

Zionist Regim and Kurdish Issue: New Periphrial Startegy

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Abstract

Since the expansion of ISIS in the summer of 2014, Israeli leaders have increasingly proclaimed the Kurds' right to an independent state in Iraqi Kurdistan. So an important question is raised. What is Israel's main objective towards to Kurds and their efforts for independence? Based on the «peripheral strategy», what could be place of the Kurds in Israel's strategy in the Near and Middle East? If does Israel consider the Kurdish issue as vital component of its priorities in the foreign policy or see it just as a temporary benefit in its regional security considerations? Relying on the various comments and opinions, our study uses the contextual analysis for finding the facts and presenting the impartial final analysis. Our analysis is shaped and developed by the facts reported and discussed by the experts as well as by real strategic considerations of the players. I try to shape my argument based on two pivotal considerations, first ethnical debate and second Tel Aviv's long term strategy in the region. Based on both of them, the Kurd issue will be a marginal not main concern for Israel. Tel Aviv seeks to abuse the Kurdish independence emotions, and it is and will be a half way comrade for Kurdish people, nothing more.

Keywords: *Zionist Regime, Kurdistan's Independence, Iraq, Islamic World*

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Introduction

Following the expansion of ISIS in the summer of 2014, Israeli leaders have increasingly proclaimed the Kurds' right to an independent state in Iraqi Kurdistan. The declarations of support surged all the more when the Kurds announced their decision to hold a referendum on independence, which ultimately took place on September 25, 2017. On that day, in a symbolic expression of the relationship between Israel and Kurdistan, a number of Israeli flags were raised beside Kurdistan's flags. Israel was the only country, and was prominently presented as such, to support Kurdish independence. Israel's public stance has provided ammunition to those who seek to delegitimize and demonize the Kurdish independence movement by portraying the Kurds as traitors, Masoud Barzani as a Zionist puppet, the referendum as the declaration of a new Israel, and Israel's support as an attempt to establish "Greater Israel." Israel's stance also further justified the forging of a lightning alliance between Iraq, Turkey, and Iran to thwart any development in Kurdish independence.

An important question is, therefore, raised; what is Israel's main objective where Kurds and their efforts for independence are concerned? Considering the "new peripheral strategy", what could be the place of the Kurds in Israel's strategy in the Near and Middle East? Does Israel consider the Kurdish issue a priority in its foreign policy, or is it rather a temporary advance in the regional security considerations of that state? This study relies on contextual analyses to elaborate the facts and shape the arguments. The analysis is structured and developed through facts reported and discussed by experts, and also through the strategic

considerations of the players, most importantly Tel Aviv. The argument is based on two pivotal considerations, first an ethnical debate and second Tel Aviv's long term strategy in the region. Based on these, the Kurd issue will be exposed as a marginal and not the main concern of Israel. Tel Aviv seeks to exploit the Kurdish independence sentiments, and it is and will be a half way comrade for the Kurdish people, nothing more.

I- The Geographical and Strategic Position

Kurdistan (/ˌkɜːrdɪˈstæn, ˈstɑːn/; Kurdish: "region of Kurds") (Encyclopedia Britannica. 2018) or Greater Kurdistan is a roughly defined geo-cultural historical region wherein the Kurdish people form a prominent majority population, and Kurdish culture, languages, and national identity have historically been based (O'Shea. 2004). Kurdistan roughly encompasses the northwestern Zagros and the eastern Taurus mountain ranges. The territory corresponds to Kurdish irredentist disputes. Contemporary use of the term refers to the following areas: southeastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan), northern Iraq (Southern Kurdistan), northwestern Iran (Eastern Kurdistan), and northern Syria (Rojava or Western Kurdistan) (Columbia Encyclopedia.2005).

From ancient times the area has been the home of the Kurds, a people whose ethnic origins are uncertain. For 600 years after the Arab conquest and their conversion to Islam, the Kurds played a recognizable and considerable part in the troubled history of western Asia—but as tribes, individuals, or turbulent groups rather than a united nation or people. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I (1914–18), and particularly with the encouragement of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, one of whose Fourteen Points stipulated that the non-Turkish nationalities of the Ottoman Empire should be “assured of an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development”, Kurdish nationalists looked to the eventual establishment of a Kurdistan state.

The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920 by representatives of the

Allies and of the Ottoman sultan, provided for the recognition of the three Arab states of Hejaz, Syria, and Iraq and of Armenia and, to the south of it, Kurdistan, which the Kurds of the Mosul *vilāyet* (province), then under British occupation, would have the right to join. Owing to the military revival of Turkey under Kemal Atatürk, this treaty was never ratified. It was superseded in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne, which confirmed the provision for the Arab states but omitted mentions of Armenia and Kurdistan. Mosul was excluded from the settlement, and the question of its future was referred to the League of Nations, which in 1925 awarded it to Iraq. This decision was made effective by the Treaty of Ankara, signed in 1926 by Turkey, Iraq, and Great Britain (Encyclopedia Britannica. 2019).

