of trust:** One of the four interviewees believed that secession was the only solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq because Kurds did not trust Arabs. Thus, he thought that federalism was an unacceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. He said:

Federalism cannot be a viable system in Iraq because Kurds cannot trust Arabs. Thus, independence is the only remedy to the Kurdish issue in Iraq.

The interviewee believed that federalism could not be successfully implemented in Iraq because Kurds did not trust Arabs. With no trust between them, it would be difficult for them to share power in Iraq. Thus, he thought that secession would be the only way to address the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination.

In summary, a small minority of interviewees wanted, for several reasons, independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. Firstly, Kurds were believed to be a nation which was entitled to the right to self-determination, and their region had all the traits of a country. Secondly, the incompatibility of the dominant Arab culture and the Kurdish culture would not be conducive to creating a successful federal system in Iraq. Thus, federalism was considered an unviable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan and for Iraqi Arabs. By contrast, the large majority of interviewees cited a variety

**Figure 5.1: Perspectives from the public sector on federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan.**



of reasons for federalism being an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. First, federalism was often perceived as a pragmatic solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Second, federalism was believed to hold political, economic, diplomatic, social and cultural advantages for Kurds in Iraq. But, as shown in Figure 5.1, within the yes category, there was a contrast between the size of the dominant permanent yes subcategory (47%), and the temporary and conditional yes subcategories (21% and 11% respectively). Overall, federalism was the most popular political arrangement but there were many reasons leading to this view and substantial divergence as to the temporal nature of federalism and to whether it was an ideal solution for Iraqi Kurdistan.

### **Federalism as a Stabilising Factor in Kurdistan and Iraq**

The third question asked was: *Would federalism provide greater political stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region than secession?* This question was designed to explore people's viewpoints

on federalism as a sustainable and viable political arrangement that would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. The answers to this question overlapped with the answers of the previous question. These answers could be classified into two main categories. The first category was the yes and the second was the no. The yes category comprised the majority of respondents. Fifteen out of nineteen interviewees (79%) agreed federalism provided greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. However, this did not mean uniformity of views as the yes classification was grouped into the satisfactory yes, the conditional yes, and the yes and no category.

First, in the satisfactory yes category six out of fifteen interviewees thought federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. They stated several rationales behind this belief. These were grouped as follows: (a) partial sovereignty; (b) equal distribution of wealth and; (c) ethnic identity recognition.

**Partial sovereignty:** four out of six interviewees believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because federalism would give partial sovereignty to the federal regions. For instance, Kurdistan would look after its own internal affairs as the Iraqi central government would not be able to interfere in Kurdish affairs. In addition, the formation of three ethnic federal regions (namely, Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish) would lead to the political stability of Iraq because each region would be responsible for its own internal affairs. All the pending ethnic issues (namely, territorially disputed areas that include Kirkuk, Shengar and other Kurdish areas) would be solved through the federal council. In this way, Iraq would be a voluntary polity where every ethnic group would have the chance to exercise the right to internal self-determination. As one interviewee stated:

Federalism provides greater political stability because of non-interference of the Baghdad government in Kurdish internal affairs. So every federal region would have a kind of autonomy in administering its affairs.

Another interviewee added:

The Kurds are not the majority as the Shiites are and they did not have unlimited authority like the Sunnis in the past. Thus, the best solution for Kurds is federalism because the creation of three federal regions (namely, Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite) will achieve coexistence, stability and development in Iraq. Each region will be responsible for its administration, security and stability, which will lead to the stability of Iraq as a whole. In addition, all pending issues will be resolved through the federal council. In this way, a voluntary Iraq will be created, not an imposed one.

The interviewees believed that the non-interference of the Iraqi central government in Kurdish affairs would contribute to the political stability of Kurdistan. Furthermore, giving Kurds the right to manage their own affairs within a federal system would play a great role in stabilising Iraq and Kurdistan. Conversely, denial of the Kurdish right to internal self-determination would create political instability in Kurdistan and Iraq at large. Moreover, federalism would stabilise Iraq because it would give Sunnis and Shiites a kind of autonomy to manage their own regions and be responsible for their regions' security and stability. The stability of the component federal regions would lead to the stability of Iraq as a whole.

**Equal distribution of wealth:** Three out of six interviewees agreed that federalism would lead to greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession because of the equal distribution of wealth among the federal regions. For instance, Kurdistan did not receive the benefits of the Iraqi oil revenues during the period of centralised authoritarian rule. Now Kurdistan benefits from the Iraqi wealth under the federal system as it has its allocated budget from Iraqi national oil revenues which contribute to the development of Kurdish economy. An interviewee stated:

During the centralism era, all Kurdish sectors were completely neglected and underdeveloped, but now Kurdistan has its allocated budget from Iraqi oil revenues, which helps develop every sector in the region.

Another interviewee with the same viewpoint stated:

In a federal system, we can exploit natural resources, and have our own budget to spend on different sectors in Kurdistan.

Kurdistan, being a federal part of Iraq, was perceived to benefit economically from Iraqi oil because of the equitable distribution of national wealth among different ethnic groups. This was believed to contribute to the stabilisation of the country politically. Conversely, the unequal distribution of wealth between Arabs and Kurds would lead to perceptions of injustice and consequently political instability in Kurdistan and Iraq.

**Ethnic identity recognition:** Two out of six interviewees believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq because federalism would safeguard and recognise the component elements of all ethnic identities in Iraq and Kurdistan. For instance, the recognition of Kurdish identity would contribute to political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq. An interviewee commented:

Federalism protects the unique Kurdish identity within the united Iraq, Thus, it provides political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq.

The interviewee believed that denial of Kurdish identity would destabilise Kurdistan and Iraq at large. She believed that federalism would ensure the recognition and protection of all ethnic identities in Iraq and that this would help stabilise Kurdistan and Iraq.

Second, in the conditional yes category, eight out of fifteen interviewees believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq provided certain conditions were met. These conditions were grouped into: (a) Arabic acceptance of federalism; and (b) the creation of other federal regions in Iraq.

**Arabic acceptance of federalism:** Five out of eight interviewees argued that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq provided that federalism was accepted by the Arabs. Before 2003, the Iraqi Arab opposition party promised the Kurds that they would uphold federalism if Saddam's regime toppled. However, they stood against federalism after 2003 because they had been used to a centralised politico-administrative system for 80 years and wanted to maintain control of the Kurdish region through it. According to one interviewee, the Iraqi Arabs believed that federalism would eventually lead to the division of Iraq. An interviewee commented:

Federalism would provide greater stability to Kurdistan and Iraq if there is a true intention of the Iraqi Arab leaders to implement federalism with no returning to centralism. Before 2003, there were opposition parties which promised Kurds to make the new Iraqi system federal but now the Iraqi parties retreated from this promise and want to change the federal system. They just want to increase the central government authority at the expense of the regional ones.

Another interviewee added:

In Iraq, it relies upon the acceptance of a federal system by the Iraqi components. There are many Iraqi parties which are sceptical about the creation of several federal regions in Iraq. They think federalism is a factor leading to the division of Iraq, not its union. It will take time for all Iraqis to believe that federalism is in the interests of all components of Iraq, not only one component, namely, the Kurds.

It was clear that Arabs were perceived as a stumbling-block to federalising, and consequently stabilising, Iraq. There were many factors mentioned as contributing to thwart the implementation of federalism. First, there was Arabic scepticism towards federalism as Arabs were perceived to believe that federalism encouraged division of Iraq. Second, some respondents thought the Arabs believed in centralism because they wanted to control the Kurdish region. These interviewees thought it would take a long time for the Arabs to accept that federalism would be beneficial to all ethnic groups in Iraq.

**The creation of other federal regions in Iraq:** Three out of eight interviewees argued that federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan provided that other federal regions would be created in the middle and south of Iraq. Iraq now had a central government with one federal Kurdish region. Having a real federal system in Iraq would require the creation of two or three more federal regions. The respondents argued that the stability of Iraq and Kurdistan would be reliant upon the formation of these regions because the implementation of federalism covering the whole of Iraq would safeguard the federal status of Kurdistan. Thus, one interviewee said:

Federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if the Arabs implement federalism as it is stipulated in the Iraqi constitution [namely, to form several federal regions in Iraq]. Theoretically and constitutionally Iraq is a federal state, but in reality there is one federal Kurdish region in Iraq, and a federal state should have two regions at least. The Kurds should play a role in convincing other Iraqi ethnic groups to form their federal regions so that federalism should be presented as an Iraqi demand, not a Kurdish one, to the world.

Another interviewee had a slightly different view on this issue and stated:

Federalism will provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if other federal regions are formed in Iraq. This is because every federal region will be busy with its affairs and the central government will be busy with its tasks.

Non-formation of other federal regions in Iraq worried the interviewees because this meant that the Kurdish federal region would be subject to dissolution because it could not stand by itself as the solitary federal region in Iraq. It also signified that federalism was a Kurdish demand, not an Iraqi one. This would destabilise the country because federalism would be resisted by the Iraqi majority. Also, it was felt that if each ethnic group was busy with running its own federal region and the central government was busy with its affairs, they would all be fully occupied. This would provide greater political stability in the country especially as each federal region would protect its interests within a united Iraq.

Third, in the yes and no category, only one out of fifteen interviewees argued that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan, but not to Iraq. This belief emanated from the continuous sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. It was argued that federalism would not stabilise Iraq because on the one hand, Sunnis had the upper hand for eighty years and wanted to restore their authority in Iraq after being marginalised by Shiites. On the other hand, the Shiites would not allow Sunnis to have a federal region in Iraq because the Shiites suffered violence and discrimination by Sunnis in the past. Thus, the respondent argued, the Shiites were prejudiced against the Sunnis. Subsequently, there would be a continuation of sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites over political control in Iraq. The interviewee stated:

In the Cairo Conference in March 1921, the creation of Iraq was premised upon six principles. One of these principles was that Arab Sunnis should have the upper hand in Iraq. The Sunnis had authority in Iraq for about eighty years. Now the Sunni sect feels that they have been betrayed because they have been sidelined after the downfall of Saddam Hussein. The Kurds and Shiites won the most votes in the recent legislative elections and they are the major players in Iraq. Furthermore, the Sunnis and Shiites cannot be united because they are two different sects with different ideologies and decision-making authorities.

This statement showed the opinion that the marginalisation of Sunnis destabilised Iraq after 2003, and that Sunnis would not be satisfied with a power-sharing arrangement because they had controlled Iraq from 1921 to 2003. Moreover, the current differences between Sunnis and Shiites in sectarian ideology and decision-making authority did not help peaceful co-existence. Thus, federalism would not provide political stability to Iraq but it would to Kurdistan because there was no sectarian violence in the Kurdish region.

In the no category, four out of nineteen interviewees (21%) contended that federalism would not provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan. It was noticeable that there was a stark numerical difference between the responses of yes category (79%) and of the no category (21%)

which reflected the vast majority of interviewees' perceptions on federalism as a political stabilising factor in Kurdistan and Iraq as a whole. This was because federalism was perceived to provide the Kurds with their political, economic and cultural rights. By contrast, a minority of interviewees viewed federalism as a political destabiliser for two reasons: (a) federalism as an incentive for secession; and (b) internal and regional impediments.

**Federalism as an incentive for secession:** Three out of four interviewees argued that federalism would not provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because federalism could not be sustained in a multi-ethnic country. They believed that federalism would be one step towards secession. It would spur Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites to seek secession due to the ethnic divisions between them. Thus, one interviewee remarked:

Federalism is on paper. The solitary solution is the division of Iraq. In future, the Sunni Arabs will ask for the division of Iraq because they are regarded as second class citizens by Shiites now.

Another interviewee shared the same sentiment and added:

Federalism will not continue in a multi-ethnic country. Federalism will develop as something else eventually [namely, the demise of federal arrangements].

These interviewees believed that the division of Iraq into three parts would be the only solution for the Iraqi ethnic quagmire. Federalism would not work in Iraq due to the history of sectarian and ethnic conflicts; hence federalism would not stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan.

**Internal and regional impediments:** One interviewee argued that federalism would not provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because it could not be implemented successfully in Iraq. There were internal and regional impediments to the implementation of federalism in Iraq. The interviewee thought that an intolerant Arabic culture would not be conducive to implementing federalism successfully. Also, regionally the contiguous countries were against

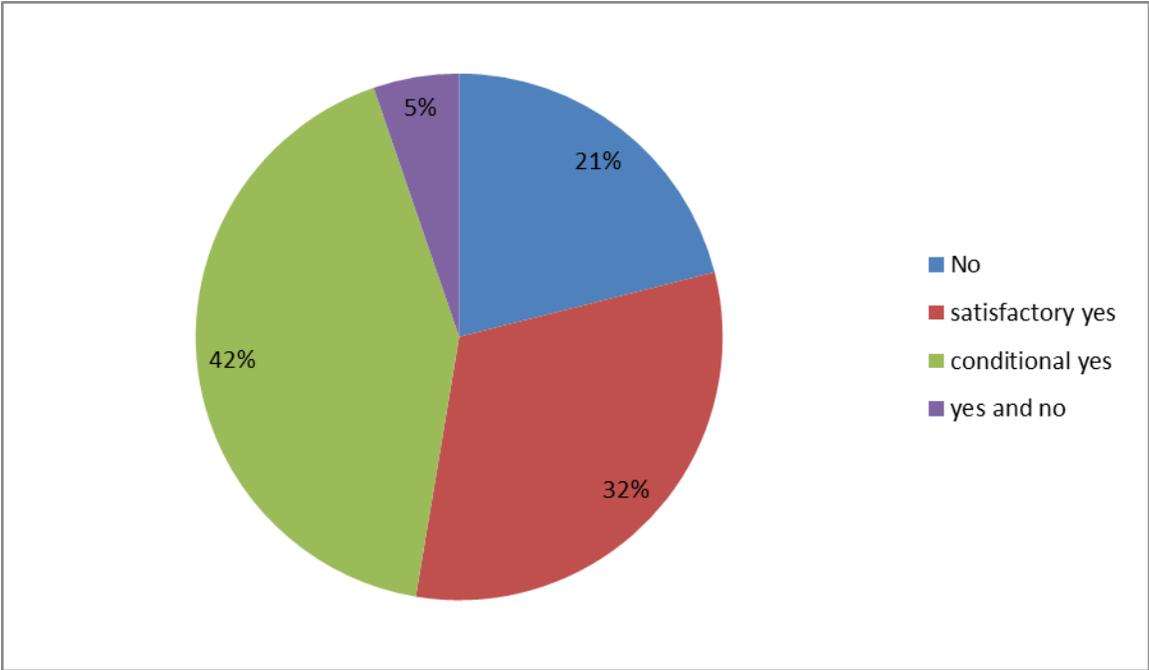
federalism in Iraq because the implementation of federalism in Iraq would stimulate Kurds in these countries to demand federalism there. He said:

Federalism would not provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because firstly, the non-tolerance of Arabic culture towards other ethnicities and religions would not be conducive to having a viable federal system in Iraq. Secondly, Kurdistan was carved up into four parts, so Turkey, Iran, and Syria are a stumbling-block to the implementation of federalism in Iraq because its implementation will pose a threat to their centralised systems. The change in the Iraqi system is tied to that in other systems in the Middle East.

This comment illustrated a belief that political stability in Iraq and Kurdistan would not be achieved through the implementation of federalism in Iraq. The perception of Arabic culture as intolerant was an internal obstacle to implementing a viable federalism in Iraq. Moreover, the neighbouring countries were a stumbling-block to the implementation of federalism in Iraq as it would place pressure on their centralised systems of government to be federalised due to the demands of their countries' Kurds. Hence, the contiguous countries were thwarting the federalisation of Iraq as it could have a domino-effect in these countries.

To sum up, the overwhelming majority of interviewees believed, for many reasons, that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq. First, the Sunni and Kurdish minorities, who were seeking power-sharing in Iraq, would have their own authority in their own federal regions. Second, these minorities would have their own budgets from the Iraqi central government to be spent on the development of their regions. In this sense, they would not be disadvantaged in terms of the distribution of Iraqi national wealth. Third, their identity would be recognised and protected within a federal system. A small minority of interviewees argued that federalism would not provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because federalism could not hold ethnic groups together in a country where ethnic and sectarian

**Figure 5.2: Perspectives from the public sector on federalism as a political stabiliser in Kurdistan and Iraq**



divisions were historically deep-rooted. In addition, the intolerant Arabic culture and the interference by the contiguous countries in Iraqi political affairs were not helping the implementation of federalism in Iraq. Although positive responses were clearly dominant, Figure 5.2, shows, as already discussed, that these responses were far from uniform. Thus, 42% of responses were in the conditional yes category while 32% of responses were in the satisfactory yes category. A clear message that communicated in all these responses was that despite the sma overwhelming approval of federalism as a political stabiliser for Kurdistan and Iraq, the success of this arrangement was perceived to be contingent on the approval of the Iraqi ethnic majority, namely, the Arabs.

## **The Iraqi Government's Position on Federalism**

The fourth question asked was: *How do you see the Iraqi government's attitude towards federalism for Kurdistan?* This question was designed to elucidate perceptions of the Iraqi government's position on federalism as its stance would play a paramount role in the political future of Kurdistan. The responses were diverse, ranging from anti-federalism to pro-federalism to the vague.

**Anti-federalism:** The majority of respondents, thirteen out of nineteen interviewees (68.5%), believed that the Iraqi government was against federalism for various reasons. These reasons were classified into: (a) Kurdish federal initiative; (b) Arabic nationalistic mentality; (c) Arabic pro-centralism; and (d) Arabic Islamic politics.

*Kurdish federal initiative:* Two out of thirteen interviewees believed that the Iraqi government was anti-federal because federalism was a Kurdish initiative. The Kurdish parliament had declared that the political system of Kurdistan and Iraq would be federal in 1992. In 2005, the Kurds took part in the preparation of the Iraqi Constitution and pressed hard for the inclusion of Article 1 which stipulates that Iraq has a democratic federal parliamentary system. Thus, federalism was a Kurdish demand and initiative. Consequently, the Arabs opposed it. One interviewee expressed this argument as follows:

The Kurdish parliament adopted and consolidated federalism as a system of Kurdistan and Iraq as a whole in 1992. Thus, the new Iraqi government does not accept such a system.

Another interviewee added:

Federalism is initiated by the Kurds who are determined to implement it. Thus, the Iraqi Arabs are against it.

It would appear that the interviewees thought the Iraqi government was against federalism because it was initiated by the Kurds. Federalism was stipulated in the Iraqi Constitution only

because the Kurds advocated it. Hence it was a Kurdish request. The Arabs were antagonistic towards federalism because it was not initiated by them and seemed to be imposed on them by the Kurds.

*Arabic chauvinist mentality:* Four out of thirteen interviewees believed that the Iraqi government was against federalism due to its dominant Arabic nationalistic mentality. This mentality, they said, was based on Arabic chauvinist ideology that was very hostile to Kurds and federalism. Thus, the Arabs were trying to change federalism to centralism in the Iraqi Constitution. One interviewee stated:

The Iraqi government is a part of the Arabic homeland, which holds a chauvinist ideology. Thus, they are anti-Kurds and anti-federalism. The mentality of the Iraqi government was premised on Arabic nationalistic ideology which believed in the superiority of Arabs over other ethnicities. Thus, Arabs did not believe in sharing power with other ethnic groups. Consequently, they were anti-federalism.

*Arabic pro-centralism:* Six out of thirteen interviewees believed that the Iraqi Government was anti-federalism because it preferred centralism to any other political system. The Arabic hierarchical culture based on centralism was oriented to thwarting the implementation of federalism in Iraq. The new Iraqi government was influenced by the legacy of centralism that stretched back 80 years. One interviewee expressed this opinion as follows:

The Iraqi government is anti-federalism and pro-centralism. This is because the Arabic culture is hierarchical and based on centralism, whereas the Kurdish culture likes freedom and anti-centralism. The Arabs thwart the implementation of federalism in Iraq, and the Kurds [Kurdish parliamentarians] in Baghdad are currently struggling to implement it.

Another interviewee added:

The people in the middle and south of Iraq do not accept federalism because they live under the illusion of centralism. The past centralism has controlled their mentality.

Another interviewee provided considerable detail when expounding this argument:

In the recent elections on March 7, 2010, some Iraqi parties propagated that Iraq needs a strong central system and the governorates' authority should be taken and given to the

central government. Through the central government, the financial and administrative affairs of these governorates will be controlled. The federal regions will be replaced by the governorates system. Thus, I am not very optimistic about the stand of the Baghdad government now and in the future. It depends on the results of the elections and the parties that will be in the new parliament. During the election campaign, some parties announced their hostility to federalism and the specificity of the Kurdistan region. Their chauvinist speeches are similar to those of the previous Ba'athist regime. For instance, Kurds went through Anfal and chemical bombing and they were deprived of their social, cultural and economic rights, and now some of the politicians state that Kurds should be dealt with in this way. They see what Kurdistan enjoys is unacceptable and they want us to go back to the era before 1991. This is because they see the development of the Kurdish region will lead to the loss of Arabic authority and land. Now they mobilise the Arabic people against federalism.

The interviewees posited that federalism was a novel concept and system to the Arabs because Iraq had been under the reign of centralism from 1921 to 2003. Consequently, the new Iraqi government, whose majority were Arabs, was used to and influenced by centralism. Moreover, the Arabic culture was perceived as supporting hierarchy leading Iraqi Arabs to believe that federalism would make the central government lose its authority over Kurdistan. Hence, the Arabs were perceived to be attempting to re-centralise Iraq rather than federalise it.

*Arabic Islamic politics:* One of thirteen interviewees believed that the Arabs were anti-federalism because their politics was based on Islamic ideology. Such an ideology was not compatible with federalism. This interviewee remarked:

The Sunni and Shiite politics is Islamic and thus such politics is not compatible with federalism.

This minority view revealed a belief that the new Iraqi government was based on Islamic ideology. Such politics was interpreted as being not secular and incompatible with federal precepts.

**Pro-federalism:** Only three out of nineteen interviewees (18%) believed that the Iraqi government was pro-federalism for two reasons: Iraqi commitment to federalism; and federalism

as the best solution for the Iraqi ethnic predicament. First, two of the three interviewees argued that the Iraqi government was committed to implementing all the articles related to federalism:

The Iraqi federal government is committed to implementing all the articles in the constitution, including these articles associated with federalism. There is, nonetheless, one Kurdish federal region in Iraq at the moment. Differences between Arabic and Kurdish sides may happen sometimes, which are normal. These differences will be solved through dialogue and recourse to the Iraqi Constitution.

According to this view, the Iraqi government was committed to the implementation of federalism as demonstrated by its pro-federalism attitude even though there was only one federal region at that stage. Another of these three interviewees contended that the Iraqi government was pro-federalism because the majority of Arabs believed that federalism was the best solution for the Iraqi ethnic predicament. He commented:

The majority of Iraqi people voted for the Iraqi Constitution which stipulated federalism as a political system of Iraq because they think that federalism is the best solution to all ethnic problems.

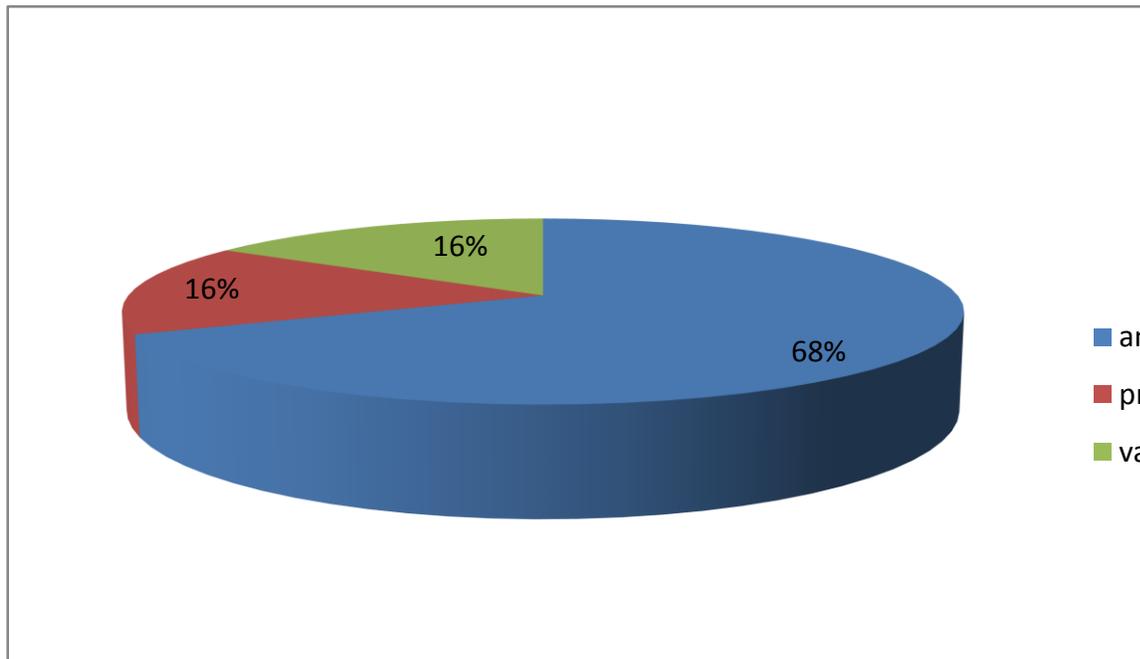
This comment revealed a belief that the majority of Iraqis voted for the Iraqi constitution that stipulated federalism as they thought that federalism was a remedy for ethnic conflicts in Iraq. As a result, the Iraqi Government was supposedly pro-federalism.

**Vague position:** Three out of nineteen interviewees (16 %) believed that the Iraqi government's position on federalism was ambiguous because they neither opposed nor upheld federalism publically. One of these interviewees said:

The Iraqi government's attitude towards federalism is vague. They do not oppose it publicly, but tend to accentuate centralism over federalism.

This statement demonstrated a suspicion that the Iraqi government was reluctant to express their true opinion on federalism. This induced ambiguity in the government's position on federalism.

**Figure 5.3: Perspectives from the public sector on the Iraqi government’s position on federalism**



In summary, a large majority of interviewees believed that the Iraqi Government, whose majority were Arabs, was anti-federalism because federalism was a Kurdish initiative and one which would result in Arabs losing their power over Kurdish areas. Thus, the Arab-dominated central government was seen as pro-centralist to ensure that Arabic authority and supremacy would be maintained. A minority of responses ranged between pro-federalism and a vague position on federalism. These responses are presented in Figure 5.3. This clearly shows that Kurdish public sector perceptions of Arab Iraq were that its politicians would not support federalism in the country.

### **Secession as a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Iraq**

The fifth question asked was: *Is it in the interests of Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq? Why?* This question was designed to explore people’s viewpoints on secession as a remedy to the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination in Iraq. The answers to this question were

grouped into yes and no categories. A small minority, three out of nineteen interviewees (16%), were in the yes category arguing that it was in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq for two reasons: secure homeland; and sovereign entity.

Two of these three interviewees contended that it was in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq because the formation of a Kurdish state would provide a sense of security to Kurds and a safe homeland. They believed that it was a natural right of Kurds to have own their state because they, as a nation, were entitled to have an independent state:

Every nation has the right to have its own state. Thus, it is the natural right of the Kurdish nation to have an independent state. It is in their interests to secede because an independent state provides Kurds with security. Thus, it is emotionally essential to have our own home.

This comment demonstrated a belief that the Kurds required a safe shelter, namely, an independent nation-state, which would not oppress or discriminate against them. The Kurds, like any other nation, believed that they were entitled to the right to self-determination. Thus, it was emotionally necessary for the Kurdish nation to have its own state. Another of the pro-secession interviewees had a different explanation for this view. He argued that by seceding from Iraq, Kurdistan would be a sovereign entity which would enable it to be a member of the UN and exercise its own discretion in selecting its own political system with its own independent institutions. He commented:

It is in the interests of Kurds to secede because Kurdistan will be a UN member, and will have its discretion to choose the kind of its political system. In addition, it will have its own finances, military and embassies.

The vast majority of interviewees, sixteen out of nineteen (84%), believed that it was not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq. This no category was classified into temporary no and permanent no. In the temporary no category, twelve out of sixteen interviewees argued that it was not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq now. This was due to internal and regional

impediments which would not be conducive to the formation of a Kurdish state at this time. They had a strong conviction that Kurds were a nation, which should be entitled to the right to self-determination, but the current circumstances were not conducive to the creation of a viable Kurdish state. Thus, one interviewee said:

According to the international charters, every nation has the right to self-determination. Kurds, like any nation, have such a right, but secession is not feasible now because of internal and regional circumstances.

Another interviewee added:

It is not in the interests of the Kurds to declare independence now in spite of the fact that 98.76% of Kurds voted for the independence of Kurdistan via an unofficial referendum organised by the Kurdistan Referendum Movement on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2005. This is because there are regional and internal obstacles that hinder Iraqi Kurdistan from seceding from Iraq.

Yet another interviewee remarked:

The independence of Iraqi Kurdistan depends on the circumstances in the future if they are helping to establish a Kurdish state. It is our right to have a Kurdish state because we are a nation, speaking a different language, living on a different land, wearing different clothes and having a different history full of genocide and Anfal operations.

These comments suggested that the Kurds wanted to secede from Iraq because it was their right as a nation to have their own state. But, the creation of a Kurdish state was, they said, not feasible and plausible at this stage due to both internal and external impediments. Thus, Kurdish independence was not in the interests of Iraqi Kurds at that time.

In the minority permanent no category, four out of sixteen interviewees contended that it was always not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq because the formation of a Kurdish state was not feasible as Kurdistan was surrounded by regional enemies. Thus, Kurdistan independence was merely a Kurdish dream, which could not be realised. In addition, they argued that the quest for independence was archaic as the struggle for federalism and autonomy was the

focus of political action nowadays. What was significant to Kurds was to enjoy their rights within a democratic federal system of Iraq. Thus, one interviewee remarked:

I believe that the creation of a Kurdish state is a dream because we have enemies and hence we are stateless. The struggle for establishing a nation state is, however, out-dated because now the struggle is for democracy and internal self-determination where the people enjoy their rights and freedom. Thus, we should struggle for having democracy where the Kurds enjoy their political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedom. At this stage, it is important for us to advocate democracy and federalism to enjoy our rights within Iraq.

Another interviewee added that:

The Kurds have a dream to have their own state, but they are realistic and choose to be a federal part of Iraq. The independence of Iraqi Kurdistan is not possible because of adjacent enemies.

It was clear that these interviewees believed that the only realistic remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq was federalism. This was because firstly, the current global trend favoured the quest for the internal right to self-determination. Secondly, the creation of a Kurdish state was not possible due to the hostility of contiguous countries towards it. Hence, these interviewees argued that it was not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq at all.

In short, there were two opinions on the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan: pro-secession and anti-secession. A minority of interviewees argued that it was in the interests of Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq because it would provide Kurds with a secure homeland and a sovereign entity. Conversely, the clear majority, about three quarters of interviewees, contended that it was not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq due to internal and external obstacles. They believed Kurds should struggle for the implementation of federalism and the consolidation of democracy in Iraq so as to enjoy their rights and safeguard the federal status of Kurdistan.

## **Internal and External Impediments to the Creation of a Kurdish State**

The sixth question asked was: *What are the internal and external impediments that prevent Kurdistan from being a state?* This question was designed to elucidate the perceived internal and external impediments that hinder Iraqi Kurdistan from evolving into an independent state. There was a diverse range of responses to this question. These responses were classified into internal and external obstacles categories.

Internal obstacles: encompassed: (a) dependent and weak economy; (b) corruption; (c) malfunction of the Kurdistan Regional Government; (d) Kurdish divided leadership; (e) the demise of Kurdish nationalism; (f) lack of democratic culture; and (g) Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence. The respondents were allowed to nominate several obstacles. The average number of nominated obstacles was four.

**Dependent and weak economy:** Nine out of nineteen interviewees (47%) argued that one of the internal obstacles that prevented Iraqi Kurdistan from being a state was its weak economy which was dependent on Baghdad. Its allocated budget, 17% of the Iraqi oil revenues, was spent on public servants' salaries and local projects. In addition, Kurdistan did not have significant industries. Thus, it was reliant on imports from contiguous countries. One interviewee remarked:

Kurdistan does not have an economy that can be counted on. It has no significant industries. Moreover, every Kurd depends on his salary which comes from Baghdad.

Another interviewee added:

Kurdistan depends on the imports that come from the neighbouring countries as it does not have a strong economy to depend on. In addition, the oil sector is controlled by Baghdad.

This theme was continued by another interviewee:

Unfortunately the Kurdish economy is weak. Iraqi Kurdistan depends on imports. Any nation depending on imports is doomed. If the Kurds rely upon imports, they cannot have their own state. This is because when the adjacent countries seal off their borders, there will

be no chance to import products and export oil. Kurdistan will starve. Then, how can Kurds survive?

A variation on this theme was that Kurdistan was very rich in natural resources which were not yet utilised:

Iraqi Kurdistan is rich in natural resources. We have good agricultural land, tourist resorts, water and mineral resources, but they have not been utilised to establish a strong economic base. Thus, Iraqi Kurdistan is relying upon imports.

There were economic possibilities, said another interviewee:

There are hopes for making Kurdistan's economy strong if the KRG can fight corruption and invest in the natural resources in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution which encourages the development of the Kurdistan region and the prosperity of its people.

All these interviewees were aware of Kurdistan's incapability of being an independent state because its economy, one of the paramount components of a viable state, was undeveloped and reliant upon Baghdad and imports. The Kurdistan finances came from Baghdad and its imports came from adjacent countries. It had not utilised its natural resources to establish a solid economic base. Also, Kurdistan did not control its oil as its oil sector was under the control of Baghdad. Thus, these interviewees said the creation of a Kurdish state was not advisable.

**Corruption:** Ten out of nineteen interviewees (52.6%) believed that corruption was one of the internal obstacles hampering Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a state. Firstly, corruption would, they thought, delay the growth of the Kurdish economy causing Kurdish youth to migrate to other countries. Secondly, it would hinder Kurdistan from establishing a good government. This would, in their opinions, cause the Kurdish leadership to lose its credibility among its people and would create a rift between Kurdish leaders and the people. Thirdly, the international community would not support the creation of a corrupt Kurdish state. One interviewee believed that corruption slowed the development of Kurdistan, saying:

Corruption is absolutely one of the obstacles that hinders Kurdistan from being a state. This is because it delays the implementation of projects and it does not give an opportunity for the

young people to get a job. Thus, they leave the country and live abroad. The development of a country counts on young manpower and funds.

Another interviewee thought that corruption would impinge on the institutionalisation of a Kurdish government and would cause Kurdistan to lose international support for its independence. She remarked:

Corruption is an internal obstacle because it prevents the establishment of institutional united government. If the corruption is not fought, the wealth of the nation will be in the pockets of rich people. This will not develop the government institutions and regions at large in any aspect. Consequently, the international community will not support Kurdistan independence in the future if it fails to present a positive model to the world.

Another interviewee added that:

Corruption is a dangerous phenomenon that poses an impediment to the growth and development of Kurdistan. The endemic corruption has created a wide gap between the public and the Kurdish leadership. This has impinged on the credibility of the Kurdish leadership in achieving the Kurdish goals of having a better and stable life.

From these comments, corruption would negatively impact on the development of Kurdistan because of the embezzlement of Kurdish wealth by senior officials. Corruption would also result in mistrust between the Kurdish leadership and the citizenry. This signified that Kurdistan lacked a competent and trustworthy leadership. Without such a leadership, a Kurdish state could not be created. Corruption thwarted Kurdistan from institutionalising its government. Moreover, corruption distorted Kurdistan's image internationally. This caused the international community to be hesitant to support the formation of what would be a corrupt Kurdish state.

**Malfunction of the Kurdistan Regional Government:** Fourteen out of nineteen interviewees (73%) believed that Kurdistan did not have a competent government that could run an independent state. This was because the KRG had many shortcomings, including tribalism, non-unified government, party dominance over government, and the newness of government.

*Tribalism:* two out of fourteen interviewees argued that one of the KRG's shortcomings was tribalism because its ministers assumed office based on their allegiance to tribes and the ruling families<sup>34</sup> rather than on their qualifications. Thus, unqualified and incompetent ministers were employed in the KRG resulting in misuse of power and corruption in its institutions. One interviewee remarked:

Iraqi Kurdistan is a tribal society and the Kurdish allegiance is to the tribe or ruling families. Those, who have got senior positions in the government, have allegiance to their tribes and ruling families. They are employed to serve the interests of the ruling parties in the government. The KRG should employ qualified people, especially technocrats, who are capable of making decisions, not waiting for their parties to receive their orders.

These interviewees believed that tribalism was the basis of allegiance to the ruling parties and was ingrained in the KRG. This meant that the employment of senior officials was not premised on qualifications, but on tribe and party affiliation. This caused the malfunctioning of the KRG.

