

KURDISTAN'S POLITICAL ARMIES: THE CHALLENGE OF UNIFYING THE PESHMERGA FORCES

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On July 23, 2014, just one week after the self-proclaimed Islamic State captured Mosul and marched toward Iraqi Kurdistan's capital, Erbil, the Kurdish parliament instructed the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to unify all of the peshmerga (army) forces in six months. Over a year later, this has still not happened.

The issue of unifying Kurdish military forces has been on the Kurdish region's public agenda since it gained de facto autonomy from then Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991. After waging separate guerrilla wars against the Iraqi army in the 1970s and 1980s, the two main Kurdish political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—formally agreed in 1992 to unify their peshmerga units and integrate them under the authority of a dedicated Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.¹ The outbreak of a bloody Kurdish civil war in 1994 blocked the integration process for several years, but the KDP and the PUK reaffirmed their commitment to unification after signing a peace agreement in 1998. Still, seventeen years later, the various peshmerga forces remain divided along partisan lines.

The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs was reconstituted as a joint body in 2010, but although it presents a veneer of unity, the KDP and the PUK still maintain their separate peshmerga

forces. Both parties, moreover, exert substantial political influence over additional groups that are under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs' nominal authority. On paper, Kurdish President and KDP head Masoud Barzani is the commander in chief of all peshmerga forces, and the PUK's Kosrat Rasul Ali is his deputy. However, Barzani has limited influence over the peshmerga groups in PUK areas, and the same is true for Rasul in relation to the units in KDP regions.

Partisan factionalism has proved to be a major stumbling block to unifying and integrating the peshmerga. No less importantly, this “partisanization” has hindered the establishment of healthy and democratic civil-military relations in Iraqi Kurdistan. Asserting the government's authority over the peshmerga, rather than that of the parties' Political Bureaus, is crucial but unlikely to be fully achieved so long as the peshmerga groups continue to function as vehicles for political patronage by the KDP and the PUK.

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The challenges of unifying and depoliticizing the peshmerga became urgent following the launch of the Islamic State's major Iraqi offensive in June 2014. Worsening political and financial relations with Baghdad—on which the KRG depends for budget transfers—has made the unification issue more critical. In response, Gorran, a new, reformist political party that emerged in 2009 as the main competitor to the KDP and the PUK, has led the call to end the peshmerga's partisan division, and the party has firmly placed the development of a fundamentally new civil-military relationship back on the public agenda. Until these issues are resolved, Iraqi Kurdistan cannot become a consolidated democracy, preventing it from eventually winning international recognition as an independent state.

THE IMPACT OF PARTY POLITICS

The politics of peshmerga unification and attempted reform have been shaped by the evolution of the power-sharing system of political governance between the KDP and the PUK.² In the latter half of the 1970s and into the 1980s, these two political parties used their peshmerga forces to fight not only the Iraqi government but also each other. Following the end of the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent unification agreement in 1992, the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah came under the Kurds' political control and Kurdish leaders declared the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

General elections in the Kurdish region in May 1992 saw Barzani's KDP and Jalal Talabani's PUK win an almost-equal share of the Kurdish vote,³ with no other parties winning seats. As part of a 50-50 power-sharing agreement, ministerial posts in the KRG were split evenly between the KDP and the PUK. This meant that PUK ministers had KDP deputies, and vice versa. The Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA), which became the Kurdish parliament in 2009, subsequently passed law no. 5 on the peshmerga, transforming the peshmerga's status from a political party militia to a regular armed force under a united government. The KNA also prohibited political parties from maintaining their own private militias or armed groups.⁴ As part of both parties' unification pledges,

joint PUK-KDP brigades (now called Regional Guard Brigades, or RGBs) were created in the summer, and a unified Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs was established with the PUK's Jabar Farman as its first minister.⁵

But political cooperation between the KDP and the PUK in the framework of a unified government proved elusive. In 1994, violent clashes erupted between the parties over sharing customs revenues, power, and territory. Relations deteriorated to such an extent that the KDP struck a deal with Saddam Hussein to obtain the help of Iraqi soldiers and tanks to force the PUK out of Erbil, justifying this on the grounds that the PUK was receiving Iranian support. A bloody civil war ensued, and the hitherto unified peshmerga forces returned to their respective KDP and PUK camps. Since then, each party has had its own governing institutions and ministries, including parallel peshmerga units.