Today the great Kurdish people live in an area which shares the land of five neighboring countries, namely Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Syria and Armenia. The estimated population is 35 million. A rough estimate by the CIA Factbook records Kurdish populations of 12 million in Turkey, 6 million in Iran, 5 to 6 million in Iraq, and less than 2 million in Syria, which comes to a total of approximately 28 million Kurds, who reside in Kurdistan and the adjacent regions. Recent emigration has resulted in a Kurdish diaspora of around 1.5 million people, with almost half of that number now living in Germany.

Any effort toward independency creates serious crises for the five countries. Iran, Turkey, and to a lesser extent Syria will face more serious problems because they share common borders with Iraq and also accommodate large Kurdish minorities of their own. Since a Kurdish revolt in any of these three states could very well foment one in the others, the three have often endeavored to cooperate on the issue. Thus the Saadabad Pact in 1937 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955, in part, obligated the three countries to cooperate on the Kurdish issue. This collaboration included measures to prevent cross-border communication and support among the Kurds and, in general, sought to prevent any joint, transnational Kurdish action that might challenge their current

international boundaries (Gunter. 1992).

Israel `s Periphery Doctrine

The Past: In the mid-1950s the young and vulnerable state of Israel sought to jump over the hostile ring, reach out to the region's "periphery" (a term relative to an Israel-centric approach), and develop strategic ties with non-Arab, non-Muslim or geographically distant Arab states that shared its concerns regarding the Arab nationalist wave and the latter's links with the Soviet Union (Yegar, 2011). The primary foundations of the periphery doctrine were two sets of triangular relationships. To the north, Israel linked up with Iran and Turkey in a "Trident", a clandestine intelligence alliance focusing on radical Arab states like Iraq and Syria. To the south, Ethiopia and, for two years, the newly independent Sudan were linked in a southern triangle that focused on Nasserist Egypt; after Sudan withdrew, ties with Ethiopia continued. Overtime these relationships were supplemented by ties with Morocco and Oman, geographically peripheral Arab states, as well as minor links with the Kurds of northern Iraq, the Anya Nya rebels in southern Sudan and the Maronites of Lebanon.

The periphery doctrine was developed as a grand strategy in Israel's early years by Ben Gurion and his close aides parallel to, and at times in co-ordination with, three additional grand strategies deemed essential for the country's survival (Yinon.1982). The first of these was a great-power relationship, meaning the military and strategic support of a powerful country with interests in the Middle East. In the 1950s and 1960s this meant weapons-supply and strategic links with France and Britain. The third grand strategy was the development of a nuclear deterrent, in which France played a key role (Alpher.2013).The original periphery doctrine ground to a halt between 1973 and 1983 and was in many ways replaced by the Arab-Israel peace process, both bilateral and multilateral. Eventually, the failure to register significant progress toward a solution of the Palestinian

issue blunted this momentum (Alpher. 2013).

Currently Israel sees itself increasingly surrounded by hostile Islamists in Egypt, Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria, as well as non-Arab Turkey and Iran. Once again it confronts the specter of regional isolation. But it is far better equipped than in the past to deal with a hostile ring of neighbors. Its policy options include not only a “new periphery” (Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Greece and Ethiopia, among others), but also the projection of both soft (particularly economic) and hard power.

A New Periphery for Tel Aviv: Political Islam has taken root in Iran, Turkey and Egypt. Israel is already actively implementing a new periphery policy in an attempt to outflank political Islam in the region while taking into account the sensitive nature of its existing relations. Essentially it involves developing or expanding a security relationship in three areas abutting the Greater Middle East (here understood as comprising the Arab world, Iran and Turkey) (Alpher. 2013). With regards to Iran, the policy focuses on cultivating close strategic ties with Azerbaijan, a country with growing oil resources that shares Israel’s concerns over Iranian subversion and Islamist-inspired terrorism. In the Red Sea region Israel has reportedly taken military action when Iran and Sudan have actively transported ordnance in support of militant Islamist elements. In Africa, Israel is falling back on its existing ties with Ethiopia and Kenya and is developing new ties with South Sudan.

Depending on the outcome of the Syrian civil war, Israel could conceivably renew some sort of “minority policy” with regard to Levant ethnic groups. Israeli Druze activists are already expressing acute anxiety over the fate of the Syrian Druze concentrated at Jebel Druze, some 80 km east of the Golan. The Druze have an influential presence in Israeli political and military life.