*Party dominance over the KRG:* Nine of fourteen interviewees argued that one of the reasons for the KRG malfunction was the ruling parties' dominance over the government. The KDP and PUK had the authority over all the government institutions and had the power to appoint officials. Thus, one interviewee said:

The hegemony of the ruling parties over the KRG has caused the government to be paralysed. For instance, the ruling parties have appointed the Vice Prime Minister of Kurdistan. That is the prime minister's responsibility, not the parties. The KRG is not like the European style of government.

Another interviewee added:

The ruling parties are still controlling and administering the government. The parties are still interfering in all governmental institutions such as parliament, police, security, court and *peshmarga*. These organisations should, however, be independent.

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<sup>34</sup> The ruling families are the Barzani and Talabani families. The Barzani family heads the KDP and controls Dohok and Erbil cities. The Talabani family heads the PUK and controls Sulaymaniyah and a part of new Kirkuk areas.

These interviewees believed that the non-separation of parties' authority from the government's authority caused the malfunction of the KRG because the KRG became merely a puppet of the KDP and PUK. The KRG could not make its own independent decisions because decisions were made by the ruling parties, as they administered all government institutions.

*The newness of government:* Five out of fourteen interviewees contended that the KRG was an inexperienced government because it was very new in comparison with the adjacent countries' governments. Thus, it was one of the reasons for its poor performance. One interviewee commented:

The Kurds had no previous experience in administering the region and establishing civil society. In addition, the KRG is a very new government which cannot be compared with other governments in the neighbouring countries because these governments have been ruling for a long time.

Another interviewee added:

The Kurdistan ruling experience cannot be compared with the neighbouring or western countries because they are more experienced and professional in administering their governments.

These interviewees believed that the KRG did not have a sufficient ruling experience in comparison with the contiguous countries because its institutions were only established in 1992. According to the interviewees, this led to the KRG institutions lacking proficiency in ruling the region. This consequently contributed to the poor performance of its institutions.

**Kurdish divided leadership:** Eight out of nineteen interviewees (42%) contended that the ruling parties, namely the PUK and the KDP, were not united in leading Kurdistan, and had no unified political strategy. This was because of the internal war between the PUK and KDP in 1996. This, they said, caused a rift between these two parties so that each party now had its own security and intelligence organisations. They pointed to the fact that the PUK controlled the Sulaymaniyah

administration and the KDP controlled the Erbil and Dohok administration. Moreover, their self-interest overrode the national one. One interviewee put it as follows:

There are internal obstacles to the formation of a Kurdish state, these are factionalism and the Kurdish leadership's disunited policy.

Another interviewee elaborated on this, saying:

The Kurds are not united among themselves, and they do not have one stance, strategy and diplomacy. They have two positions diplomatically. This means that the Kurds are divided within themselves. Even the unification of the KRG is artificial. Kurdistan has two security and intelligence organisations administered by the ruling parties. The party sphere has impinged upon the KRG institutions. The internal war of 1996 caused the Kurds to be ten years backward. Many Kurds were killed in this war which has left a rift between these two parties. Until now it is obvious that we have two administrations in the KRG.

This view was reinforced by another interviewee:

We had an internal war which was a disaster in 1996. The Kurdish authority and leadership are divided between these two parties due to that war. These two parties are controlled by the ruling families. These families defend their interests which they consider more important than the Kurdish interests. They want to stay in power at any cost.

These interviewees believed that the rift between the ruling parties had deepened after the internal war in 1996. This led to the division between the PUK and KDP. Thus, factionalism characterised the KRG institutions, and the self-interests of the PUK and KDP caused a disunited political position and strategy among the Kurdish leadership. A Kurdish divided leadership would be one of the internal impediments that Kurdistan would have to overcome to create a viable state.

**The demise of Kurdish nationalism:** Six out of nineteen interviewees (31.5%) argued that Kurdish nationalism was dead and thus there was no demand for a Kurdish state. The demise of Kurdish nationalism was because of the malfunction of the KRG and the lack of interest in nationalism from the Kurdish leadership. Moreover, the Kurdish allegiance to parties rather than

to Kurdistan caused the Kurdish national sentiment to die. One interviewee expressed this as follows:

There is no Kurdish national awareness. The Kurdish leadership is responsible for the demise of Kurdish nationalism because they are not nationalist and have caused people's Kurdish nationalism to fade away.

Another interviewee expressed similar sentiment:

Firstly, Kurds have lost hope in the Kurdish administration because of the bad performance of its cabinet in the last years. This resulted in Kurds being pessimistic about the future of Kurdistan. Secondly, the Kurds belong to the parties rather than to the homeland, Kurdistan. They have pledged their allegiance to the parties, not Kurdistan. Now there is an attempt by the Kurdish leadership to make the young busy with other things, such as drugs. This makes the youngsters lose their sense of nationalism and subsequently the region cannot depend on them in the future.

These interviewees had a strong conviction that the Kurdish leadership and government played a double negative role in the demise of Kurdish nationalism. First, the Kurdish leadership, in their opinion, was not nationalist, which caused the Kurds to pledge their allegiance to the parties rather than to Kurdistan. Secondly, the bad performance of the Kurdish government made the Kurds lose hope in their region. These issues, according to the interviewees, led to the demise of Kurdish nationalism.

**Lack of democratic culture:** Three out of nineteen interviewees (15.7%) believed that the lack of democracy in Kurdistan would impede the region from becoming a state. The PUK and KDP were undemocratic because they did not accept the democratic precept of the rotation of power through elections. They always wanted to stay in power by any means. The interviewees alleged that in the Kurdistan legislative election in 2009, these parties fired people, who did not vote for them, from universities and ministries, and used electoral fraud to win elections and continue ruling the regions. Furthermore, the people could not think or act freely because most of them

were employed by the ruling parties. If they stood against these parties, they would lose their jobs as punishment. An interviewee said:

We do not have a real pluralistic democracy. We have two ruling parties [PUK and KDP] which have the upper hand in the region. They do not accept the rotation of authority. The recent elections [legislative elections in 2009] showed that through electoral fraud, firing employees and threatening people, the PUK and KDP wanted to be voted to stay in power.

Another interviewee added:

There is no real democracy in Kurdistan. Its people cannot think freely because they are employed by and tied to parties through nepotism. In my opinion, the people of Kurdistan would prefer to have a democratic federal region to a totalitarian state.

These comments demonstrated a belief that to have a viable and stable state, it should be premised on democratic principles. The dictatorship of these ruling parties was hindering Kurdistan from becoming a state. This was, in the interviewees' opinions, because the people of Kurdistan would favour a democratic federal region to an autocratic Kurdish state.

**Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence:** Four out of nineteen interviewees (21%) argued that the Iraqi government would oppose the independence of Kurdistan because the Iraqis would not want to lose Kurdistan's natural resources. Thus, the creation of a Kurdish state would be destined to fail. One interviewee expressed this as follows:

Iraq will not allow us to establish our state because Arabs and Turkmen will not give away the Kurdistan natural resources to the Kurds.

There was, however, one interviewee out of nineteen, who had a different viewpoint on the Iraqi position on Kurdish independence. He contended that the position of the Iraqi Government was ambiguous in this regard. Thus, no one would know, he contended, how they would react to the declaration of the independence of Kurdistan if it happened in the future. He stated:

The Iraqi government's position on the creation of Kurdish statehood is ambiguous. If Kurdistan declares its independence, no one knows how the Iraqi government will react to such a declaration.

External obstacles to Kurdish independence identified by the interviewees included: (a) landlocked territory; (b) contiguous countries; and (c) international community. The respondents were allowed to nominate several obstacles. The average number of nominated obstacles was two.

**Landlocked territory:** Six out of nineteen interviewees (31.5%) contended that one of the external obstacles that prevented Kurdistan from being a state was being a landlocked territory. A Kurdish state would end up being destroyed because the Iraqi Kurdistan territory was surrounded by hostile countries. These countries would impose a siege on Kurdistan and would not allow it to use their skies and lands for transport. Thus, Kurdistan would not be able to survive in such an antagonistic environment. An interviewee stated:

Kurdistan is an enclave. The neighbouring countries will impose a blockade on Kurdistan if it declares its independence. Thus, it will be very hard for the Kurdish region to survive by itself.

Another interviewee added:

Kurdistan is a landlocked territory, surrounded by unfriendly countries, and it does not have any marine outlets.

These comments demonstrated the perception that the geography of Kurdistan was not conducive to the establishment of a Kurdish state. Thus, the declaration of Kurdistan independence would, in the interviewees' opinions, lead the country to its demise. The survival of the Kurdish state would be reliant upon the approval of the contiguous countries.

**Contiguous countries:** Eighteen out of nineteen interviewees (94.7%) believed that the adjacent countries were a stumbling-block to the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq because many Kurds resided in these countries. If such a state was formed, this would encourage other

Kurds to secede from these countries. Thus, the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would be seen as a threat to the national security of these countries. One interviewee commented:

It is currently impossible for Iraqi Kurdistan to secede because the neighbouring countries, with large Kurdish populations, will be against the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. For instance, all the neighbouring countries, including Iraq, were against and fought the creation of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Iran in 1946. At that time, it was one of the Baghdad Alliance aims to restrain the Kurdish movements in these countries, which regarded the Kurdish question as a threat to their national security. Thus, the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan is unthinkable despite a strong desire among the young Kurds to have an independent Kurdish state. The reality is very different from a subjective desire.

Another interviewee added:

The external obstacles are more serious than the internal ones because there are Kurds living in Turkey, Syria and Iran. The creation of a Kurdish state in the North of Iraq will encourage the Kurds in these countries to secede. Most Kurds live in the south of Turkey, and constitute a third of the Turkish population.

According to these respondents, it was obvious that the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would be seen as potentially destabilising for the contiguous countries because it would encourage other Kurds to secede from Turkey, Iran and Syria. Thus, the Kurdish question was depicted as a threat to the national security of these countries. Hence, the hostility of the neighbouring countries towards the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would prevent it from being a state.

**International community:** Seven out of nineteen interviewees (36.8%) argued that the international community would not support the creation of a Kurdish state in Iraqi Kurdistan because this would lead to re-drawing the map of the Middle East. It would cause instability, possibly chaos, in the region as a whole. Thus, one interviewee remarked:

In reality, everyone from the Kurdish leadership to the grassroots wants to have a Kurdish state. To have such a state, there should be international and regional acceptance. The international politics is not in favour of the creation of a Kurdish state because this will lead to re-drawing the map of the Middle East.

Another interviewee added:

The creation of a Kurdish state has not been in the interests of the international actors; and there has been historical prejudice against Kurds. The creation of a Kurdish state was possible after World War One if the Allies had not broken their promise to the Kurds by the annulment of the Sevres Treaty<sup>35</sup> on August 10, 1920. This treaty was replaced by the Lausanne Treaty on July 24, 1923; this was a big blow for the Kurds when other nation-states were emerging at that time. According to this treaty, Kurdistan was carved up into several parts. The state of Mosul [Iraqi Kurdistan nowadays] was given to Iraq by the order of the League of Nations. Thus, the creation of a Kurdish state was not possible.

These comments demonstrated a belief that the creation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East was very complicated and perilous because such a state would pose a threat to the stability and peace in the region. Thus, the international community was, in the interviewees' opinions, reluctant to support the formation of such a state. Moreover, historically the Kurdish state was not seen to be in the interests of the international community. Thus, the Kurdish state was not created after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.

In brief, the responses revealed a large quantitative difference between the negative responses on secession (84%) and the positive ones (16%). The overwhelming majority of interviewees agreed that the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan was not happening at least in the near future due to the unfavourable local, regional and international environments. There were many internal and external impediments, identified by the interviewees, to the creation of a Kurdish state. The internal impediments were a dependent and weak economy, corruption, malfunction of the KRG, Kurdish divided leadership, the demise of Kurdish nationalism, a lack of democratic culture and Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence. Iraqi Kurdistan would need to overcome the internal impediments to become a state. Overcoming these obstacles would not be easy as it would require time, determination and the willingness of all Kurds to work together to address these problems. Second, the external impediments were the problems posed by being a landlocked

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<sup>35</sup> The Treaty of Sevres recognised the Kurds' right to internal self-determination. It was the only document that allowed the proclamation of an independent Kurdistan.

territory, opposition by contiguous countries and lack of support by the international community. The independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would not be welcomed regionally and internationally as it would threaten the national unity of the contiguous countries. The creation of a Kurdish state would be reliant upon the future changes of the neighbouring countries' regimes and policies towards the Kurdish question as well as the future US foreign policy towards Kurdistan.

### **The American Role in the Kurdish Quest for the Right to Self-determination**

The seventh question asked was: *What is the role of the US in the Kurdish right to self-determination in Iraq?* This question was designed to seek the people's viewpoints on US foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan as the role of the US would be one of the paramount determinants of the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. There was a wide spectrum of responses which were classified into: (a) pro-internal right to self-determination; and (b) interest-oriented role.

**Pro-internal right to self-determination:** Fourteen out of nineteen interviewees (73.6%) argued that the US foreign policy supported the Kurdish right to internal self-determination. The US wished to guarantee the unity of Iraq, and the creation of a Kurdish state would destabilise Iraq. Also, a Kurdish state would put the American interests in Iraq and Turkey at stake. Thus, the respondents thought that the US believed that the only remedy for the Kurdish question in Iraq was federalism where the Kurds would enjoy their rights and administer their region within Iraq. One interviewee summed up this argument:

America is with the Kurdish self-determination, namely, the Kurds decide their fate internally and the ways of developing themselves politically, economically and socially within the framework of the Iraqi federal government. This means that the US is not for the Kurdish external self-determination, at least in the current circumstances. The current American interests lie in the unity of Iraq, people and land. America will not risk its interests

with the Arabs and Turks for the sake of the Kurds. The American policy towards Iraq and the Middle East as a whole, will, however, not forsake the protection of Iraqi Kurds because the Americans have realised the significance of Kurds in achieving stability in Iraq and in the Middle East as a whole.

Another interviewee focused on US strategy in the Middle East:

US interests come first. Its interests lie in oil and economy. The US wants to use Iraq as a base to control the Middle East. In addition, it is aligned with Turkey because Turkey is an old ally. Oil is pumped from Kurdistan to Europe through Turkey, and the US does not want to disturb this process by supporting the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan.

These comments reflected beliefs that the American approach to address the Kurdish question in Iraq was through federalism. Such an arrangement would not pose a threat to the unity of Iraq and would not risk the American strategic and economic interests with Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. Thus, the creation of a Kurdish state would not be supported by the US.

**Interest-oriented role:** Four out of nineteen interviewees (21%) believed that the American role in the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination was changeable in accordance with its interests. They argued that the US would support the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan or federalism in Iraq if this would serve the interests of the US. Thus, the Kurds should, in their opinions, depend on themselves to address their issue in Iraq. One interviewee stated:

The US, as a superpower, has all the rights to think about its interests first. It thinks how to protect its interests. If its interests intersect with your interests, it will support you. America does not have a friend or enemy. America does not support Kurds unless it has interests with them. Thus, the Kurds should defend their rights by themselves and never depend on America. For instance, when the coalition authority [led by the US] ruled Iraq in 2003, it declared the borders of Kurdistan were similar to those of 19/03/1991, and other disputed territorial areas should be constitutionally resolved. This meant that America did not help the Kurds to restore their lands from the Arabs at that time.

Another interviewee argued along similar lines:

America deals with the Kurds as a part of its Iraqi file. US protects Kurds provided that its interests are with Kurds. When its interests change, it does not take Kurds into account. Before 2003, we were completely autonomous, but after the downfall of Saddam's regime, America pressured to lessen the Kurdish authority in the Kurdistan region. It is clearly shown that America's interests are with Arabs more than Kurds. Thus, the US has no

positive role in the Kurdish question as the Kurds want it. It is true that the existence of Kurds and Kurdistan are tied to US support, but if the US stopped its support, there would be civil war in Iraq.

For these interviewees, it was obvious that the US foreign policy in Iraq and Kurdistan was primarily based on America's interests. Its approach was, in their opinions, realist. Thus, these interviewees argued that such a policy orientation would not guarantee the protection of Kurdistan. There was, however, a lone voice (5.2%) who stated that the US interests supported Kurdistan because:

The US interests lie in Kurdistan because firstly, Kurds uphold democracy. Secondly, they are not influenced by Islamic ideology. Thirdly, the Kurds regard the US and westerners as allies. Fourthly, Kurdistan has geopolitical significance for the US because it borders Iran, Syria and Turkey. The location of Iraqi Kurdistan helps the US achieve its strategic goals in the region.

This lone comment saw Iraqi Kurdistan as an amicable ally of the US in the Middle East as Kurds embraced democracy and secularism. In addition, its location would serve the strategic interests of America in the region. Thus, the US would be more interested in Kurdistan than in any country in the region.

In summary, the interviewees generally believed that the US would not support an independent Kurdistan because the US would not risk its interests in Iraq and Turkey for the sake of the Kurds. The American role was seen by the interviewees to be supportive of federalism in Iraq rather than the independence of Kurdistan. The US might, nonetheless, support the creation of the Kurdish state in the north of Iraq if it was in its interests in the future.

## **The future of Iraqi Kurdistan**

The eighth question asked was: *In your opinion, where is Iraqi Kurdistan heading?* This question was designed to explore people's opinions on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan; whether

they thought it would head towards independence or federalism. There were several responses to this question. They were grouped into: (a) secession; (b) federalism; (c) ambiguous; and (d) bleak.

**Secession:** Four out of nineteen interviewees (21%) argued that Iraqi Kurdistan would head towards independence because it had been politically and economically developing since 1991. Iraqi Kurdistan was on a trajectory that would lead to the formation of the Kurdish state in the future. Thus, one interviewee said:

Iraqi Kurdistan has a promising future. It is heading towards a country of investment because of oil, gas and tourism. There have been many developments in the region such as free media, the emergence of opposition parties, active civil society, good security, stability, democracy, and an efficient Kurdish Parliament.

Another interviewee added:

Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards political stability, democratisation, developing its infrastructure, building institutions, and strengthening its relationships with the neighbouring countries, which are based on friendship and economic interests. All of these will enable us to be a state in the future.

These interviewees believed that Iraqi Kurdistan was in the process of state-building. It needed to attain democracy, a strong economy, an institutionalised government and an economic-based relationship with the contiguous countries if it was to form an independent state in the future.

**Federalism:** Nine out of nineteen interviewees (48%) believed that Iraqi Kurdistan would head towards federalism. Its future would be promising because it would achieve democracy, stability and economic development within a federal system of Iraq. It would also strengthen its relationship with the West, which would provide international protection to the Kurdish region.

An interviewee commented:

Iraqi Kurdistan is going towards federalism. Through political consensus, we can achieve the Kurdish aims to live in a democratic state and enjoy our rights. We will diplomatically

strengthen our relationship with the USA and Europe. Thus, I believe the future of Kurdistan is promising.

There were, however, two interviewees who put provisions on a federal future. One remarked:

Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards federalism provided that: (i) the two Kurdish administrations are unified, having one political stance at the local and national level; (ii) the democratisation of Iraqi Kurdistan; and (iii) the US and UN resolve the issue of territorially disputed areas which will determine the federal borders of Kurdistan.

The first statement demonstrated a belief that Iraqi Kurdistan would unconditionally head towards federalism. By contrast, the second statement reflected a perception that it would conditionally head towards federalism. The viability of federalism in Kurdistan and Iraq would be dependent on the unification of the Kurdish administration, democratisation in the Kurdish region of Iraq, and the resolution of the territorially disputed areas.

**Ambiguous:** Five out of nineteen interviewees (26.3%) believed that the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was difficult to determine because of the political instability in Iraq and the Middle East region. Moreover, the Kurdish leadership had a double-standards policy on the political future of Kurdistan. On the one hand, it advocated federalism in Iraq and Kurdistan. On the other hand, it was in the process of state-building. Such a policy would cause Kurdistan to have an ambiguous future. Thus, one interviewee remarked:

I cannot predict which direction Kurdistan will develop towards. According to the status quo, the current political leadership is working towards two directions. The first direction is pragmatic, to implement and consolidate the pillars of federalism in Iraq and participate in the central government of Baghdad. The second direction is to consolidate the pillars of the Kurdish semi-independent entity, develop its legitimate institutions, establish a strong and prosperous economy and build up its military to safeguard Kurdistan.

Another interviewee added:

The future of Iraqi Kurdistan is unclear. According to the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan is heading towards federalism, but in reality we do not know what will happen tomorrow. This is because there is no stability in Iraq and the Middle East, and nothing is guaranteed in this region.

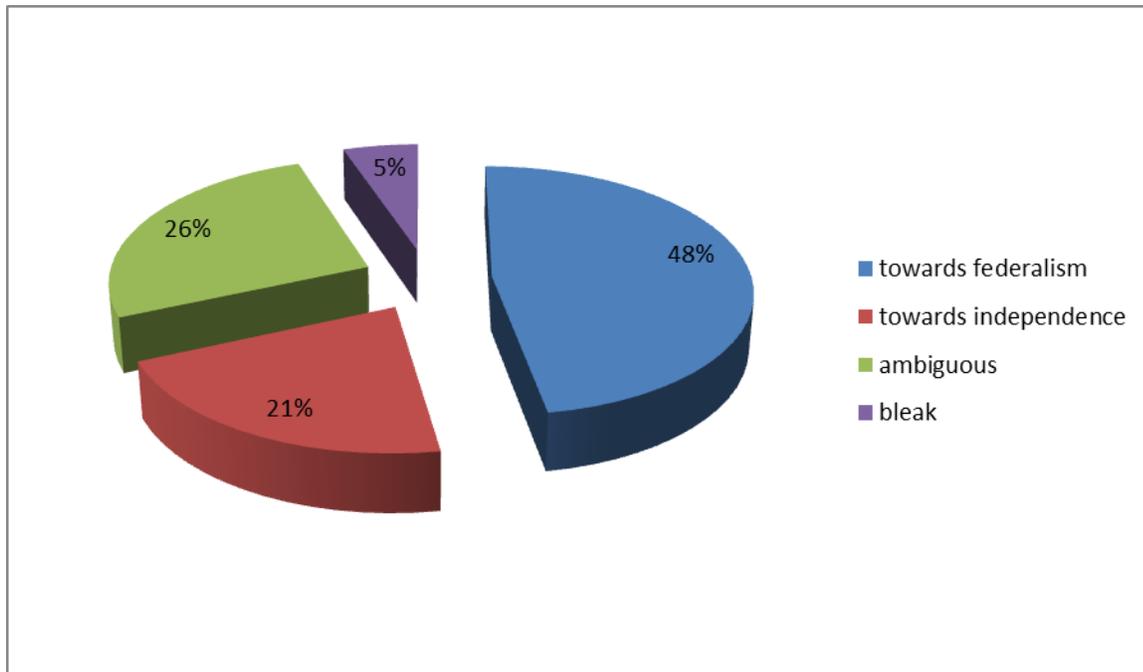
These interviewees perceived ambiguity in the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan due to the complexity of the Kurdish question and political instability in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. In addition, they thought the Kurdish leadership stance on the political future of Kurdistan was vague due to the sensitivity of the Kurdish question in the region. Thus, it was ambiguous as to which direction Iraqi Kurdistan would take.

**Bleak:** One out of nineteen interviewees (5%) contended that the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was bleak because it was heading towards a dictatorship due to corruption and party authority over the KRG. Furthermore, she believed that the Iraqi central government was going to have more political authority over the KRG. This interviewee commented:

Iraqi Kurdistan is gradually going towards an undemocratic system because of corruption, nepotism and party interference in the KRG. Thus, we are moving backwards; and our future is not promising as the Iraqi central government is getting more powerful than the KRG.

The interviewee believed that internal Kurdish problems would weaken the Kurdish political position in Baghdad. As a result, Iraq would tend to be more centralised than decentralised. Furthermore, corruption and party interference in the KRG were perceived to work against Kurdistan becoming a viable federal region and this would also not help it to become a state. Thus, this interviewee believed that the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was bleak. From Figure 5.4, it can be seen that there was a significant quantitative difference between the interviewees' perceptions on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan as heading towards federalism (48%) and those perceptions on this future as heading toward independence (21%). This demonstrated a popular Kurdish perception that federalism was a more feasible and plausible political arrangement than secession. However, the other 26% of responses showed that the political future of the Kurdish region of Iraq was ambiguous to a significant minority. This reflected the perceived volatility of the political situation in Iraq as a whole.

**Figure 5.4: Perceptions from the public sector on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan**



## **Conclusion**

Several important points have arisen from the data presented in this chapter. First, the universally held perception of Kurds as a nation demonstrated that Kurds felt entitled to the right to self-determination. Second, secession was not perceived as a plausible and feasible political approach to the Kurdish right to self-determination. Difficulties inside Kurdistan and Iraq were seen as stumbling-blocks to the formation of a Kurdish state. The malfunctioning of the KRG was seen to be especially detrimental to achieving the “Kurdish dream”. In addition, external forces were judged to be unsupportive of the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Third, federalism was, thus, viewed as a pragmatic and acceptable political arrangement to address the Kurdish right to self-determination. Federalism was seen to hold political and

economic gains for Iraqi Kurdistan in the long-run. The current non-implementation of federalism in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution was interpreted by interviewees as representing the Arab preference for the centralisation of Iraq. Finally, half of the interviewees held realistic views that Kurdistan was more likely to head to a federal region in the future, as federalism was the only solution to the survival of Iraqi Kurdistan as a self-ruled region.

## **Chapter Six: Federalism or Secession as a Remedy for the Kurdish Question in Iraq: Perspectives from the Non-state Sector**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to explore attitudes among society towards federalism and secession as solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Knowing these attitudes assists in understanding the political dynamics and future direction of the Kurdistan polity. The data were obtained through interviews carried out in 2010, using the eight semi-structured questions listed in Appendix 3.

There were twelve interviewees from different non-state sector institutions. There were two free-lance journalists: one from Sulaymaniyah and one from Erbil. Two editors-in-chief were from *Awene* newspaper and Jamwer news agency. Three participants were civil society activists: one was from the Civil Society Initiative; another was from the Kurdish Institute for Elections, and another one was from a Kurdistan human rights organisation. Additional interviewees included one military officer from the US Army stationed in Erbil; and one businessman from the Kurdistan Trading Company in Erbil. The remaining participants were three chairmen from the Sardam Publishing House, Kurdistan Strategic Studies and the Cultural and Awareness Centre. The non-state sector interviewees were selected to participate in this study for two reasons. First, the journalists and NGO activists stemmed followed closely the daily developments in the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan. Second, businessmen were economic-oriented towards the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan and were best positioned to evaluate which political arrangement bore the best economic advantages and caused prosperity for Iraqi Kurds. The interviews concentrated on: the concept of Kurdish nationhood; federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan; federalism as a stabilising factor in Kurdistan and Iraq;

the Iraqi government's position on federalism; secession as a solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq; the internal and external impediments to the creation of Kurdish state; the American role in the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination; and the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

### **Kurds as a Nation or an Ethnic Group?**

The first question asked was: *Do you think Kurds are a nation or an ethnic group?* This question aimed to explore the interviewees' perception of themselves as a nation or an ethnic group. All of the twelve participants (100%) believed that Kurds were a nation rather than an ethnic group, presenting various reasons. These reasons were grouped into three categories: ethnic characteristics; shared symbols; and the imperialist factor.

In the first category, nine out of twelve interviewees (75%) believed that Kurds were a distinct nation because of their ethnic characteristics. Seven interviewees (58%) used ethnic differences such as language and culture to express their unique national identity. A typical response was as follows:

Kurds are different from other nations such as Arabs and Turks because we have a different language, a different history and a different culture. Hence, we have the right to self-determination.

However, there were two interviewees (17%) who stressed the historical and ancestral features of the origin of Kurdish nationhood:

Kurds are descendants of Medes and builders of the ancient Median civilisation. Thus, Kurds are one of the ancient people who have existed for a long time.

The first quote demonstrated that the Kurds had a different language, a different history, and a different culture which united them as a nation and set them apart. In the second quote, the interviewees stated history and ancestry (being the descendent of Medes) to express their

distinctive nationhood. All these stated reasons made the Kurds think that they were a nation rather than an ethnic group.

In the second category, two interviewees (17%) used shared symbols, such as historical events, memories and festivals, to express their nationhood. An interviewee stated:

Being a Kurd means celebrating Nawroz and commemorating Anfal and Halabja chemical bombing events every year. These tragic reminiscences make us a nation which has a distinctive history.

This perception reflected that Kurds had shared symbols such traditional celebration of the Kurdish New Year (Nawroz), and horrific events (Anfal and chemical bombing) to express their distinctive nationhood and remind them of who they were.

In the final category, one interviewee (8%) mentioned imperialism as a reason for Kurds to construct and raise their sense of nationhood and/or nationalism. An interviewee stated:

We are a nation which should have obtained independence in accordance with the Sevres Treaty after World War One, but the Kurdish dream was not realised. Instead, the British occupied Kurdistan and then attached it to Iraq. The occupation of our country made us react like any other nation and we resisted and refused the incorporation of Kurdistan into Iraq and demanded a nation state.

This statement demonstrated that the Kurdish nationhood was a response to imperialism, as Kurdistan was occupied by the British and was then attached to Iraq. Thus, the Kurds were fighting for independence as the interviewee believed that Kurds, as a nation, had the right to establish a nation state. Overall, the responses demonstrated an overwhelming perception among Kurds that their nationhood was primordial and was deserving of an independent state.

### **Federalism as an Acceptable Political Arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan**

The second question asked was: *Do you think federalism is an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan?* This question was designed to explore the interviewees' attitudes towards

federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. There were diverse responses to this question and they can be grouped into two categories: yes and no. Eleven out of twelve interviewees (91.7%) agreed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The yes answer was, however, classified into three subcategories. The first subcategory was the temporary yes, namely, that federalism was a temporarily acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The second subcategory was the permanent yes which meant that federalism was a permanently acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. The third subcategory was the conditional yes which signified that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement if specific conditions were met.

In the first yes subcategory, four participants out of eleven believed that federalism was an acceptable temporary political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. They argued that the creation of a Kurdish state was not feasible at this stage due to the hostility of contiguous countries. An interviewee stated:

Federalism is a temporary solution because if the Kurds declare independence now, the regional countries, our enemies, will destroy it. We hope that federalism will lead to confederalism and eventually will lead to statehood.

The sensitivity and infeasibility of the creation of a Kurdish state were perceived as significant issues at this stage. The creation of such a state was seen to be impracticable due to the antagonism of the adjacent countries towards a Kurdish state. Thus, the interviewees believed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan at this stage.

In the second yes subcategory, three out of eleven interviewees believed that federalism was a permanently acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. They contended that the Kurds wanted a state but such a state was not welcomed by the neighbouring countries. Hence they

believed that federalism was the only realistic remedy for the Kurdish question in Iraq. An interviewee expressed this belief as follows:

The Kurds want a state because they were persecuted by former Iraqi governments. It is the right of Kurds to have their own state, but federalism is a realistic option for Kurds. If we can make Kurdistan a strong federal region, we can create a mini state within a state. A federal region is better than an independent state blockaded by adjacent countries, which ends up in destruction.

These interviewees perceived federalism as a realistic approach to the Kurdish question in Iraq. They accepted federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because this was the only viable solution. They thought that there were major external impediments in the Middle East region to the establishment of a Kurdish state. Thus, they regarded federalism as a realistic approach to the Kurdish issue in Iraq.

In the third yes subcategory, four out of eleven interviewees (33%) believed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement if specific conditions were met. The first was the recognition of Kurdish rights; the second was the successful implementation of federalism; and the third was the acceptance of federalism by the Arabs.

**Recognition of Kurdish rights:** A lone voice believed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurds provided that the Kurdish political, economic and cultural rights were recognised by the Arabs. In addition, prior discrimination against the Kurdish people should not, in the interviewee's opinion, be repeated by the Arabs. He expressed this sentiment thus:

It is okay for Kurds to live in Iraq if their rights and freedom are protected. And Kurds don't feel that they are second class citizens. The question, nonetheless, poses itself: can we, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians and other ethnic groups, build a country which belongs to all of us and make us peacefully coexist with each other? If we could do that, federalism would be the best solution to the Kurdish question.

The recognition of Kurdish rights and identity were perceived as conditions for the acceptance of federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurds. Hence, treating Kurds as second class citizens, as had happened under previous regimes, should not, in the interviewee's opinion, be repeated. The interviewee, however, questioned whether the Iraqi federal components would be successful in building a peaceful state that would belong to all Iraqis.

**Successful implementation of federalism:** A lone voice argued that federalism was an acceptable political settlement if it was implemented successfully like a German or Swiss federal model. He believed that if federalism is not properly implemented in Iraq, the Kurds would not want such a settlement. He expressed this argument as follows:

Federalism is an acceptable political arrangement if it is like Swiss or German federalism, but if it is merely on paper, no one wants it.

This statement demonstrated a perception that federalism had not been implemented in Iraq. The interviewee perceived federalism to be an acceptable political settlement for Iraqi Kurds provided that such a settlement would be similar to the ways in which western federal models operated. Otherwise, federalism was viewed to exist merely on paper in Iraq.

**Arabic Acceptance of federalism:** Two out of four interviewees contended that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement if it was accepted by Iraqi Arabs. They believed that the Kurds had embraced federalism since 1992 when the Kurdish parliament adopted it as the political system of Iraq. The Arabs were perceived as antagonistic towards federalism because they believed that federalism was imported from the West and imposed on them. Thus, the interviewees believed that Iraqi Arabs wished to change the federal system of Iraq. One interviewee remarked:

The Kurdistan parliament has adopted federalism as a system of the region and Iraq since 1992. The Arabs are against it and always state that they need to amend the Iraqi

constitution; namely, they want to change the item related to federalism. They believe that adoption of federalism in Kurdistan is de facto and imposed on them because it has been ingrained in them since the withdrawal of Saddam's regime and the coming of the US and its allies in the Kurdish region in 1991. Federalism is a good arrangement if it is accepted by the Arabs.

This statement shows a conviction that federalism was not approved by the Arabs. The implementation of federalism would be, in the interviewees' opinions, reliant upon the Arabic acceptance of such a system.

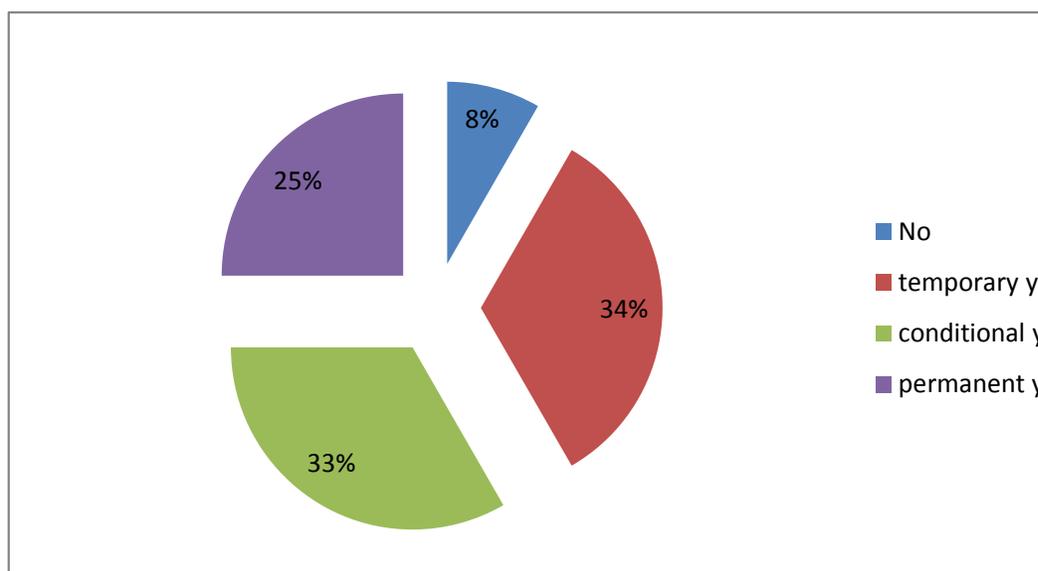
In the no category, a lone voice (8.3%) believed that federalism was an unacceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurds because the Kurdish ruling parties were seen to have double standards. On the one hand, they defended federalism in the Iraqi central government. On the other hand, the interviewees believed they supported the centralisation of the KRG. He expressed this belief as follows:

The Kurdish administration failed to present a positive image of federalism in a way the Kurdish citizens will believe in it as a good system and the people outside Kurdistan will follow it as an exemplary model. Federalism in Kurdistan is merely a political motto; however, it is stipulated in the constitution. The Kurdish ruling parties believe in centralism and do not believe in the decentralisation of Kurdish governorates. For instance, if I have a petition, I need to go to Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, so that it can be processed. This is because all ministries are there. In addition, if I want to get permission for a demonstration in Sulaymaniyah City, I need to get that from the Ministry of Interior in Erbil.