The Kurdish civil war ended when the KDP and the PUK signed the Washington Agreement in September 1998. With peace established, the parties resumed shared governance of Iraqi Kurdistan through the KRG, and they pledged to again merge their peshmerga forces under the Regional Guard Brigades.⁶ Despite this facade of unity, the KRG remained divided between two zones of control from 1996 to 2006. The PUK controlled a green zone encompassing Sulaymaniyah Province, while the KDP controlled a yellow zone spanning Erbil and Dohuk Provinces. But to ensure continued U.S. assistance, both parties expressed public support for unifying their peshmerga forces under one depoliticized body.⁷

SOME PROGRESS TOWARD UNIFICATION AFTER 2003

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 generated a renewed sense of urgency about peshmerga unification. Both the KDP and the PUK recognized that they could benefit more from the post-Saddam political vacuum by using unification as a means to obtain increased U.S. support and to secure funding from the Iraqi government. The parties made an initial show of unity through a cooperative division of labor—with

the PUK commanding all Kurdish forces in Kirkuk and the KDP supervising all peshmerga groups fighting around Mosul during U.S. operations against Saddam Hussein's forces there.⁸

On the political side, a joint KDP-PUK list won 85.2 percent of the vote in the 2005 Kurdistan election, and Barzani was sworn in as KRG president in June 2005.⁹ The following year, Barzani and Talabani signed the KRG Unification Agreement to overcome past differences between their respective parties.¹⁰ The agreement reestablished and formalized the 50-50 power-sharing deal between the PUK and the KDP.¹¹

The KRG Unification Agreement of 2006 divided ministerial posts evenly between the two major parties, and article 7 of the agreement stipulated the depoliticization of the Kurdish armed forces. It also said that a "Supreme Commission to institutionalize the police and security agencies of the Kurdistan Region" was to be established.¹² But although Barzani alongside the PUK's then deputy secretary general, Nawshirwan Mustafa, and Vice President Kosrat Rasul Ali reiterated the commitment to forging a single Kurdish army, all deadlines have been missed, including the one Barzani set in a renewed pledge in 2012 to complete the integration of all peshmerga forces by the end of that year. Ministerial control over the peshmerga has continued to be divided between the KDP's yellow and the PUK's green zones of control.

However, some progress toward political and military integration has apparently been made. The party-controlled ministries were merged into unified KRG ministries in 2009.¹³ Since January 2010, fourteen integrated and—in principle—apolitical RGBs, comprising about 40,000 peshmerga fighters, have been formed and nominally brought under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs' authority.¹⁴

PESHMERGA DIVISIONS PERSIST

Outside the RGBs and the intelligence and internal security agencies, there are still about 120,000 peshmerga fighters—mostly in the PUK's 70 Unit and the KDP's 80 Unit—who

remain under the direct control of their respective Political Bureaus, not the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.¹⁵ The PUK's Emergency Force and the KDP's Zerevani units are de facto peshmerga forces, despite being under the Interior Ministry's control. Adding to the complexity, the Interior Ministry is led by a KDP member, whereas a Gorran minister has headed the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs since June 18, 2014.

Both forces are now deployed on Kurdistan's front lines with the Islamic State: Zerevani in the KDP's zones and the Emergency Force in the PUK's zones. The approximately 1,050-kilometer front line (over 650 miles) between Kurdish and Islamic State forces is divided into eight sectors, which are split evenly between the PUK and the KDP.¹⁶ The KDP's Asayish, 80 Unit, and Zerevani forces are deployed in traditional KDP-controlled areas, like Gwer, Makhmour, and Sinjar, near Mosul and Erbil. The PUK has deployed its Counter Terror Group, Asayish, 70 Unit, and Emergency Force units around Kirkuk and Diyala. Although the two parties generally respect each other's established zones, relations between them remain tense in territories such as Kirkuk and Sinjar. The fourteen so-called integrated RGBs are still internally organized on the basis of the 50-50 power-sharing principle, and command positions and promotions are similarly split. Brigades headed by KDP commanders have PUK deputy commanders, and vice versa.¹⁷ Moreover, ground operations are designed and executed to comply with traditional KDP and PUK zones of influence, under sector commanders who are not appointed by the minister of peshmerga affairs but by their respective parties.¹⁸