This, then, is the “new periphery. A key issue in evaluating this new periphery strategy is the strategic planning concept behind it. Clearly, Azerbaijan does not measure up to Iran strategically, just as Turkey dwarfs Cyprus and Greece in terms of strategic clout. While the southern periphery shares Israel’s

concerns about Arab and Islamist encroachment, because of the Nile it also constitutes a strategic backdrop to Israeli-Egyptian relations (Alpher. 2013).

The Iraqi Kurds, however are not evaluated as a major concern by the Israeli strategic planners. In the document entitled “Grand Strategy for Israel: Reflections and Directions” (2017), Iraqi Kurds are mentioned just once, and alongside other separatist groups like Druze. The text declares “in addition to continued cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, the advantages of identical current interests between Israel and Saudi Arabia should be exploited. Israel should also consider supporting ethnic groups such as the Kurds and the Druze” (The Samuel Neaman Institute of National Policy Research .2017). Yossi Alpher in his analysis, “Israeli Regional Strategies: Balancing the Arab Core, the New Periphery, and Great Powers” refers to the issue of the Kurds only once, as a marginal topic in the forty four pages of his discussion. In fact, the targets of “peripheral strategy” do not count on the weak and divided minorities who cannot support Israel adequately. Tel Aviv has established ties firstly with Jewish Kurds, then with the Kurdish people, but not on the basis of the periphery doctrine. This strategy leads Tel Aviv to put its priority on the states that can play a significant supportive role in the issues of the region. Relying on Aldo Liga`s study, the Kurds represent 15 to 20 percent of the Iraqi population. Israel has identified the Kurdish minority as a buffer against common adversaries, while the Iraqi Kurds see the Jewish state as a potential ally in order to legitimize their political independence and an economic partner to alleviate internal instability (Liga.2016).

III- Data and Analysis

Ethnic Origins and Historical Background

In 2001 a team of Israeli, German and Indian specialists published the results of a research according to which it was maintained that the Jews were distant ethnic relatives of the Kurds. It is claimed that the research was carried out in sight of all the latest achievements in the decoding of the human genome, and used

precise instruments.

Some maintain that, the Jews and Kurds had common ancestors who resided on the borders of modern day Iraq and Turkey. For instance, Ofra Bengio claims “a comparison between Jews and Kurds shows many similarities. Both are relatively small nations (15 million Jews and 30 million Kurds), traumatized by persecutions and wars. Both have been leading life and death struggles to preserve their unique identity, and both have been delegitimized and denied the right to a state of their own. In addition, both are ethnically different from neighboring Arabs, Persians, and Turks, who represent the majority in the Middle East. He speaks about a legend which narrates the origins of the Kurds. In this telling, King Solomon, who ruled over the supernatural world, called his angelic servants and ordered them to fly to Europe and bring him five hundred beautiful women. When his servants returned, they learned that the king had passed away, but they retained the women for themselves, who then gave the birth to the Kurdish nation. (Bengio. 2014)

Given the questionable validity of these sorts of statements, narrations and reported results, more scientific and reliable findings should be considered. The Kurds emerged as an ethnic group during the medieval period. They are believed to be of heterogeneous origins, combining a number of earlier tribal or ethnic groups including the Median Semitic, Turkic, and Armenian. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims belonging to the Shafi'i school. Mystical practices and participation in Sufi orders are also widespread among Kurds. There is also a minority of Kurds who are Shia Muslims, primarily living in the Ilam and Kermanshah provinces of Iran and in central and southeastern Iraq (Fayli Kurds), and some who are Alawites, mostly living in Turkey.

The Kurdish language comprises the related dialects spoken by the Kurds. A northern dialect of Kurdish called *Kurmanji* is spoken in Turkey, the Kurdish areas of Syria, and the most northern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish language holds

official status in Iraq as a national language along with Arabic; it is recognized in Iran as a regional language, though Iranians regard Kurdish as a dialect of Persian. In Armenia it is a minority language.

In the southern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as in western Iran, another dialect called *Surani* or central Kurdish is spoken. Speakers of *Kurmanji* and *Surani* can understand each other. A third Kurdish dialect, known as *Zaza*, is basically a separate language. *Kurmanji* and *Surani* speakers usually cannot understand speakers of *Zaza*. A fourth linguistic group among the Kurds is speakers of *Gulani*, which is closer to *Zaza*. The Kurds also use different writing systems, relying on the Latin alphabet in Turkey. While they use an Arabic script in Iraq and Iran, a Cyrillic script is used in Armenia. For purposes of nation-building, the Kurds will need to produce a standardized Kurdish language (Neriah.2012).