The centralisation of the Kurdish regional system was perceived as a contradiction to the Kurdish political elite's stance on federalism in Baghdad. The Kurdish administration was viewed to be unsuccessful in decentralising the Kurdish regional system. Thus, the people of Kurdistan, in the interviewee's opinion, would not believe in federalism as an acceptable remedy for the Kurdish question in Iraq. It was noticeable that there was a significant numerical contrast in the interviewees' responses on federalism as the overwhelming majority (91.7%) was in favour of this political arrangement, whereas only a small minority (8.3%) was against it. This demonstrated a common Kurdish perception that federalism was the most pragmatic approach to

resolving the Kurdish issue in Iraq. However, as shown in Figure 6.1, there were diverse views among the supporters of federalism as the perceptions of federalism were divided into three yes categories: as a permanent solution for Iraqi Kurdistan (25% of the total number of respondents), as a temporary solution (34%), and as an acceptable arrangement on certain conditions (33%). This suggested that federalism was not widely viewed as a sustainable political arrangement as there were internal obstacles, according to some interviewees' perceptions, to its implementation in Iraq as a whole. In addition, the ultimate goal of Kurds was, according to others, independence.

**Figure 6.1: Perspectives from the non-state sector on federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan.**



In summary, the overwhelming majority of interviewees in the non-state sector believed that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. They most often perceived it as a pragmatic solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. By contrast, a lone voice

believed that federalism was an unviable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan because the Kurdish political culture inclined towards a centralised Kurdish system rather than a decentralised one. In general, federalism was, in the interviewees' eyes, a more plausible arrangement for Iraqi Kurds than independence.

### **Federalism as a Stabilising Factor in Kurdistan and Iraq**

The third question asked was: *Would federalism provide greater political stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region than secession?* This question was designed to explore people's viewpoints on federalism as a sustainable and viable political arrangement that would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. Some answers to this question overlapped with the answers to the previous question. The answers to the second question were classified into two main categories: yes and no. In the yes category, ten out of twelve interviewees (80.3%) agreed that federalism provided greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. The yes classification was grouped into the satisfactory yes and the conditional yes subcategories.

First, in the satisfactory yes category, three out of ten interviewees thought federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. They stated several rationales behind this belief. These were: (a) partial sovereignty; (b) federalism as a democratising factor; and (c) ethnic identity recognition.

**Partial sovereignty:** One of three interviewees believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because in the federal system, partial sovereignty would be conferred on the federal regions. As such, Iraqi Kurds were perceived to attain a kind of independence to administer their own region. One interviewee stated:

When federalism is based on geographical ethnic regions and partnership between Arabs and Kurds in ruling the country, there will be several things in common between us and Iraq, which are the borders, citizenship and currency. Iraqi Kurdistan will have their flag, parliament, army, language and its decision-making authority. So the priority will be given to the regions, not the central government. Kurdistan, in this way, will be a mini state within a state.

The interviewee believed that conferring partial sovereignty on Kurdistan would contribute to the political stability of Kurdistan and Iraq. This was because the Kurds, as a minority, were perceived to have been given the right to internal self-determination. Hence, federalism was interpreted as ensuring all minorities administered their own regions, a situation that would lead to the political stability of Iraq as a whole.

**Federalism as a democratising factor:** One of three interviewees argued that federalism would provide political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq because federalism would prevent the emergence of a totalitarian regime in Iraq due to its devolutionary nature. Hence, the Kurds would not be subject to the persecution that occurred under the former centralised governments. An interviewee expressed this perception as follows:

Federalism provides greater stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region because Kurds have got rid of dictatorship that committed genocide against them during the centralised former Iraqi regime.

This statement demonstrated a belief that the former centralised Iraqi system created a dictatorship. Such a regime, in the interviewee's opinion, deprived the country's ethnic groups of their basic rights and subjected them to injustice and oppression. Hence, federalism was seen as a democratising factor which would lead to the political stability of Iraq and Kurdistan.

**Ethnic identity recognition:** One out of three interviewees believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq because federalism would safeguard and recognise the distinctive elements of all ethnic identities in Iraq. This would lead, in the

interviewee's opinion, to the co-existence of different ethnic groups within Iraq. He expressed this sentiment as follows:

Federalism provides political stability because the identity of each ethnic group is respected and recognised. In this way, all ethnic groups can co-exist together within Iraq. This is similar to the people who are living in the same house but having differently designed rooms.

This statement showed a perception that federalism would ensure the recognition of different ethnic identities in Iraq. This was seen to stabilise the country politically as ethnic identities would not be denied. Federalism was perceived to create a stable multi-ethnic country depicted as one house with differently designed rooms.

In the conditional yes, seven out of ten interviewees contended that federalism would provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan provided certain conditions were met. These conditions were grouped into four categories: (a) territorially disputed areas; (b) minimal Baghdad authority; (c) Arabic acceptance of federalism; and (d) the removal of two-party hegemony in Kurdistan.

**Territorially disputed areas:** Three out of seven interviewees argued that federalism would provide political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq provided the issue of territorially disputed areas was addressed. They thought that the federal borders of Kurdistan should be determined by implementing Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. So far, the Kurds were, in their opinions, struggling to implement this Article as the Arabs were opposed to it. They expressed this belief as follows:

Federalism would provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if the issues of Kirkuk and other disputed territories are resolved. Until now, Article 140 has not been implemented as the Arabs are against it. Stability will not be present if the disputed territories are still occupied by Arabs.

This statement illustrated a perception that Kurdistan's borders not finally determined, as the implementation of Article 140 was hampered by Iraqi Arab political forces. Federalism was perceived as being a stabilising factor provided the territorially disputed areas would be returned to Kurdistan. Accordingly, the stability of Iraq and Kurdistan was viewed to be reliant upon the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution.

**Limited Baghdad authority:** four interviewees contended that federalism would politically stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan provided the central government of Iraq would have limited authority over the federal regions and would not interfere in the regions' affairs. Moreover, they thought that federalism should not be under majoritarian control so that ethnic minority groups would not be discriminated against. One interviewee expressed this opinion thus:

Federalism will provide political stability provided the authority of the centralised government is lessened and the government does not interfere in the regional governments' affairs. This is because now, the Arabs are trying to lessen the Kurdistan authority and strengthen the centralised system. The problem is that the Kurdish leadership does not have any strategy to have an influential role in the centralised Iraqi government to implement federalism in Iraq. The Kurds are not satisfied with the performance of Kurdish politicians in Baghdad. In addition, federalism should not be based on majority and should protect the minority's rights in the parliament.

This statement showed a belief that minimising the authority of Iraq's central government would politically stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan as federal regions would have their own political autonomy to look after their own affairs. The Kurdish leadership was seen as inactive and ineffective in convincing the Arabs to implement federalism in Iraq. Furthermore, federalism based on majoritarianism was perceived to be a destabilising factor in Iraq as a whole, because ethnic minorities would be marginalised in the legislating and decision-making processes in the central Iraqi government.

**Arabic acceptance of federalism:** Three out of seven interviewees argued that federalism would provide stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if the Iraqi Arabs would accept it and the neighbouring countries would not thwart the implementation of federalism in Iraq. They thought that the Arabs believed in centralism and thus opposed federalism. One interviewee expressed this belief as follows:

Federalism will stabilise Iraq if all Iraqi parties and the neighbouring countries do not create any problem for the Kurds. The problem lies in the dissatisfaction of Arabs with federalism. They do not believe in what is in the Constitution. They believe in centralism. In addition, federalism is a new experience in the Middle East. Thus, we, as Kurds, are a different nation which wants federalism to protect our identity in Iraq.

Another interviewee expressed his opinion on this issue differently:

Theoretically, federalism will stabilise Iraq, but on the ground it depends on the understanding of all parties in Iraq and how they peacefully co-exist with each other. Until now in Iraq, the national Arabic ideology is very powerful, and cannot accept any other ethnicities. In addition, the religious ideology is very vigorous, particularly in the Arabic parts of Iraq which do not accept the diversity of religions or sects. Evidence of this is the sectarian war between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The idea of tolerance of other religions and acceptance of other ethnic identities is new to our region generally. Religious and nationalistic ideologies are deep-rooted in the Arab world. Changing these mentalities takes a long time.

This statement illustrated a belief that the intolerant Arab nationalistic and religious ideologies were part of Arab culture. Such a culture was perceived to be intolerant towards other religions and ethnic groups and to be an impediment to the implementation of viable federalism in Iraq. Federalism was, however, perceived to be reliant on the understanding of all Iraqi parties and the peaceful co-existence of Iraqi ethnic groups. In addition, the non-interference of the adjacent countries was seen to be a condition to the success of a federal experience in Iraq.

**The removal of two-party hegemony over Kurdistan:** One of seven interviewees argued that federalism would stabilise Kurdistan provided the two Kurdish ruling parties stopped their hegemony over political, economic and social aspects of Kurdistan as they were seen to now

have authority over everything. A situation of no party hegemony was seen to lead to social justice and stability in the Kurdish region. One interviewee expressed this view as follows:

Federalism does not provide stability to Kurdistan if the hegemony of ruling parties over all aspects of Kurdistan continues. Consequently, there will not be social justice and stability, and Kurdistan will be subject to violence.

The political stability of Iraqi Kurdistan would be seen to be reliant upon the non-continuation of hegemony of the two Kurdish ruling parties over Kurdistan. Continuing hegemony was perceived as a destabilising factor in Kurdistan because this was seen to cause social injustice which might lead to violence in the region.

In the no category, only two out of twelve interviewees (19.7 %) believed that federalism would not politically stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan due to: (a) the ethnic division; and (b) the crisis of trust.

**Ethnic division:** One of two interviewees argued that federalism would not provide political stability to Iraq as a whole, due to the ethnic division between Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites. Hence, he felt that federalism had not been implemented in Iraq yet. He expressed this opinion as follows:

Federalism is only on paper because, to some extent, federalism is merely applied to Kurdistan but the other parts of Iraq have not become federal regions yet. The divisions between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds is an indicator that they cannot live together.

This statement illustrated a belief that federalism would not close the ethnic gap between Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites. Federalism, in the interviewee's opinion, would fail to stabilise the country politically as it could not make Iraqi ethnic groups peacefully co-exist with each other. Thus, federalism was viewed to be an infeasible solution for the Kurdish question in Iraq.

**The crisis of trust:** Another interviewee contended that federalism would not stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically as there was a crisis of trust between Kurds and Arabs. He thought that the Iraqi history was full of oppression and discrimination that caused its ethnic communities to mistrust each other and feel insecure about their futures. He expressed this feeling as follows:

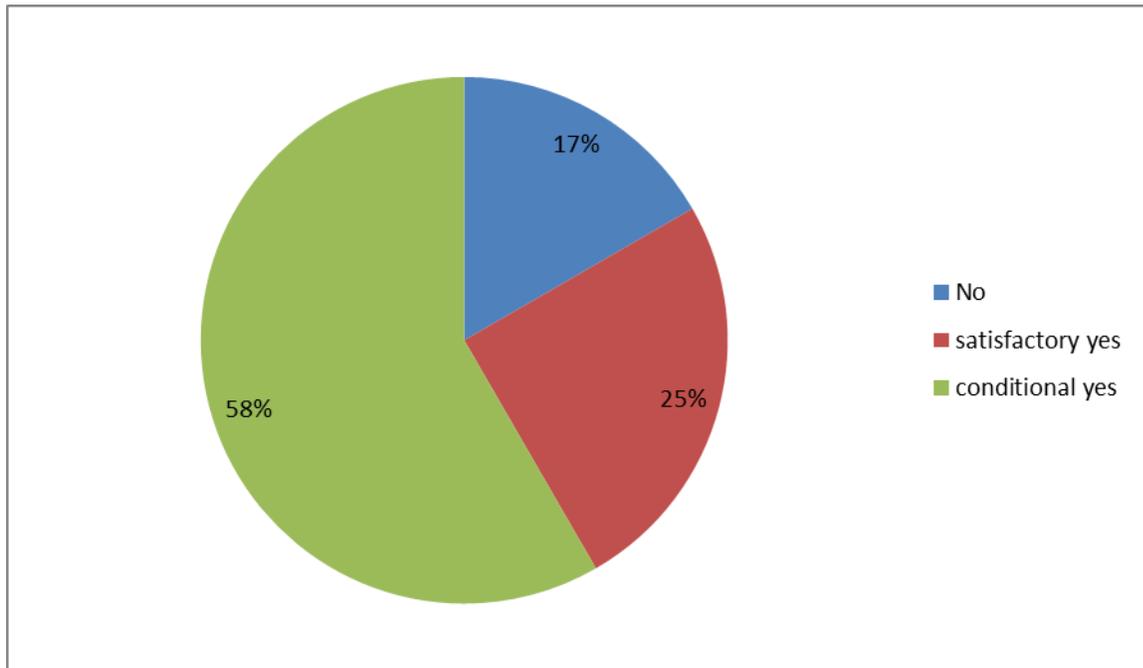
The main issue is that there is no trust between Kurds and Arabs. This is an obstacle to the establishment of a voluntary united Iraq. Sunnis are concerned about their future because they are a minority, and Shiites have an inferiority complex because of their oppression in the past. The Kurds are concerned about their future and have an inferiority complex because of their past oppression. Thus, there is crisis of trust in Iraq among its ethnic groups

This statement demonstrated a perception that Iraqi history and future feelings of insecurity among ethnic components in Iraq had caused a crisis of trust between Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites. This was perceived as an impediment to the establishment of a voluntarily federal Iraq. Thus, federalism, according to the interviewee, failed to stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically.

Overall there was a significant numerical difference between the positive responses on federalism as a political stabiliser in Kurdistan and Iraq (80.3%) and the negative ones (19.7%). This dominant perception was that federalism had the political and cultural advantages which could satisfy the Kurdish minority in Iraq, and thus would politically stabilise the country. However, Figure 6.2 shows that there was a contrast within the yes category as 58% of total responses were in the conditional yes category, whereas 25% of them were in the satisfactory yes category. This showed that federalism as a political stabiliser was perceived to be unmaintainable and unviable if certain provisos were not fulfilled.

In summary, according to an overwhelming majority, specific conditions were necessary for the federal solution to work. These included: the federal regions' authorities would not be

**Figure 6.2: Perspectives from the non-state sector on federalism as a political stabiliser in Kurdistan and Iraq**



minimised; the Kurdistan federal borders should be determined according to Article 140; the Iraqi Arabs should accept and implement federalism in Iraq; and the Kurdish leadership should not usurp authority in Kurdistan. A small minority, nonetheless, thought that federalism would not stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically because ethnic divisions were so deeply ingrained in the Iraqi society and the crisis of trust among the ethnic groups would worsen the political situation in Iraq.

### **The Iraqi Government's Position on Federalism**

The fourth question asked was: *How do you see the Iraqi government's attitude towards federalism for Kurdistan?* This question was designed to elucidate perceptions of the Iraqi

government's position on federalism as its stance would be a leading influence on the political future of Kurdistan. All respondents (100%) believed that the Iraqi Arabs were anti-federalist for various reasons. These reasons were grouped into: (a) an Arab chauvinist mentality; (b) Arab pro-centralism; (c) federalism as an imported system; (d) federalism as an disintegrative system; and (e) the older generation's disapproval of federalism.

**Arab chauvinist mentality:** Three out of twelve interviewees believed that the Iraqi Arabs were against federalism because they were perceived to hold a Ba'athist chauvinist ideology. It was argued that if Arabs were powerful enough, they would invade and 'flatten' Kurdistan. Thus, one interviewee expressed this conviction as follows:

The Iraqi Arabs are trying to nullify federalism in the Constitution because they are chauvinist and subscribe to a different form of Ba'athist thinking. If the Arabs had power, they would eliminate the Kurds in Iraq. When the Sunnis and Shiites state that they support the Kurdish rights, such a statement is merely a political courtesy.

This statement demonstrated a belief that the Iraqi Arabs' chauvinist mentality was a rationale for their attempt to annul federalism in the Iraqi Constitution. Such a mentality was seen to emanate from the former Ba'athist ideology. Thus, the dominant Iraqi Arab position was viewed as anti-federalist.

**Arab pro-centralism:** Seven out of twelve interviewees argued that Iraqi Arabs supported centralism because they had used such a system for 80 years. An additional reason for Arabic pro-centralism was that the Arabic culture was perceived to favour centralism. Furthermore, there was no federal model in neighbouring countries that would encourage Iraq to federalise its system. One interviewee remarked:

The Arabs are against federalism because they have been used to centralism, and the Arabic political culture is based on centralism. In addition, Iraq does not have any neighbouring country which has a federal system that might influence the Iraqi political system.

Another interviewee shared the same sentiment:

Arabs always think about a strong centralised government because the previous 80 years of rule in Iraq was centralised, and the Shiites want to control the country through the establishment of a strong centralised system. The Sunnis and Shiites are agreed on establishing a united centralised system in spite of their political differences. All the election campaigns run by Sunni and Shiite Arabs on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 were about a united, centralised Iraq. Here the Kurds will be a big loser in terms of political, ethnic and economic rights.

These statements illustrated a belief that the Iraqi Arabs' pro-centralism position sprang from their centralised culture, the influence of previous centralised Iraqi regimes and from the neighbouring countries' centralised regimes. Thus, centralism was perceived by interviewees as the way Iraqi Arabs would like to rule Iraq, and with an iron fist.

**Federalism as an imported system:** A lone voice believed that the Iraqi Arabs were anti-federalism because they thought that federalism was imported from the US. Thus, federalism was regarded as a system that was artificially planted in Iraq. An interviewee expressed this feeling as follows:

The Arabs believe that federalism is imported from the US. Thus, they think this system is not naturally-born and they are against it.

Federalism was seen as a system that was not initiated by Iraqis and, as such, the system was regarded as foreign. Hence the Iraqi Arabs stood against it.

**Federalism as a disintegrative system:** Three out of twelve interviewees contended that the Iraqi Arabs were anti-federalism because they believed that federalism would encourage Kurds to secede from Iraq. Thus, federalism was regarded as a disintegrator of Iraq. An interviewee stated:

The Iraqi Arabs think that federalism will be one step for Kurds to secede from Iraq.

This statement reflected a perception that to Iraqi Arabs, federalism would pose a threat to the national unity of Iraq. Federalism was seen to assist Kurds in establishing their own state. Thus, federalism was not supported by Iraqi Arabs.

**Old generation's disapproval of federalism:** One of the twelve interviewees believed that the old Arabic generation saw Kurds as rebels and could not accept federalism as a political system for Iraq. This generation, in the interviewee's opinion, worried that the implementation of federalism would result in Kurdistan acquiring the territorially disputed areas. By contrast, the new Arabic generation was seen to support federalism and co-exist with Kurds peacefully. The interviewee expressed this view as follows:

The Arabs are jealous to see all this progress in Kurdistan and have asked the Kurds to slow down in this regard. The young Arabic generation willingly accept federalism and get along with the Kurds, whereas the old Arabic generation sees Kurds as rebels. In addition, they are concerned with the issue of Kirkuk and Mosul [two of the territorially disputed areas].

This statement demonstrated a belief that the old Arabic generation was still influenced by the former Ba'athist mentality. Such a mentality regarded Kurds as "rebels". Thus, their position was seen as anti-federalism because firstly, such a system should work to ensure the rights of all Iraqi ethnic groups, including the "rebels". Secondly, if federalism was implemented in Iraq, the territorially disputed areas were perceived to be incorporated into Kurdistan in accordance with Article 140.

In summary, all respondents contended that the Iraqi government, whose majority were Arabs, held a negative position on federalism. This stumbling-block for the implementation of federalism was seen to be caused by a variety of interrelated factors, especially Arab preference for centralism, the Arab chauvinist mentality and Arab perceptions of federalism as a disintegrative political arrangement.

## **Secession as a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Iraq**

The fifth question asked was: *Is it in the interests of Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq? Why?*

This question was designed to explore people's viewpoints on secession as a remedy to the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination in Iraq. The answers to this question were grouped into yes and no categories. A small minority, three out of twelve interviewees (25%), were in the yes category arguing that it was in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq for two reasons: the Kurds were a nation; and Kurdistan would have an independent polity.

One out of three interviewees contended that it was in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq because Kurds were perceived to be a nation entitled to have an independent state. Thus, he believed that Iraq would eventually be carved up into three parts: Sunni Iraq; Shiite Iraq; and Kurdistan. He expressed this view as follows:

Every nation should have its own state. Eventually Iraq will be divided into three parts: Sunni Iraq, Shiite Iraq and Kurdistan.

This statement demonstrated a perception that a multi-ethnic country would end up as separate ethnic entities. Kurds were viewed as a nation which had the right to establish their own state. The other two interviewees offered a different reason for supporting the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. They argued that as an independent country, Kurdistan would have an economy, institutions and policy which were all independent. One interviewee expressed this sentiment as follows:

All Kurds wish to have a state, which is our dream. It is in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq because Kurdistan will have its independent administration, politics and economy.

The division of Iraq was seen as fulfilling a dream for Kurds as it would enable them to run their own country, Kurdistan, independently. The independent Kurdistan was seen to have its own government, economy and policy.

The vast majority of interviewees (75%), nonetheless, believed that the independence of Kurdistan was not in the interests of Iraqi Kurds because of the internal, regional and international impediments. An interviewee commented:

The Kurdish public wants to secede from Iraq, but in reality it is not plausible for the Kurdistan Regional Government to declare its independence. This is because it is weak and cannot support itself and the Kurdish economy is not strong and is reliant upon imports from the neighbouring countries. In addition, Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq will fight the Kurdish state if it is established.

This statement illustrated a conviction that Iraqi Kurdistan independence was not feasible due to its weak institutions and economy, and to the hostility of the surrounding countries towards the establishment of the Kurdish state. There was, however, one interviewee who had a different view on this question:

The creation of a Kurdish state was a 20<sup>th</sup> century dream. Some Kurdish parties are using this old motto to mobilise people, but as a young Kurd, I, together with many friends of mine, think about enjoying our rights and having a decent life and freedom. These are what we are aspiring to, not a state. If the young people get all these rights within a federal system, they will accept to live within Iraq.

This statement illustrated a belief that the Kurdish dream of having an independent state was archaic. The young Kurdish generation was characterised as accepting to live within Iraq if this gave them their rights and freedom, and the opportunity to have a decent life. Some parties were, nevertheless, seen to use the Kurdish dream to get public support.

In summary, there were two opinions on the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan among non-state sector interviewees: pro-secession; and anti-secession. A minority of interviewees argued that it was in

the interests of Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq because it would provide Kurds with a sovereign entity and it would be their legitimate right to establish a Kurdish state. Conversely, the clear majority, three quarters of interviewees, contended that it was not in the interests of Kurds to secede from Iraq due to internal and external obstacles.

### **Internal and External Impediments to the Creation of Kurdish State**

The sixth question asked was: *What are the internal and external impediments that prevent Kurdistan from being a state?* This question was designed to elucidate the perceived internal and external impediments that non-state sector interviewees saw as hindering Iraqi Kurdistan from evolving into an independent state. There was a diverse range of responses to this question. These responses were classified into internal and external obstacles. Internal obstacles included: (a) Kurdish divided leadership; (b) malfunction of the Kurdistan Regional Government; (c) a lack of democratic culture; (d) a dependent and weak economy; (e) the demise of Kurdish nationalism; (f) corruption; (g) non-strategic vision of the Kurdish leadership; and (i) Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence. The respondents were allowed to nominate several obstacles. The average number of nominated obstacles was five, a demonstration of the widespread perception that multiple obstacles impeded Kurdistan from attaining statehood.

**Divided Kurdish leadership:** Six out of twelve interviewees (50%) argued that one of the internal obstacles that hampered Iraqi Kurdistan from being a state was the chasm between the two leading parties, namely, PUK and KDP. These parties were perceived not to have a united national position on the Kurdish question in Iraq. This was perceived to be as a result of the internal war between the two ruling parties in 1996. One interviewee expressed this view as follows:

The internal obstacle is that the Kurdish ruling parties are not united under the Kurdish banner. The split between the PUK and KDP was caused by the civil war in 1996. Now the PUK and KDP are allied, but there is still no trust between them.

This statement demonstrated a belief that the Kurdish leadership was not united due to the civil war of 1996. This war was perceived to have caused a split and mistrust between the two Kurdish ruling parties. This resulted in Kurdistan having a deeply divided leadership.

**Malfunction of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG):** Six out of twelve interviewees (50%) contended that one of the internal impediments preventing Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a state was the malfunctioning of the KRG. This was seen to be caused by the authority of the Kurdish ruling parties over the government. These two parties were seen to totally dominate the decision-making process of the Kurdish government. One interviewee elaborated on this issue:

The problem lies in the system which is still ruled by parties, not ruled by the government. The decision-making process is not inside the government. To have a strong state, it should have the budget, security and army under the control of the government. None of these are controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government. In addition, the political decision-making is under the control of these two parties. For instance, the Prime Minister of Kurdistan cannot decide on any national issue, but the politburos of the ruling parties, mainly the two leaders [Barzani and Talabani], make decisions relating to all sensitive and important issues of this region. The mentalities of these parties have not changed for 19 years.

This statement demonstrated a perception that the KRG was merely a puppet, controlled by the ruling parties. This government was seen to be dysfunctional due to the influence of these two parties over the government institutions. The leaders of the PUK and KDP were seen to determine government politics as they were viewed to have the power to decide about any national issue in Kurdistan.

**Lack of democratic culture:** Five out of twelve interviewees (41.6%) argued that there was no democracy in Kurdistan due to the undemocratic culture of the ruling parties. Such a culture was perceived to be akin to Stalinism, which underpinned the political ideology of these parties.

Thus, the structure of these parties was also seen to be centralist with the political power vested in the politburos. One interviewee expounded on this issue:

The reason for the totalitarian chauvinist mentality of the Kurdish leadership is the Stalinist structure of their parties. This communist structure is hierarchical. Having such a structure has put the power in the hands of their central party committee which is controlled by their politburo. The politburo is headed by their leader who has all the authority. There are two main leaders who determine the future of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani. The vertical or hierarchical authority should be made more horizontal, but the Kurdish leadership is not willing to share power with other parties. These ruling parties control everything. For instance, the economy, media, government, market and employment are controlled and monopolised by these two parties. The Kurds do not want to have a totalitarian state. They prefer to have a federal region instead if federalism guarantees the Kurdish rights and meets their requirements. There is an orientation towards achieving democracy in the region rather than obtaining a Kurdish state.

Another interviewee added:

The ideological background of PUK and KDP is based on communism. They were Stalinist parties from 1940 to 1980. After the 1980s, they changed their slogans but their mentality is still Stalinist. Besides having a Stalinist mentality, they are also selfish. They control all institutions and are trying to control non-governmental organisations. They have a bureau of democratic organisation inside the party. This bureau controls the syndicates of workers, teachers, students, doctors and everything. They are trying to control all aspects of society. That has been their approach to controlling the region for the last 19 years. It is very dangerous for Kurdistan to secede now. This is because this will create a totalitarian regime like that in Sudan.

These statements illustrated a conviction that Kurdistan could not be a viable state due to the authoritarianism of the ruling parties. This authoritarianism was perceived to impinge on the functions of all the government institutions, civil society organisations, the economy and the media. In addition, authoritarianism was seen to cause the Kurdish power to be hierarchical and concentrated in the hands of one person, the party leader. Thus, Talabani and Barzani were viewed to be the decision makers of the political future of Kurdistan. The ruling parties' domination of power was perceived to lead to the creation of an authoritarian Kurdish state, when or if it were to be established.

**Dependent and weak economy:** Eight out of twelve interviewees (66.6%) argued that one of the internal obstacles that prevented Iraqi Kurdistan from being a state was its weak economy which was dependent on Baghdad. Its allocated budget, 17% of the Iraqi oil revenues, was perceived to be spent on public servants' salaries and local projects. In addition, Kurdistan was viewed not to have significant industries. It was seen to be reliant on imports from contiguous countries. Furthermore, corruption was seen to weaken the Kurdish economy. One interviewee remarked:

Kurdistan depends on imports from the neighbouring countries despite it having fertile land, livestock and many water sources. If Baghdad deprived Kurdistan of its budget for a month, Kurdistan could not survive because it does not have a strong economy that it can rely upon.

Another interviewee had a different opinion on this issue:

There are tremendous sources to be used such as customs and revenues from foreign investment in Kurdistan. There is, however, enough mismanaged money because there is tremendous corruption in Kurdistan.

Another interviewee added:

Kurdistan is enriched with water, fertile land and mineral resources, but they have not been utilised yet. The problem lies in the ruling parties' mentality. These two parties have become like cancer cells impinging on Kurdistan's economy. They are responsible for corruption in our region.

All these interviewees believed Kurdistan's incapability of being an independent state was because of its poor economy. They argued that one of the paramount components of a viable state was a robust economy, but that Kurdistan's economy was undeveloped and reliant upon Baghdad and imports. Kurdistan's finances were known to come from Baghdad while it was seen to be dependent on imports from the adjacent countries. It was believed that Kurdistan had not utilised its natural resources to establish a solid economic base. Also, Kurdistan was seen to be unable to manage its revenues to establish a strong economy due to corruption caused by the ruling parties.

**The demise of Kurdish nationalism:** Six out of twelve interviewees (50%) argued that the demise of Kurdish nationalism was one of the internal impediments that hampered Kurdistan from being a state. This demise was seen to have been caused by the corruption of the ruling parties and tribalism. One interviewee elaborated on this issue as follows:

Kurdish nationalism is fading away because there is social injustice due to corruption in Kurdistan. Certain senior officials are paid 10 times higher than the ordinary employees are. The Kurds are still struggling to earn their livelihoods and economise because the prices in the markets are on the hike. These two parties dominate the markets and control the prices. The government has no role in price control. The problem is that our politicians are businessmen. These two fields [politics and business] are intermingled. These parties use the law and authority to serve their own interests. They are above the law and do not respect it. The law is only enforced at the grassroots level. The corrupt senior officials are not prosecuted in the courts. This creates injustice in the society. Thus, the people do not pin their hopes on such a corrupt government to meet their requirements.

Another interviewee added:

The nationalist ideology is very weak because the Kurdish leadership has not changed the education system yet. Such a system is based on the same old Ba'athist system. The way of our thinking and education is not changed. The curriculum is not concerned with Kurdish nationalism and how to preserve our national identity. Moreover, the issue of political corruption and injustice have weakened the nationalist ideology. Thus, this ideology cannot mobilise people to demand independence.

Another interviewee had a different perspective on the causes of weak Kurdish nationalism:

Kurdish nationalism is very weak because of tribalism. The Kurdish people pledge their allegiance to their tribes, but not to Kurdistan. They think that they become powerful when they are supported by their tribes.

These interviewees had a strong conviction that the Kurdish leadership and government combined to play a negative role resulting in the demise of Kurdish nationalism. Firstly, the Kurdish leadership, in their opinion, did not develop the schools' curriculums which would promote Kurdish nationalism. Secondly, the Kurdish leadership was perceived to create social injustice in the Kurdish society, due to their corruption. Corruption led to Kurds losing hope in

their region. In addition, tribalism in Kurdistan was seen to weaken the sense of Kurdish nationalism because the Kurds' primary allegiance was perceived to be to their tribes rather than to Kurdistan.

**Corruption:** Eleven out of twelve interviewees (91.6%) believed that corruption was one of the internal obstacles hampering Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a state. Firstly, corruption was, they thought, delaying the growth of the Kurdish economy because of wasted government money. Secondly, corruption was viewed as hindering Kurdistan from operating according to the principles of good government. This was, in their opinions, because unqualified people assumed government positions through nepotism and party affiliation. Thirdly, they thought the international community would not support the creation of a Kurdish state which was demonstrably corrupt. One interviewee expounded on this issue at length:

Corruption is a dangerous obstacle because it has thwarted Kurdistan from building the basic components of statehood such as a strong economy. The ruling parties have their own companies that control the market. For instance Nokan is a PUK company that controls Sulaymaniyah's market, whereas Ster is a KDP company that controls Erbil and Dohok markets. Moreover, these two parties will not allow any individuals to invest in the region unless they are partnered with these two parties. The administrative and financial corruption is as dangerous as Saddam's regime. Corruption has made the ruling parties very rich while the grassroots of society live in poverty. This has created a wide gap between the rich and the poor. The situation of Kurdistan now is similar to the French royal rule before the French Revolution in 1789. At that time, Louis XVI was busy with building mansions and nowadays our leaders are busy with building mansions in Qala Cholan and Salaheldin resorts<sup>36</sup>. Marie Antoinette had political and financial authority at that time and Hero Talabani<sup>37</sup>, the first lady of Iraq, has all the authority to make any decision she wants. The new form of feudal system is headed by the ruling parties in Kurdistan. They have the authority over everything: government, economy and jurisdiction.

Another interviewee added:

The Kurdish leadership failed to establish an exemplary democracy, based on the free market that fights corruption and achieves justice, like in Israel. If we created such a system, it would be internationally supported. The ruling parties receive the budget from Baghdad and

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<sup>36</sup> Qala Cholan resort is owned by Jalal Talabani, the PUK leader. Whereas, Salaheldin resort is owned by Masud Barzani, the KDP leader.

<sup>37</sup> Hero Talabani is Jalal Talabani's wife and the head of the PUK politburo.

divide it between themselves. Corruption has divided these two parties. Each party [elite] is making money for themselves.

Another interviewee believed that corruption caused the KRG to function inefficiently:

There is high corruption in the region which makes the people hate the government and not demand a state. The people are not satisfied with the Kurdistan Regional Government's performance. Since 2003, the government has been receiving its budget from Baghdad, and we do not have the basic services such as electricity and clean water. There is a lack of everything in every sector in spite of the fact that our budget is higher than Jordan's.

From these comments, corruption was seen to negatively affect the development of Kurdistan because of the embezzlement of Kurdish wealth by senior officials. Corruption was also viewed as weakening Kurdistan's economy and causing the poor performance of the KRG. This corruption was, in the interviewees' opinions, because Kurdistan lacked a competent and trustworthy leadership. Without such a leadership, a Kurdish state was perceived to be both impossible and undesirable. Corruption was also seen to result in the Kurdish people not demanding a state. The corruption and domination of the ruling parties over politics and economics were perceived as resulting in Kurdistan having a feudal system in which there was a huge gap between the rich Kurdish political elite and the grassroots poor. Moreover, corruption was perceived to cause the international community to be hesitant to support the formation of a Kurdish state that would be corrupt.

**Non-strategic vision of the Kurdish leadership:** Four out of twelve interviewees (33.3%) contended that the ruling parties did not have any strategic vision to establish a Kurdish state in the future. This was, they said, because the policies of the PUK and KDP were based on self-interest. Thus, an interviewee expressed this sentiment as follows:

The Kurdish leadership had no plan for Kurdish statehood because the Kurdish leadership is backward and immature, and has no strategic thinking. We don't have a public leader in Kurdistan but we have party leaders. In addition, the Kurdish leaders don't back each other up. The Kurdish leaders' private interests precede the national interests. The egocentrism of these party leaders makes them not think about the creation of a Kurdish state. What is

disastrous is these ruling parties' leaders collaborate with our enemies [Turkey, Syria and Iran] at the expense of the Kurdish national interests. Each ruling party is working for its own interests.

Another interviewee added:

The PUK and KDP are pro-secession or federalism if one of these serves their interests. What is crucial to them is to stay in power without having any strategic vision for the future of Kurdistan.

These statements demonstrated a conviction that the ruling parties had no strategic planning to achieve Kurdish statehood due to their egocentrism and backwardness. Their interests were seen to lie in staying in power even if it would incur collaboration with Kurdistan's enemies. Thus, the ruling parties' leaders were perceived to work for their own interests at the expense of the Kurdish national interests. Moreover, Kurdistan was perceived to lack a charismatic leader that would fulfil the Kurdish dream, namely, the creation of a Kurdish state. Thus, Barzani and Talabani were viewed to be party leaders rather than public leaders.

**Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence:** Two out of twelve interviewees (16.6%) argued that the Iraqi government would oppose the independence of Kurdistan because the Iraqis were viewed to be unwilling to lose Kurdistan's land. Thus, the creation of a Kurdish state was seen to be destined to fail. One interviewee expressed this as follows:

Iraq will fight the Kurdish state if established because it will not give away Kurdistan to the Kurds.

This statement illustrated a perception that Iraq would not give up Kurdistan to the Kurds as it would fight the Kurdish state, if it was formed.

Besides these internal obstacles, there were external obstacles that the non-state interviewees saw as hampering Kurdistan from being a state. These were grouped into: (i) landlocked territory; (ii)

the contiguous countries; and (iii) the international community. The respondents were allowed to nominate several obstacles. The average number of nominated obstacles was two.

**Landlocked territory:** Five out of twelve interviewees (41.6%) contended that one of the external obstacles that prevented Kurdistan from being a state was being a landlocked territory. The creation of the Kurdish state was seen as being destined to end up in its destruction because the Iraqi Kurdistan territory was surrounded by hostile countries. These countries were viewed as potentially imposing a siege on Kurdistan and not allowing it to use their skies and lands for transport and oil pipelines. Moreover, these countries were perceived to be able to cut the flow of water into Kurdistan if the Kurdish state was established. Thus, Kurdistan was seen to be unable to survive in such an antagonistic environment. An interviewee stated:

If Kurdistan declares its independence, there will be a water crisis in the region as the neighbouring countries will cut the flow of rivers into Kurdistan. In addition, these countries will not allow us to export oil to Europe. Thus, the enclave geography of Kurdistan is not helping us to secede from Iraq.