As a result, KDP and PUK sectors along the KRG's borders often have contrasting policies and operational practices. For example, sector five, led by Kemal Kerkuki, who is a KDP official and a peshmerga commander, accepts Iranian-Kurdish fighters but refuses Western volunteers for the fight against the Islamic State, whereas his PUK counterpart in the neighboring sector four accepts Western volunteers.¹⁹ As this and many other examples show, the peshmerga groups lack a standard policy with regard to many of the details of everyday operating procedures.

The peshmerga forces remain deeply partisan. As veteran peshmerga commander Mohammed Haji Mahmoud explained:

“If you go there [to the front lines], all forces are the same. If you know someone personally, you can know [if] he is KDP or PUK. They all listen to their specified commanders of their area of operation. But as far as unification is concerned, this is not a unified force. They are a forced mixed together from the parties. We should make a force not based on political parties. Despite all of them fighting in a united front, when the political parties call them back, they will go back to the respective parties. . . . We have the experience from 1992; we had a similar force, but when civil war broke [out] in 1994, each of these members of these forces went back to their own parties.”²⁰

Partisan control has also enabled both the KDP and the PUK to use their armed wings to crush local dissent. For example, KDP security forces fired on antigovernment protesters in Sulaymaniyah on February 18, 2011,²¹ and the PUK later used its own security forces to break up these protests.²² These heavy-handed measures prompted criticism from all of the opposition parties in the KRG parliament and led to renewed calls to reform state institutions and create independent and nonpolitical security forces.²³

THE REFORMISTS' TRAVAILS

A serious challenge to the partisan character of Kurdistan's security forces came when the newly established opposition party Gorran (meaning “Change”) won 25 of 111 parliamentary seats in the July 2009 Kurdistan election. Created only months earlier, Gorran's main goals were to delink the KRG's bureaucracy from the political parties, end corruption, and transform the military wings of the KDP and the PUK into a nonpartisan state military.²⁴ Owing to its stellar electoral performance, Gorran was brought into the

KDP-PUK coalition government and, in April 2014, given the portfolios of peshmerga affairs, finance and the economy, trade and industry, and endowment and religious affairs.²⁵

Even so, Gorran's reformist program has been consistently thwarted, not least in relation to the peshmerga. As a party without its own military wing, Gorran has lacked the clout needed to integrate the units nominally under the ministry's authority, depriving the minister of decisionmaking power and reducing him to the role of a mere representative or spokesman.²⁶ Combat officers continue to report to and take orders from their party leaders—who alone control the deployment of forces loyal to them and appoint frontline and sector commanders.²⁷ Moreover, KDP officials led by Barzani dominate the General Command Staff, severely limiting the minister's influence.²⁸

Gorran has also faced political pushback in public, with President Barzani complaining that, “Unfortunately there are now voices in the Kurdistan region and in the Kurdish parliament that call the Kurdish forces militias and doubt the legality of these troops,” and adding “those who today have the guts to denigrate the name of the Peshmergas, will tomorrow also do this with the names of martyrs.”²⁹ More worrying is that criticism of Gorran has reflected a more general lack of acceptance of the legal authority of a government official who did not belong to either the KDP or the PUK, despite the nominal veneer of national unity. Civil-military relations have remained flawed as a result. In another sign of pushback against Gorran, PUK security forces detained six of its election observers in May 2014, accusing them of tampering with the ballots and subsequently broadcasting their alleged confessions online.³⁰