The history of the settlement of Jews and the spread of Judaism in Kurdish-populated areas can be traced back to ancient times. According to the Bible, after the defeat of the Kingdom of Israel by king Salmanzar III of Assyria in 722 B.C. some of the captured Jews were settled in Media and Mesopotamia. When Nebuchadnezzar II, together with the Medians, defeated Assyria and conquered Judea, he settled many Jews in Babylon and its environs (Minasian.2007).

Jewish immigration from Kurdistan to Israel began in the sixteenth century, with the initial Jewish immigrants settling in Safed. Kurdish Jewish immigrants arrived in the 1920s and 1930s, and by 1948 there were some 8,000 Kurdish Jews in Israel. After statehood was declared that year, masses of Jews from all four parts of Kurdistan moved to the country. Today Israel's Kurdish Jewish population is over 150,000, with the largest concentration around Jerusalem. The Kurdish Jewish immigrants have generally sustained the cultural heritage of Jewish Kurdistan with their distinctive cuisine, music, and traditions (Neriah.2012). Therefore, an undeniable array of similar ethnic roots and ties can be traced

between the Jewish Kurds and the Israeli people, but one cannot classify the majority of the Kurdish nation as a common and historic part of the Jewish people of the Jerusalem region.

It is obvious that the Kurdish area is completely located out of the “Promised Land”.

IV- Historical Ties and Signs of Exploitation

Back in the late 1930s, the initiative of establishing contacts with the Kurds belonged to an officer of the Zionist secret service Rubin Shilia, one of the leading ideologists of the “peripheral strategy”. Under the disguise of a Hebrew school student in Baghdad, he organized a network of agents and established secret contacts in the mountainous Kurdish-populated regions of Iraq (Minasim.2007). By the end of 1950s and in the early 1960s Israel became the principal source of weapons supplies and training for the Kurds in their struggle against the government. By various estimates, thousands of Mossad agents and instructors of the Israeli army resided in the Kurdish-populated regions of Iraq at the time and conducted undercover operations. Various arms supplies for the Iraqi Kurds actively continued in 1965-1975 (MacDowall.1991).

The Parastin, the intelligence service of the Kurdish Democratic Party, was also established with Mossad’s support in the late 1960s. The operations conducted by the Israeli intelligence agency in Northern Iraq were of particular significance for Israel because the Iraqi Kurds were pounded not only by the Iraqi troops but also by the regular army of Syria, another Arab state ruled by the Baath party. Mossad had been involved in joint operations with the SAVAK for many years, since the late 1950s. Mossad assisted SAVAK and supported the Kurds in Iraq.

According to a former senior Mossad official Eliezer Tsafirir, Israel had military advisers at the headquarters of Mulla Mustafa Barzani in 1963-1975, who trained, and supplied the Kurdish units with fire arms, field and anti-aircraft artillery. The US also

participated in this campaign (Reuters, 21.02.1999). Israel spent tens of millions of dollars on the support of the Kurds, supplying them via Iran, which pursued its own goals in Iraq and had close ties with Israel up until 1979. However, according to Eliezer Tsafir's testimony, a former senior Mossad official, Israel never supported the Turkish Kurds in their war against Turkey or the Iranian Kurds under the Shah (Reuters, 21.02.1999). Once again, according to Eliezer Tsafir, during 1963-1975, Israel had military advisers at the headquarters of Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, and trained and supplied Kurdish units with firearms, field artillery, and anti-aircraft guns. According to a former director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, this was part of a strategy of seeking alliances with other non-Arab nations in the region. Pro-Kurdish feelings were also reinforced by the assistance the Kurds provided in the 1950s when Iraqi Jews were fleeing to Israel.

Israel's clandestine relations with the Kurds were officially acknowledged in 1980 by Prime Minister Menachem Begin. He confirmed that Israel had sent not only humanitarian aid but also military advisers and weapons. Even today, the state-owned Israeli communications company Bezek transmits evening broadcasts on behalf of the KDP in northern Iraq. During the First Gulf War, Jewish organizations launched lobbying campaigns worldwide to aid the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and stop the government's persecutions there. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, called on the United States to defend the Kurds (Neriah, 2012). It is not ruled out that it was thanks to the Kurdish sources and the agents of the former SAVAK, that the Israeli intelligence service gained the needed intelligence about the location of the Iraqi nuclear reactor Tammuz-1 (Osirak) which was destroyed by the Israeli air force in June 1981 (although in this case aerial intelligence proved more valuable) (Фабричников И.2003).