This comment demonstrated the perception that the geography of Kurdistan was not conducive to the establishment of a Kurdish state. Thus, if Kurdistan declared independence, the resulting external opposition was perceived as potentially leading the country to its demise. The survival of the Kurdish state was seen to be reliant upon the approval of the contiguous countries.

**Contiguous countries:** Nine out of twelve interviewees (75%) believed that the adjacent countries were a stumbling-block to the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq because many Kurds resided in these countries. If such a state was formed, this would be seen to encourage other Kurds to secede from these countries. Thus, the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would be interpreted as a threat to the national security of these countries. One interviewee commented:

If we declare our independence, we will be surrounded by strong enemies and there will be no chance to survive as a country. For instance, Turkey is currently against the Iraqi Kurdish independence because it has 20 million Kurds. The Kurdish secession is seen as a national threat to our neighbouring countries.

Another interviewee added an economic dimension:

Most of the companies and university staff here are from the neighbouring countries. If the Kurdish state declared independence, these companies and workers would leave the region. This would have a very negative impact on the Kurdish economy.

According to these respondents, it was obvious that the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would be seen as potentially destabilising for the contiguous countries because it would encourage other Kurds to secede from Turkey, Iran and Syria. Thus, Iraqi Kurdish secession was depicted as a threat to the national security of these countries. In addition, such secession was seen to impinge on the economy of Kurdistan as the adjacent countries' investment and expertise were likely to leave Kurdistan if a Kurdish state was established. Hence, the hostility of the neighbouring countries towards the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan was perceived as affording a Kurdish state no chance of survival.

**International community:** Six out of twelve interviewees (50%) argued that the international community would not support the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq because their major interests lay in Iraq and the neighbouring countries. Thus, the respondents thought that the international community would not sacrifice their interests for the sake of Kurdish statehood.

One interviewee expressed this sentiment as follows:

There is no international support for Kurdish independence because the international community's interests support the adjacent countries and the unity of Iraq.

This comment demonstrated a belief that the creation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East was very complicated because the interests of the international community coincided with the

interests of the contiguous countries and Iraq. Thus, the international community was, in the interviewees' opinion, reluctant to support the formation of a Kurdish state.

In summary, the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq was currently seen as being impossible due to internal and external impediments. First, the internal impediments to the creation of an independent Kurdish state were: a dependent and weak economy; corruption; malfunctioning of the KRG; divided Kurdish leadership; the demise of Kurdish nationalism; the lack of strategic vision of the Kurdish leadership; the lack of a democratic culture; and Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence. Iraqi Kurdistan would need to overcome these internal impediments in order to become a state. This would not be easy as it would require time and the determination and willingness of all Kurds to work together to address these problems. Second, the external impediments to the creation of an independent Kurdish state were: landlocked territory; and the vest interests of the contiguous countries and the international community. The independence of Iraqi Kurdistan was seen as not being welcomed regionally and internationally as it would threaten the national unity of the contiguous countries and jeopardise the international community's interests with these countries. The creation of a Kurdish state would be reliant upon the future changes of the neighbouring countries' regimes and policies towards the Kurdish question, as well as the international community's policy towards Kurdistan and its neighbours.

### **The American Role in the Kurdish Quest for the Right to Self-determination**

The seventh question asked was: *What is the role of the US in the Kurdish right to self-determination in Iraq?* This question was designed to seek the non-state sector interviewees' viewpoints on US foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan since the role of the US would be one of the most important determinants of the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan. There were three

responses: (a) pro-Kurdistan independence; (b) interest-oriented role; and (c) pro-internal self-determination.

**Pro-Kurdistan independence:** Only two out of twelve interviewees (16.6%) argued that the US interests lay in the creation of a Kurdish state because Kurdistan was viewed as a good ally with geopolitical and economic significance to the US. Moreover, Kurdistan was seen as a crucial counterpart to Israel. Thus, the formation of a Kurdish state would be seen as contributing to ‘balancing power’ in the Middle East. One interviewee expressed this view as follows:

Winston Churchill said at the Cairo Conference in 1921 that Kurdistan was a base for the British. The US and UK still believe that Iraqi Kurdistan is a geopolitically significant base for them to control the neighbouring countries. In addition, Iraqi Kurdistan is a balancing power to Israel. Kurdistan’s existence is tied to Israel’s existence. The US will not leave Kurdistan because they have made a big sacrifice when a large number of their soldiers were killed to liberate Iraq from totalitarianism. Gradually, the US will back the creation of a Kurdish state because of its economic interests in Kurdish natural resources and its military interests in the establishment of permanent bases in Iraqi Kurdistan to control the region.

This statement illustrated a conviction that the US interests were in the Kurdish natural riches and in the establishment of military bases in Kurdistan. Thus, the US was seen as supporting the creation of a Kurdish state. Such a state was seen to be similar to Israel, and would be a ‘balancing power’ in the Middle East region; Kurdistan would be the counterpart of Israel.

**Interest-oriented role:** Two out of twelve interviewees (16.6%) believed that the American role in the Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination was changeable in accordance with its interests. They argued that the US would support the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan or federalism in Iraq if this would serve the interests of the US. Thus, one interviewee stated:

There is no morality in US politics; it is merely based on serving its own interests. The US is acting like a trader. When its interests are with the Kurds, it does care about us. Otherwise it ignores our question. It has a selective policy. It intervenes in Tibet, but it does not intervene in Turkey where the Kurds are struggling for their basic rights. Thus, the US foreign policy incorporates a double-standard.

There was, however, a lone voice (8.3%) who believed that the US interests supported the neighbouring countries and Iraq:

The US has no role in the Kurdish self-determination. If the US supported the Kurdish state, they would lose their allies: Turkey, Iraq and other Arabic countries. Thus, it will not jeopardise its interests for our sake.

For these interviewees, it was obvious that US foreign policy in Iraq and Kurdistan was primarily based on America's interests. Its approach was, in their opinions, realist. Thus, the US was viewed as being highly unlikely to assist the Kurds in attaining statehood.

**Pro-internal right to self-determination:** Seven out of nineteen interviewees (58.3%) argued that the US foreign policy supported the Kurdish right to internal self-determination. The US wished to guarantee the unity of Iraq, and the creation of a Kurdish state would destabilise Iraq. Also, the US aimed, in the interviewees' opinions, to present a viable federal Iraqi state that would be an exemplary model for the other countries in the Middle East. Thus, the respondents thought that the US believed that the only remedy for the Kurdish question in Iraq was federalism. One interviewee summed up this argument:

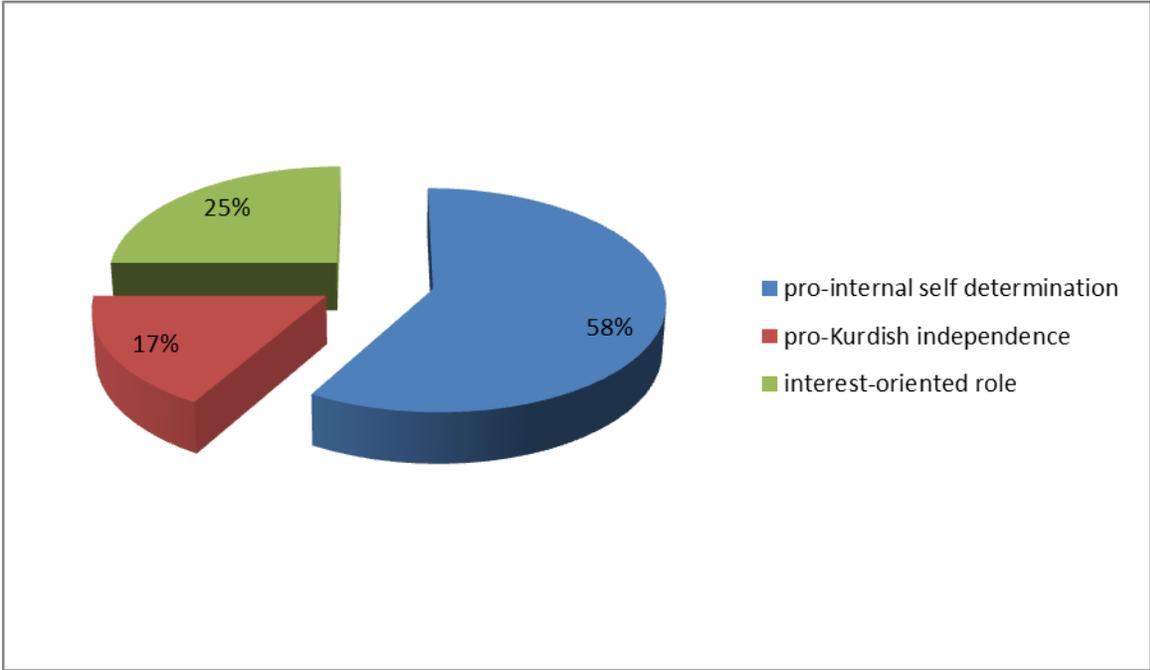
It [US] emphasises the unity and stability of Iraq and the coexistence of the ethnicities with each other. It does not have any policy to do anything for Kurds. It deals with the Iraqi file and the Kurdish issue is one chapter of this file. The US wants federalism in Iraq to present an exemplary model of the Iraq federal system to other countries in the Middle East so that they will follow it.

Another interviewee took a wider regional view to explain why the US did not support Kurdish self-determination:

The current US interests are not with the creation of a Kurdish state because our leadership has not created a situation where US interests can be politically and economically tied to our region. It also failed to convince the US that its interests are in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is rich in oil and geopolitically important. For instance, Turkey has utilised its location to attract US interests. Turkey was used to control the communist waves in the area during the Cold War and to curtail the export of the Iranian revolution to the region. In addition, the Kurdish leadership has not played a significant role in influencing US policy in Iraq. For instance, from Paul Bremer's diary, it was clear that the Kurdish leadership failed to play an influential role during Bremer's ruling period.

This statement demonstrated a perception that one of the reasons for the lack of US support for Kurdish independence lay in the failure of the Kurdish leadership to attract American interest in Kurdistan. US policy towards Iraq was perceived as supporting Iraqi unity through federalism, so that this system would be seen as a model for neighbouring countries to follow. Thus, the Kurdish question was seen to be resolved for the US within the framework of the Iraqi federal system. Figure 6.3, shows numerical contrast in the non-state sector responses on the perceived US role in Kurdish self-determination as pro-internal self-determination (58%), as pro-independence (17%), and in pursuit of self-interest (25%). This demonstrated a popular perception among Iraqi Kurds that the US would not be a foreign patron for the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan at least in the foreseeable future.

**Figure 6.3: Perspectives from the non-state sector on the US role in the Kurdish right to self-determination**



In summary, the interviewees generally believed that the US would not play any positive role in promoting the Kurdish right to an independent state because the US would not risk its interests in Iraq and the neighbouring countries for the sake of the Kurds. Thus, the American role could be more clearly seen as supporting federalism in Iraq rather than the independence of Kurdistan. The US might, nonetheless, support the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq if it was in US interests to do so in the future.

### **The Future of Iraqi Kurdistan**

The eighth question asked was: *In your opinion, where is Iraqi Kurdistan heading?* This question was designed to explore people's opinions on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan; whether they thought it would head towards independence or federalism. There were two responses to this question: (a) federalism; and (b) a challenging future.

**Federalism:** Eight out of twelve interviewees (66.6%) believed that Iraqi Kurdistan would head towards federalism. Its future was perceived as being bright because it was felt that democracy, stability and economic development would be achieved within a federal system in Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan was also seen to be strengthening its relationship with the West because foreign investment in the Kurdish region was perceived as increasing under a federal political arrangement. An interviewee commented:

Kurdistan will remain part of Iraq and will economically and socially develop. The number of media corporations and civil society organisations which cause public awareness will surge. It will democratically develop. It will strengthen its relationship with the West as international companies and universities invest in Kurdistan.

Another interviewee believed that the new generation would prefer federalism to secession because it would have economic advantages for Kurds. He remarked:

Kurdistan is heading towards federalism. The Kurds will give up their dream because the new generation differs from the old one. They think about the economic advantages of being part of Iraq. I believe the scenario of Quebec will be repeated in Kurdistan.

Two interviewees argued that Iraqi Kurdistan would head towards a viable federal region providing it was democratised. Thus, one interviewee summed up this argument as follows:

If democracy is achieved in Kurdistan, and we have an institutionalised government which is not based on nepotism or old boy networks or party affiliation, Kurdistan will be a viable federal region. Otherwise, the region will head towards centralism and dictatorship.

The first and second statements demonstrated a belief that Iraqi Kurdistan would unconditionally head towards federalism. By contrast, the third statement reflected a perception that it would conditionally head towards federalism. The viability of federalism was viewed as being reliant upon the democratisation of the KRG.

**A challenging future:** Three out of twelve interviewees (25%) contended that the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan would be challenging because the Kurds needed to resolve their internal problems and be united to have a strong position and voice to fight for federalism in Baghdad. It was especially noted that ‘Arabic fascism’ had emerged in Baghdad. Thus, one interviewee expressed this opinion as follows:

Kurdistan will face many challenges to solve its internal problems, such as corruption, tribalism, domination of ruling parties over the region, and no democracy. In addition, Kurdistan has its external problems with Baghdad, such as the non-implementation of federalism and non-resolution of territorially disputed area. If we solve our internal problems and improve our system, that will make us strong enough to stand up for our rights and address our problems with the Iraqi Central Government.

One out of three interviewees thought that the future of Kurdistan was challenging because there was no certainty as to which direction Iraqi Kurdistan would head. He expressed his view as follows:

There is no certainty about how the political future of Kurdistan will look. There is, however, a possibility that Kurdistan is heading towards one of the following: first, federalism; second, civil war, which may be sparked between the Kurds and the Arabs. It is also possible that the Turks could become involved in this war; third, maintaining an autonomous Kurdish region in a peaceful state with a central government; fourth, the self-destruction of the Kurdistan Regional Government internally may be caused by the greed and corruption of the ruling parties. Recently, there has been a protest in Peera Magron because the PUK has not done any project in that village since 1991. The people burnt the police cars in reprisal for the PUK negligence of this area.

These statements demonstrated a perception that the future of Iraqi Kurdistan would be full of challenges and uncertainties. It was believed that the KRG would need to solve its internal problems so that it could address pending issues with the Iraqi centralised government. It was also thought that the political future of Kurdistan was uncertain due to the political instability in the Kurdish region, and Iraq as a whole. One interviewee did not answer this question. The optimistic scenario on the federal future of Iraqi Kurdistan was expressed by 66.6% of respondents while the pessimistic ones on the challenging future of the Kurdish region of Iraq accounted for 25%. This once again showed that federalism was perceived by the majority to be a pragmatic solution for the Kurdish question in Iraq which would result economic gains for the Iraqi Kurds.

## **Conclusion**

Several interesting points emerged from the data presented in this chapter. First, the universal perception of the Kurds as a nation demonstrated that Kurds viewed themselves as being entitled to the right to self-determination. Second, secession was not perceived as a plausible and feasible political approach to the Kurdish right to self-determination. The internal difficulties inside Kurdistan and Iraq, and the negative stances of external elements were seen as stumbling-blocks to the formation of a Kurdish state. The non-state actors were especially concerned about corruption in Kurdistan as being detrimental to the realisation of Kurdish statehood. Third,

federalism was thus viewed as a pragmatic and acceptable political arrangement to address the Kurdish right to self-determination in Iraq. Federalism was seen to bring political and economic gains for Iraqi Kurdistan in the long-run. The current non-implementation of federalism in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution was judged to have been primarily caused by the Arab inclination to the centralisation of Iraq. Finally, more than half of the interviewees held realistic views that Kurdistan was more likely to head towards becoming a federal region in the future as federalism was the only solution to the survival of Iraqi Kurdistan as a self-rule region.



## **Chapter Seven: Federalism or Secession as a Remedy to the Kurdish Question in Iraq: Perspectives from Kurdish Students**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaire survey of students regarding the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan, whether it is towards federalism or secession. To determine in which direction Iraqi Kurdistan is moving, the attitudes of sixty students were sought, thirty from the University of Salaheldin in Erbil and thirty from the University of Sulaimani in Sulaymaniyah. These students were juniors in the political science schools and were selected purposively. These young people are the future leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan. Knowing their attitudes enriches this study with a particular set of perspectives on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

To explore the viewpoints of the students, the survey questionnaire included twelve questions (see Appendix 4) which asked about: their perceptions on Kurdish nationhood and self-determination; the desirability of having an independent state or a federal region; whether it was economically beneficial for Kurdistan to remain part of Iraq; and whether federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan and Iraq rather than the creation of a Kurdish state. Also included were: whether Kurdish nationalism was pushing the Kurds towards Iraqi Kurdistan independence; and whether Iraqi Kurdistan currently had the political institutions to operate as an independent state or whether it could develop the appropriate political institutions for an independent state.

The students of the political science schools were also asked to give their opinions on whether Iraqi Kurdistan had a strong economy that would help it to become a state in the future; and

whether they thought the US would be a source of help for Iraqi Kurdistan in attaining its independence in the future. Furthermore, they were asked their views on whether the Iraqi Kurds were unified in working to achieve their goals; and whether corruption was one of the obstacles that would hamper Kurdistan from becoming a state in the future. Finally, the students were asked about how they saw the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan, whether it was promising or not. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire forms in their classes after their professors had finished lecturing. The answers to all the questions were scaled between one and five from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There was no response error. The responses are presented in tables and discussed below under the headings of possible solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq; the obstacles to the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq; and the future of Iraqi Kurdistan. The demographic data of the respondents is presented first.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Sixty respondents participated in this questionnaire survey. The majority, namely 56 out of 60 (93.3%), were young, between 18 and 30 years. A small minority, namely 4 out of 60 (6.7%), were older, between 31 and over 50 years. Thirty one of the respondents (51.7%) were male, and twenty nine (48.3%) were female (See Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1: Demographic characteristics of student survey respondents**

Gender		Age					Total
		18 to 25	25 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	50+	
<b>Male</b>	Count	21	6	2	1	1	31
	% within Gender	67.7%	19.4%	6.5%	3.2%	3.2%	100.0%
	% within Age	44.7%	66.7%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	51.7%
<b>Female</b>	Count	26	3	0	0	0	29
	% within Gender	89.7%	10.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% within Age	55.3%	33.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	48.3%
<b>Total</b>	Count	47	9	2	1	1	60
	% within Gender	78.3%	15.0%	3.3%	1.7%	1.7%	100.0%
	% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Thirty respondents (50%) were from the University of Sulaimani and the remainder (50%) were from the University of Salaheldin. Sixteen participants (26.7%) of the total number of University of Salaheldin respondents were male; whereas fifteen participants (25%) of the respondents from the University of Sulaimani were male. Fifteen respondents (25%) from the University of were Sulaimani female, whereas fourteen respondents (23.3%) from the University of Salaheldin were female (see Table 7.2).

**Table 7.2: Gender distribution of student survey respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>University of Sulaimani</b>	<b>University of Salaheldin</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	15	16	31
	25%	26.7%	51.7%
<b>Female</b>	15	14	29
	25%	23.3%	48.3%
<b>Total</b>	30	30	60
	50%	50%	100%

### **Kurdish Nationhood**

This section is concerned with the question of Kurdish nationhood and self-determination. The first question asked was whether or not Kurds thought that they were a nation entitled to the right to self-determination (see Table 7.3). All respondents (100%) believed that Kurds were a nation which had the right to self-determination. These responses reflected a firm conviction that Kurds were a nation rather than an ethnic group, and they thus should have the political right to self-determination.

**Table 7.3: Student views on Kurdish nationhood**

University	Q1: You think that Kurds are a nation entitled to the right to self-determination.					Total
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	0	0	0	0	30	30
Count						
% within University	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	0	0	0	0	30	30
Count						
% within University	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100%	100.0%
Total	0	0	0	0	60	60
Count						
	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100%	100.0%

### **Possible solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq**

This section concerns questions that sought views on two possible solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq, namely, federalism and secession. The second question asked the respondents whether they believed federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region rather than independence (see Table 7.4). The reason for asking this question was to explore students' views on federalism as a sustainable and viable political arrangement that would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan than secession. Opinions were divided on this matter with substantial numbers agreeing and disagreeing. Fifty percent of respondents agreed that federalism would provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan, although very few respondents (5%) strongly agreed, while 40% disagreed with the statement.

Only a few respondents (3.3%) strongly disagreed with the statement. This divergence of opinion suggested that federalism was a divisive subject among the young Kurdish generation. A small minority (10%) of participants did not volunteer any opinion on this matter.

**Table 7.4: Student views on federalism as a political stabiliser in Iraq and Kurdistan**

University	Q2: federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and the region than Kurdish independence.					Total
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	2	10	2	14	2	30
Count						
% within University	6.7%	33.3%	6.7%	46.7%	6.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	0	12	4	13	1	30
Count						
% within University	.0%	40.0%	13.3%	43.3%	3.3%	100.0%
Total	2	22	6	27	3	60
Count						
	3.3%	36.7%	10.0%	45.0%	5.0%	100.0%

The third question asked whether it was economically preferable for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq. The reason for asking this question was to know whether students' saw federalism as a system bearing economic advantages for Kurds. Views on this question were once again divided with substantial numbers in both agreement and disagreement (see Table 7.5). Fifty-eight percent clearly agreed that it was economically preferable for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq. Thirty three percent disagreed in this matter. There was a noticeable gender difference in the responses. Males clearly outnumbered females among those who disagreed that federalism was economically preferable for Kurdistan. Twenty-three percent of male respondents disagreed,

whereas only 10% of the females disagreed. There was a small minority, 8% of respondents, who did not express any opinion on this matter. All but one of these came from the University of Salaheldin.

**Table 7.5: Student views on federalism as an economically preferable system for Kurdistan**

University	Q3: It is economically preferable for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq.					Total
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	2	9	4	13	2	30
Count						
% within University	6.7%	30.0%	13.3%	43.3%	6.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	2	7	1	16	4	30
Count						
% within University	6.7%	23.3%	3.3%	53.3%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	4	16	5	29	6	60
Count						
	6.7%	26.7%	8.3%	48.3%	10.0%	100.0%

The fourth question was whether Iraqi Kurdistan should be an independent state. The reason for asking this question was to know whether this generation of Kurds wanted to have their own independent state or not. Views on this question were polarised, either agreeing or disagreeing (see Table 7.6). Thirty-six percent of respondents agreed that Kurdistan should be an independent state, whereas 38% disagreed. There were gender differences with 48% of male respondents believing that Kurdistan should be an independent state compared to 24% of females. Conversely, 48% of female participants disagreed with having a Kurdish state, whereas only 29% of males did not agree. This demonstrated that the spirit of nationalism was higher in

the males than females; but it may also indicate these females were more realistic than the males in dealing with the Kurdish question in Iraq. A small but significant proportion of respondents (15%) did not express opinions on this question opting for the ‘neither’ response. This was particularly the case at the University of Salaheldin where 33% chose the ‘neither’ category compared to only 16% of the respondents at the University of Sulaimani.

**Table 7.6: Student views on secession as a solution to the Kurdish question**

University		Q4: Iraqi Kurdistan should be an independent state.					Total
		strongly disagree	Disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	3	9	5	10	3	30
	% within University	10.0%	30.0%	16.7%	33.3%	10.0%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	5	6	10	9	0	30
	% within University	16.7%	20.0%	33.3%	30.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	8	15	15	19	3	60
		13.3%	25.0%	25.0%	31.7%	5.0%	100.0%

### **Obstacles to the Creation of a Kurdish State in the North of Iraq:**

This section examined perceptions of the impediments that could hamper Kurdistan from being an independent state. The impediments surveyed were corruption, Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish political institutions, Kurdish economy, US foreign policy, and the chances of a unified Kurdish stance on Kurdistan’s political future.

The fifth question asked whether corruption was a major obstacle that hampered Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a state. The question was intended to assist the researcher in understanding whether or not corruption was perceived as a stumbling-block to the creation of a Kurdish state. The overwhelming majority, 83% of respondents, agreed that corruption was a major obstacle (see Table 7.7). By contrast, a small minority (11%) disagreed, and believed that corruption would not hamper Kurdistan from becoming a state. Only 5% of respondents did not express any opinion on this matter. There was no gender variance in responses to this question. There was, however, a large difference between the agreeing category (83%) and disagreeing category (11%) which suggested that corruption was perceived by the majority of respondents to be one of the major issues in Iraqi Kurdistan which could prevent the Kurds from attaining their 'dream'.

The sixth question asked, whether respondents perceived Kurdish nationalism to be pushing for Iraqi Kurdistan independence. This question was included to help examine whether contemporary Kurdish nationalism was seen as demanding the formation of a Kurdish state. The overwhelming majority, 75% of respondents, agreed that Kurdish nationalism was pushing for independence (see Table 7.8). By contrast, a small minority, 20% of participants, disagreed. These answers revealed that the majority of the young Kurdish generation were not only nationalistic but that their nationalism involved pushing for an independent state to resolve the Kurdish question in Iraq. There was a contrast between the male and female responses. Twenty-seven percent of females believed that Kurdish nationalism was not pushing for secession, whereas only 9% of males provided such a response. This suggested that the nationalism of some females was less contingent on secession and had a more pragmatic character in relation to resolving the Kurdish question in Iraq. Five percent of participants did not volunteer any opinion

**Table 7.7: Student views on corruption as a major obstacle to the creation of a Kurdish state**

University		Q5: Corruption is a major obstacle that hampers Kurdistan from becoming a state.					Total
		Strongly disagree	disagree	neither	Agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	0	3	1	12	14	30
	% within University	.0%	10.0%	3.3%	40.0%	46.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	0	4	2	15	9	30
	% within University	.0%	13.3%	6.7%	50.0%	30.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	0	7	3	27	23	60
		.0%	11.7%	5.0%	45.0%	38.3%	100.0%

on this question. From these responses, it is clear that the majority of students did not see Kurdish nationalism as an obstacle to the creation of Kurdistan.

The seventh question asked whether Iraqi Kurdistan had political institutions that would enable it to operate as an independent state. This was designed to help the researcher explore whether or not the respondents perceived Iraqi Kurdistan to have political institutions which would enable it to become a state and function adequately as one. Views were evenly divided on this matter (see Table 7.9). Forty-three percent of respondents agreed that Iraqi Kurdistan currently had political

**Table 7.8: Student views on the role of Kurdish nationalism as a factor demanding a Kurdish state**

University		Q6: Kurdish nationalism is pushing for Iraqi Kurdistan's independence.					Total
		strongly disagree	disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	0	8	2	13	7	30
	% within University	.0%	26.7%	6.7%	43.3%	23.3%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	1	3	1	18	7	30
	% within University	3.3%	10.0%	3.3%	60.0%	23.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	11	3	31	14	60
		1.7%	18.3%	5.0%	51.7%	23.3%	100.0%

institutions with the capability of operating as an independent state. By contrast, 45% disagreed on this matter. There was, however, a considerable numerical difference between the two universities' responses. Only 26% of the University of Salaheldin students disagreed with the proposition that Iraqi Kurdistan currently had political institutions capable of operating as an independent state, while 63% of the University of Sulaimani students made this response. This significant contrast suggested that the young Kurds from Sulaymaniyah viewed the political institutions of Iraqi Kurdistan as almost dysfunctional to operate as an independent state as compared to those Kurds from Erbil, the capital. There was also some gender contrast with 55% of males disagreeing with the proposition compared to 34% of females. This indicated that the

Kurdish males were less confident in the capability of the Kurdistan political institutions to work as an independent state than the females were. A small number (11%) of respondents gave neutral responses on this issue, all but one coming from the University of Salaheldin.

**Table 7.9: Student views on capability of the political institutions of Iraqi Kurdistan**

University		Q7:Kurdistan currently has the political institutions to operate as an independent state.					Total
		strongly disagree	Disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	0	19	1	5	5	30
	% within University	.0%	63.3%	3.3%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	1	7	6	15	1	30
	% within University	3.3%	23.3%	20.0%	50.0%	3.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	26	7	20	6	60
		1.7%	43.3%	11.7%	33.3%	10.0%	100.0%

The eighth question built on the previous one by asking whether it was possible for Iraqi Kurdistan to develop its political institutions so it could operate as an independent state. The overwhelming majority, 78% of respondents, took the optimistic view and agreed that Iraqi Kurdistan could develop its political institutions sufficiently for this purpose (see Table 7.10). Sixty-five percent of females gave this response, whereas a massive 90% of males expressed confidence that Kurdistan could develop appropriate political institutions. A small minority, 13% of respondents, disagreed on this matter, with females (20%) more likely to adopt such a view

than males (6%). There was a considerable numerical difference between the agreeing (78%) and disagreeing (13%) responses which suggested that the majority of the young Kurdish generation believed in the future improvement of their government's performance. Only 8% of participants did not volunteer any opinion on this question. The majority were female, all but one coming from the University of Sulaimani.

**Table 7.10: Student views on the possibility of developing Kurdistan's political institutions**

University		Q8: Kurdistan can develop political institutions to operate as an independent state.					Total
		strongly disagree	disagree	Neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	1	4	1	23	1	30
	% within University	3.3%	13.3%	3.3%	76.7%	3.3%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	1	2	4	19	4	30
	% within University	3.3%	6.7%	13.3%	63.3%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	2	6	5	42	5	60
		3.3%	10.0%	8.3%	70.0%	8.3%	100.0%

The ninth question surveyed the attitudes of the students on whether or not Iraqi Kurdistan had an economy with sufficient strength to support it as a state in the future. The reason for asking this question was to explore Kurdish students' views on the strength or weakness of the Kurdish economy which would either enable or hamper Kurdistan to become an independent state. The

majority, 68% of respondents, agreed that Iraqi Kurdistan had a strong enough economy to help it to sustain statehood in the future (see Table 7.11). A significant minority, 28% of respondents, disagreed on this matter. Only 3% of participants gave neutral responses to this question. While the dominant perception among the young Kurdish generation was that the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would be sustainable due to its economic richness almost one in four respondents did not express this optimistic view.

**Table 7.11: Student views on the Kurdish economy**

University		Q9: Iraqi Kurdistan has a strong economy to help it be a state in the future.					Total
		strongly disagree	disagree	Neither	Agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	1	9	0	15	5	30
	% within University	3.3%	30.0%	.0%	50.0%	16.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	0	7	2	17	4	30
	% within University	.0%	23.3%	6.7%	56.7%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	16	2	32	9	60
		1.7%	26.7%	3.3%	53.3%	15.0%	100.0%

The tenth question asked whether respondents thought the US would help Iraqi Kurdistan attain its independence. This question was asked to explore Kurdish students' opinions on US foreign policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan, whether they thought it would support the creation of a Kurdish state or not (see Table 7.12). Forty-six percent of respondents did not agree that the US would

assist Iraqi Kurdistan in attaining its independence in the future, and 45% of participants did not volunteer any opinion on this matter. This strong ‘neutral’ response rate demonstrates considerable uncertainty about the US stance on Kurdish independence. There were merely 8% of respondents who agreed that the US would help Iraqi Kurdistan in this matter. Overall, the response suggested that the students thought that the US was not the patron of the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Table 7.12: Student views on US foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan**

University	Q10: The US will help Iraqi Kurdistan to attain its independence in the future.					Total
	strongly disagree	disagree	Neither	agree	Strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani Count	2	12	13	3	0	30
% within University	6.7%	40.0%	43.3%	10.0%	.0%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin Count	4	10	14	2	0	30
% within University	13.3%	33.3%	46.7%	6.7%	.0%	100.0%
Total Count	6	22	27	5	0	60
	10.0%	36.7%	45.0%	8.3%	.0%	100.0%

The eleventh question asked whether Iraqi Kurds were united in the aim to achieve their political goals. This question helped the researcher explore students’ opinions on whether there was a single Kurdish stance on achieving their national aims. A large majority, 66% of respondents, disagreed with the statement that the Iraqi Kurds were unified in a way that would allow them to

work together to achieve their goals (see Table 7.13). By contrast, 30% of respondents agreed with the statement. This significant numerical contrast in the agreeing and disagreeing responses suggested that the historical political division between the PUK and the KDP was perceived, by the majority of respondents, to be persisting and preventing unity in political aims. Moreover, there were differences between students at the two universities. Thirty-six percent of the University of Salaheldin students agreed that the Iraqi Kurds were unified regarding their goals, whereas only 16% of the University of Sulaimani students were in agreement. There was also gender differentiation apparent, with 41% of male participants agreeing that Iraqi Kurds were unified to work together to achieve their aims as compared to only 16% of females. This contrast in the responses indicated that the Kurdish males had more confidence in their ruling parties to achieve the Kurdish political goals than the females. A very small minority, only 3% of respondents, were neutral in response to this question.

### **The Political Future of Iraqi Kurdistan**

This section focused on how the students viewed the political future of Kurdistan. The twelfth question asked whether respondents thought the future of Iraqi Kurdistan looked promising, in order for the researcher to determine whether they were optimistic, pessimistic or simply unsure about Kurdistan's future. A substantial majority, 67% of respondents, disagreed with the statement that the future of Iraqi Kurdistan was promising, thus indicating the dominance of a pessimistic viewpoint (see Table 7.14). By contrast, a small minority, only 17% of respondents, agreed with the statement and were optimistic about the future. Optimism was more common

**Table 7.13: Student views on the Iraqis Kurds achieving a united stance on their political goals**

University		Q11: The Iraqi Kurds are unified to work together for achieving their goals.					Total
		strongly disagree	disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	3	20	0	5	2	30
	% within University	10.0%	66.7%	.0%	16.7%	6.7%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	2	15	2	11	0	30
	% within University	6.7%	50.0%	6.7%	36.7%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	5	35	2	16	2	60
		8.3%	58.3%	3.3%	26.7%	3.3%	100.0%

among males, with 25% of male respondents as compared to only 6% of females. Overall, the responses suggested that the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was perceived to be unstable, challenging and complicated. Not only were 67% pessimistic but also a significant minority (17%) demonstrated unsureness by not volunteering any opinion on this matter.

## Conclusion

Despite the student respondents viewing themselves as a nation entitled to self-determination, opinions were very much split down the middle about whether a federal or independent future was desirable and/or feasible. Responses tended to cluster more in the moderate “agree” and

**Table 7.14: Student views on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan**

University		Q12: The future of Iraqi Kurdistan is promising.					Total
		strongly disagree	Disagree	neither	agree	strongly agree	
University of Sulaimani	Count	2	18	4	5	1	30
	% within University	6.7%	60.0%	13.3%	16.7%	3.3%	100.0%
University of Salaheldin	Count	2	18	6	3	1	30
	% within University	6.7%	60.0%	20.0%	10.0%	3.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	4	36	10	8	2	60
		6.7%	60.0%	16.7%	13.3%	3.3%	100.0%

“disagree” rather than in the “strongly” categories, perhaps suggesting a widespread reluctance to espouse strong views. There was a low level of neutral responses regarding federalism, but a quarter of respondents chose not to express a preference on secession. The Kurdish youth nationalist trend was pro-secession for Kurdistan as three quarters of respondents believed that Kurdistan nationalism was pushing for the independence of Kurdistan. But corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan was perceived to have a majorly detrimental impact on the attainment of Kurdistan independence.

Second, the lack of a united Kurdish stance on the achievement of political goals was seen as having a negative impact on the realisation of the ‘Kurdish dream’ by 66% of respondents.

Third, perceptions of a negative stance by the US towards Kurdish nationhood were expressed

by 46% of respondents. However, 45% of respondents were ambivalent about the US role in the Kurdish right to self-determination. The general pessimism of the Kurdish youth about the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was clearly evident in the questionnaire responses. These views could be related to the students' perceptions of the unsupportive stance of the US on Kurdish independence,, the absence of a united Kurdish stance on the political future of Kurdistan and the high levels of corruption in the region.



## **Chapter Eight: The Political Resolution for Iraqi Kurdistan: Federalism or Secession?**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an analytical explanation of which political arrangement, federalism or secession, is feasible and preferred by the Kurdish population to address the Kurdish right to self-determination in Iraq. There is a comprehensive analysis of the data about the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan gathered in this research, using concepts and theories discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter is organised in accordance with four analytical dimensions set out in Chapter Three: ethnicity and nationhood, self-determination, federalism (internal self-determination), secession (external self-determination) and federacy. In addition, this chapter uses the researcher's observations made during the field study in 2010 and specific events in Kurdish modern history discussed in Chapter Four to provide additional insights into Kurdish nationhood and self-determination, and an informed appreciation of the factors influential in determining Iraqi Kurdistan's political trajectory.

### **Ethnicity and Nationhood**

As was shown in Chapter 3, there are various theoretical approaches to ethnicity and nationhood. Each of these is tested here against the interview and questionnaire data, the researcher's field study observations and data drawn from secondary sources presented in Chapter Four. The first task is to establish whether the Kurdish people who were interviewed and surveyed believed that the Kurds constitute a nation. All of the participants in the semi-structured interviews (100%) stated that the Kurds were a nation. Similarly, all of the students in the survey (100%) indicated that the Kurds were a nation rather than just an ethnic group. However, the perceptions of Kurdish nationhood can be divided into two types. The overwhelming majority of interviewees

(80% from the public sector and 75% from non-state sector) identified Kurdish nationhood through perceptions of themselves as comprising a distinctive ethnic group. The remainder (20% from the public sector and 25% from non-state sector) perceived themselves as either a modern or ancient nation.