PATRONAGE POLITICS: A ROADBLOCK TO INTEGRATIONS

In an interview in April 2015, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, Jabbar Yawar, ruefully conceded that “until now, the laws of the parliament couldn't achieve

the unification.”³¹ The personalized and clientelistic nature of power in the KRG political system is one main reason behind the lack of progress in integrating and depoliticizing Kurdistan’s security forces.³² Holding office is used to enhance personal partisan power and to maintain the loyalty of one’s followers. Indeed, most of the parties’ Political Bureau members have their own private protection forces or peshmerga units.³³

PUK leader Kosrat Rasul Ali, for example, has his own protection brigade called Hezekani Kosrat Rasul, which is made up of between 2,000 and 3,000 peshmerga fighters.³⁴ Similarly, the PUK’s Bafel Talabani (one of Jalal Talabani’s sons) commands his own antiterror force that is not controlled by any ministry.³⁵ The KDP’s Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister of the KRG, also has his own personal security force, which secured the oil fields in Kirkuk in July 2014. In addition to these assorted units, there are two PUK presidential peshmerga brigades personally controlled by Jalal Talabani or his wife, Hero Ibrahim Ahmed.³⁶

The personalization of power rests on an extensive system of patronage that was built by the KDP and the PUK, based on government employment. Of a total Kurdish population of 4.5 million in Iraqi Kurdistan, 1 million reportedly work in some capacity for the KRG.³⁷ In this patronage system, peshmerga units are used as vehicles for distributing economic services and resources in exchange for political support. This practice dates back to 1992, when the main parties were the only significant employers in Kurdistan; enlisting as a peshmerga fighter was the only available job for many youth.³⁸ This practice continued and even intensified after the KRG was recognized in the Iraqi constitution in 2003.

Clientelism also helps explain the huge increase in the number of peshmerga members over the years. After 1992, the KDP had between 15,000 and 25,000 full-time fighters and an auxiliary force of another 25,000. The PUK had a smaller force of about 18,000 fighters.³⁹ The combined number of peshmerga soldiers in Kurdistan had grown upward of 120,000 fighters and 70,000 reservists by 2007, reflecting the continuing expansion of patronage-based recruitment.⁴⁰ As

salaries are paid through partisan commanders rather than apolitical ministries, peshmerga soldiers are directly connected to and controlled by the main political parties rather than by state institutions.

The clientelistic system is highly dependent, as is the KRG’s general budget, on oil revenue transfers from the Iraqi government in Baghdad. The KRG’s defense budget, which accounts for 17 percent of the KRG’s total revenue, is used to pay all of the autonomous region’s security forces, including special police units under both parties’ control. However, deteriorating relations with Baghdad in recent years have frustrated the routine transfer of agreed funds. Before transfers were cut entirely in January 2014, security and defense allocations were, in theory, paid by Baghdad directly to the KRG’s Peshmerga Affairs and Interior Ministries, which in turn distributed the money to the commanders of the unified brigades and the private security forces of the PUK and the KDP, like Asayish, the Counter Terror Group, and Zerevani.

Besides financial unpredictability, the KRG suffers from a general lack of basic and accurate logistical bookkeeping, giving rise to ambiguity about the actual strength of peshmerga forces and generating opportunities for corruption. Some officers admit to not knowing how many personnel they have under their command, while others claim more men in their units than they have in reality. This reflects the practice of collecting the salaries of so-called ghost soldiers, who are either deceased fighters or nonexistent individuals.⁴¹ According to a Kurdish parliamentarian, one government official had registered 200 bodyguards on the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs’ payroll, but nobody could verify whether these individuals even existed.⁴²

The clientelistic system remains an effective mechanism for harnessing political support for the PUK and the KDP, which is precisely why the Gorran party campaigned vigorously against it in the 2013 election.⁴³ It is unlikely that either of the major parties will want to dismantle this system because they regard their respective security forces as the ultimate

guarantee to maintaining political power. This will continue to outweigh whatever benefits may come from unifying, integrating, and depoliticizing the peshmerga forces for the foreseeable future.