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Mossad and the CIA started to operate in the opposite direction, i.e., from the Kurdish-

populated areas of Iraq (especially, the Mossad) and Turkey against Iran. The published documents of the US embassy in Tehran on the Kurdish question bear witness to the active subversive operations of the Mossad and the CIA in the Kurdish-populated areas of Iran (Жигалина О.1990). In February 1982, Oded Yinon, an Israeli journalist and former foreign ministry attaché, published an article, «A Strategy for Israel in Nineteen Eighties» in the periodic publication of the World Zionist Organization's Information Department, the «Kivunim.». The central idea of the article was that Israel must continue to pursue an active policy aimed at the undermining of Arab states (primarily, internal breakdowns and rifts) by means of ethnic and religious minorities (Minasim.2007). Beyond being a moral issue for the Israelis, the geostrategic value of the northern districts of Iraq for the security of Israel is almost unmatched (Bahgat.2004).

According to Garry Younge, "Israel has always supported the Kurds in a Machiavellian way - a balance against Saddam," one former Israeli intelligence officer told the New Yorker, "it's Realpolitik. By aligning with the Kurds Israel gains eyes and ears in Iran, Iraq and Syria. The critical question is 'What will the behaviour of Iran be if there is an independent Kurdistan with close ties to Israel? Iran does not want an Israeli land-based aircraft carrier on its border. "By supporting Kurdish separatists, Israel also risks alienating its Turkish ally and undermining attempts to create a stable Iraq (Younge.2004).

Cooperation in the Present: The distinctive relations between Israel and the Kurds manifested themselves again during Operation Desert Storm held by the US and coalition forces against Iraq in 1991. It is common knowledge that after the active phase of Operation Desert Storm the allies instigated uprisings against the Baghdad regime in the Shiite South and the Kurdish North. These uprisings were harshly suppressed by government troops. The subsequent reprisals in the North resulted in a humanitarian crisis which turned tens of thousands of Kurds into refugees. All over the world, the Jewish organizations started a

vigorous propaganda and lobbying campaigns to aid the Iraqi Kurds and to exert pressure on Iraq to stop persecutions (Barron.A.1991).

Israel demonstrated its sympathy with the Kurds by means of large-scale supplies of medication and first-aid items through the Turkish-Iraqi border. This campaign was organized by the Israeli community of the Iraqi Jews. The Iraqi Jews even organized a large-scale demonstration at the residence of the Israeli Prime Minister Shamir during the meeting of the latter with the US State Secretary James Baker calling on the US government to defend the Kurds from reprisals (Shahak.2013). In 2004, the Israeli mass media reported on the meetings of Israeli officials with Kurdish political leaders, Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. The Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, also, publicly confirmed good relations with the Iraqi Kurds (Рошан М.С.2004). After this, the cooperation of Israel with the Iraqi Kurds actively developed, beginning in the sphere of security. Lately, according to newly surfaced information, Israeli experts are involved in the training of the Kurdish forces, the Peshmerga (which have transformed from militias into a semi-regular army of the Kurdish autonomy) in Northern Iraq.

Although Israeli officials, the head of the Kurdish administration M. Barzani and the President of Iraq J. Talabani (who is also the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) denied the information disseminated by the Israeli media, the experts have no doubts about it. The Israeli government officially advised the Turkish authorities that even if Israeli citizens trained the Kurdish soldiers in Iraq, they did it without permission, at their own risk (Израиль.2005).

According to Israeli newspapers, dozens of Israelis with a background in elite combat training have been working for private Israeli companies in northern Iraq, helping the Kurds there to establish elite anti-terror units. Reports say that the Kurdish government contracted Israeli security and communications companies to train Kurdish security forces and to provide them

with advanced equipment.

Motorola Inc. (which has a branch in Israel) and Magalcom Communications and Computers have won contracts with the Kurdish government to the tune of hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars. The flagship of these contracts is the construction of an international airport in the

northern Kurdish city of Erbil, a stepping stone toward fulfilling Kurdish aspirations for independence. In addition to Motorola and Magalcom, a company owned by Israeli entrepreneur Shlomi Michaels is in full business partnership with the Kurdish government, providing strategic consultation on economic and security issues. The strategic consultation company was initially established by former Mossad chief Danny Yatom and Michaels, but Yatom sold his shares upon his election to the Knesset.

Tons of equipment, including motorcycles, tractors, sniffer dogs, systems to upgrade Kalashnikov rifles, bulletproof vests, and first-aid items have been shipped to Iraq's northern region, with most products stamped "Made in Israel." The Kurds had insisted that the cooperation be kept a secret, fearing that exposure of the projects would motivate terror groups to target their Jewish guests. Recent warnings that Al-Qaeda might be planning an attack on Kurdish training camps prompted a hasty exit of all Israeli trainers from the northern region. In response to the report, the Defense Ministry said: "We haven't allowed Israelis to work in Iraq, and each activity, if performed, was a private initiative, without our authorization, and is under the responsibility of the employers and the employees involved" (Neriah. 2012).