Having established the dominant self-perception of the Kurds as a nation, this analysis now seeks to determine which of the theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and nationhood reviewed in Chapter Three best fit the data gathered for this thesis. The following discussion is divided into two parts. The first evaluates Kurds and theories of ethnicity and the second appraises Kurds and theories of nationhood.

### **Kurds and Theories of Ethnicity**

The overwhelming majority of interviewees (80% from the public sector and 75% from non-state sector) identified Kurdish nationhood through perceptions of themselves as comprising a distinctive ethnic group. There are five theoretical approaches to ethnicity which are grounded on ideology, sociobiology, class conflict, boundary and power. According to the approach grounded in ideology, ethnicity is revealed through an ideology of common descent or history (Wolf 1988). The respondents who fit into this category believed that they were a nation rather than an ethnic group because they told their history as being characterised by oppression and injustice, features which differentiate them from others such as Arabs or Turks. This was mentioned by 5% of public sector participants and 17% of non-state sector participants. Given that the percentage of the responses is relatively small, this theoretical approach is weak as a general explanation of Kurdish perceptions of nationhood. A typical representation of this ideological orientation was as follows:

Kurds are a nation because we have our own history full of oppression, struggle, genocide and injustice. In addition, Kurds are an ancient people who built the Median civilisation in the Middle East. Thus, we have the right to self-determination.

This statement demonstrates that the concept of the Kurdish nationhood was premised on a belief in a history full of horrendous events such as genocide and injustice. It implied that to be a Kurd was to relate oneself to the past, replete with hardship and injustice. Thus, Kurds as a formerly oppressed nation had the right to their own country free of tyranny and persecution. Another related Kurdish perception of nationhood was grounded in a belief in a common descent through identification of the Kurds as an ancient people, the Medes, who established the Median civilisation in the region. It was evident from the interviews that historical and ancestral ideology played an influential role in the composition of the Kurdish national identity by defining who the Kurds are and how old their nation is. Kurds derive a sense of connection, continuity and dignity from the past which produces a strong sense of distinctive national identity.

The second theoretical approach to ethnicity is sociobiology which is based on extended kinship. From sociobiology, ethnicity is viewed as “common descent either real or putative, but, even if putative, the myth has to be validated by several generations of common historical experience” (Van de Berghe 1981, p.16). This theory explains the Kurdish perceptions of nationhood as being based on common descent. Only 5% of public sector participants and 17% of non-state sector participants were inclined to this view. The participants’ perceptions can be interpreted as representing overlap between the ideological and sociobiological approaches. Thus, one interviewee’s response, that “Kurds are an ancient people who built the Median civilisation in the Middle East” reflects the Kurdish conviction of their nationhood was premised on ancient lineage. The Kurdish perceptions of their ancestral origin as Medes make them believe that they are a nation rather than an ethnic group. Thus, there is a myth of descent that provides not only

the means to collectively locate the Kurdish nation in the world, but also the nation's self-understanding of its origin. Kurds as a nation feel bound together because they come from the same ancestry. Accordingly, the perceptions of Kurds as being Mede descendants communicate an explicit message, namely, that Kurds are an ancient nation and have the right to their own state.

The third theoretical approach to ethnicity is neo-Marxism which focuses on social class. Such a theory sees social life through a paradigm of conflict and presents history as a path of continuous struggle between classes. None of the interviewees mentioned any form of class conflict or structural inequality when identifying either what it meant to be a Kurd or how they determined Kurdish identity. Despite the Kurds having been marginalised and discriminated against in the past, from the field work data neo-Marxist theory seems unrelated to the present perceptions of Kurdish nationhood.

The fourth theoretical approach to ethnicity is concerned with boundaries (Barth 1969). It involves ethnicity as a fundamental means of ordering social life, a means that relies on manipulating cultural traits and ideas about origin so as to communicate difference. "Across a boundary there are differences between groups signalled and reproduced by things like clothing and language use" (Verdery 2000, p.44). Barth's theory provides the closest fit with the participant responses. The respondents (75% from the public sector and 58% non-state sector) perceived Kurds as a different nation due to their different language, different folklore celebrations and different traditional clothes. Thus, it seems that this theoretical approach provides the most powerful explanation for Kurdish perceptions of nationhood. The perceived

Kurdish nationhood is dependent on manipulating cultural traits, such as language and clothes, to communicate difference. A typical response illustrates this:

Kurds are a nation, different from Arabs, Persians and Turks. For instance, we have a different language, different traditional clothes, and different Kurdish traditional celebrations. Being a distinctive nation qualifies us to seek the right to self-determination like any nation in this world.

Kurdish national consciousness is created through the belief by the members that there is something different that unites them and sets them apart. The cultural differentiators of primary significance for Kurds are those used to mark Kurdish distinctiveness, the boundary between “us” and “them”. The cultural differentiators perceived by interviewees such as language and clothes mark the Kurds as a nation, different from the Arabs, Turks and Persians who exist on the other side of the boundary. Another interviewee stated:

Kurds are a nation because we have our own language, culture, and territory. Thus, we are entitled to the right to self-determination.

This statement demonstrates a conviction that Kurds are a different nation due to their cultural, linguistic and territorial characteristics. These also set a boundary between Kurds and other nations. All these ethnic markers are transformed into a Kurdish national identity that is used to express a political claim, namely, the right to self-determination. An important facet of national identity is its dependence on “other”. The creation of “other” is necessary in the construction of national identity. As Hall (1996, p.4) explains: “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference”. National identity is significant to Kurds because identity provides a sense of who they are and gives deep meaning and belonging to their lives (Dieckhoff 2004). One interviewee’s answer identifies such a significance:

Kurds are a nation. Being a Kurd is important as such an identity denotes who we are.

The perceptions of Kurds as a nation viewed in terms of Barth's theory of boundary are confirmed by the observation made during the field study that there is a national Kurdish song played once a week on the KurdSat TV, one of Kurdish Satellite channels. This song, written by one of KDP's founders, Ibrahim Ahmed, is called "We have always been Kurds and we will be so" and it contains the lines (KurdSat 2010):

We have always been Kurds and we will be so...I am not an Arab, not a Persian, not a mountainous Turk. I have always been a Kurd and a Kurdistani.

This line reflects the view that Kurds as a nation are different from others such as Persians and Arabs. This song has used cultural differentiators such as being Kurdish and from the Kurdish land to mark distinction as both an ethnic group and a nation. Barth's theory of boundary can also account for the perceived Kurdish nationhood that was observed during the field study at Kurdish schools. All Kurdish school syllabi are taught in Kurdish and include Kurdistan's geography, history, literature and Kurdish linguistics. Such syllabi emphasise the sense of belonging to Kurdistan rather than Iraq (KRG-ME 2006) and depict the Kurds as a nation. They reinforce the Kurdish feeling of being different: studying Kurdistan's geography, history, literature and linguistics marks Kurdish identity as different and distinctive from others such as Arabs. In addition, the official language in Iraqi Kurdistan is Kurdish and every institution and organisation uses it including government and the mass media. This helps to reinforce the distinct identity of the Kurdish nationhood along the lines of Barth's theory of boundary. The mass media have always depicted Kurds as a separate nation using cultural traits about their origin to mark distinction. For instance, there is a programme called *Kurdish Culture and History*, screened on KurdSat every week that presents Kurds as a distinct nation with a distinctive history and culture.

The fifth theoretical approach to ethnicity is Cohen's instrumentalist theory of power elite. Cohen (2007) analysed ethnicity as "means" of making economic and political claims. It is a strategy of manipulation and mobilisation employed by elites for political ends. The power elite use emotional appeals to common ethnic ancestry such as ethnic symbols and rituals as tools to achieve their political goals. This perspective has explanatory power for Kurdish nationalism because there have been many instances in Kurdish modern history that involve the power elite's use of ethnicity as a technique for political mobilisation. For instance, Sheikh Mahmud promoted the idea of Kurds as a distinct nation entitled to have independence, to mobilise Kurds to demand for a Kurdish state and revolt against the British so he would gain power. When the British appointed Sheikh Mahmud as the governor of Sulaymaniyah, he used "the British subsidy, provided for salaries and to assist recovery from the ravages of war, in order to consolidate his power base, buying the loyalty of chieftain" (McDowall 1996, p.156). According to Chorev (2007, p.26), Sheikh Mahmud's revolt can be seen as "a tool to advance his own interests".

In Cohen's model, the power elite use their privileged position "in some important sphere of social life" to preserve their interests through promotion of some "ethno-nationalistic" goals (Cohen 1981, p.xv). Sheikh Mahmud as the head of the most powerful family of religious leaders and as the governor of Sulaymaniyah used an ethno-nationalistic goal, namely Kurds as a nation entitled to an independent state of Kurdistan, as an instrument to promote and maintain his own interests which included regional power, personal wealth and a regional land base secured under the 1858 Ottoman Land Code (Chorev 2007). Hence, it can be said that the ethnic instrumentalism was used to mobilise the Kurdish masses to achieve the elite's aims in the modern history of the Kurdish national movement.

The majority of the respondents (80% from the public sector and 75% from the non-state sector) identified themselves as a nation by using various elements such as common descent and history. But what makes the Kurds a nation rather than an ethnic group? Self-consciousness is a key differentiating factor. Kurds identify themselves as a nation rather than an ethnic group because they have a self-conscious view that they are a distinctive nation, with a different history, language and culture. There is a line of thinking that an ethnic group may be readily distinguished by “the outside observer, but until the members are themselves aware of the group’s uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation” (Connor 1994, pp.45&46). Hence, as Connor (1994, p.42) states, “a prerequisite of nationhood is a popularly held awareness or belief that one’s own group is unique in a most vital sense. In the absence of such a popularly held conviction, there is only an ethnic group.” According to the majority of the Kurdish responses (80% from the public sector and 75% from the non-state sector), the self-view of Kurds rather than any objective characteristics is the essence of the existence of their nation. A typical response illustrates the Kurdish belief of themselves as a nation rather than an ethnic group:

Kurds are a nation, not an ethnic group because we have our own language, culture and territory. Thus, we are different from Arabs, Persians and Turks. We have existed since the dawn of civilisation, and lived with Assyrians. We always believe that we have the right to self-determination.

According to this view, there is awareness among the Kurdish interviewees that they are a distinct nation. The Kurdish nationhood awareness presumes a consciousness of other nations such as Arabs and Turks. Hence, as Connor (1973, p.3) suggests the Kurds have “the sense of being unique or different”, and they have “a referent, that is, the concept of us requires them.” In addition, there is “a psychological bond between” Kurds “which is characterised by a feeling of sameness and oneness”, they have one culture, language and territory (Ortiz 1986, p.17).

## **Kurds and Theories of Nationhood**

Twenty percent of interviewees from the public sector and twenty five percent of interviewees from the non-state sector perceived themselves as either a modern or ancient nation. Their perceptions match with two theories of nationhood and nationalism, namely, ethno-symbolism and constructivism. Smith's (1991) ethno-symbolism theory is based on primordialism, and the belief that nations and nationalism have existed since early human history, and thus have roots in earlier ethnic communities. Ethno-symbolism is focused on the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols. Symbols "encompass emblems, hymns, festivals, customs, linguistic codes and sacred places which can be powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture of the ethnic community" (Smith 1991, p.29).

Ethno-symbolism accounts for Kurdish nationhood because there were powerful symbols of Kurdish nationhood evident during the field research in 2010. The Kurds regularly used certain symbols to distinguish themselves from other nations and remind themselves of their distinctive culture. For example, flying the Kurdish flag and playing the Kurdish national songs and anthem are routine procedures during official ceremonies and daily school assemblies. Scholars like Aziz (2011) and Kirmanj (2010) argue that such regular presentation of symbols has furthered the sense of ethno-nationalism ("Kurdistanism") in Iraqi Kurdistan. A minority of interviewees (10% from the public sector and 17% from non-state sector) expressed nationhood along lines proposed by Smith (1991) pointing to certain symbols to express their nationhood such as historical atrocities and Kurdish festivals. This view can be seen in the following response:

We never forget that we are a nation as we celebrate Nawroz, wearing our traditional clothes every year and commemorate Anfal and Halabja chemical bombing events every year as well. We as any nation should have the right to self-determination.

This representative quote shows that Kurds use ethno-symbols such as shared memories of the Anfal campaign, the chemical bombing of the Kurdish village of Halabja and Nawroz, the traditional celebration of the Kurdish New Year, to be “powerful differentiators and reminders” of their unique culture, and the history of their nation. The Iraqi Kurds celebrate Nawroz on 21 March every year by dancing around a big fire. Nawroz means a new day in Kurdish and celebrates a symbolic story of Kurdish struggle against persecution and liberation from tyranny. According to the Kurdish mythology, Zuhak was a dictator who had snakes growing out of his shoulders. Physicians were not able to treat this deformity. Satan appeared to the dictator and advised him that he would be cured if he would feed the snakes every day with the brains of two children. Thus, Zuhak ordered for two children to be killed daily to feed his snakes. Because of his tyranny and cruelty, the Kurdish blacksmith Kawa decided to kill him as Zuhak’s minions had murdered Kawa’s seventeen sons around three thousand years ago.

The day that Zuhak was killed was called Nawroz, a new day for Kurds. Such mythology indicates that the Kurds were persecuted and Nawroz represents the Kurdish liberation from dictatorship. The persecution of Kurds in the myth is manifested in reality. During the twentieth century, Kurds were subject to genocide, assimilation and the Anfal campaign. There are museums and monuments in Iraqi Kurdistan to annually commemorate the Anfal campaign and chemical bombardment. During the field research, it was observed that there was a specific programme on the victims of Anfal campaign and Halabja chemical bombing screened every week. This programme and the monuments and museums remind the Kurds of their horrific past which is part of their perceived national identity. Thus, it can be said that persecution is a legacy and part of the Kurdish perceived nationhood. These observations and interview responses confirm that the perceptions of Kurdish nationhood are derived from ethno-symbolism: they are

perceptions premised on the role of symbols, myths, memories, and festivals and thus mark Kurds as a distinctive nation.

The second theoretical approach to nationhood is constructivism which argues that nations are recent and contingent creations, the product of the development of modern economic, social and political conditions. Anderson (2006), for example, defines a nation as “an imagined political community”. Anderson's (2006, p.4) theoretical concept is based on “nation-ness” and nationalism, both “cultural artefact of a particular kind”. They have emerged and spread to every corner of the world due to anomalies created by European imperialism. This theoretical approach also throws light on the Kurdish perception of nationhood. Ten percent of public sector and eight percent of non-state sector interviewees stated imperialism as a factor in construction of their nationhood. They believe that Kurds are a nation which reacted to the British annexation of Southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan nowadays) to Iraq. The reaction was in the form of revolutions to demand the independence of Kurdistan. That the Kurdish constructivist nationhood has stemmed from imperialism and decolonisation is reflected in the following interviewee's comment:

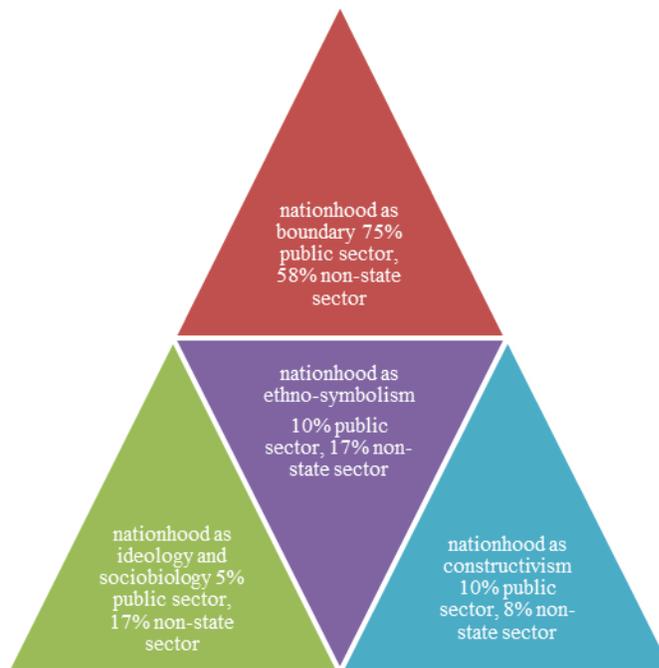
After the downfall of Ottoman Empire and the emergence of nation states, we as any other nation should have had a nation state but the annulment of Sevres Treaty announced the end of the Kurdish national project. Kurds were against the British annexation of Southern Kurdistan to Iraq. This annexation caused the Kurdish national movements to revolt against the British and Iraqis and demand the independence of Kurdistan.

This representative quote indicates that following the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, many nation states emerged, but the Kurds could not establish their nation-state due to the annulment of the Treaty of Sevres by the victors of World War One and the British occupation of Southern Kurdistan. According to Kurdish perceptions, this caused Kurdish nationalism to respond to the imperial power in the form of revolutions that demanded the establishment of their own nation-

state. According to constructivist theory, most nationalisms had their “origins [in] a response to the new-style global imperialism made possible by the achievements of industrial capitalism” (Anderson 2006, p.139). The rise of print media has also been identified as being significant in the creation of imagined communities (Anderson 2006), and historically, several Kurdish leaders used print to create and arouse Kurdish nationalism. For instance, during Sheikh Mahmud’s *de facto* kingdom, the Kurdish intellectuals were relied on to produce publications in Kurdish such as *Bangi Kurdistan* (the Proclamation of Kurdistan), *Roji Kurdistan* (the Sun of Kurdistan), *Bangi Haq* (the Proclamation of Justice) and *Umedi Istiqlal* (the Hope of Independence) (Kirmanj 2010). From the constructivist perspective, it can be said that the Kurdish intelligentsia came to think of its own language as an expression of their cultural identity, from which “the colonial intruder”, namely the British and their subjects, the Iraqi Arabs, “had to be excluded” (Chatterjee 1993, p.7).

The publication of these Kurdish language newspapers played a significant role in the construction of Kurdish nationhood and is believed to “have had a significant impact on the ideas and attitudes of Kurds to this day” (Kirmanj 2010, p.51). Despite the reality that “the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them”, the printed word will enable that “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006, p.6). In this sense, the concept of Kurdish nationhood is an “imagined community” or a construct that Kurds use in order to create themselves against others. Norman (2006, p.89) suggests that “both nations and national identities exist because of the beliefs, convictions, sentiments and attitudes of individual people”. Such Kurdish sentiments may explain why two thirds of Kurdish adults voted for independence for Iraqi Kurdistan in an unofficial referendum in 2004 (Galbraith 2005).

**Figure 8.1: the theoretical bases for the perceptions of Kurdish nationhood**



From the interviewees' responses, it can be inferred that Barth's theory of boundary provides the most powerful explanation for Kurdish perceptions of their nationhood (see Figure 8.1). Figure 8.1 shows that the most powerful theory accounts for the majority of the responses is so placed at the top of the pyramid. The less powerful theory explains 10% and 17% of the responses of public and non-state sectors participants respectively so is placed in the middle of the pyramid. The weakest theories that explain the minority of the responses are at the bottom of the pyramid. The interviewees employed ethnic markers to delineate their difference from other groups, thus providing the basis on which to claim nationhood. They live in an environment full of features that reinforce this difference in such as the media and school activities. This difference sets a boundary between Kurds and others such as Arabs. Moreover, it implies that Kurds are entitled to promote their political, economic and cultural rights to preserve, protect and defend their distinctive identity from the encroachment of competing cultures, and to ensure the continued

survival of their identity. Although the boundary theory is reflected in the responses of the largest portion of the interviewees and in my observations, there are other complementary theories, including sociobiology, ideology, ethno-symbolism and constructivism, which provide additional insights into Kurdish perceptions of nationhood. While each of these theoretical approaches is relatively weak on its own in the delineation of Kurdish perceived nationhood, each, nonetheless, constitutes part of the overall perceptions of Kurds as a nation: the ethnic origin of Kurds descended from Medes represents ancient and ancestral perceptions of and justifications for Kurdish nationhood; shared memories of oppression and injustice represent another facet of ethno-symbolic perceptions of Kurdish nationhood; the role of imperialism was crucial in the construction of Kurdish perceived nationhood; and imperial forces are remembered as preventing Kurds from acquiring their legitimate political rights.

While several theories of ethnicity and nationhood can be used to provide insights into the current perceptions and practices of Iraqi Kurds regarding their desired political future, the overwhelming majority's framing of Iraqi Kurds as a nation indicates a deeply-rooted belief that Iraqi Kurdistan should have its own state. But such belief may be tempered by appreciation of local and international politics that makes certain political trajectories more feasible than others, whatever the underlying desire. The question must be then raised: is statehood demanded by all Kurds? And, what is the desirable political arrangement that satisfies Kurds and safeguards their unique identity? The next section discusses this subject.

### **Self-determination and the Kurdish Question in Iraq**

This section analyses the perceptions of Kurds on the right to self-determination and the factors that have led the Kurds of Iraq to armed struggle to obtain the right to self-determination. Using the factors contributing to ethnic conflicts presented in Chapter Three as the analytical

framework for field study and documentation of data facilitates understanding of why the Kurds have been demanding the right to self-determination for more than a century.

The Kurds of Iraq have been seeking the right to self-determination since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The right to self-determination is defined as nations having the right to choose their political status (Musgrave 1997). There is a strong and absolute belief among Kurds that they are a nation-state. The statistical data in Table 7.3 demonstrates that all respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (100%) believe that Kurds are a nation entitled to the right to self-determination. Moreover, the qualitative data echo this conviction as all of the participants from both the public and non-state sectors believed that the Kurds had the right to self-determination because they were a nation. A typical response was as follows:

Kurds are a nation because we have our own language, culture, language and territory. Thus, we are entitled to the right to self-determination.

This typical comment demonstrates the Kurdish perceptions of their entitlement to the right to self-determination based on the conviction of their nationhood. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurds struggled to obtain this right because there were factors pushing them into this struggle. In the literature, there are four factors seen as contributing to ethnic conflicts: three are discussed here due to their relevance to this analysis of the Kurdish struggle for the right to self-determination, namely, oppressive policies towards minorities, the nature of colonial policy and practice, and inequality and discrimination against ethnic communities.

Minority peoples are propelled into ethnic conflicts when governments adopt oppressive policies towards them such as assimilation. Assimilation means the whole population of a nation-state should belong to one culture and language (Macartney 1934). This factor has relevance to the modern history of Kurdish peoples' struggle to self-determination because Kurds were subject to

the Arabisation policy, the Anfal campaign and the genocide of 5000 Kurds in Halabja in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All these oppressive policies and actions led the Kurds into armed struggle for the right to self-determination because such efforts to achieve a forcible assimilation and/or massacre members of an ethnic minority have usually been counter-productive and awakened the national consciousness of ethnic groups to resist such a policy (Musgrave 1997).

The second contributing factor in ethnic conflicts is the role of colonial policy and practice in shaping and dividing ethnic groups. Although Horowitz (1985, p.156) argues that “the relationship between colonialism and ethnicity cannot be captured by sweeping notions of divide and rule”, this factor does have considerable explanatory power for the Kurdish struggle to achieve the right to self-determination. This is because the British introduced the politics of ethnicity into Iraq. They heightened ethnic and religious differences by elevating Sunni Arabs to high positions of power in the government: their preferential treatment to Sunni Arabs antagonised the Kurds and Shiites (Natali 2005). For instance, the British authorities imposed a Sunni ruler, Amir Faisal, on a predominantly Shiite population in Iraq in 1921 (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). Hence, the Iraqi government was dominated by Sunni Muslim Arabs who comprised a minority in the country. The colonial policy of promoting the interest of one minority ethnic group at the expense of another as a means of controlling the political power of a dominant group (Horowitz 1985) enabled the Sunni majority to assert their cultural and political dominance. This attempted hegemony caused the Kurds to struggle for their right to self-determination.

The third factor contributing to ethnic conflicts is inequality and discrimination against ethnic communities. It is argued that “every state tends to support particular groups, to distribute privileges unequally and to differentiate among various categories in the population” (Brass

1985, pp.9 & 29). In the research, Kurds referred to discrimination against them when justifying their pursuit of the right to self-determination. For instance, after the incorporation of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq in 1926 by the British, Kurds became an ethnic minority promised, by the British, an autonomous status once the Iraqi state was established (Meiselas & van Bruinessen 2008). But the first King of Iraq, Amir Faisal, overlooked the matter of Kurdish autonomy and scarcely tolerated the political advocacy of Kurdish interests (Aziz 2011). Instead, he affirmed the Arabic cultural and political dominance in Iraq. This led Kurds to struggle for their political, economic and cultural rights in Iraq during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

All these historical factors are reasons the Kurds of Iraq continue to seek their right to self-determination. They fear that they could be persecuted again or their political, economic and cultural rights could be once more denied. The perceptions of Kurds on the right to self-determination are characterised by their references to both secession and federalism. Such perceptions are explained by Raic (2002) who suggests that the right to self-determination has two interpretations, namely, external and internal. External self-determination entails the formation of a state in the international community, whereas internal self-determination is associated with political arrangements which work within the existing structures and boundaries of states' and include arrangements such as federalism and autonomy. Do the Kurds of Iraq perceive either federalism or secession as a solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq? The following sub-sections deal with the Kurdish perceptions on secession and federalism in detail.

## **Secession**

The "Kurdish dream" is very popular among all Kurds in the Middle East. It simply means the establishment of a Kurdish state. Kurds perceive themselves to be a nation which has led them to

aspire for their own nation-state. They see this as their legitimate right because they are a nation. The popularity of secession among Kurds stems from the historical facts which were discussed in Chapter Four. The promise of Kurdistan independence in accordance with the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 was broken by the victors of the World War One. Since then, this treaty (even though it was superseded by the treaty of Lausanne) has been a legal document to which contemporary Kurdish scholars refer to legitimise Kurdish secession from Iraq. This researcher noticed the frequent reference to this treaty in the Kurdish local newspapers and Kurdish TV political programmes to legitimise the declaration of Kurdistan independence. Moreover, oppression and discrimination of Kurds by Iraqi Arabs, the centralised orientation of Arab-dominated governments and the failure of those governments to accommodate the Kurds of Iraq led to the emergence of a popular Kurdish belief that the only solution for the Kurdish question in Iraq is secession. The recent isolation of Kurdistan from Iraq between 1991 and 2003 has caused the new generation of Kurds to have no sense of belongingness to Iraq as they have been brought up in a place called Kurdistan where their education is delivered in Kurdish language and is about Kurdistan history, geography, politics and economy. Thus, Kurdish secession is popular among the Kurds of Iraq.

But does this desire for secession signify that the Kurds of Iraq will take organised action to form an independent nation state? Taking such action depends on the intensity of feeling, the strength of organisations supporting that view and an evaluation of the broad political environment – whether it is amenable or hostile. Perhaps one could envisage a continuum for this political environment. At one extreme is hostile (no chance of creating a nation state) and at the other is amenable (good support for creating a nation state).

This sub-section evaluates the Kurdish perceptions on secession and elucidates how these perceptions associate with the practices of secession presented in Chapter Three. This sub-section analyses the participants' perceptions on the feasibility and plausibility of the formation of a viable Kurdish state in the Middle East.

According to 36% of responses of students from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.6), 16% of responses from public sector and 25% of responses from the non-state sector, Kurds should secede from Iraq. It is obvious that the Kurdish students are more secession-oriented than other participants from public and non-state sectors. This derives from their more radical perceptions of the solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq. The pro-secession respondents provided three reasons for Kurdish secession. First, Kurds constitute a nation which has the right to have an independent state. The majority of interviewees (75% of public sector and 58% non-state sector) used cultural differences as principal indicators of their nationhood. This was in line with Aschenbach's (1993) argument that many nationalist movements are likely to strive for independence based upon tribal, linguistic, or religious differences. Second, the formation of a Kurdish state would provide a sense of security to Kurds and a safe homeland. Having their own homeland would ensure Kurds that they would not be subject to persecution of any kind by another ethnic group. This follows, Demissie's (1996, p.175) observation that "many resurgent nationalist movements lay the foundation of their claims on that historical fact". A typical interviewee answer explains the first and second reasons for secession as follows:

Every nation has the right to have its own state. Thus, it is the natural right of the Kurdish nation to have an independent state. It is in their interests to secede because an independent state provides Kurds with security. Thus, it is emotionally essential to have our own home.

Third, having an independent state would enable Kurds to choose the political system that they aspire to. A typical answer illustrates this third reason for secession:

It is in the interests of Kurds to secede because Kurdistan will be a UN member, and will have its discretion to choose the kind of its political system. In addition, it will have its own finances, military and embassies.

The Kurdish perceptions on secession are based on the legitimate right of any nation to an independent state that provides a sense of security to Kurds and enables a nation-state to flourish politically, economically and socially. Being an independent nation-state would enable Kurds to rule their country more efficiently in all aspects — political, economic and social — and would provide Kurds with a sense of protection through avoiding persecution by other ethnic groups. All these reasons, said the pro-secession interviewees, gave the Kurds entitlement to secession.

Despite all Kurds perceiving themselves to be a nation which dreamed of establishing a nation-state, the majority of Kurds did not support secession as the solution to the Kurdish question of self-determination in Iraq. There was a broadly held Kurdish view that, “secession should be our right because we are a nation, but because of political circumstances we do not support secession”. The vast majority of interviewees (84% from the public sector and 75% from the non-state sector) and a significant minority of student respondents (38% from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin-see Table 7.6) took a realistic approach to the issues of Kurdish secession from Iraq. It is noticeable that there is a huge difference between responses from the public and non-state sectors on one hand and the students on the other hand. This may be accounted for by the age difference as the interviewees from the public and non-state sectors are older and more mature than the students of the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin. The majority of the mature interviewees and a minority of young students did not think that the secession of Kurdistan from Iraq is practical because they pragmatically assessed the political

circumstances of Iraqi Kurdistan, and saw secession as a destructive and counter-productive approach to resolving the Kurdish question in Iraq. Their opposition to the establishment of a Kurdish state stemmed from their identifications of major obstacles to the formation of a viable and sustainable Kurdish state in the Middle East. These factors are classified below into internal and external impediments.

The internal impediments included weak economy, corruption, malfunctioning of the KRG, divided Kurdish leadership, the demise of Kurdish nationalism, lack of a democratic culture, Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence and non-strategic vision of the Kurdish leadership. The first internal impediment, according to 47% of the respondents from the public sector, 66% of the respondents from the non-state sector and 28% of the student respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.11), was weak economy. It was apparent that a minority of Kurdish students perceived the economy of Kurdistan as an impediment. This indicated an underestimation of the strength and prospects of Kurdish economy by the Kurdish youth.

The weak economy perceptions of participants from the public and non-sectors, and the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin emanated from the fact that 17% of Iraq's oil export revenues constitute 97% of Iraqi Kurdistan's budget (UNDP 2009). This means that the KRG relies almost totally on oil revenues distributed by Baghdad to cover its expenses (Pollock 2008). Its complete economic reliance on Baghdad prevents Iraqi Kurdistan from forming a viable independent Kurdistan as its independence will entail the removal of oil revenues from the Iraqi government. A typical answer illustrates the perception of reliance of Iraqi Kurdistan on the central government of Iraq:

Kurdistan does not have an economy that can be counted on. It has no significant industries. Moreover, every Kurd depends on his salary which comes from Baghdad.

Independence of Iraqi Kurdistan would enable Kurds to control the oil production in their own region but it would not enable them to export it to the world because the oil pipelines go through adjacent hostile countries. In addition, the reliance of the Kurdish economy on imports from other countries indicates that any secessionist attempt means deprivation of these imports. Iraqi Kurdistan cannot subsist on its local industries. This means that a Kurdish state could be destined to fail economically. These Kurdish perceptions of economic dependence of Iraqi Kurdistan were seen to necessitate political compromises with Baghdad and adjacent countries. That is to say, the Kurds of Iraq should stop demanding the creation of a Kurdish nation-state and remain part of Iraq. This would ensure their survival as a stateless nation and enable them to seek self-determination within the Iraqi state. A typical response illustrates the widely held realisation of how dependent Iraqi Kurdistan was on neighbouring countries:

Unfortunately the Kurdish economy is weak. Iraqi Kurdistan depends on imports. Any nation depending on imports is doomed. If the Kurds rely upon imports, they cannot have their own state. This is because when the adjacent countries seal off their borders, there will be no chance to import products and export oil. Kurdistan will starve. Then, how can Kurds survive?

The anti-secession perception of Iraqi Kurdistan is realistic, and stems from the realistic assessments of the Kurdish economy. The perception is supported by Connor (1994) who argues that ethnic secession should be denied when the possibility of maintaining a viable economy is too remote (Connor 1994). Similarly, Wellman (1995, p.161) contends that an ethnic minority may secede provided their new state is cohesive and with sufficient resources to form a government which effectively carries out the functions “necessary to create a secure political environment”. The respondents who identified the problems stemming from a weak economy

acknowledged that Iraqi Kurdistan was economically better off when it was part of Iraq. This perception has been explained by Etzioni (1992) who argues that the way to welfare is not breakup but its opposite. Thus, it is economically beneficial for Iraqi Kurdistan to remain part of Iraq in order to boost its economy from Iraqi oil revenues.

The second impediment to the formation of a Kurdish state was corruption according to 52% of public sector respondents, 91% from the non-state sector and 83% of the students from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.7). Notably, only 52% of responses of interviewees from the public sector identified corruption as an impediment. This may be because about half of the public sector interviewees were avoided criticising the Kurdish ruling parties due to their dependence on the political parties for their positions in the Kurdish government and their loyalty to those parties. Corruption is powerful enough to be a stumbling-block to the transition of Iraqi Kurdistan from autonomy to a *de jure* state because it already has, and promises more, detrimental effects on the political and economic fabric of Iraqi Kurdistan. Corruption has been one of the reasons for the sluggish and weak Kurdish economy due to the embezzlement of the nation's wealth by the Kurdish leadership. This has caused Kurds to distrust their leaders, who have exploited state positions for personal gains at the expense of the masses. A typical response illustrates the perceptions of the negative effects of corruption on Iraqi Kurdistan's political future:

Corruption is a dangerous phenomenon that poses an impediment to the growth and development of Kurdistan. The endemic corruption has created a wide gap between the public and the Kurdish leadership. This has impinged on the credibility of the Kurdish leadership in achieving the Kurdish goals to have a better and stable life.

Another harmful effect of corruption has been the reluctance of the international community to support the Kurdish region to become an independent state. They have been averse to supporting Kurdish statehood due to the involvement of the Kurdish elite in corruption that has impinged on

the justice system and democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan. The following statement from an interviewee captured the perceived negative impact of corruption on Iraqi Kurdistan's international reputation:

The Kurdish leadership has failed to establish an exemplary democracy based on the free market, that fights corruption and achieves justice like in Israel. If we created such a system, it would be internationally supported. The ruling parties receive the budget from Baghdad and divide it between themselves. Corruption has divided these two parties. Each party is making money for themselves.

With corruption paralysing the rule of law in Iraqi Kurdistan, the international community has been discouraged from acting as patrons of Kurdish independence. Moreover, the level of corruption has created friction between the grassroots and the political elite due to its contribution to social injustice in terms of the unequal distribution of wealth. Corruption has enabled the Kurdish elite to control Kurdish markets and own lands in a way such that the Iraqi Kurdistan's system has been likened to the French monarchy before revolution in 1789. The Kurdish upper class wields power over every aspect of Kurdish life. This has caused public indignation as observed in anti-corruption demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil in 2010. A profound interview response illustrates how corruption has affected Iraqi Kurdistan's economy and politics:

Corruption is a dangerous obstacle because it has thwarted Kurdistan from building the basic components of statehood such as a strong economy. The ruling parties have their own companies that control the market. For instance Nokan is a PUK company that controls Sulaymaniyah's market, whereas Ster is a KDP company that controls Erbil and Dohok markets. Moreover, these two parties will not allow any individuals to invest in the region unless they are partnered with these two parties. The administrative and financial corruption is as dangerous as Saddam's regime. Corruption has made the ruling parties very rich and the grassroots live in poverty. This has created a wide gap between the poor and the rich. The situation of Kurdistan now is similar to the French royal rule before the French revolution in 1789. At that time, Louis XVI was busy with building mansions and nowadays our leaders are busy with building mansions in Qala Cholan and Salaheldin resorts. Marie Antoinette had political and financial authority at that time and Hero Talabani, the first lady of Iraq, has all the authority to make any decision. The new form of feudal system is headed by the ruling parties in Kurdistan. They have the authority over everything: government, economy and jurisdiction.

Corruption has caused Iraqi Kurdistan to have a weak and flimsy economy, has disabled the judicial system and slowed democratisation in the region. Thus, it can be said that its detrimental impact permeates every aspect of Kurdish life. The Iraqi Kurdistan system resembles a feudal system where the nobles possess all financial and social power. In essence, the Kurdish polity is pre-modern even though it has a façade of modernity in its functions and decision-making processes. Such a system, respondents said, made the KRG dysfunctional and lacking in the competence or integrity to rule an independent state.