A LEGACY OF MUTUAL SUSPICION AND MISTRUST

Grievances and animosities rooted in the Kurdish civil war also pose one of the main impediments to genuine integration and depoliticization. The civil war claimed upward of 2,000 lives, leaving bitter memories on both sides that are not easily erased by political reconciliation.⁴⁴ The KDP's temporary alliance with Saddam Hussein to expel the PUK from Erbil in 1996 is still remembered as a grave betrayal; conversely, many KDP members recall being driven out of other territories by the PUK. In part for these reasons, each side keeps a portion of its own forces under direct party control as a final guarantee to maintain the balance of power.⁴⁵

This distrust extends to the foreign relations of each party. The mutual suspicion that the rival party is pursuing the interests of its regional patron stymies any genuine progress toward consolidating the peshmerga forces. While the PUK maintains good relations with Iran and has coordinated its peshmerga operations with Shia militias controlled by Iran in Diyala Province,⁴⁶ the KDP has built good political and economic relations with Turkey since 2009,⁴⁷ and its forces are being trained by Turkish Special Forces in the Kurdish city of Zakho.⁴⁸

Mutual mistrust is problematic because many former peshmerga commanders from the civil war continue to hold senior positions in KRG ministries and security agencies. This helps explain why the PUK stopped the integration of its military units into the Regional Guard Brigades after Gorran's Mustafa Sayid Qadir became minister of peshmerga affairs in June 2014, for example.⁴⁹

Similarly, although the interior security and intelligence agencies of the PUK and the KDP were officially united in 2012 under the Security Council of the Kurdistan Region,⁵⁰ they

reportedly still are internally divided along party lines, monitor each other's activities, and even arrest rival party members on occasion.⁵¹ In this atmosphere of mistrust, a complete and genuine integration of peshmerga forces is unlikely to happen so long as the PUK and the KDP continue to perceive their security forces as some sort of final line of defense against their fellow Kurdish political rivals.

THE ISLAMIC STATE FACTOR

In August 2014, the Islamic State launched offensives in key areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, initially overrunning peshmerga positions until U.S. airstrikes and peshmerga counterattacks halted the advance. Since then, the peshmerga and other Kurdish military formations have been among of the most successful ground forces fighting the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Even so, the group's rapid territorial conquests exacerbated the long-standing mistrust between the two main Kurdish parties, each of which has tried to take advantage of the vacuum of central government authority in large areas of northern Iraq. That in turn has aggravated territorial contestation between the two parties. Indeed, when both KDP and PUK peshmerga forces were overly concentrated around the city of Kirkuk—due to their competition for control over the oil-rich province—the KDP's front lines in western parts of Mosul were left understaffed, contributing to the ease with which Mosul fell to the Islamic State.⁵²

The KDP and the PUK are also engaged in counterproductive one-upmanship. For example, PUK-affiliated media outlets blamed the KDP forces for withdrawing from the crucial border area of Sinjar without a fight, thereby facilitating the massacre of Yazidi civilians and the enslavement of Yazidi women.⁵³ They also credited the PUK's counterterrorism force and the Kurdistan Workers' Party,⁵⁴ which has entrenched itself and established a political and military presence in KDP-dominated areas, with retaking the town of Makhmour.⁵⁵ In response, the KDP accused the PUK of seeking propaganda gains.⁵⁶

The Islamic State revealed in an issue of its monthly magazine that it is aware of these political cleavages and plans to exacerbate intra-Kurdish rivalries to its advantage.⁵⁷ The PUK

and the KDP's media tactics have hardly been conducive to the spirit of unity that a complete and genuine integration of Kurdistan's security forces requires. The peshmerga forces are an immense source of pride for Iraqi Kurds across a broad political spectrum, and speaking disparagingly about the bravery and effectiveness of the other party's peshmerga units is nothing short of provocative.

CONCLUSION: CURRENT CHALLENGES, FUTURE RISKS?