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From 1963 until the early 1970s, Mossad sent medical aid, military instructors, and weapons to the Iraqi Kurds via Iran. To reciprocate, the Kurds gave Mossad agents intelligence regarding Iraq's military capabilities. All the while, SAVAK remained a very willing partner (Shaoulian-Sopher.2017). As Efron reports: "Israel has maintained discreet military, intelligence, and business ties with the Kurds since the 1960s, partially to create a buffer against common Arab adversaries (primarily Saddam Hussein's Iraq) and Iran (Efron.2018).

Further Signs of Exploitation Through Espionage Against Iran: The aggravation of the Iranian factor is presently a critical element in the dynamics of the Israeli-Kurdish relations. Over the past years, the attempts to conduct covert operations from the territory of Iraq using the organizations in the Kurdish-populated areas of Iran (also, in close cooperation with the American intelligence services) have become a significant component of Israel's «Kurdish strategy». However, in this case, in addition to the goals pursued by Israel in its relations with the Kurds (except the constant imperative, i.e., the weakening of Iran, the change of its theocratic regime, and the reduction of its influence in the region) a new important task has emerged, namely, to obstruct the

development of the Iranian nuclear program by all means. It is thanks to the assistance of the US and Israeli intelligence agencies that the fighters from the Kurdish organizations forming the United Front of the Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan founded in March 2006 in Erbil (Iraqi Kurdistan) infiltrate into the Iranian Kurdistan. These are, in particular, the fighters of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, the Organization for the Struggle of Iranian Kurdistan and the Revolutionary Union of Kurdistan (Iran) attempting to weaken and overthrow the Iranian regime with help from the coalition troops deployed in Iraq (Жигалина О.2006).

Together with the Kurdish troops, the fighters of the Israeli special forces also penetrate the territory of Iran in order to install super-sensitive equipment for the monitoring of the Iranian nuclear and military objectives. In addition, Israel trains the Kurdish special forces for the execution of a mission the American intelligence services failed to accomplish, namely, to infiltrate into the Islamic opposition in Iraq, collect intelligence and liquidate the heads of the Sunni and Shiite «insurgents» in Iraq. Israel also intends to use the Kurdish Peshmerga, numbering at least 75,000, as a force capable of countering both the secular and Islamic opposition in Iraq. The experts from Israel who served in elite forces organized a large training center in the desert areas of Kurdistan where the local Kurdish fighters are trained. The activities of the Israelis in Kurdistan claimed the lives of six Mossad agents in Kirkuk (Northern Iraq), probably killed by the radical Kurdish Islamic group Ansar al-Islam, according to press reports (Лукоянов А.2007).

Patrick Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy suggests, “Israel’s overwhelming national security concern must be Iran (Kibaroglu.2005). Given that a presence in Kurdistan would give Israel a way to monitor the Iranian nuclear effort, Clawson argues, “it would be negligent for the Israelis not to be there” (Hersh.2004). Similarly, a former American senior intelligence official argues that the Israelis’ tie to Kurdistan

“would be of greater value than their growing alliance with Turkey. On the same issue, a former Israeli intelligence officer says “we love Turkey but have got to keep the pressure on Iran ... the Kurds were the last surviving group close to the United States with any say in Iraq. The only question was how to square it with Turkey” (Hersh. 2004). On the whole, it can be stated that at present Israel continues, though semiofficially (through shell firms and organizations), but steadily carry out its military and political penetration to the northern Kurdish-populated regions of Iraq, as well as large-scale economic and infrastructure projects (e.g. the construction of a large modern airport at Erbil.) According to expert estimates, this will enable Israel, in the event of dramatic deterioration of the situation around the Iranian nuclear program (or the expansion clashes in Iraq proper), to use the Kurdish resources and possibilities for rapid response based on Israel’s national interests.

Israel’s Strategic Relations with Turkey: The Israeli attitude to the Kurds was largely dependent on the level of the Israeli-Turkish cooperation. As the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointed out in May 1997, the threat of terrorism unites Turkey and Israel, “Turkey suffers from the PKK terrorist attacks, and we see no difference whatsoever between the PKK terrorism and the terrorism faced by Israel”. This speech by Netanyahu was noteworthy not only for his statement against the establishment of the Kurdish state but also for his words that a peace treaty could not be signed between Syria and Israel unless Damascus stopped supporting the PKK (Washburn.1998). The changing priorities in the security policy of Israel forced the latter to reconsider its attitude to the Turkish Kurds. It was clearly manifested during the Israeli air raid against the PKK in the North of the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon during Operation Grapes of Wrath and by the support provided by the Israeli intelligence service in order to locate and capture the leader of the Turkish Kurds, Abdullah Ocalan (Ахмедов В.2000).