The third impediment to the creation of a Kurdish state was the malfunctioning of the KRG, according to 45% of the responses of students from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.9), 73% of responses from the public sector and 50% of responses from the non-state sector. The factors they saw as contributing to the malfunction of the KRG were tribalism, party dominance over the government and the newness of the government. There was, therefore, serious doubt as to the KRG's capability to rule an independent state. The KRG's incompetence springs from the deep-seated tribal nature of its government. Allegiance to the ruling parties and their associated tribes seemed more important, according to respondents, than qualifications and competence to take a position in the government. A typical response illustrates this view:

Iraqi Kurdistan is a tribal society and the Kurdish allegiance is to the tribe or ruling families. Those who have got senior positions in the government have allegiance to their tribes and ruling families. They are employed to serve the interests of the ruling parties in the government. The KRG should employ qualified people, especially technocrats, who are capable of making decisions, not waiting for their parties to receive their orders.

The tribal nature of the KRG has meant its institutions fail to function independently and objectively, and its decision-making processes are manipulated by the ruling parties. The KRG has been a government dominated by the Kurdish party elite and working for this elite. Such a

government could not run an independent state, respondents said, as it would lack technocratic skills and transparency in its decision-making processes.

Another factor, the respondents saw, contributing to the malfunction of the KRG was the ruling party dominance over the KRG. This has introduced dysfunctions into the rule of law over the region. The hegemony and the interference of the ruling parties over the functions of the KRG institutions were thought to have paralysed Iraqi Kurdistan's political system and established the primacy of party interests over national interests. The following comment illustrates perceptions of the extent of the ruling parties' hegemony over the KRG:

The problem lies in the system which is still ruled by parties, not ruled by the government. The decision-making process is not inside the government. To have a strong state, it should have the budget, security and army under the control of the government. None of these are controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government. In addition, the political decision-making is under the control of these two parties. For instance, the Prime Minister of Kurdistan cannot decide about any national issue, but the politburos of the ruling parties, mainly the two leaders [Barzani and Talabani], decide about sensitive and important issues of this region. The mentalities of these parties have not changed for 19 years.

The ownership of the KRG's institutions by the Kurdish political elite has incapacitated the government. Having a government that represents the interests of the ruling parties rather than those of the populace indicates the failure to establish an independent state that would or could represent the free will of Kurds. The supremacy of the ruling parties' interests over those of the public has been characteristic of the Kurdish elite for about a century, and has become a cumbersome legacy.

The final factor noted as a contributor to the malfunctioning of the KRG, in the respondents' eyes, was the newness of its institutions. The KRG was only established in 1992 and so may require a long time to mature its institutions. The lack of proficiency and experience in ruling the

region was said to have contributed to the poor performance of the government. A typical insight into this issue was provided by one respondent:

The Kurds had no previous experience in administering the region and establishing the civil society. In addition, the KRG is a very new government, which cannot be compared with other governments in the neighbouring countries because these governments have been ruling for a long time.

The fourth impediment to the formation of a Kurdish state was the divided Kurdish leadership, according to 42% of public sector respondents, 50% of non-state sector respondents and 66% of students from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaeldin (see Table 7.13). The historical enmity between the ruling families had caused disunity in the Kurdish leadership and society. The internal Kurdish war of 1996 played a destructive role in furthering the division of the Kurdish leadership by splitting the KRG administration into two parts. As Bengio (2005, p.180) has suggested, the ramifications of the Kurdish internal war are that “the unique window of opportunity for a unified autonomous region [seems] to have been lost because of the Kurds themselves, not because of any external force”. Since the internal war, Iraqi Kurdistan has been divided into sub-regions in accordance with the sphere of influence of each ruling family. Kurdish society has been divided politically, economically, geographically and even intellectually into two blocks (Stansfield 2003b). A typical response showed the ramifications of the internal Kurdish war on the Kurdish political unity:

We had an internal war which was a disaster in 1996. Since then, the Kurdish authority and leadership have been divided between these two parties. These two parties are controlled by the ruling families. These families defend their interests which they consider more important than the Kurdish interests. They want to stay in power at any expense.

The war was precipitated by the conflict between the ruling parties over the division of customs fees and the power-sharing formula, and is a demonstration that sectional interests have overridden national interests, resulting in the fracture of the Kurdish leadership into two parts.

This was perceived as an impediment to the creation of an independent Kurdish state as the “Kurdish dream” cannot materialise without a united leadership. During the field research, it was noted that the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masud Barzani, commented on Kurdish unity as a vital factor in fulfilling Kurdish national goals during his speech on the Kurdish New Year (Nawroz) in 2010 (KurdistanTV 2010):

Dear Kurdish and Kurdistan nation, we wish you a happy Kurdish new year full of happiness and success. We should always be thankful that we are free people. Our freedom comes from a thousand years of Kurdish struggle and sacrifice. Great Kurdish revolutionary leaders emerged during this historical struggle but their revolutions had never been successful because we, Kurdish and Kurdistan nation, had never been united to achieve our goals. But in spring 1991, we were united to revolt against dictatorship. Thus, we were successful to liberate ourselves from the yoke of totalitarianism, and now we are a free nation. This is a good lesson for us because only our united stand and brotherhood will make us successful in achieving our goals. Our failure merely lies in that we will be against each other.

His speech demonstrates that an enemy of the Kurds has historically been disunity among the Kurds themselves. This disunity had caused the failure of many Kurdish revolutions in the past, and it hindered Kurds from achieving their goals then and now. Hence, the president was seemingly sending a message to his rivals, the PUK and *Goran*, that it was not in the interests of Kurds to be disunited as this could lead to the failure of Kurdish autonomous experience in Iraq.

The fifth impediment to the establishment of a Kurdish state that emerged from the responses was the demise of Kurdish nationalism. Two main reasons were given for this. The first, expressed by 31% of participants in the public sector, 50% in the non-state sector and 20% in Kurdish Universities (see Table 7.8), indicated that the demise of Kurdish nationalism stemmed from the malfunctioning of the KRG which caused the Kurds to lose their trust in and reliance on their leadership. The second reason given was nepotism, namely the Kurdish allegiance to the ruling parties and their associated tribes. These conditions eroded the belief Kurdish nationalism. One respondent explained the reasons for the demise of Kurdish nationalism in this way:

Firstly, Kurds have lost hope in the Kurdish administration because of the bad performance of its cabinet in the last years. This resulted in Kurds being pessimistic about the future of Kurdistan. Secondly, the Kurds are belonging to the parties rather than to the homeland, Kurdistan. They have pledged their allegiance to the parties, not Kurdistan.

As nepotism is one form of corruption, it can be said that corruption has played a role in the demise of the Kurdish nationalism. However, the sense of Kurdish nationalism seems higher among young Kurds than among public and non-state sector respondents: about 75% of University respondents indicated that Kurdish nationalism should be pushing for independence (see Table 7.8). This showed the intensity of nationalist feeling among the Kurdish younger generation and the high enthusiasm of the Kurdish youth for Kurdistan independence.

The sixth impediment to the creation of a Kurdish state, identified by 15% of respondents from the public sector and 41% of respondents from the non-state sector, was the lack of democratic culture and practice in Iraqi Kurdistan. Few respondents from the public sector commented on the lack of democratic culture and practice in Iraqi Kurdistan, which almost certainly stemmed from their association with the government, and their consequent reluctance to express their views on this issue. The undemocratic culture of the ruling parties, in the respondents' eyes, appeared to be conducive to an authoritarian state, and one not wanted by the Kurds of Iraq. The centralisation of power under the ruling parties was, in respondents' eyes, a system likened to Stalinism. Clearly, a democratic federal region was preferred by respondents to a centralised Kurdish state. A typical comment illustrated the negative attitude to the centralisation of the ruling parties:

The reason for the totalitarian chauvinist mentality of the Kurdish leadership is the Stalinist structure of their parties. This communist structure is hierarchical. Having such a structure has put the power in the hand of their central party committee controlled by their politburos. The politburo is headed by their leader who has all the authority in his hand. There are two main leaders who determine the future of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani and Masod Barzani. The vertical or hierarchical authority should be horizontal, but the Kurdish leadership is not willing to share power with other parties. These ruling parties control everything. For

instance, the economy, media, government, market and employment are controlled by these two parties. The Kurds do not want to have a totalitarian state. They prefer to have a federal region instead if federalism guarantees the Kurdish rights and meets their requirements. There is an orientation towards achieving democracy in the region rather than obtaining a Kurdish state.

The ruling parties' domination over every aspect of Kurdish life seems to have originated from the centralist structure of their parties. Consequently, the mindsets of these parties were interpreted as involving an unwillingness to share power with any other Kurdish parties. By contrast, the Kurdish populace were in favour of a federal democratic region rather than an authoritarian state ruled by centralist parties.

The seventh recognised impediment to the formation of a Kurdish state, according to 21% of public sector responses and 16% of non-state sector responses, was Iraqi opposition to Kurdish independence. Iraq's reluctance to lose Kurdistan's natural resources, particularly oil and gas, was interpreted as a factor forestalling any Kurdish secessionist move and hence, a stumbling-block for Kurds to materialise their dream. A typical response demonstrates this view:

Iraq will not allow us to establish our state because Arabs and Turkmen will not give away the Kurdistan natural resources to the Kurds.

The final internal impediment to the establishment of a Kurdish state, identified by 33% of non-state sector participants but no others, was the non-strategic vision of the Kurdish leadership. To these respondents, the policy of the ruling parties seemed to be based on the view that the ruling parties worked for immediate self-interest rather than planning for Kurdistan's secession. This impediment is interrelated with another one, the Kurdish divided leadership, as it has been the self-interest of the ruling parties that has made a major contribution to the division of the Kurdish leadership. A typical response illustrated the perceived self-interest of the ruling parties:

The PUK and KDP are pro-secession or federalism if one of these serves their interests. What is crucial to them is to stay in power without having any strategic vision for the future of Kurdistan.

Besides the internal constraints, external impediments were identified that hinder Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a nation-state. These were principally the landlocked territory, contiguous countries, international community and US interests. The first external impediment to the creation of a Kurdish state was the landlocked situation of Iraqi Kurdistan, according to 31% of the public sector responses and 41% of the non-state sector responses. The geography of Iraqi Kurdistan is not conducive to the establishment of an independent state as it is encircled by countries antagonistic to the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. This may not leave any chance for an independent Iraqi Kurdistan to survive politically and economically as it would be internationally isolated. According to respondents, the survival of Iraqi Kurdistan as a state would be dependent on cooperation with regional neighbours. This impediment is interrelated with the next one which is the position of the neighbouring countries on Kurdish independence. A typical response demonstrates the perception of the attitudes of neighbouring countries towards Kurdish independence:

Kurdistan is an enclave. The neighbouring countries will impose a blockade on Kurdistan if it declares its independence. Thus, it will be very hard for the Kurdish region to survive by itself.

The second external impediment to the formation of a Kurdish state was contiguous countries, according to 94% of public sector responses and 75% of non-state sector responses. The independence of Iraqi Kurdistan, respondents said, appeared to be a national threat to the neighbouring countries as such a status would encourage other Kurds in these countries to demand independence. Hence the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan would receive an antagonistic reaction from these countries. To ensure the political and economic survival of Iraqi Kurdistan, respondents therefore rejected secession as an option to solve the Kurdish question in Iraq. A

typical response shows the anticipated backlash from neighbouring countries should Iraqi Kurdistan secede:

If we declare our independence, we will be surrounded by strong enemies and there will be no chance to survive as a country. For instance, Turkey is currently against the Iraqi Kurdish independence because it has 20 million Kurds. The Kurdish secession is seen as a national threat to our neighbouring countries.

This popular Kurdish perception of Turkey's position on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan stemmed from the fact that Turkey has the largest number of Kurds whose history is rich in revolts and insurgency against the Turkish assimilatory policies (Gunter 2004). Accordingly, the issue of Iraqi Kurdistan independence greatly concerns Turkey as the creation of this state "would serve as a magnet or model for Turkey's own Kurdish population" (ICG 2005, p.1). The perceived Turkish fear of Iraqi Kurdistan independence is explained by Horowitz's (1985) theory of reciprocal separatism. This basically suggests that "what will placate one group may be precisely what is required to inflame another" (Horowitz 1985, p.279). In this sense, the secession of Kurdistan from Iraq could induce the secession of the Kurdish region from Turkey. This would lead to the division of Turkey, and thus Turkey is antagonistic towards Iraqi Kurdistan independence.

The third impediment to the formation of a Kurdish state was the international community's objection to it, according to 36% of the public sector responses and 50% of the non-state sector responses. The international community was seen to be hesitant to support the Kurdish secession because its interests were vested in the unity of Iraq and maintaining the territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. The secession of Kurds from Iraq would be seen posing a threat to the stability and peace in the Middle East region. Thus, as Danspeckgruber (2005) suggested, the international community does not support ethnic secession because such secession may set a precedent for promoting ethnic secession elsewhere. This could destabilise countries, regions and

even the world. Hence, the international community has adopted the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris* (as possessed under law) to safeguard the territorial sovereignty of newly independent states by rejecting overlapping claims of title grounded on ethnic kinship and cultural bonds (Christopher 2011). This impediment is related to the previous one: the international community does not support Kurdish independence in Iraq because this would destabilise Turkey, Syria and Iran. A typical comment illustrated respondents' thinking on this issue:

In reality, from the Kurdish leadership to the grassroots want to have a Kurdish state. To have such a state, there should be international and regional support. The international politics is not in favour of the creation of Kurdish state because this will lead to re-drawing the map of the Middle East.

Another response pointed to the shared interests of the international community with the neighbouring countries:

There is no international support for the Kurdish independence because the international community's interests support the adjacent countries and the unity of Iraq.

The fourth external impediment to the establishment of a Kurdish state, identified by respondents, was the unpredictability of US foreign policy for Iraqi Kurdistan. The participants had different views on the US foreign policy towards Kurds. The first view, expressed by 21% of public sector interviewees and 25% of those from the non-state sector, saw American foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan as realist (namely, states act in pursuit of their own national interests, and are concerned with their own security and struggle for power) and thus changeable in accordance with US interests. One interviewee summed up this perspective:

There is no morality in US politics It is merely based on serving its own interests. The US is acting like a trader. When its interests are with the Kurds, it does care about us. Otherwise, it ignores our question. It has a selective policy. It intervenes in Tibet, but it does not intervene in Turkey where the Kurds are struggling for their basic rights. Thus, the US foreign policy is double-standard.

American patronage of the Kurdish independence seems vital to creating a viable and sustainable Kurdish state, and to ensuring its survival in a hostile regional environment. Without such patronage, the establishment of a Kurdish state appears to be unrealistic. However, US interests seem to be more concerned with Iraq and neighbouring countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as vital economic and military US allies. A small number of non-state sector responses (8.3%) reflected this view, as for example the following:

The US has no role in the Kurdish self-determination. If the US supported the Kurdish state, they would lose their allies: Turkey, Iraq and other Arabic countries. Thus, it will not jeopardise its interests for our sake.

The second view on US foreign policy, expressed by 73% of public sector respondents and 58% from the non-state sector, referred to US support for the Kurdish right to internal self-determination. According to these respondents, the US sees federalism as the only remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq, an arrangement where the Kurds enjoy their political, economic and cultural rights, because this approach supports American interests in the Middle East. Thus, the political self-interests of states explain why this secession effort was not supported (Christopher 2011). A typical response reflected this:

The US is with the Kurdish self-determination, namely, the Kurds decide their fate internally and the ways of developing themselves politically, economically and socially within the framework of the Iraqi federal government. This means that the US is not with the Kurdish external self-determination in the current circumstances at least. The current American interests lie in the unity of Iraq, people and land. America will not risk its interests with the Arabs and Turks for the sake of Kurds. The American policy towards Iraq and Middle East as a whole will, however, not forsake the protection of Iraqi Kurds because the Americans have realised the significance of Kurds in achieving stability in Iraq and the Middle East region as whole.

This popular Kurdish perception of the US position on the Kurdish issue in Iraq is supported by Mack's argument (as quoted in Shareef 2010, p.219) which stated, "the US

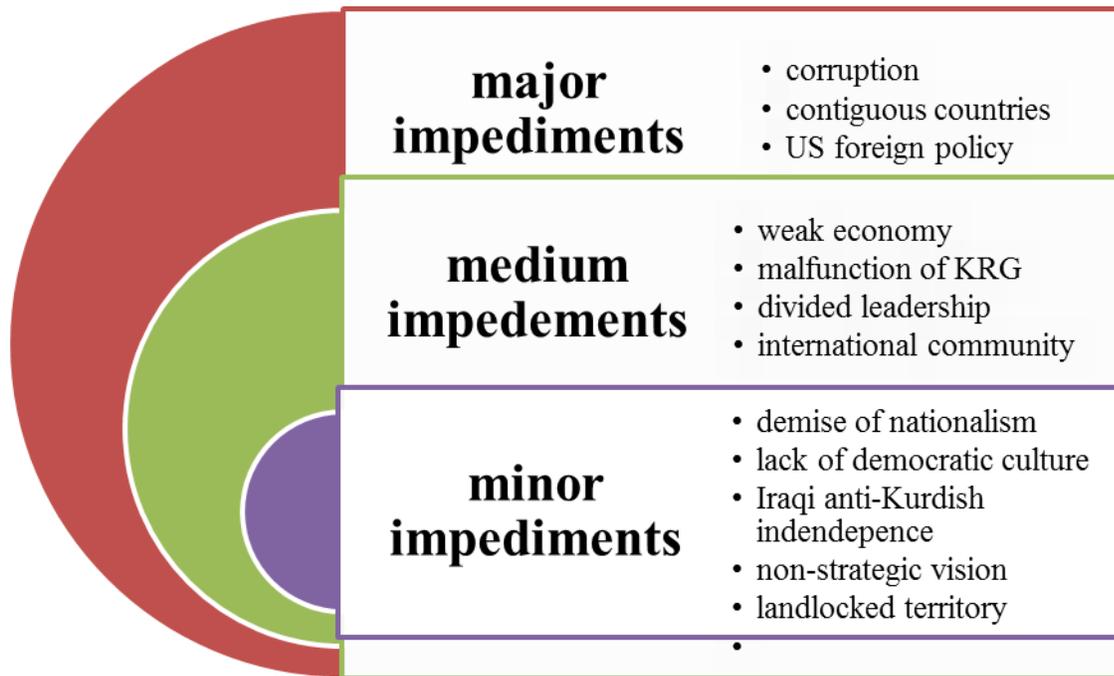
essentially supported the rights of Kurds to have the rights that all Iraqis should have at managing their own political affairs and having a greater say how their country was run, but we do not support a Kurdish state”. The US is seen to support “Turkish integrity and believes that a Kurdish declaration of independence will cause a war in the region” (Shareef 2010, p.215). This is because “there would be blowback in Turkey among its large Kurdish population, leading to the destabilisation of the country” (Shareef 2010, p.215). Turkey’s views matter to the US because Turkey is an important NATO ally of key strategic significance. Accordingly, it can be said that the US policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan has been part of American policy towards Iraq and of its relationship with Turkey and thus it has not supported the Kurdish nationalist aspirations.

While the vast majority of Kurdish respondents saw no evidence of American support for Kurdish independence, and US foreign policy as a major impediment, the third view on the US foreign policy, expressed by only 16% of the non-state sector respondents and 5% of the public sector participants, indicated that the US supported Kurdish independence. They believed that Iraqi Kurdistan had geopolitical and economic significance to the US, and was a good ally to the westerners and Israel as Kurds embrace democracy and secularism. By the creation of a Kurdish state, Iraqi Kurdistan could be a strategic base for the US to exercise its influence and implement its agenda in the Middle East. This somewhat hopeful interpretation of US policy aligns with , Christopher’s (2011, p.330) argument that states that stand to benefit from a successful secession “by weakening a rival or creating a potential new ally in the newly independent territory are prone to take a more permissive view toward particular secession efforts”. A typical respondent version of this argument was:

The US interests lie in Kurdistan because firstly, Kurds uphold democracy. Secondly, they are not influenced by Islamic ideology. Thirdly, the Kurds regard the US and westerners as

an ally. Fourthly, Kurdistan has geopolitical significance for the US because it borders Iran, Syria and Turkey. The location of Iraqi Kurdistan helps the US achieve its strategic goals in the region.

**Figure 8.2: The strength and weakness of external and internal impediments to the creation of a Kurdish state**



Using the perceptions of interviewees and survey respondents and combining these with personal observations and documentary evidence, the impediments to the creation of a Kurdish state can be classified into major, medium and minor (see Figure 8.2). These categories are based on the percentage of responses which identified particular internal and external impediments. The higher the percentage, the more serious the impediment. The major impediments indicate more widely held views. Corruption, US foreign policy and neighbouring countries' antagonism towards the formation of a Kurdish state were identified as the most serious impediments. Corruption slowed down the political and economic development of the region; the neighbouring

countries were against Kurdish independence; and US foreign policy supported the national interests of the neighbouring countries and the unity of a federal Iraq.

The weak economy, the malfunctioning of the KRG, divided leadership and the international community were viewed as mid-level impediments, but still were considered to be playing significant roles in preventing Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming a *de jure* state. By comparison, the minor impediments, namely, the demise of nationalism, the lack of democratic culture, the Iraqi anti-Kurdish independence, the non-strategic vision and landlocked territory, were viewed by participants as having a small impact, but they still provide insight into Kurdish thinking and their existence complements and interweaves the other higher level impediments.

Besides these internal and external impediments to the formation of a Kurdish state, there is a constitutional impediment to achieving the Kurdish dream. There is no article in the existing constitution which allows for the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan within a specified time. In the case of Croatia, for instance, secession was admissible in accordance with the Yugoslav constitution. The Iraqi Kurdistan's secession would not, therefore, be legitimate. However, on the "Kurdish Debate" programme on KurdSat TV in 2010, a group of Kurdish lawyers argued that in the preamble of the Iraqi constitution there is a reference to the right to self-determination. There is a provision which refers to the Iraqi union (*ittihad*, the same word used to mean federation in this document) as voluntary. This could imply a right of secession. However, the word *ittihad* is vague, and in fact holds two different meanings: union and federation. Hence, it cannot be absolutely asserted that *ittihad* means union in the Iraqi constitution's preamble as it may refer to federation instead. Federalism is stipulated in the first article of the Iraqi constitution 2005 (see Appendix 5). Hence the following sub-section focuses on Kurdish perceptions on federalism as

an acceptable political arrangement and a means of resolving the question of Kurdish self-determination in Iraq.

## **Federalism**

It has been demonstrated in the previous sub-section that while the overwhelming majority of Kurds see themselves as a nation, and hence entitled to a nation-state, their pursuit of this objective is moderated by practical political considerations. Secession was not viewed as a viable political future by 84% of respondents from the public sector, 75% of respondents from the non-state sector and 38% of student respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin. This means that the major political questions about Iraqi Kurdistan's future concern the nature of its integration into Iraq: questions such as how much autonomy should Iraqi Kurdistan have? How much autonomy is likely to be granted? And, what kind of federation is more likely to be viable and requested by Iraqi Kurds? These questions will be pursued through an analysis of respondents' views and other data relating to a federal future. Six aspects are considered: federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan; federalism as a political stabiliser for Iraq and Kurdistan; Iraqi Arabs and federalism; the federal formula for Kurdistan and Iraq; federalism in the Iraqi constitution; and the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

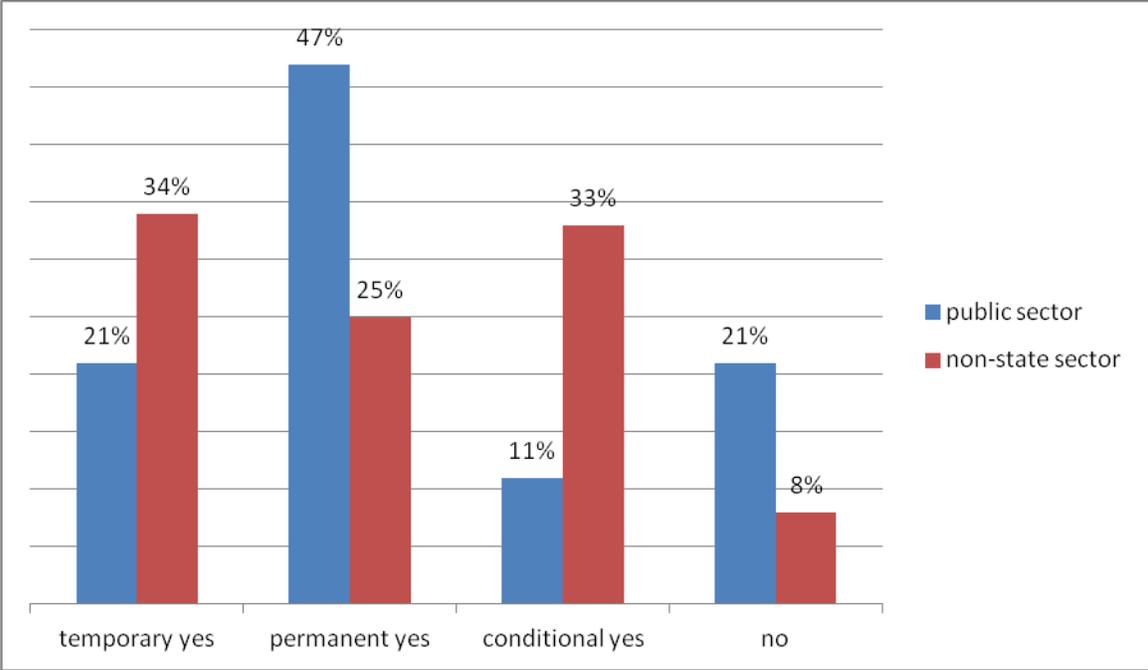
### *Federalism as a political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan*

Federalism is a political arrangement that grants varying degrees of internal self-determination grounded on shared-rule and self-rule. This sub-section is concerned with the Kurdish perceptions of federalism as a resolution to the Kurdish question of self-determination. The Kurdish perceptions on federalism were clear-cut: the responses were either pro-federalism or anti-federalism. The overwhelming majority of responses, 79% from the public sector and 91% from the non-state sector, perceived federalism as an acceptable political arrangement.

However, a detailed examination of the participants’ views on federalism found that they were diverse and could be categorised into three perspectives. The first perspective is federalism as a temporary solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq, and this was in accordance with the responses of 21% from the public sector and 34% from the non-state sector (see Figure 8.2). This approach, in respondents’ eyes, appeared to stem from their realistic evaluation of the current antagonistic environment for the creation of a Kurdish state. A typical answer demonstrated such a perspective:

Federalism is temporarily an acceptable political settlement for Iraqi Kurdistan because our regional enemies [namely, neighbouring countries] will destroy the Kurdish state if established now.

**Figure 8.3: Respondents’ views on federalism as an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan**



**Note:** These are respondents’ views on federalism which are either in the yes or no categories. The yes category is classified into temporary yes as some of respondents thought that federalism was a temporary political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan, permanent yes as others believed that federalism was permanently an acceptable arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan and conditional yes as the respondents thought that federalism was an acceptable political arrangement provided certain conditions were met.

The second perspective in the federalism yes category saw federalism as a permanent remedy to the Iraq Kurdish quest for the right to self-determination due to the unfavourable international environment for the establishment of a Kurdish state in the Middle East. It was included in 25% of responses from the non-state sector and 47% from the public sector. Federalism was viewed as the only realistic solution to the Kurdish question of self-determination in Iraq. Federalism seemed, in these respondents' eyes, to hold six advantages for Iraqi Kurds. First, there was political advantage for Iraqi Kurds under a federal system in gaining political autonomy where Kurds would govern their region with the devolved executive, legislative and judiciary authorities. They pointed to Article 121, Section 1 of the Iraqi constitution (2005) which stipulates the political autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan:

The regional authorities shall have the right to exercise executive, legislative, and judicial authority in accordance with this constitution, except for those powers stipulated in the exclusive powers of the federal government.

A typical response related the advantage of political autonomy through federalism for Iraqi Kurdistan:

In federalism, the Kurds have gained a kind of independence to administer their region. The Arabs do not interfere in the executive, judiciary and legislative authorities of the Kurdish government except in the areas where Arabic interests intersect with the Kurdish interests.

In respondents' eyes, political autonomy within the state gave the Kurds some degree of independence within the existing borders of Iraq. This perception is explained by Burgess (2006, p.33) who states that in federalism, "there is a division of powers between one general and several regional authorities, each of which, in its own sphere, is coordinated with the others and each of which acts directly on the people through its administrative agencies." While this type of federal arrangement would involve Iraqi Kurds giving up their "Kurdish dream", it would

guarantee them a form political autonomy. This autonomy could be similar to a Kurdish mini-state where Kurds exercise executive, judicial and legislative authorities over their homeland.

Second, according to the interviewees, there was economic advantage for Iraqi Kurdistan under a federal system in enabling Kurds to run oil production in their region and ensuring the regional government receives its share from Iraqi oil revenues. This appears to explain why the majority (58%) of the respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.5) believed that it was economically preferable for Kurdistan to be a part of federal Iraq. According to the Iraqi constitution Article 113, Iraqi Kurdistan is allowed to undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from its wells under the supervision of the Iraqi federal government. A typical response elaborated on this fact:

Federalism enables Kurdistan to administer in its oil wells under the supervision of Iraqi government.

Economic gains from federalism appeared to be one of the crucial factors for accepting federalism as a feasible political settlement for Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdistan's economy under a federal system was, in respondents' opinions, predicted to flourish.

Third, in respondents' views, there was advantage in enabling Iraqi Kurdistan to be involved in paradiplomacy. This would place Kurdistan in the international arena as a regional actor and this could happen under a federal system. Respondents thought that forging economic and cultural ties with the world through paradiplomacy would help Iraqi Kurdistan develop its polity. Article 121, Section 4 of the Iraqi constitution (2005) stipulates:

The regions and governorates shall establish offices in the embassies and diplomatic missions, in order to follow up cultural, social and developmental affairs.

A typical response illustrated the realisation of paradiplomatic possibilities made available in the 2005 Iraqi constitution:

The federal regions, according to the Iraqi constitution, are entitled to have their offices under the umbrella of Iraqi embassies. These offices are for the social, cultural and development affairs.

Kurdistan's representation overseas in the form of offices is important for maintaining and articulating a territorially-based ethnic group's identity and makes "the overall political settlement viable and attractive" (Wolff 2007, p.12). The international presence of Iraqi Kurdistan enables their region and identity to gain international and national recognition. It also gives Iraqi Kurds the opportunity to promote the development of the Kurdish region through pursuing policies in the international arena, such as economic, environmental and social policies.

Fourth, equality of all ethnic groups was seen as another privilege to be gained by Kurds under a federal system. Federalism, in the respondents' eyes, provided a guarantee of equal citizenship and so ensured no discrimination and marginalisation of the Kurdish identity by Arabs. A typical comment demonstrated this view:

Federalism gives equal citizenship to all ethnic groups. Thus, there is not the concept of citizen class two or four in this political system.

Federalism would give constitutional assurances to minorities such as Kurds that their identities would be formally equal and respected. Hence, federalism appeared to be an attractive political arrangement to Iraqi Kurds. Article 14 of Iraqi constitution (2005) stipulates:

Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, origin, colour, religion, creed, belief or opinion, or economic and social status.

Fifth, federalism was perceived as a democratising factor due to its devolutionary structure. The shared-rule nature of federalism seemed, in respondents' opinions, to be a bulwark against any

attempt to reintroduce centralised autocracy in Iraq. A typical response demonstrated the view of federalism as a buffer against authoritarianism:

The Kurds had a bad experience with the Arabic centralised system. After World War One, the Arabic Sunnis had been controlling Iraq through central totalitarianism for eighty years. But federalism is the best system that will not create a dictator.

This follows the view of Erk (2008) who argues that federalism generates difficulties for any parties aspiring to get hegemonic control over the whole country as it fosters party proliferation that is conducive to inter-segmental compromise and coalition building.

Sixth, federalism was perceived as a protector of Kurdish identity in Iraq. This was seen as a cultural advantage that Kurds would gain under this political system. In respondents' eyes, federalism appeared to ensure the recognition and protection of Kurdish identity in Iraq. Such a recognition is stipulated in Article 4 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution:

First: The Arabic language and Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq.  
Second: The scope of the term official language and the means of applying the provisions of this Article shall be defined by law which shall include:

- A. Publication of the official gazette, in the two languages;
- B. Speech, conversation and expression in official settings, such as the Council of Representatives, the Council of Ministers, courts, and official conferences, in either of the two languages;
- D. Opening schools that teach the two languages, in accordance with the educational guidelines;

The recognition of Kurdish language under the federal system of Iraq means recognition of Kurdish identity. This political system promises to be a guarantor and protector of Kurdish identity; however, the Iraqi constitution of 2005 does not clearly state that Kurds are one of the two main peoples in Iraq.

Federalism was perceived by 11% of respondents from the public sector and 33% from the non-state sector (see Figure 8.2) as a solution to the Kurdish right to self-determination provided

conditions were met. Three conditions were identified. First, acceptance of federalism by both Arabs and Kurds was necessary to the success of federalism in Iraq. In respondents' views, there was no real commitment to federalism from the Arab and Kurdish sides. Neither Arabs nor Kurds were, in these respondents' opinions, willing to share power with each other due to the Arabs' past supremacy over Kurds and Kurdish oppression by Arabs. A typical answer illustrated this perspective:

On the one hand, Arabs don't want federalism because they think it is a disintegrative system. In addition, the Arabs regard themselves as big brothers and Kurds as small brothers. In federalism, there is not such a concept. It is based on the equality of all ethnic groups. The Arabs should get rid of such a chauvinist nationalistic mentality. On the other hand, Kurds have complex inferiority of being second class citizens in the past. Thus, they aspire to establish a Kurdish state. Both Arabs and Kurds should get rid of these mentalities to achieve federalism successfully.

The second condition was recognition of Kurdish rights by Arabs. Prior Arab discrimination against the Kurdish people should not, in the respondents' opinions, be allowed to recur. A response illustrates this view:

It is okay for Kurds to live in Iraq if their rights and freedom are protected, and Kurds don't feel that they are second class citizens. The question, nonetheless, poses itself: can we, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians and other ethnic groups, build a country which belongs to all of us and make us peacefully coexist with each other? If we could do that, federalism would be the best solution to the Kurdish question.

Kurds still mistrust and dread Arabs, even though the 2005 Iraqi constitution stipulates the political, economic and cultural rights of Kurds. This mistrust appears to stem from past actions of persecution, discrimination and domination. It is only through building real trust between the ethnic groups in Iraq that the federal arrangement can be successful.

The third condition was implementation of a viable model of federalism. A viable federal system was considered a system that resembled the ways in which Western federal models operate and

this was a prerequisite to any acceptance of federalism as a remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq. As one respondent said:

Federalism is an acceptable political arrangement if it is like Swiss or German federalism. But if it is merely on paper, no one wants it.

According to 21% of responses from the public sector and 8% of responses from the non-state sector, federalism was an unacceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan. There were five reasons for this negative minority perspective. First, there was the view that Kurds already comprised a nation, so naturally this was one reason for rejecting federalism. This perspective stemmed from a belief that Kurds as any nation were entitled to the right to external self-determination. A typical response illustrating this conviction was:

Kurds, as a nation, have a different culture and history. Thus, they have the right to form their own state.

Second, the perception of Kurdistan as a country was another reason for rejecting federalism as Iraqi Kurdistan possessed all the traits of a country, namely, nation, territory and state. The thinking was that by accepting federalism as a political arrangement, Kurds would be making concessions relating to their nationalism to Arabs. Hence, secession was viewed as the only remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq. As one respondent reported:

The Kurds have all the characteristics of a country, namely, nation, land and state. The creation of modern Iraq was imposed on Kurds by the British. This country had a long history of discrimination against Kurds. Thus, statehood is the only solution for us.

Thirdly, the intolerance of Arabic culture was another factor contributing to the rejection of federalism by some respondents. As federalism embraced and celebrated multi-culturalism, Arabic intolerance, therefore, seemed to be the cause of failure in the implementation of this system. Arabic culture was seen to promote Arab supremacy and be based on one religious

ideology. This culture could not accept other ethnicities on an equal footing and recognise their rights. The following response illustrates such a perspective:

Federalism failed to be implemented because of different cultures in Iraq. In Kurdistan, the tolerant Kurdish culture embraces all diversities of religions and ethnicities whereas, in the Middle and South of Iraq, there is one culture based on a religious ideology that cannot accept and tolerate others [religions and ethnicities].

A crisis of trust was, in some respondents' eyes, another obstacle to the acceptance of federalism as a remedy to the Kurdish question in Iraq. This mistrust between Kurds and Arabs had sprung from past oppression of Kurds by Arabs. A response that shows such a perspective is:

Federalism cannot be a viable system in Iraq because Kurds cannot trust Arabs. Thus, independence is the only remedy to the Kurdish issue in Iraq.

