Iraq Recognizes Kurdish Autonomy

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Special to The New York Times

BAGHDAD, Iraq, March 11 —The Iraqi Government tonight recognized the autonomy of the Kurdish people within the Iraqi state, and declared a national holiday tomorrow to celebrate the event.

The Iraqi President, Lieut. Gen. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, in a radio and television address following months of negotiations with the Kurds and years of rebellion, said that they would exercise their national rights within a unified area in the north of Iraq.

He said that one Iraqi Vice President would be a Kurd, that Kurds would have proportional representation in a future Iraqi Parliament and that the Kurdish language would be an official language, along with Arabic, in Kurdish areas.
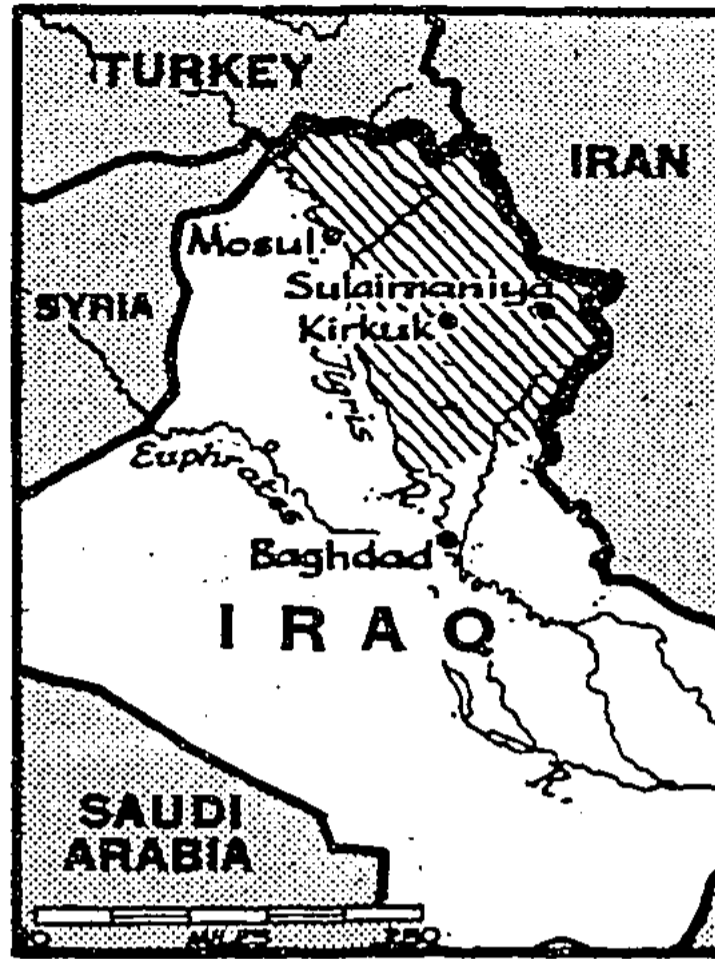
All this and more, the President said, will be written into a new Iraqi constitution recognizing that the country is formed of two nationalities, Kurds and Arabs.

A representative of the Kurds read a statement over radio and television, asserting that the declaration had the full support of Gen. Mustafa al-Barzani, the leader of the Kurds.

Fighting for Centuries

If it is carried out—as previous accords have not been—the declaration will end eight and a half years of sporadic warfare between the Baghdad Government and the Kurds. Iraq has a population of 8.6 million people of whom 1.5 million to 2 million are Kurds. Five million other Kurds live in Turkey while it is estimated that three million live in Iran.

Kurds have been fighting Turks, Persians and Arabs for centuries. They rose in a series of futile rebellions in Turkey after World War II in quest of

The New York Times   March 12, 1970

Diagonal shading delineates area of the Kurds in Iraq.

independence and managed in 1946 to form a short-lived republic in Iran, in the region between Soviet and British occupation zones, but with Soviet support.

The Kurds in Iraq, however, have continued the fight since World War II not for independence but for autonomy within the Iraqi state.

General Barzani, a tribal leader, began fighting the British in Iraq 40 years ago and continued to fight the Iraqi republic. He united the Kurdish tribes and gained de facto autonomy in 1961.

The final negotiations on which President Bakr based his declaration today were between General Barzani and Sidan Hussein Taarit, the Assistant Secretary General of the Iraqi Baath party, who is reputed to be the most powerful man in the country. He is also Vice Premier, and vice chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, the ruling government body.

On his return to Baghdad from these talks the Vice Premier announced that he had reached agreement not on a truce or cease-fire but on a "total and final" settlement of the Kurdish question.

Kurdish sources cautioned, however, that the declaration was unilateral, by the Government, and that it was up to the Government to carry it out.

The Kurds emphasized that their armed force, known as the Pesh Merga, or the devoted ones, and numbering about 10,000 men, would remain intact while the agreement was being carried out.

The question of whether the town of Kirkuk, center of the Iraqi oil fields, should be included in he Kurdish area remained open.

Government to Keep Oil

But the Government made clear that it would keep control of the oil, by stating that "the development and exploitation of the national resources of the area is the responsibility of the republic."

The Kurds' agreement for coming to terms is that, no matter what some Kurds may think of the Baath, the chance to reach agreement with any Iraqi Government that recognized Kurdish autonomy was a historic opportunity.

Moreover, General Barzani is getting old. While his age is given as 66, some believe that he is older. And the Kurds, with thousands of their villages in ruins from fighting and from aerial bombardment, and with a generation growing up almost without education, are weary. If the declaration does not lead to final peace, it will at least give them a respite.