Following in the footsteps of Western countries, Israel had to

take Turkish sensibilities into consideration; Ankara regarded the PKK as a deadly enemy. Jerusalem felt obliged to keep its distance from Kurdish leaders in Turkey, certainly the PKK, so as not to antagonize the Turks and jeopardize their special ties. It should be noted that Israel's strategic relations with Turkey, which reached their peak in the mid- 1990s, coincided with the lowest point of relations between Ankara and the PKK, then engaged in a fierce civil war (Sarhan.2013). Yet for all the Turkish pressure, Jerusalem was long reluctant to denounce Kurdish terrorism. For example, during his visit to Israel in 1993, Turkey's foreign minister Ahmet Çetin raised this demand, but his hosts refused to comply(Gregory. 2003).

In May 1997, however, at the height of the Turkish-Israeli relations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly declared Israel's support for Turkey in its conflict with the PKK. Netanyahu went further and asserted there would be no peace with Damascus unless it ended its support for PKK terrorism (Nachmani.1998). Another low point in the relations between the Israelis and the PKK came in February 1999 following Turkey's capture of Öcalan, for which Israel was partially blamed. Although Jerusalem had adamantly denied accusations of having helped track Öcalan, the suspicion of huge Kurdish demonstrations in front of the Israeli consulate in Berlin, which ended with the killing of three Kurdish protestors. The crisis calmed with no further repercussions, but the PKK has lately demanded an Israeli apology for allegedly handing over Öcalan. Another sour point in relations was the question of ten Israeli-made Heron drones which Jerusalem sold Ankara in 2004 and which the PKK suspected were being used to spy against it (Matthews.2011).

However, after the end of the new US military operation against Iraq in 2003 from which the Kurds probably benefited most, the Turkish press reported that one of the Kurdish leaders was a Jew, and as a result "Israel will soon establish close ties with the de facto Kurdish state in Northern Iraq". For several

weeks, the Turkish mass media actively speculated about this scenario. On February 19, 2003, the famous Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* published an article which claimed that the leader of the KDP, Masud Barzani, was an ethnic Jew and a descendant of an old family of Kurdish rabbis. This article referred to a well-known work, "Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: published back in 1982 and the research done by the Turkish historian Ahmed Ucar who found material about the activities of a Kurdish rabbi named Barzani in the Turkish archival materials dating to the 19th century. The Turkish media believed that Masud Barzani would ostensibly head the new pro-Israeli Kurdish-Jewish state expanding from the Nile to the Euphrates throughout the Biblical Promised Land, including the Kurdish-populated territory of Northern Iraq.

But the author of "The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews", Professor Yona Sabar in her comments on the Turkish publications pointed out that the latter was based on misinterpretation of history. According to Professor Sabar, the 16th century Kurdish rabbi Samuel Adoni was also named "Barzani" which meant that he was a native of Barzan town. He founded a well-known dynasty of the Barzani rabbis represented by the female rabbi A. Barzani. According to the Israeli scholar, it is unlikely that Masud Barzani belonged to this dynasty since Barzani is a common Kurdish surname, besides there are few Jews left in this area of Iraq.

The Jewish historian from Istanbul Rifat Bali also notes that the whole issue about the possible Jewish origin of Masud Barzani is part of the broader theory spread recently in the Turkish conservative, nationalist and Islamist circles, and very popular with the Turkish public. According to him, "the Islamists claim that Israel wants to use the 'Kurdish card' and establish a new Jewish state from the Nile to the Euphrates including the Kurdish regions in Northern Iraq and South- Eastern Turkey; this is coincident with the traditional Turkish fears about the plans to dismember Turkey". Let us also add that a few years ago a book

by Dr. Harun Yahya was published in Turkey, *Israel's Kurdish Card* about Israel's plans to expand its borders at the expense of Iraq and Turkey in an alliance with the Kurds (JTA.2003).

It is absolutely clear that the establishment of the Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq after the 2003 war and the overthrow of S. Hussein's regime led to the commencement of a new stage in the Israeli-Kurdish relations which can be a serious limiting factor for Israel's political contacts with the other states of the region. Nevertheless, «the Kurds count (and quite reasonably) on the support of Israel's state structures, but even more, on the hundred thousand Kurdistan Jews who previously resided in Kurdistan (Minasian.2007). As Jacques Neriah pointed out, "although Turkish-Israeli relations have deteriorated during the rule of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Israeli policy should be based on the eventual restoration of Israeli-Turkish strategic cooperation. Hence Israeli policy toward the Kurdish issue should not undermine the territorial integrity of the Turkish state, or be interpreted in that manner"(Neriah.2012).