Fifth, the double-standard of the Kurdish ruling parties was also seen to be an impediment to the successful implementation of federalism. It appeared to respondents that the Kurdish ruling parties defended federalism in the Iraqi central government, but supported centralisation when it came to running the KRG. Such a contradiction was a factor contributing to the rejection of this system by some respondents. One explained this as follows:

The Kurdish administration failed to present a positive image of federalism in a way the Kurdish citizens will believe in it as a good system and the people outside Kurdistan will follow it as an exemplary model. Federalism in Kurdistan is merely a political motto; however, it is stipulated in the constitution. The Kurdish ruling parties believe in centralism and do not believe in the decentralisation of Kurdish governorates. For instance, if I have a petition, I need to go to Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, so that it can be processed. This is because all ministries are there. In addition, if I want to get permission for a demonstration in Sulaymaniyah city, I need to get that from the Ministry of Interior in Erbil.

### *Federalism as a political stabiliser for Iraq and Kurdistan*

As federalism was seen by the majority of those in the government and non-government sectors as a feasible and acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurds, it is crucial to know whether the respondents thought such an arrangement could establish political stability in Iraq, a country

that has suffered from political instability since its formation in 1921. Fifty percent of respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin (see Table 7.4) believed that federalism would provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan, and the overwhelming majority of respondents from the public sector (74%) and the non-state actor (80%) saw federalism as a viable way to stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically. There were four reasons given. The first was that partial sovereignty meant that the Kurds and other ethnic groups in Iraq would be awarded the right to exercise internal self-determination, and thus would administer their own affairs without the interference of Baghdad. It appeared that partial sovereignty would give Kurds a feeling of having their own state and they could legitimately run their own region. One response illustrating this feeling was:

When federalism is based on geographical ethnic regions and partnership between Arabs and Kurds in ruling the country, there will be several things in common between us and Iraq, which are the borders, citizenship and currency. Iraqi Kurdistan will have their flag, parliament, army, language and its decision-making authority. So the priority will be given to the regions, not the central government. Kurdistan, in this way, will be a mini state within a state

The second reason given to explain why the federal system would provide political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq was that there could be a more equal distribution of wealth. Respondents believed federalism would allow for the Iraqi wealth to be fairly distributed among the federal regions. This would lead to political stability. Federalism would, thus, ensure and safeguard Kurds' economic rights in Iraq and this system would, in respondents' opinions, enable development of the Kurdish region in every sector. A typical response demonstrating the economic advantages of federalism for Iraqi Kurds was:

During the centralism era, all Kurdish sectors were completely neglected and underdeveloped, but now Kurdistan has its allocated budget from Iraqi oil revenues, which helps develop every sector in the region.

Recognition of ethnic identity was the third reason for believing the federal system would provide political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq. Federalism would, respondents said, protect and recognise the component elements of all ethnic identities in Iraq and Kurdistan and guarantee the cultural rights of ethnic groups thus bringing political stability. As Stein (1971, p.34) suggests, in a federal system there is a federal society “where a society is constituted of territorially based communities which are clearly differentiated by language and ethnicity.” Accordingly, federalism can organise ethnic relations and so preserve, promote and generally accommodate viable distinct identities so they coexist side by side in peaceful neighbourly association. One interviewee provided an insight into the assurance of ethnic cultural rights under the federal state by saying:

Federalism provides political stability because the identity of each ethnic group is respected and recognised. In this way, all ethnic groups can co-exist together within Iraq. This is similar to the people who are living in the same house but having differently designed rooms.

The final reason given for expecting greater political stability with a federal system in Iraq and Kurdistan was that federalism is itself a democratising factor. Federalism would, respondents said, forestall the emergence of a totalitarian regime in Iraq due to its devolutionary nature which allows all ethnic groups to participate in ruling the country. Hence, the Kurds would not be subject to oppression, injustice and persecution as happened under the former centralised governments. One interviewee expressed this perception as follows:

Federalism provides greater stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region because Kurds have got rid of dictatorship that committed genocide against them during the centralised former Iraqi regime.

In order to secure political stability under federalism, 42% of the public sector respondents and 58% of the non-state sector respondents believed five conditions must be met. The first condition was Arabic acceptance of federalism. The stability of Kurdistan and Iraq would,

respondents said, be dependent on the acceptance of federalism by Arabs. Arabs were, however, viewed as pro-centralists as they had used such a system for decades. Kurdish perceptions of the Arabs' antagonistic stance on federalism can be seen in the following comment:

Federalism would provide greater stability to Kurdistan and Iraq if there is a true intention of the Iraqi Arab leaders to implement federalism with no returning to centralism. Before 2003, there were opposition parties which promised Kurds to make the new Iraqi system federal. But now the Iraqi parties retreated from this promise and want to change the federal system. They just want to increase the central government authority at the expense of the regional ones.

The second condition for political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq under a federal system, according to the respondents, was the creation of other federal regions in Iraq. The stability of Iraq and Kurdistan would, respondents believed, be reliant upon the formation of other federal regions in Iraq because implementation of federalism covering the whole of Iraq would protect the federal status of Kurdistan and also ensure the political, economic and cultural rights of other ethnic groups in Iraq:

Federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if the Arabs implement federalism as it is stipulated in the Iraqi constitution [namely, to form several federal regions in Iraq]. Theoretically and constitutionally Iraq is a federal state, but in reality, there is one federal Kurdish region in Iraq, and a federal state should have two regions at least. The Kurds should play a role in convincing other Iraqi ethnic groups to form their federal regions so that federalism should be presented as an Iraqi demand, not a Kurdish one, to the world.

The third condition for political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq under a federal system, according to respondents, was the resolution of territorial disputes. Once the issue of territorially disputed areas is addressed, federalism would help to stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically. This was because the regional borders of Kurdistan would, respondents said, be determined by implementing Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. So far the Kurds were, in their opinions, struggling to implement this article particularly because the Arabs were opposed to it. A view on this issue was:

Federalism would provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan if the issues of Kirkuk and other disputed territories are resolved. Until now Article 140 has not been implemented as the Arabs are against it. Stability will not be present if the disputed territories are still occupied by Arabs.

The territorially disputed areas are inhabited by Kurdish majorities. According to Article 140, these areas were to hold referenda to decide whether or not they joined Kurdistan in December 2007. But the Iraqi central government supported by Turkey opposed the referendum. Thus, Iraq currently argues that this article is null and void as it was supposed to be implemented in 2007. The Iraqi position on this article has created controversy in Kurdistan as Kurds believe that this article is not void as it is clearly stipulated in the 2005 Iraqi constitution and simply needs to be implemented. As Chapter Three showed, Kirkuk, one of the disputed areas, has long been a controversial issue as former Iraqi regimes did not reach to an agreement with the Kurdish political elite to determine its political status due to contestation over its rich oil resources.

The fourth condition for political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq under a federal system, according to respondents, was limiting the authority of Baghdad over federal regions. Minimising the authority of Iraq's central government would, in these respondents' eyes, politically stabilise Iraq because Kurdistan would have political autonomy to administer its own affairs. As O'Leary (2008) argues, the centralisers who threaten the foundation pact of federations can later endanger stability. Furthermore, federalism based on majoritarianism was perceived to be a destabiliser for Iraq as a whole because ethnic minorities would be sidelined in the legislative and decision-making processes in the Iraqi central government. One voice expressed this view:

Federalism will provide political stability provided the authority of centralised government is lessened and the government will not interfere in the regional governments' affairs. This is because now the Arabs are trying to lessen the Kurdistan authority and strengthen the centralised system. The problem is the Kurdish leadership does not have any strategy to have an influential role in the centralised Iraqi government to implement federalism in Iraq. The Kurds are not satisfied with the performance of Kurdish politicians in Baghdad. In addition,

federalism should not be based on the majority and should protect the minority's rights in the parliament.

The final condition given for gaining political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq under a federal system, according to one respondent, was removing the hegemony of the two dominant political parties over multiple areas of Kurdish politics, economics and society. Explaining this condition it was said:

Federalism does not provide stability to Kurdistan if the hegemony of the ruling parties on all aspects of Kurdistan continues. Consequently, there will not be social justice and stability, and Kurdistan will be subject to violence.

A lone voice from the public sector believed that federalism would provide greater political stability to Kurdistan, but not to Iraq. This conviction stemmed from the respondent's understanding of the continuous sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. It was contended that federalism would not stabilise Iraq politically because, on the one hand, Sunnis had had the upper hand for eighty years and wanted to restore their authority in Iraq after being sidelined by Shiites. On the other hand, the majority Shiites would not allow Sunnis to have authority in Iraq because the Shiites suffered violence and discrimination by Sunnis in the past. Hence, in this respondent's eyes, there would be a continuation of sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites over political control in Iraq even with a federal system in place. The interviewee stated:

In the Cairo conference in March 1921, the creation of Iraq was premised upon six principles. One of these principles was that Arab Sunnis should have the upper hand in Iraq. The Sunnis had authority in Iraq for about eighty years. Now the Sunni sect feels that they have been betrayed because they have been sidelined after the downfall of Saddam Hussein. The Kurds and Shiites won the most votes in the recent legislative elections and they are the major players in Iraq. Furthermore, the Sunnis and Shiites cannot be united because they are two different sects with different ideologies and decision-making authority.

There were 40% of the respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin, 21% of public sector respondents and 19% non-state sector respondents who believed that federalism would not politically stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan for four reasons. The first reason, in the respondents' opinions, was that federalism was an incentive for secession. Federalism could not, respondents said, be a viable political arrangement in a multi-ethnic country because it would encourage Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites to seek secession:

Federalism will not continue in a multi-ethnic country. Federalism will develop as something else eventually [namely, the demise of the federal arrangements].

The second reason, according to one respondent, was both internal and regional impediments. Internally, an Arabic culture that is intolerant towards other ethnic and religious groups was perceived to be uncondusive to providing political stability in Iraq and Kurdistan. Regionally, the adjacent countries were perceived to be against federalism in Iraq because its implementation could have a domino effect on these countries by stimulating Kurds in these countries to agitate for federalism. Thus, O'Leary (2008) argues that pluralist federations will do better if they do not have interventionist neighbours. One respondent summarised the internal and external obstacles to providing political stability in Iraq and Kurdistan under a federal system in this way:

Federalism would not provide political stability to Iraq and Kurdistan because firstly, the non-tolerance of Arabic culture towards other ethnicities and religions would not be conducive to having a viable federal system in Iraq. Secondly, Kurdistan was carved up into four parts, so Turkey, Iran, and Syria are a stumbling-block to the implementation of federalism in Iraq because its implementation will pose a threat to their centralised systems. The change in the Iraqi system is tied to that in other systems in the Middle East.

The third reason, according to one respondent, was ethnic division. Federalism would fail to stabilise the country politically as it could not make Iraqi ethnic groups peacefully co-exist with each other. The historical ethnic division between Kurds and Arabs on one hand, and Shiites and Sunnis on other hand would not be overcome.

Federalism is on paper because to some extent federalism is merely applied to Kurdistan but the other parts of Iraq have not been federal regions yet. The divisions between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds is an indicator that they cannot live together.

The fourth and last reason, according to one respondent, was the crisis of trust. Iraqi history was perceived to be full of oppression and discrimination that caused its ethnic communities to mistrust each other and feel insecure about their futures. Accordingly, federalism would, in respondents' opinions, fail to stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically. One interviewee illustrated this historical mistrust between Iraqi ethnic groups:

The main issue is that there is no trust between Kurds and Arabs. This is an obstacle to the establishment of a voluntary united Iraq. Sunnis are concerned about their future because they are a minority, and Shiites have a complex inferiority because of their oppression in the past. The Kurds are concerned about their future and have a complex inferiority because of their past oppression. Thus, there is crisis of trust in Iraq among its ethnic groups.

### *Iraqi Arabs and Federalism*

In the previous discussion on federalism, some respondents mentioned the Iraqi Arabs' position on federalism. To explore this issue further, respondents were questioned how they saw the Iraqi government's stance on federalism in Iraq as the incumbent government is comprised of a majority of Arabs. The respondents characterised the Arabs' position on federalism into anti-federalism, pro-federalism and vague. According to the majority of respondents, 68% from the public sector and 100% from the non-state sector, the Iraqi government was against federalism for seven reasons. The first was Arabic chauvinist mentality. The Iraqi Arabs were seen to hold a chauvinist and nationalistic mentality stemming from the former Ba'athist ideology. Accordingly, Iraqi Arabs were perceived by respondents to be currently attempting the annulment of federalism in the Iraqi constitution. A typical comment illustrates this mentality:

The Iraqi Arabs are trying to nullify federalism in the constitution because they are chauvinist and hold a Ba'athist thinking in a different form. If the Arabs had power, they would eliminate the Kurds in Iraq. When the Sunnis and Shiites state that they support the Kurdish rights, such a statement is merely a political courtesy.

The second reason given was Arabic pro-centralism. Federalism was perceived to be a novel concept and system to the Arabs because Iraq had been centralist for eight decades. Accordingly, the new Iraqi government, whose majority was Arab, was seen by respondents to be used to and favourable towards centralism. Respondents said they (the Arab majority) saw strength and authority in the centralisation of the Iraqi system. The respondents observed that Iraqi political leaders stressed a strong national united Iraq during their speeches on TV. This view was summed up by one interviewee:

Arabs always think about a strong centralised government because the previous 80 years of rule in Iraq was centralised, and the Shiites want to control the country through the establishment of a strong centralised system. The Sunnis and Shiites are agreed on establishing a united centralised system in spite of their political differences. All the election campaigns run by Sunni and Shiite Arabs on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 were about a united centralised Iraq. Here the Kurds will be a big loser in terms of political, ethnic and economic rights.

The third reason for Arabs' anti-federalist position, according to the respondents, was the perception that federalism was an imported system and not one initiated by Iraqis: it was considered foreign. Accordingly, the Iraqi Arabs opposed it:

The Arabs believe that federalism is imported from the US. Thus, they think this system is not naturally-born and they are against it.

The fourth reason, according to the respondents, was that federalism was a disintegrative system. Federalism was perceived to stimulate Kurds to secede from Iraq and assist them in forming their own state. Thus, federalism was, in respondents' eyes, regarded by Arabs as posing a threat to the national unity of Iraq:

The Iraqi Arabs think that federalism will be one step for Kurds to secede from Iraq.

There are many scholarly arguments which explain this Arabic view of federalism being a disintegrative political system. First, the risk for secession might be relatively higher in ethnically pluralist federal states because administrative boundaries tend to match with ethnic

group boundaries creating “latent states” (Deiwiks 2009). This may give reason and opportunity for ethnic groups to eventually fight for secession. Second, regional autonomy arrangements may “harden” ethnic identities because these identities can be forged, “politicised” and attached to the territory (Chapman and Roeder 2007). Hence, there is a propensity for secessionist conflict (Sisk 1996). Third, decentralisation may strengthen regional parties, and this can increase the mobilisation capacity for secessionist agendas in the future (Brancati 2006). Thus, the existence of relatively autonomous state institutions at the regional level may provide ethnic groups with the resources to make secession feasible and look legitimate to the international community (McGarry & O’Leary 2003). Such thinking helps explain why the Arabs view federalism as a disintegrative system.

The fifth reason for Arabs’ anti-federalist position, according to one respondent, was that the old generation disapproved of federalism. The old Arabic generation was perceived to be worrying that the implementation of federalism would result in Kurdistan acquiring the territorially disputed areas which are rich in mineral resources. They were seen to maintain a Ba’athist mentality, which perceived Kurds as rebels. Thus, they could not co-exist with Kurds peacefully under a federal system:

The Arabs are jealous to see all this progress in Kurdistan and have asked the Kurds to slow down in this regard. The young Arabic generation willingly accept federalism and get along with the Kurds, whereas the old Arabic generation sees Kurds as rebels. In addition, they are concerned with the issue of Kirkuk and Mosul [two of the territorially disputed areas].

The sixth reason, according to the respondents, was that federalism was a Kurdish initiative. This was so because in October 1992 the Kurdistan National Assembly gave a unanimous commitment “to determine its fate and define its legal relationship with the central authority... on the basis of a federation within a democratic parliamentary Iraq” (Bengio 2005, p.178). In

addition, in 2005, the Kurds took part in the preparation of the Iraqi constitution which stipulated that Iraq was a democratic federal parliamentary system, an arrangement the Arabs were perceived to oppose:

The Kurdish parliament adopted and consolidated federalism as a system of Kurdistan and Iraq as a whole in 1992. Thus, the new Iraqi government does not accept such a system.

The seventh reason for Arabs' anti-federalist position, according to one respondent, was Arabic Islamic politics. Arab Islamic ideology was, in the respondent's eyes, incompatible with federalism due to the lack of secularism:

The Sunni and Shiite politics is Islamic and thus such politics is not compatible with federalism.

There were very few respondents who saw the Iraqi government as being pro-federalism—only 18% of respondents from the public sector. Two reasons were given. The first, according to the respondents, was an Iraqi commitment to federalism. The Iraqi government was committed to the implementation of federalism although there was only one federal region at this stage:

The Iraqi federal government is committed to implementing all the articles in the constitution, including these articles associated with federalism. There is, nonetheless, one Kurdish federal region in Iraq at the moment. Differences between Arabic and Kurdish sides may happen sometimes, which are normal. These differences will be solved through dialogue and recourse to the Iraqi constitution.

The second reason, according to the respondents, was that the Iraqi government saw federalism as the best solution for eliminating the country's ethnic conflict and the majority of Arabs believed that federalism was the best solution for the Iraqi ethnic predicament. Hence, it was argued, they voted for the Iraqi constitution which decreed federalism as the political system of Iraq:

The majority of Iraqi people voted for the Iraqi constitution which stipulated federalism as a political system of Iraq because they think that federalism is the best solution to all ethnic problems.

Only 16% of public sector respondents believed that the Iraqi government's position on federalism was vague and neither opposed nor upheld federalism publically. They were, however, seen to emphasise the centralisation of Iraq:

The Iraqi government's attitude towards federalism is vague. They do not oppose it publicly, but tend to accentuate centralism over federalism.

### *Federal formula for Iraqi Kurdistan*

In regard to the preferred mode of federalism, theory presents the choice of one of two major kinds of federation, namely, integrative and pluralist. The integrative federation builds on the liberal logics of dividing power and of organising competition for power. According to the respondents' perceptions on federalism, an integrative federal arrangement would not be a plausible design for Kurds for four reasons. First, integrative federalism recognises one nation (O'Leary 2008). Hence, it aspires to national homogeneity so there is the need to eliminate internal national and/or ethnic differences from lasting political salience. Integrative federalists think that a federation can combine its parts into one nation (O'Leary 2008). In this case, Iraq may be one nation on the world political maps, but in reality it has never had a united people that is, a people who think of themselves as descended from the same ancestors, who speak the same language, or who profess the same religion. Thus, an integrative institutional design would not work in Iraq especially as the Kurdish respondents in this study reflect the universally held Kurdish perception of themselves as a nation. Any attempt to impose the idea of Iraq being one nation may actually worsen the stability of the country as a whole. So, while integrative federalism may work for a homogeneous people, it is highly unlikely to work for the ethnically divided society of Iraq.

Second, integrative federalism has elements of centralisation: the federal government and judiciary have significant powers over citizens and over the member units of the federation (O'Leary 2008). This could be a problematic aspect, as Kurdish respondents saw federalism as a feasible political arrangement very much because it would allow them to enjoy political autonomy and minimal central government authority. Any attempt to enforce Baghdad's authority over their region would destabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically. Iraqi Arabs' tendency to centralise government in Iraq was, in respondents' eyes, a factor that would endanger the federal arrangement. It is quite apparent, then, that integrative federalism is not a viable institutional design for Kurds because of its centralising tendencies.

Third, integrative federalism is built on balance of power precepts involving the proliferation of points of power away from a focal centre. Despite encouraging intra-ethnic rivalry, it provides incentives for inter-group co-operation by designing regions without ethnic majorities (Horowitz 2004). This federal institutional design has no prospect of success in Iraq. The political stability of a federal system in the future was, in respondents' eyes, reliant on the recognition of the ethnic borders of Iraqi Kurdistan. To redraw Kurdistan regional borders along non-ethnic lines would encourage another internal war, this time between Kurdistan and Iraq. Thus, the respondents believed that it was essential to implement Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution as a means of achieving political stability in Kurdistan and Iraq.

Fourth, integrative federalism forms coalitions across ethnic group lines (Horowitz 2004). Respondents said that such coalitions were not feasible in Iraq because there was a crisis of mistrust between Kurds and Arabs and deep ethnic divisions due to the long history of Arab Sunni dominance over, and prejudice against, Kurds and Shiites. The situation is similar to that

presented by Sisk (1996) and which led him to question whether voters would be willing to opt for parties that are not based in their own ethnic group.

Fifth, integrative federalism facilitates a strong majoritarian federal government in the executive or legislature or both (O'Leary 2008). According to the respondents' perceptions on majoritarianism, Kurds who have been struggling for the right to self-determination, would refuse this majoritarian democracy because it would inevitably entail the one-sided victory of the Arab majority community over the Kurdish minority. Such majoritarianism would likely exacerbate ethnic conflict in Iraq. Kurds have always been a minority group in Iraq and their judgement has been that they would be losers from the creation of a strongly majoritarian federation. The Arab majority could threaten their national and cultural identity, as well as their regional and economic interests. Given the respondents' perceptions on federalism and the extensive history of oppressive tyrannical government from Baghdad under the Ba'athists, there was no endorsement of a strong integrative federal government. Kurds, according to the respondents, wanted maximum autonomy in administration, policy-making, law-making, and paradiplomacy. Hence integrative federalism was judged to be an unworkable and undesirable institutional design for Iraqi Kurdistan.

The second major kind of federalism is pluralist. The pluralist federation is decentralised: "the member states have significant policy-making and legal powers and can resist encroachments by the federal branches of government" (O'Leary 2008, p.57). It inclines to be consociational in the federal executive, legislature and judiciary. The federal judiciary is "representative of the member states and cautious about interfering in the self-government of the member-states" (O'Leary 2008, p.57). In the respondents' eyes, this type of federalism would be an acceptable and attractive political arrangement as a best alternative to secession because Iraqi Kurdistan

would enjoy political autonomy with non-interference by the Iraqi central government in Kurdish affairs. Interviewees also said that such federalism would stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically if the Iraqi government would not centralise the whole country. Pluralist federalism, therefore, seemed to be a plausible institutional design for Iraqi Kurds according to the majority of respondents as it offered a decentralised Iraqi polity with a regional autonomy arrangement. It would confer on Iraqi Kurds maximum political autonomy within the Iraqi state but with minimal Baghdad authority.

Another strength of pluralist federalism in Kurds' eyes was that it seeks "to unite people who seek the advantages of a common political unit, but differ markedly in descent, language and culture" (Forsyth 1989, p. 4). It recognises, expresses and institutionalises at least two national and/or ethnic cultures on a durable basis. Pluralist federations involve the preservation of two or more nations, and reject the strongly integrationist intentions of national federalists (O'Leary 2008). Moreover, pluralist federalists believe that it is possible for the citizens of such federations to have dual or multiple loyalties, namely, a patriotic attachment to the federation and a nationalist attachment to their regional homeland (O'Leary 2008). In Kurdish eyes, such an institutional federal design would suit Iraq and Kurdistan best, because Iraq is bi-national: there are two nationally mobilised and linguistically distinctive collective communities, Kurds and Arabs. In respondents' opinions, the recognition, institutionalisation and protection of Kurdish ethno-national identity would be the reasons for Iraqi Kurds to accept pluralist federalism as a feasible and plausible political arrangement. Indeed, as the respondents believed that Kurds were a nation and Kurdistan was their ancient homeland, it could be only pluralist federalism that could satisfy Iraqi Kurds. Only in this way would Iraqi Kurds be able to have dual loyalties,

nationalist attachment to their regional homeland, and a possible patriotic attachment to the federation of Iraq.

Pluralist federations are *de facto* highly asymmetric as one or more constituent unit will be national-based with the majority of its population consisting of a national minority (Funk 2010). This produces cultural and linguistic asymmetry between the constituent units. In case of Iraqi Kurdistan, if pluralist federalism is implemented throughout Iraq, the inclusion of Iraqi Kurdistan would automatically create a *de facto* asymmetry for two reasons. First, it would be the most geographically extensive regional unit and second to Baghdad in population. But presently, all the other units are governorates, lower level territorial entities. Iraqi Kurdistan is the only entity administered by another non-Arab ethnicity, the Kurds. It is the sole territorial unit whose citizens mainly speak the other official language of Iraq, Kurdish. Second, Iraqi Kurdistan has a president, whereas other governorates or potential regions would not have such a leader. The Kurdish region has a different polity from the rest of Iraq, thus it has been depicted as a quasi-state (Natali 2010).

Under the Iraqi Constitution, Iraqi Kurdistan would, nonetheless, have a *de jure* symmetrical status if federalism is implemented throughout Iraq. This is because the potential federal regions would be granted their own power under Article 121, each of which would be similar to Kurdistan's federal status. All governmental powers except those solely belonging to the federal government may be exercised by the region. According to Article 121(2), "in case of a contradiction between regional and national legislation in a respect to a matter outside the exclusive authorities of the federal government, the regional power shall have the right to amend the application of the national legislation within that region". Thus, the potential federal regions (or governorates not organised as regions) would be allowed to form different degrees of

cooperation with the federal government. This allows the evolution of asymmetric policies and practices amid the formal symmetry of powers among regions and the formal symmetry of powers among governorates.

As asymmetry is one of the characteristics of pluralist federations, another trait of those federations is consociationalism. Consociationalism acts as an antidote to majority rule in multi-ethnic countries through “consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximise the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with being a bare majority” (Lijphart 1999, p.33). The promotion of a consensual culture between Arabs and Kurds could be an approach to resolving pending issues between Kurdistan and Iraq such as disputes relating to the territorial areas, and to accommodating the divergent interests and demands of their communities. As the majoritarian rule would, in respondents’ opinions, not be accepted by the Kurdish minority, federalism with a consociational power-sharing formula was seen as a workable institutional design for Kurdistan and Iraq. Notably, it has a mechanism for a minority veto. This mechanism would ensure the avoidance of being outvoted by the majority against the political interests of the minority (Lijphart 1977). This was seen as essential for safeguarding Kurdish minority interests at the national level. In addition, federalism with the consociational power-sharing formula adopts the proportional representation of the ethnic groups in the decision-making process (Lijphart 1977). The proportionality system is important for Iraqi Kurds as it ensures a fair representation of Kurds at the federal level. Hence, federalism with the consociational power-sharing formula seems to carry many advantages for Iraqi Kurds.

Despite carrying many advantages for Iraqi Kurds, pluralist federalism is not likely to be embraced by Iraqi Arabs. This is because of several factors which have been discussed in

Chapter 3 and 4 and identified by the public and non-state sector participants in Chapter 5 and 6. First, the Arabs see the unity of Iraq in danger if pluralist federalism is implemented throughout Iraq as this would entail the re-alignment of Iraqi Kurdistan's regional borders to include the territorially disputed areas in accordance with Article 140. History has shown that the Kurdish insistence of incorporation of these disputed areas, especially Kirkuk, has always frightened the prior and current Iraqi governments. For instance, in an interview in the late 1990s, Tariq Aziz, former Iraqi foreign minister of Iraq, summed up the longstanding Iraqi view that "Kirkuk must not be part of the Kurdish autonomous area because if it is incorporated, it will be the first step towards [Kurdish] secession" (as quoted in Na'na' 2000, p.163).

Second, Arabs views pluralist federalism as a disintegrative system which would assist Kurds in establishing their own state in the future. In the pluralist federal system the borders of the internal units are usually demarcated in such a way that some of them are controlled by national or ethnic minorities to guarantee that each national/ethnic community is able to keep itself as a distinctive and self-governing society and culture (McGarry & O'Leary 2007). This prospect in relation to Kurdistan unnerves the Arab. This is because when regional autonomy borders match with national/ethnic minority borders "latent states" may be created for national/ ethnic minorities (Deiwiks 2009). National/ethnic identities may "harden" as these identities can be forged, "politicised" and attached to the territory (Chapman & Roeder 2007). As Kurdish history is renowned for its uprisings and revolutions against Iraqi governments, this kind of federal arrangement can be seen by the Arabs as giving possibilities for Iraqi Kurds to eventually fight for secession. In addition, diverse ethnic communities can be recognised as nations with the right to self-determination demonstrated in the establishment of an autonomous government (O'Leary

et al. 2005). The recognition of ethnicity as a nation can be seen as a prelude to secession (Deiwiks 2009). As the Iraqi Arabs are believed to think along these lines, they are seen by Iraqi Kurds and some academics as being against the establishment of the pluralist federal system in Iraq.

Third, Iraqi Arabs were viewed by the research participants to be pro-centralist. Accordingly, any arrangement involved decentralisation is not supported by the Arabs. As a pluralist federation is decentralised in nature (O'Leary 2008), it is unlikely to be embraced by the Arab majority as an appropriate political arrangement for Iraq. The Arab fear of decentralisation may stem from the argument that pluralist federations may strengthen regional parties which can increase the mobilisation capacity for secessionist agendas in the future (Brancati 2006). Further, the existence of state institutions at the regional level provides national/ethnic minorities with the resources to make secession feasible and even legitimate to the international community (Deiwiks 2009). Thus, the Arabs of Iraq are unlikely to pursue the implementation of a pluralist federal arrangement in Iraq.

### *Federalism in the Iraqi Constitution*

The Iraqi Constitution of 2005 and the accompanying electoral framework include many consociational power-sharing mechanisms, including proportional representation, regional autonomy and a parliamentary system with a weak presidency. The first constitutional mechanism of consociational power-sharing is a parliamentary system in which a prime minister rules alongside a weak president. The prime minister is responsible for “the general policy of the state”, he is “commander-in-chief of the armed forces”, and director of the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives (Article 78). By contrast, the president is described by the

constitution as simply a “symbol of the unity of the country” (Article 67) with the power to issue pardons, ratify international treaties, award medals and accredit ambassadors (Article 73).

The second mechanism of consociational power-sharing is regional autonomy within a federal system. The Iraqi Constitution of 2005 allows a high level of power to be devolved to the regions. Section 5, Article 117 of the Constitution recognises the “existing authorities” of Kurdistan as a “federal region”. It sets out the process by which other governorates can become regions. The region-forming process can be started by a request from one-third of the council members from the relevant governorate or by one-tenth of the voters in the relevant governorate, and the final decision is made by a general referendum. Those governorates that become regions are expected to adopt their own constitutions (Article 120), to “exercise executive, legislative, and judicial powers” within their region, and even to form their own internal security forces (Article 121). Furthermore, Article 121 states that regional legislation is to take primacy over national legislation when contradictions are found. Besides its provisions for regionalism, the Constitution also assures individual governorates broad financial and administrative independence, and they give their ruling governorate councils complete independence from “the control or supervision of any ministry” (Article 122). This federalism has not been fully implemented in Iraq in Kurdish respondents’ eyes. Apart from Kurdistan, no federal region has been formed in Iraq. Thus, the respondents believed that the political stability of Iraq and Kurdistan was dependent upon the formation of another region, because such a development would show that the Iraqi polity was federal in practice.

The third mechanism of consociational power-sharing is proportionality on which the Iraqi electoral system is premised. The Iraqi Electoral Law 26 of 2009 established electoral districts. This means that voters can vote either for a party list in their local area or for individual

candidates within party lists. The proportionality system results in the allocation of seats to ethnic and religious parties “in proportion to their numerical strength” (Streiner as quoted in Lijphart 1977, p.39). This system is considered fair as it translates votes into seats (Lijphart 1977). However, the results of the second Iraqi parliamentary elections held in March 2010 were a blow to the Iraqi Kurds as the Kurdish share of seats was reduced. All Kurdish parties together won 53 out of 325 seats in an election where the total number of Iraqi parliamentary seats had increased from 275 to 325 (Nicoll & Johnstone 2011). The outcome of this second Iraqi parliamentary election demonstrated the weak influence of Kurds in Baghdad as the number of their seats decreased drastically in comparison with the first Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2005 when the Kurdish parties won 77 out of 275 seats. This weakening of Iraqi Kurds’ representation in parliament means that they may be forced to make nationalist concessions to Arabs.

The fourth consociational power-sharing mechanism is the grand coalition. In practice, in Iraq, “coalition-building between parliamentary blocs has become a key part of Iraqi federal politics” (Natali 2011, p.3). For instance, the Kurdistan Alliance and the Iraqiyya list have recently responded to Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki’s control over key ministries and political processes by uniting efforts on oil sector policymaking. The last mechanism of consociational power-sharing is a minority veto. This mechanism is not in practice in Iraq as this right was abolished in November 2010. Public opinion in Kurdistan strongly supported the restoration of the minority veto in the Iraqi political system to give adequate safeguards for Kurdish interests at the national level.

It is clear that while the Iraqi political system has many consociational power-sharing mechanisms in both theory and practice, it still lacks key features of a properly functioning federal system. For instance, Iraq has not established a supreme court which umpires differences between governmental tiers, and it has not instituted a second chamber or senate to protect the interests of would-be regions and minority ethnic communities. In addition, while the Iraqi central government has devolved power to fifteen provinces, those provinces “lack the authority and capabilities to provide services” (Natali 2011, p.4). All of these factors, plus the absence of a region other than Kurdistan and the reality of centralising tendencies mean that a consociational federal system does not function in Iraq now and will face considerable obstacles for its installation in the future.

### **The Future of Iraqi Kurdistan:**

Constitutionally, Iraq is a federal state but one in which federalism has not been fully implemented. This incomplete political engineering contributed to diverse perceptions among respondents when asked about the future of Iraqi Kurdistan and the uncertainty surrounding it. Respondents’ perceptions can be categorised into secession, federalism, ambiguous, challenging future and bleak. First, according to only 21% of respondents from the public sector, Iraqi Kurdistan was seen to be heading towards independence because of its political and economic development since 1991. Iraqi Kurdistan, in these respondents’ eyes, needed to attain democracy, a strong economy, an efficient government and an economic relationship with the adjacent countries in the process of forming an independent state in the future. There was, nevertheless, no clarity about when in the future the declaration of Kurdish independence would be:

Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards political stability, democratisation, developing its infrastructure, building institutions, and strengthening its relationships with the neighbouring countries, which are based on friendship and economic interests. All of these will enable us be a state in the future.

Second, the most popular view was that Iraqi Kurdistan was heading towards federalism, as this future was promising due to the potential for democracy, stability and economic development within a federal system of Iraq. This position was reported by 48% of respondents from the public sector and 66% of respondents from the non-state sector. Iraqi Kurdistan was also seen by them to strengthen its relationship with the West under federalism because they thought that foreign investment in the Kurdish region would increase under a federal political arrangement. Thus, one interviewee commented:

Iraqi Kurdistan is going towards federalism. Through political consensus, we can achieve the Kurdish aims to live in a democratic state and enjoy our rights. We will diplomatically strengthen our relationship with the US and Europe. Thus, I believe the future of Kurdistan is promising.

There were, however, two interviewees from the public sector and another two from the non-state sector who put provisos on a federal future. The viability of federalism in Kurdistan and Iraq was seen by them to be dependent on the real unification of the Kurdish administration, the democratisation of the Kurdish region, and the resolution of the territorially disputed areas:

Iraqi Kurdistan is heading towards federalism provided that (i) the two Kurdish administrations are unified, having one political stance at the local and national level; (ii) the democratisation of Iraqi Kurdistan; (iii) the US and UN resolve the issue of territorial disputed areas which will determine the federal borders of Kurdistan.

The third possible political future for Iraqi Kurdistan, according to only 26% of respondents from the public sector and none from the non-state sector, was that the future was difficult to determine or was ambiguous for two reasons. The first was the political instability in Iraq and the Middle East. The second reason was the Kurdish leadership which was perceived to have a double-standards policy on the political future of Kurdistan. On the one hand, it publically advocated federalism for Iraq and Kurdistan. On the other hand, it was perceived to be in the process of centrally oriented state-building in Kurdistan by strengthening its political, economic

and military pillars. Such a policy was seen to make Kurdistan's future ambiguous. As one interviewee commented:

I cannot predict which direction Kurdistan is developing towards. According to the status quo, the current political leadership is working towards two directions. The first direction is pragmatic, to implement and consolidate the pillars of federalism in Iraq and participate in the central government of Baghdad. The second direction is to consolidate the pillars of the Kurdish semi-independent entity, develop its legitimate institutions, establish a strong and prosperous economy and build up its military to safeguard Kurdistan.

Another interviewee added:

The future of Iraqi Kurdistan is unclear. According to the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan is heading towards federalism, but in reality we do not know what will happen tomorrow. This is because there is no stability in Iraq and the Middle East, and nothing is guaranteed in this region.

Fourth, according to only 5% of respondents from the public sector, the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was bleak. It was, in these few respondents' eyes, heading towards dictatorship due to corruption, ruling parties' dominance over the KRG and the centralisation of government in Iraq by Arab politicians. A perception from the public sector illustrated the bleak picture of Iraqi Kurdistan:

Iraqi Kurdistan is gradually going towards an undemocratic system because of corruption, nepotism and party-interference in the KRG. Thus, we are moving backwards; and our future is not promising as the Iraqi central government is getting more powerful than the KRG.

In stark contrast with the public sector responses, and thus indicating the dominance of a pessimistic viewpoint among the Kurdish youth (see Table 7.14), a substantial majority, 66%, of respondents from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin, believed that the future of Iraqi Kurdistan was unpromising. This could have stemmed from their assessment of the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan which was riddled with corruption, a high rate of unemployment and ruling parties' dominance over politics, economy and society.

Fifth, according to 25% of respondents from the non-state sector, Iraqi Kurdistan's future was full of challenges and uncertainties. It was thought that the KRG would need to resolve its internal problems so that it could address pending issues with the Iraqi central government. Also, the political future of Kurdistan was considered uncertain due to the political instability in the Kurdish region and Iraq as a whole:

Kurdistan will face many challenges to solve its internal problems such as corruption, tribalism, domination of ruling parties over the region, and no democracy. In addition, Kurdistan has its external problems with Baghdad such as the non-implementation of federalism and non-resolution of territorially disputed area. If we solve our internal problems and improve our system, that will make us strong enough to stand for our rights and address our problems with the Iraqi central government.

### **Iraqi Kurdistan Federacy**

The perceptions of the participants on the political futures of Iraqi Kurdistan have demonstrated that the most contentious issue in Iraqi/Kurdistan politics today revolves around those (Kurds) who support a loose federal arrangement against advocates (Arabs) of a return to centralised rule. Thus, the major political struggle of the post-Saddam era concerns ethnic conflict between Kurdish ethno-federalists and Arab nationalist-centralists (Anderson and Stansfield 2010). The views of the Kurdish public and non-state sector participants (68% and 100% respectively) on the Iraqi government were that its majority Arabs were anti-federalists. This perspective was supported by prior polls such as one conducted by YouGov in April 2009. In this poll, the people outside the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk were asked to choose between “a system whereby all regions accept the authority of the government in Baghdad” and “a system whereby each region, or group of regions, is largely self-governing” (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.223). High percentages in all Sunni Arab and Shi'a Arab areas supported a centralised polity, ranging from a low of 74% in Nasariyah, Basra and Amara to a high of 84% in Kut and Babylon.

From the participants' perceptions and the poll outcomes, views on a satisfactory constitutional design are polarised between the Kurds and the Arabs in Iraq. If the current stalemate persists and federalism is not implemented throughout Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan can survive with the present federacy arrangement which grants them a high degree of regional autonomy. The Iraqi Kurdistan federacy enjoys most characteristics that any federacy enjoys.

The first characteristic of a federacy is that "it creates a division of powers between the federacy and the central government that is constitutionally entrenched, that cannot be unilaterally altered by either side." (O'Leary 2003, p.20). According to the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, the division of powers between regions and the central government is entrenched and cannot be unilaterally changed by either the centre or the regions. According to Article 126 (2), the "fundamental principles" delineated in the first section of the Constitution cannot be changed "except after two successive electoral terms", with the consent "of two-thirds of the Council of Representatives members, and the approval of the people in a general referendum and the ratification of the President of the Republic within seven days". Furthermore, Article 126(4) forbids changes "if such amendment takes away from the powers of the regions that are not within the exclusive powers of the federal authorities, except by the approval of the legislative authority of the concerned region and the approval of the majority of its citizens in a general referendum".

The second characteristic of a federacy is that "explicit powers fall in the exclusive domain of the federacy; powers remain in the domain of the centre; and powers that might be shared or even remain with the centre but that can be progressively transferred permanently to the federacy" (Stepan et al. 2010, p.205). Iraqi Kurdistan as a federacy has a relationship with the

central government that is not enjoyed by any other Iraqi governorates. It enjoys different powers to those governorates because it is the only region in Iraq which exercises executive, legislative and judicial authority in accordance with Article 121 of the Iraqi constitution (2005). It is responsible for all the administrative requirements of the region including service delivery. It is indisputably the only entity granted exclusive jurisdiction in internal and territorial security. In addition, it is the sole region which has established its own diplomatic offices abroad in accordance with Article 121 (4) of the Iraqi Constitution 2005.

Under the Iraqi Constitution the Kurdish region is the sole region. All the other territorial units are governorates. It is the largest regional entity and (except for the capital region of Baghdad) in population. It is the sole entity ruled by a non-Arab ethnicity, the Kurds. It is the only entity whose citizens mainly speak the other official language of Iraq, Kurdish. Kurdistan is therefore quite different from the governorates. Its differences are stated in the Constitution in accordance with Article 117(5): “This Constitution shall approbate the region of Kurdistan and its existing regional and federal authorities, at the time this constitution comes into force”. It has been recognised as it was before 2003 as far as its laws do not contradict those in the Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

The third characteristic of a federacy is that it is “part of an internationally recognised independent state” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.206). The KRG is part of Iraq which is internationally recognised as an independent state. The fourth characteristic of a federacy is the reciprocal representation between the central state and the federacy. Although there is currently a KRG representation in Baghdad, there is no real cooperation between the KRG and Baghdad (Natali

2010). Thus, the central government would need to have its official representative in the Kurdish federacy to assist in coordinating “those activities in the federacy that fall under central state powers” (Stepan et al. 2010, p.206).

As the fifth characteristic of a federacy indicates the presence of adjudication mechanisms (Stepan et al. 2010), Iraq and Kurdistan also need to establish conflict resolution mechanisms to deal with difficulties that might arise between the Kurdish federacy and the central government of Iraq such as the establishment of a constitutional or a supreme court. However, from the perceptions of the participants and the review of modern Kurdish history, it has been repeatedly illustrated that Kurds mistrust Arabs due to their persecution by successive Iraqi Arab regimes. Hence, the federacy status of Iraqi Kurdistan would require “hard international guarantees” to further guarantee the protection of the special status and the exclusive powers of the Kurdish region; for example, through a UN-sponsored treaty agreement as Anderson and Stansfield (2010) propose. This would provide the Kurds with something more than they currently enjoy, which is international recognition of their autonomy. In addition, “hard international guarantees” are of great importance to Kurds as an ethnic minority in Iraq which “may legitimately question the future integrity of the stronger party’s commitment to abide by the terms of an established arrangement” (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.231). In cases of disputes related to the powers and privileges of Iraqi Kurdistan, the involvement of the International Court of Justice, for instance, in settling these disputes between the Kurdistan region and the centre would afford Kurds an extra layer of protection above and beyond the terms of the Constitution itself.

Providing the Kurds of Iraq with a “hard international guarantee” holds benefits for both Kurdistan and Iraq for two reasons. First, it not only involves an internationally recognised

commitment on the part of the Iraqi government to protect Kurdish federacy, but it also suggests a mutual commitment on the part of the Kurds to a future inside Iraq. Thus, Anderson and Stansfield (2010, p.233) argue, “it is, the absence, not the presence of guaranteed autonomy for the Kurds that is most likely to trigger a secessionist bid”. Second, the Kurdish region obtains international recognition of its autonomous status within Iraq. Hence, any future efforts by “a resurgent Arab nationalist government in Baghdad to revoke Kurdish autonomy cannot simply be dismissed by the international community as a purely internal affair” (Anderson & Stansfield 2010, p.233).

Granting Iraqi Kurdistan an internationally recognised special status similar to that enjoyed by the people of the Aland Islands can stabilise Iraq as a whole for a long-term period. This is because the Kurds will not only have a special status in the international community, but will also hold a separate Kurdistan regional citizenship with Iraqi passports marked with the word Kurdistan. This could satisfy Kurds as their regional identities would be internationally recognised. However, granting such a status relies on, first, whether Iraq is willing to conclude an agreement with the KRG under the auspices of the UN or the EU, and second, whether the international community is willing to be involved in such a treaty.

## **Conclusion**

There are three major findings that emerge from the analysis in this chapter. The first is the complexity of identity definition for ethnic and national groups which are minorities. There are different perspectives and different aspects of ethno-national identity. As the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan has revealed the components of ethno-national identity can encompass boundary,

sociobiology, ideology, ethno-symbolism and constructivism. Hence, the minority's identity can be understood as an intricate web of meaning that must be deciphered through different theories and not simply through one lens. The minority's identity cannot merely be captured in terms of ethnicity or nationhood as it can be a compound of both of them. The Kurdish minority identity can be labelled ethno-national. This was the overwhelming perception of the Kurdish interviewees in this study and the conclusions of my own observations and reading of secondary materials.

The Kurdish ethno-national identity has been mobilised, politicised and reinforced for three reasons. First, the political, economic and cultural rights of Iraqi Kurds were denied in the past. Second, Iraqi Kurds were subject to persecution and discrimination. Third, their prior colonial ruler (Great Britain) played an unintended role in the reinforcement of their identity. As a result, the vast majority of respondents indicated their desire for their own Kurdish nation state. They saw this as a right because they perceived themselves to be a nation. All of the respondents believed that Kurds are a stateless nation. However, this does not mean that they will take concerted collective action to create an independent nation state. Their evaluations of the political, economic and international environments are realistic in that they tell the Kurds that the path to independence has numerous obstacles and opposing forces.

The second major finding of this research has revealed that Iraqi Kurdistan lacks the three essential pillars to establish a viable and sustainable Kurdish state in the Middle East. These pillars are a foreign patronage, a well-governed polity and a strong economy. Regarding the first pillar, Iraqi Kurdistan lacks international and regional support to form its state. The international community seems to be, and is perceived by Kurds to be, reluctant if not hostile to patronage of Iraqi Kurds to declare their independence because they fear that this independence would set a

precedent for other minorities in the ethnic conflict-ridden Middle East to fight for their independence. The formation of a Kurdish state has been appraised by the international community as potentially destabilising for the whole region and it is thought it would pose a threat to international peace. Kurds are well aware of this as the interviewees showed. In addition, the interests of the international community, especially the US, appear to be interlaced with Iraqi Kurdistan's neighbouring countries. The US has, therefore, taken a realistic approach to the "Kurdish dream" and will not jeopardise its military and economic interests with Turkey and Saudi Arabia for the sake of a stateless weak nation like Kurdistan. Moreover, the failure of the Kurdish administration to present Iraqi Kurdistan as a democratic "beacon" in the Middle East has given further reason for the US not to support the formation of an independent Kurdish state. The denial of foreign patronage also significantly includes regional countries. As Kurds spread over four countries, the establishment of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan is interpreted as giving encouragement to other Kurds in other parts of Greater Kurdistan to secede from Iran, Turkey and Syria. This would pose a grave threat to the national integrity of these countries. Thus, they are antagonistic towards the "Kurdish dream". The prospect of the survival of a Kurdish state if established is dire, as it would lack not only an amenable regional environment but also the wider international community's patronage. Thus, the case of Iraqi Kurdistan demonstrates the importance of foreign patronage, as discussed in the literature review chapter, as an important element in the failure or success of secessionist endeavours and the creation of new states (Christopher 2011; Collins 2012).

The second pillar crucial to the formation of a successful Kurdish state is a polity characterised by good governance. Iraqi Kurdistan was found to be riddled with corruption, malfunctioning government, divided leadership and lack of a democratic culture. The fragile institutionalisation

of the KRG, inadequate rule of law and the ruling parties' hegemony over the Iraqi Kurdish polity have prevented the region from achieving its citizens' "Kurdish dream". This lack of good governance emerged in both interviews and historical analysis. To establish a durable, democratic and functional state would require a government that represents the free will and interests of its people rather than the interests of the political elite. Kurdistan needs checks and balances to enable the independent exercise of power, free from the ruling parties' interference. In addition, there is a requirement for a Kurdish leadership that respects democratic institutions and processes.

The third pillar essential to the establishment of a viable Kurdish state is a strong economy. The Kurdish economy was perceived by most participants and by the researcher's analysis to be very weak due to its dependence on Iraq and neighbouring countries. With its fiscal budget coming from Iraqi oil revenues and its imports from the neighbouring countries, the current Iraqi Kurdistan economy would not be sufficient to support a sustainable state. In addition, geography means that Iraqi Kurdistan has no outlet to the sea to help it develop economically through trading with Europe and other parts of the world. The absence of this third pillar as a reason for denying secession is academically supported by scholars such as Connor (1994, p.19) who argues that the right to secession for ethnic groups should be "denied when... the territory too limited, or the possibility of maintaining a viable economy too remote".

Lacking all of the necessary pillars for the construction of a viable independent state, the majority of Iraqi Kurds have taken a pragmatic approach to the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan by focusing on how to ensure the survival of Iraqi Kurdistan politically, economically and internationally. The majority of the respondents indicated preference for a federal arrangement

rather than an independent Kurdish state, believing this to be a realistic remedy to the Kurdish quest for self-determination.

But what is the acceptable or desired type of federalism for Kurds? From the interviewees' responses and my own analysis, it can be inferred that a pluralist federalism is the desirable type of federation. The reasons are that it would provide Kurds with full autonomy with limited Baghdad authority over the region, the recognition of the Kurdish ethno-national identity in Iraq, consensual democracy as an anti-dote to majoritarianism, proportionality in the decision-making process, and the protection of Kurdish interests via a minority veto mechanism.

Would the pluralist federation be a viable and functional political system in Iraq? The respondents saw that many conditions needed to be met to form a viable and durable federation that would stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically. They were: the acceptance of federalism by Arabs; the creation of other federal regions in Iraq; the resolution of territorial disputes limited authority of Baghdad over federal regions; and the removal of the hegemony of the Kurdish ruling parties over Kurdistan. The third major research finding has thus emerged from the respondents' perceptions of these conditions. This finding is that there are five elements that would facilitate the implementation of a successful federal system in Iraq: cooperation, compromise, consensus, concession and commitment. I have called them "the 5Cs". They are crucial to ethnic conflict resolution in Iraq but also anywhere on this globe. They are original conclusions and categories that have emerged from the analysis of the data gathered for this thesis.

The first element is cooperation between Arabs and Kurds in the implementation of federalism. This may be problematic as the respondents' perceptions were that Arabs were anti-federalist

and thus unlikely to be cooperative in creating other federal regions in Iraq due to their perception of federalism as a disintegrative system. But, cooperation is required to make this political settlement work. The second element fundamental to ethnic conflict resolution is compromise in resolving the pending issues between Iraqi Kurdistan and the Iraqi central government. Compromise between Arabs and Kurds needs to be reached to conclude an agreement over the territorially disputed areas.

The third element is consensus to accommodate the interests of Arabs and Kurds at the national level. A consensual rather than majoritarian democracy was perceived by participants as necessary to secure, maintain and improve the prospective federal political system in Iraq. The fourth element essential to ethnic conflict resolutions is concession which is required to achieve a sustainable and durable federal system in Iraq. Arabs need to make concessions to Kurds by relinquishing their centralist-oriented policy and demonstrating willingness to establish a devolutionary system throughout Iraq. Kurds also need to make concessions to Arabs by giving up their “Kurdish dream” of secession in favour of maintaining the integrity of a would-be federation of Iraq. The fifth element vital to ethnic conflict resolution is commitment. The commitments of Arabs to implement federalism and of Kurds to adhere to its rules are crucial to make the potential federation workable and long-lasting.

Iraqi Kurdistan is more likely to head toward a federal region in Iraq than toward an independent state despite Kurds viewing themselves as a nation. The feelings of nationhood have been tempered by prudent assessments of the political environment: it is hostile and un conducive to independence but an acceptable level of autonomy is possible under the federal system. However, from my analysis of interviewees’ responses, personal observations and secondary

materials, even the establishment of a viable federal system is fraught with difficulty in a weak, violent and politically volatile state.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

Is Iraqi Kurdistan evolving into a federal region of Iraq or an independent state? Or is secession the most practical and effective way of addressing the Kurdish issue of self-determination in Iraq? These were the questions set out at the outset of this research to examine through the medium of a case study using mixed research methods. The political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was studied through Kurdish eyes. There were insufficient existing studies to evaluate the political dynamics of Iraqi Kurdistan and elucidate which political arrangement is most desired by Iraqi Kurds and more likely to occur. In addition, there was a lack of research delineating the components of the Kurdish identity even though it has persisted throughout history. As discussed in Chapter One, there have been few in-depth studies tracing the trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan's political development. This research took particular notice of this in its concern with identifying and explaining the direction in which the Kurdistan region is heading. Previous researchers had paid little attention to the views of the population of Iraqi Kurdistan on the political future of the Kurdish autonomous region. This research addressed this gap in our knowledge by examining what the population thought through interviews with persons of knowledge and influence in the politics, economy and society of Kurdistan and surveying the highly educated younger generation who will be the future leaders. All respondents gave rich and insightful views on the following issues: which political arrangement was more attractive and feasible for Iraqi Kurdistan? Was secession regarded as the best solution to the Kurdish right to self-determination? If not, what was an acceptable alternative to Kurdish independence? And if the future was to be within the Iraqi state, what decentralised arrangements would be acceptable? In

answering these questions, this thesis makes a significant contribution to understanding the political present and future of Iraqi Kurdistan and to the broader study and resolution of ethnic conflict in general.

To pursue research questions, Chapter Two outlined the methodology. The methodology included the use of a single case study, documentary analysis and fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan that combined semi-structured interviews, a survey, observation and documentary analysis. The use of a mixed methods approach facilitated the collection, classification and analysis of data used in this research. This enabled triangulation of data to achieve greater authority for the research findings. This research acknowledged that additional participants from Dohok, territorially disputed areas, Baghdad and Basrah were required to be included in further studies to obtain a wider spectrum of views on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

To provide a theoretical and conceptual context, Chapter Three reviewed contemporary literature which dealt with the broad issue of ethnic politics and ethnic conflict resolution. Six main theoretical approaches were identified as having potential relevance for analysing and understanding the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan and other ethnic conflict-ridden countries. The six key frameworks which emerged from the literature review were: ethnicity, nationhood, the right to self-determination, secession, federalism and federacy. Each theoretical framework offered an explanation of ethnic and/or national identity and its relevance to the right to self-determination as well as potential political arrangements for the ethnic and/or national groups who were seeking the right to self-determination.

The first theoretical framework in the literature review concerned the notion of ethnicity. This required review of theories of ethnicity with various foci: ideology, power, boundary, class conflict and kinship. First, the theory of ideology considers ethnicity as common descent or history. Second, the theory of kinship or sociobiology sees ethnicity in terms of extended kinship and the bond of human association throughout history. Third, the theory of class conflict or neo-Marxism views ethnicity as a form of hidden class conflict and emphasises relationships between ethnicity and the socio-economic division of labour. Fourth, the theory of boundary sees ethnicity as the “social organisation of cultural differences” (Barth 1969, p.13). It relies on manipulating cultural traits and ideas about origin so as to communicate difference and establish boundaries around ethnic groups. Fifth, the theory of power is about ethnic politics.

The second theoretical framework in the literature review was nationhood as interpreted through ethno-symbolism and constructivism. Ethno-symbolism sees myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols as “powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture of the ethnic community” (Smith 1991, p.29). By contrast, constructivism firmly states that the modern character of nationalism is related to factors such as sociological transformations, capitalist developments and political ideas. Thus, Anderson (2006), one of the foremost constructivists, defines nation as “an imagined political community”. In this approach, European imperialism stimulated the emergence of nationhood and/or nationalism in every corner of the world. The rise of nationalism was further facilitated by the emergence of media print.

Whether invented or in existence since early human history, the concept of nationhood is intimately related with the concept of the right to self-determination which was the third theoretical framework dealt with in the literature review. As this right to self-determination refers

to the free will of nations to determine their political status, the classical interpretation of the right to self-determination (or called external self-determination) is based on the formation of a nation-state in the international community. The principle of self-determination is viewed as controversial due to the inviolability of state sovereignty. Hence, writers on self-determination have introduced a novel interpretation of self-determination which is premised on working within the existing structures and boundaries of the state. This novel interpretation, called “internal self-determination”, offers many alternative internal political arrangements to the state to accommodate those who claim the right to self-determination, such as federalism and federacy.

Federalism, the fourth theoretical framework examined in the literature review, is grounded on a formal division of power between the centre and sub-state units (provinces, states, regions or cantons). There are two major kinds of federations, namely mononational/integrative and multinational/pluralist. The mononational/integrative federation is constructed according to a formula involving dividing power and organising competition for power. The multinational/pluralist federation is constructed using the merits of power-sharing and dividing power.

Federation was identified as one of the internal self-determination arrangements with great relevance to Iraqi Kurdistan. It was found that federation might not satisfy an ethnic and/ or national group which might claim their entitlement as a nation in terms of the right to external self-determination, namely, independence. Hence secession, the fifth empirical framework covered in the literature review, focused on the permissibility of a nation to secede. Discussion involved the practices of secession in the international community and the involvement of states’ interests in thwarting or supporting certain secessionist movements. However, secession or

federalism could not be attainable by ethno-national groups in certain circumstances due to the complexity of ethnic politics and conflict. Hence, federacy, the sixth theoretical framework, was discussed as an alternative political arrangement which could grant ethno-national groups a high degree of autonomy inside a unitary state. Having established the range of theories relating to ethnicity, federalism, secession and federacy, the research project was equipped with a set of analytical tools that could be mobilised to direct data collection and analyse the results.

Complementing the theoretical and conceptual context provided in Chapter Three, Chapter Four contextualised the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan historically. This chapter helped understand why the Kurds of Iraq fought for the right to self-determination and yet failed to achieve the political goals of their revolts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It outlined six periods in history. The first period related the British occupation in 1918 and Sheikh Mahmud's revolt. The second period explained the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 and the "Mosul Problem". This treaty was a very significant document for Kurds as it stipulated the right of Kurds to have an independent Kurdistan. The third period involved the Republican Regime era between 1958 and 1968. In this period, the Iraqi regime refused to confer autonomy on the Kurds fearing that such an arrangement would enable Kurds to secede from Iraq. Consequently, there was a series of battles between Kurds and successive republican regimes. The fourth period, the Ba'ath regime between 1968 and 1990, was the toughest time in Kurdish history due to aggressive actions conducted by the regime against Kurds including chemical bombing, the Anfal campaign and Arabisation programs. The fifth period, the Gulf War in 1990, resulted in the emergence of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992 and remained the political situation of Iraqi Kurdistan until 2003. The sixth period was the political status of Iraqi Kurdistan after Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003

until 2009. The common theme to emerge from this historical review was the persistent failure of Kurds to secure their own independent state despite their struggles over more than 100 years.

After reviewing the contemporary literature on ethnicity, nationhood, the right to self-determination, federalism, secession, federacy and the history of Iraqi Kurdistan on self-determination struggle, this thesis focused on the following questions to guide the research:

1. Are Kurds an ethnic group or a nation?
2. Is independence feasible for Iraqi Kurdistan?
3. Is federalism more likely than full independence?
4. What are the perceived imperatives and obstacles affecting Iraqi Kurdistan's political future as a federal region of Iraq or a *de jure* state?
5. What roles are international actors playing in determining the political future of this region?
6. What are the Iraqi government's and Arabs' attitudes towards the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan?

The answers of these research questions were in the empirical data collected for this thesis which are organised into three chapters. Chapters Five and Six report the perspectives of the public and non-state sectors interviewees respectively on ethnicity, nationhood, self-determination, federalism and secession. These chapters explore key informants' attitudes towards federalism and secession as solutions to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Elucidating these attitudes has greatly assisted in understanding the political dynamics and future direction of the Kurdistan polity. All of the participants believed that Kurds were a nation entitled to establish its own state, but the majority of them (79% from the public sector and 91% from the non-state sector) gave

preference for a federal arrangement rather than an independent Kurdish state. This was due to their prudent appraisals of the political, economic and international environments as being antagonistic towards Kurdish independence. However, it was thought that federalism needed to be fully institutionalised in the Iraqi polity. It was viewed as being formally in place in the law, but respondents noted that it had not yet been implemented.

The third data chapter (Chapter Seven) presents findings from the questionnaire survey on Kurdish self-determination in Iraq. This chapter explores the viewpoints of the students of university political science departments in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah on the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan, whether it is heading towards federalism or secession and where they want it to go. The questions were concerned with the perception of Kurdish nationhood and self-determination, the desirability of having an independent state or a federal region and the role of the US in the Kurdish self-determination. Despite the Kurdish students viewing themselves as a nation entitled to the right to self-determination, the youth opinions were very much split down the middle about whether a federal or independent future was desirable and/or feasible. The general pessimism of the Kurdish youth about the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan was noticeable in their responses. This appeared in part due to their perceptions of the US' unsupportive role in the Kurdish struggle for the right to self-determination in Iraq, the lack of Kurdish solidarity on the question of Kurdistan's political future and high levels of corruption in the region.

Chapter Eight analysed the empirical data in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The first task was to examine whether Kurds were perceived as a nation or ethnic group entitled to the right to self-determination, utilising various theoretical approaches to ethnicity and nationhood identified in Chapter Three. All the respondents from the public and non-state sectors as well as the

Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin believed that Kurds were a nation entitled to the right to self-determination. Viewing themselves as a nation was, nonetheless, articulated through different perspectives. Accordingly, the first major finding was that the perceptions of Kurdish identity were multifaceted. Hence, one theoretical ethnic or nationalist framework was not adequate to depict the Kurdish identity as this identity was a mosaic of ethnicity and nationhood, namely, ethno-national.

It was found that the ethno-national identity of Kurds reflected the following theoretical components to different degrees: boundary, sociobiology, ideology, ethno-symbolism and constructivism. The boundary theory of ethnicity held the most explanatory power for the perceptions of the Kurdish ethno-nationhood. The majority of interviewees (75% and 58% of public sector and non-state sector responses respectively) used boundary-related differences as principal indicators of their ethno-nationhood. Accordingly, they believed that Kurds were clearly different from Arabs as recognised in cultural traits, like language.

Difference or boundary was, nonetheless, only one facet of Kurdish ethno-national identity. Sociobiology was another theoretical facet for understanding of this group's identity. A small minority of interviewees voiced their ethno-nationhood through their ancestral origin as being of Median descendants. Common descent was interrelated with the theory of ideology which explained another component of Kurdish ethno-national identity. The ideology of common decent or history was perceived to characterise the Kurdish ethno-national identity, especially through the Kurdish history of persecution and injustice. Historical injustice or atrocities were seen by a small portion of interviewees to be shared memories, which articulated another facet of their ethno-national identity, namely, ethno-symbolism. Moreover, the construct of Kurdish ethno-nationalism was also seen as a reaction to imperialism as the former colonial power (Great

Britain) was perceived to have deprived Kurds of their right to establish their own nation state. All of these theories of ethnicity and nationhood complemented and reinforced each other to provide a better understanding of the intricacy of the strong and universal Kurds' perception of themselves as an ethno-nation.

Perceiving themselves as an ethno-nation involved entitlement to the right to self-determination; but, was secession desired by all the respondents to achieve their "Kurdish dream"? The vast majority of interviewees (84 % from the public sector and 75% from the non-state sector) and a significant minority of respondents (38% from the Universities of Sulaimani and Salaheldin more than one in three respondents) saw secession as an infeasible approach to the realisation of their dream because they carefully weighed all the factors against the possible dangers of and impediments to the formation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East. These impediments were internal, regional and international. From analysis of the Kurdish perceptions of those impediments, the second major finding of this thesis revealed that Iraqi Kurdistan lacked the three requisite pillars for the formation of a viable and durable Kurdish state. Those pillars included foreign patronage, a well-governed polity and strong economy, and were interrelated to each other. All or even two of these pillars could be applicable to the formation of a successful and long-lasing nation-state desired by some other ethno-national groups throughout the world.

The first pillar was foreign patronage, and it was found that the formation of a Kurdish state was perceived to be destined to fail without it. A landlocked territory like Iraqi Kurdistan was seen to be encircled by hostile neighbouring countries, especially Turkey which includes the largest number of Kurds. The establishment of a Kurdish state could be squashed by the Turkish state if the international community, particularly the US did not protect such a state. The reluctance of the US to support Kurdish secession from Iraq was viewed to stem from three factors. The first

was its vested economic and military interests in the neighbouring countries, notably Turkey. The second was maintaining the security and the stability of the Middle East, as Kurdish independence would convey an explicit message on ethno-national entitlements and spur on other minorities in the region to secede. The third was Iraqi Kurdistan viewed as a badly governed polity with high corruption, poor governance and abuse of human rights which led the international community, including the US, to back off from supporting Kurdish independence.

The second pillar crucial to the formation of a maintainable Kurdish state was a well-governed polity. Iraqi Kurdistan was perceived to be riddled with a multitude of internal problems which caused its polity to be badly governed. The interviewees identified those problems as corruption, malfunctioning of the KRG, divided Kurdish leadership, non-strategic vision of the Kurdish elite and lack of democratic culture. The ruling Kurdish parties (PUK and KDP) were perceived to abuse power to serve their own interests and to embezzle the nation's wealth to consolidate the parties' economic gains that consequently weakened the economic basis of Iraqi Kurdistan. After fighting for the Kurdish right to self-determination for decades, those ruling parties were viewed to work self-interestedly to remain in power and enjoy the spoils of Kurdish victory over Ba'athism at the expense of the masses. They were, thus, viewed to be the root cause of a bad Kurdish polity that incapacitated Kurds in their efforts to realise their "Kurdish dream".

The third pillar vital to the formation of a sustainable Kurdish state was a strong economy. The Kurdish economy was viewed to be weak and reliant on Iraqi oil revenues and imports from neighbouring countries. An independent Kurdish state was perceived to be unable to subsist economically, especially as Iraqi Kurdistan is an enclave with no outlet to the sea. Thus, the majority of respondents (78% from the public sector and 91% from the non-state sector) took a

realistic approach to addressing the Kurdish right to self-determination by indicating their preference for a federal arrangement. But what kind of federalism is acceptable and desired by Iraqi Kurds? They appeared to want a pluralist federation constructed along ethnic or geographic lines and taking into account historic realities for several reasons. First, it would confer on Iraqi Kurds maximum political autonomy with limited Baghdad authority over the Kurdish region. Second, the pluralist federation would preserve two or more nations and oppose the strongly integrationist intents of national federalists. Third, it would promote a consensual culture between Arabs and Kurds, which could greatly assist the resolution of outstanding issues between Kurdistan and Iraq, and the accommodation of the divergent interests and demands of their communities. Fourth, it would give Kurds fair representation at the national level, based on the proportionality mechanism, and safeguard their interests through the mechanism of a minority veto.

The majority of respondents saw the federal arrangement holding many political, economic and cultural advantages for the inhabitants of Iraqi Kurdistan. Politically, enjoying partial sovereignty within Iraq would give them a sense of being a Kurdish mini-state where Kurds could freely administer their parliament, cabinet, court, army, overseas offices and other government institutions in their region. Economically, Kurds could administer oil production in their region and receive their fair share from Iraqi oil revenues. Culturally, federalism would provide Kurds with the protection and recognition of their identity. But was federalism espoused in Iraq? The 2005 Iraqi Constitution set the federal process in motion, a process which, it was presumed, would lead to a functioning federal system. However, the *de jure* existence of federalism in the Constitution was not mirrored in *de facto* operational arrangements.

The Iraqi Constitution anticipates the formation of an unspecified number of regions in the future. It would be possible for a single governorate, or a group of governorates, to form a region by holding a referendum as specified in Article 119. But, Iraq is not in fact a federal country yet. Kurdistan has a highly autonomous regional government but the rest of Iraq consists of the administrative governorates which are a legacy of Iraqi history. Even though the provinces have been constitutionally conferred with large powers, they have neither the institutional capacity nor resources to manage or implement large-scale projects or service delivery. Hence, the respondents viewed Iraq as being in a state of struggles between the historical experience of a centralised unitary state and the promise of a decentralised federation. They saw the Iraqi government, the majority of who were Arabs, thwarting the implementation of federalism in Iraq because of the following reasons. Arabs were perceived to hold chauvinist, nationalistic and Islamic mentalities which were pro-centralist. In addition, they were perceived to view federalism as a disintegrative system that was initiated by Kurds and imported from the US. Accordingly, the respondents identified many conditions to be met to form a successful and long-lasting federation that would stabilise Iraq and Kurdistan politically.

These conditions were: the acceptance of federalism by Arabs; the creation of other federal regions in Iraq; the resolution of territorial disputes and the guarantee of limited central authority over federal regions; and the removal of the hegemony of the Kurdish ruling parties over Kurdistan. From these perceived conditions, the third key finding of this research is that five elements are required to facilitate the implementation of a viable federation in Iraq. These are cooperation, compromise, consensus, concession and commitment. I have named those five elements “the 5Cs” which are essential to the ethnic conflict resolution process. Without *cooperation* between Arab and Kurd, the federal arrangement cannot be operative in Iraq.

Without *compromise*, the outstanding issues between Kurdistan and Iraq cannot be resolved. Without *consensus*, the interests of Arabs and Kurds cannot be accommodated at the national level. Without *concessions*, a durable and viable federation cannot be established. And without *commitment*, the prospective federation cannot be maintained. Hence, all “the 5Cs” are vital to facilitate the implementation and the maintenance of a workable and acceptable federation in Iraq. However, if federalism is not implemented throughout Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan can survive with the present federacy status which grants it a high degree of regional autonomy and some limited power-sharing with Baghdad.

In summary, based on the realpolitik appraisals of the local, regional and international circumstances, federalism was found to be the most feasible and plausible arrangement and more likely to be the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan at least in the near future. Implementing federalism in Iraq is, however, fraught with difficulty. The KRG is required to follow a prudent politics to ensure the implementation of this political arrangement in accordance with the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, and to ensure the sustainability of the potential federation by using “the 5Cs” identified in this study. If federalism is successfully implemented in Iraq, would Iraqi Kurds relinquish their “Kurdish dream”? The underlying feelings of the respondents were that Kurdish secession was in a state of abeyance until the local, regional and international circumstances were conducive to the formation of a Kurdish state. This indicated that the ultimate goal of an ethno-national group (in this case the Kurds) could always be statehood. Thus, political arrangements such as autonomy and federalism propounded by the theorists of ethnic conflict resolution and currently favoured by Kurds could merely be provisional preferences. Deeply held ethno-national sentiments in support of independence may still be a potent political force among Kurds in the volatile political environment of the Middle East.



## **Appendix 1**

### **The Treaty of Sevres of 1920, Articles 62-4**

#### **Article 62**

A commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local authority for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may hereafter be determined and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia.

#### **Article 63**

The Turkish Government hereby agrees to accept and execute the decisions of both the Commissions mentioned in Article 62 within three months from their communication to the said Government.

#### **Article 64**

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey and if the Council then considers that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such as recommendation and to renounce all rights and title over these areas...If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the principal

Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish state of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul *Vilayet*.

## **Appendix 2**

### **The Agreement of 11 March 1970**

1. Participation of Kurds in government, including the appointment of Kurds to key posts in the state.
2. Recognition of Kurdish in those areas where Kurds constitute the majority. Kurdish and Arabic would be taught together in all schools.
3. Furtherance of Kurdish education and culture.
4. Requirement that officials in the Kurdish areas speak Kurdish.
5. Right to establish Kurdish student, youth, women's and teachers' organisation.
6. Economic development of the Kurdish area.
7. Return of Kurds to their villages or financial compensation.
8. Agrarian reform.
9. Amendment of the constitution to read "the Iraqi people consist of two main nationalities: the Arab and Kurdish nationalities".
10. Return of the clandestine radio and heavy weapons to the government.
11. Appointment of a Kurdish vice-president.
12. Amendment of provincial laws in accordance with this declaration.
13. Formation of a Kurdish area with self-government.



## **Appendix 3**

### **Semi-structured interview questions**

1. Do you think Kurds are a nation or an ethnic group?
2. Do you think federalism is an acceptable political arrangement for Iraqi Kurdistan?
3. Would federalism provide greater political stability to Iraq and the Kurdish region than secession?
4. How do you see the Iraqi government's attitude towards federalism for Kurdistan?
5. Is it in the interests of Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq? Why?
6. What are the internal and external impediments that prevent Kurdistan from becoming a state?
7. What is the role of the US in the Kurdish right to self-determination in Iraq?
8. In your opinion, where is Iraqi Kurdistan heading?



## Appendix 4

### Questionnaire survey form

#### Section A: Demographic

(1) Gender

A. Male ( )      B. Female ( )

(2) Age

A. 18-25 years old ( )

B. 26-30 years old ( )

C. 31-40 years old ( )

D. 41-50 years old ( )

E. over 51 years old ( )

(3) University of

A. Sulaimani

B. Salaheldin

#### Section B: your say on the future of Iraqi Kurdistan

(1) You think that Kurds are a nation entitled to the right to self-determination.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(2) Kurdish federalism would provide greater political stability to Iraq and the region than  
Kurdish independence.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
(3) It is economically preferable for Kurdistan to be a federal part of Iraq.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(4) Iraqi Kurdistan should be an independent state.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(5) Corruption is a major obstacle that hampers Kurdistan from becoming a state.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(6) Kurdish nationalism is pushing for Iraqi Kurdistan independence.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(7) Kurdistan currently has the political institutions to operate as an independent state.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(8) Kurdistan can develop political institutions to operate as an independent state.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(9) Iraqi Kurdistan has a strong economy to help it be a state in the future.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(10) The US will help Iraqi Kurdistan to attain its independence in the future.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(11) The Iraqi Kurds are unified to work together for achieving their goals.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

(12) The future of Iraqi Kurdistan is promising.

Strongly disagree    disagree    neither    agree    strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5



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