Pro-Zionist Approach among Kurdish Groups: The adage that governed Israel's relations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was the opposite of the Barzani-dominated Kurdish Democratic Party. With the PKK, the reality was, "my enemy's friend is my enemy." The PKK's friends were Syria and radical Palestinian groups acting under Damascus's auspices while Israel's long-time friend was Turkey. Thus, relations between Israel and the Kurdish leadership in Turkey have been complicated. PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan has made anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist statements bordering on anti-Semitism. For example, in 2005 he stated, "similar to a second Zionism, the Kurdish collaboration [in the KRG] is about to achieve statehood. The statehood of Kurdish nationalism will be used against Turkey and Iran. I tried to stop this. Our guys are weak [though] ... Similar things had happened in Palestine in 1948. The result [was] grim wars. Just like how they made Israel fight the Arabs, and they devastated the Arabs, the process which is taking place here

is also a policy of let the dog fight the dog (*iti ite kurdirmak*). On the same occasion, he stated: “We want simple rights. If we do so, we shall be able to prevent Kurdish second Zionism”. He also emphasized: “I should not be misunderstood as if I am against Jews here, nor am an anti-Semite. I am for the Jews to take part democratically in the Middle East. [However] Zionism is a different mentality. It always creates its opponent”.

On the practical level, since he was granted asylum by Syria’s Hafez al-Assad in 1979, Öcalan became a Syrian client and a close ally of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). As early as the end of 1979, the PKK had transferred many militants as well as its central leadership to Palestinian camps in Lebanese territory where they trained together with Palestinians and even participated in combat against Israel (Ismet.1992). As Daniel Pipes notes, “in 1982, the PKK proved its mettle by fighting Israeli forces in Lebanon and was rewarded with a large camp in the Bekaa Valley, which became its headquarters”(Pipes.1994). Two dozen PKK members were killed in the Israeli operation in Lebanon that year. According to Ismet G. Imset, after the Israeli destruction of PLO camps in Lebanon, Syria allowed the PKK to train in its own territory (Pipes.1994). In 1991, Öcalan claimed to have “hundreds of camps” in Lebanon, and a reporter witnessed both Palestinians and dissident Turks using PKK facilities (Pipes.1994). Relations with the PKK were also a reflection of Israel’s relations with the West in general and Turkey in particular.

Israel as a Halfway Comrade: Israel’s support played a palpable role in the stages before the referendum and during the event itself, raising the Kurds’ morale by helping them feel they were not alone in their just struggle. However, the Kurds clearly had unrealistic expectations of Israel – particularly their hopes that Jerusalem would persuade the US administration to support the principle of Kurdish independence, and that Israeli military forces would come to the Kurds’ aid if there was a need for it. In both cases they suffered bitter disappointment.

Israel did not seriously try to alter Washington’s position on

the referendum. The US not only did not support the referendum but sided with the Baghdad government in the conflict between Kurdistan and Iraq. The US abandoned the Kurds to their fate, even though they are seen as loyal US allies. When, in the aftermath of the referendum, military clashes erupted between Baghdad and Irbil, many Kurds expected, with a patent lack of realism, that Israel would dispatch aircraft or ground forces to help rebuff the Iraqi attacks, even though Israel has no physical access to the Kurdish enclave. This was a reprise of the severe disappointment the Kurds suffered in 1975, when the Americans abandoned them and Israel had to stop its assistance because of the Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran and the loss of physical access via Iran.

For the second time in four decades, Kurdish hopes have been shattered. Not only has Israeli support seriously damaged the Kurds' image in the Arab and Muslim world, but it has provided a pretext for an unholy anti-Kurdish alliance of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

Conclusion

Based on the elaborated analysis, it would be difficult to argue with the Kurdish proverb, "the Kurds have no friends." The US and Israel, among others, used the Kurds in Iraq for their own ends only to drop them when it no longer served their purposes to continue the relationship. On the other hand, it was the massive international alliance which defeated Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War that led to the current situation in which an embryonic Kurdish state has arisen in northern Iraq.

From the Israeli standpoint, an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq would help dilute regional threats, serving as a buffer against Iranian influence, blocking Iran's design of a "Shi'a crescent" linking Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. An independent Kurdistan will be a base for Israeli operations against Iran, via Iran's Kurdish population.

The argument is based on two pivotal considerations, first

ethnic debate and second Tel Aviv's long term strategy in the region. Based on these, the Kurd issue will be exposed as a marginal not main concern for Israel. Tel Aviv seeks to exploit the Kurdish independence, and it is and will be a half way comrade for Kurdish people, nothing more.

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