Beneath the KRG's facade, Kurdistan's political system is, at best, a flawed democracy. The 50-50 power-sharing agreement between the KDP and the PUK, the partisan disregard for rival government ministers, and the political deal making outside parliamentary discussion and debate are all undemocratic practices that frequently override the will of the people. The KDP and the PUK fear a more representative system because it would place them at the full mercy of election results. Either party could, in theory, lose most of its political power and relevance at the voting booths. As Jabbar Yawar explained, "Political parties still haven't convinced themselves to completely give up their forces at once. . . . There are some peshmerga figures in the PUK and KDP leadership who believe that having military forces [under party control] brings you political power, and this makes it very hard for them to contribute forces to the unification."⁵⁸

Whatever political benefits these structures and practices have given to the main political parties will not last indefinitely. The sharp drop in the price of oil from late 2014 onward, the region's faltering economy, and the KRG's continued financial dependence on Baghdad make its governance model unsustainable. Budget constraints will also increasingly restrain the KRG's ability to maintain its bloated partisan security forces—including the various private militias and ghost soldiers.

To effectively integrate Kurdistan's security forces, the private militias of politicians and the separate KDP and PUK forces—such as Zerevani, the Emergency Force, and Units 70 and 80—must first be disbanded. Integration should then extend to encompass the security police and intelligence forces on

a nonpartisan basis, along with cutting the inflated salaries of their KDP and PUK commanders. Following that, the two parties should retire the old guard of partisan peshmerga fighters who date from the civil war, reorganizing the KRG's front lines with the Islamic State on a nonpartisan basis rather than maintaining the division into PUK- and KDP-controlled zones. Lastly, the PUK and the KDP should end party influence over peshmerga forces, their deployment, and their operations and relinquish these powers to the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.

In the long run, the U.S.-led coalition could further support the integration process by helping to establish a nonpartisan military academy and abolish the separate KDP and PUK academies in Zakho and Qalasholan. This could have the added benefit of enticing Kurdish recruits who are already nonpartisan. Paying peshmerga salaries directly through the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs would also contribute greatly to ending the clientelistic system by preventing PUK and KDP commanders from controlling payments to buy support.

Most of these recommendations will be difficult to implement while the political uncertainty in the region continues. The incumbent parties in the KRG are likely to resist any reforms as long as there is no lasting agreement over the fate of the disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil, and if Kurdistan's political status as either part of Iraq or an independent state is unresolved. The Kurdish parties use this political uncertainty and the tensions with Baghdad over the KRG's budget and disputed territories as a convenient excuse to resist reforms and to maintain political party militias. But in an eventual post-Islamic State scenario, the West is also unlikely to support full Kurdish independence from Iraq so long as its politics are dominated by militarized parties, bipartisan tribalism, and dysfunctional civil-military relations.

NOTES

- 1 The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs was a PUK invention in 1995 and remained as such until 2005 when the two groups of peshmerga were united under the current name: Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.
- 2 The Kurdistan Democratic Party was founded by tribal leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani in 1946. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan was created by former KDP members Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed in 1975. The PUK split from the KDP due to differences between Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the urban intelligentsia led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talabani.
- 3 Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (New York: Walker and Company, 2009), 66.
- 4 Dennis P. Chapman, "Security Forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 2009), 99, <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA510826>; and interview with Jabbar Yawar, peshmerga spokesperson, Erbil, April 2015.
- 5 Chapman, "Security Forces," 97.
- 6 U.S. Department of State, "Northern Iraq: KDP and PUK to Unify Administrations and Peshmerga, Turkmen Participate in Irbil Protest, PUK Complains of ITF Incitement," March 4, 2003, published by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2003/03/03ANKARA1391.html>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Lawrence, *Invisible Nation*, 186.
- 9 "Iraqi Kurdistan Leader Sworn In," BBC News, June 14, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4092926.stm.
- 10 KRG Representation in Austria, "The Kurdistan Regional Government Unification Agreement 2006," November 14, 2013, <http://austria.krg.org/en/das-vereinigungsabkommen-der-kurdischen-regionalregierung-2006/>.
- 11 For a copy of the entire agreement, see Kurdistan Regional Government, "Kurdistan Regional Government Unification Agreement," January 23, 2006, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=223&l=12&a=8891&s=02010100&cs=010000>.
- 12 See article 7 of Kurdistan Regional Government, "Unification Agreement," <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=223&l=12&a=8891&s=02010100&cs=010000>. It is also stipulated in article 7 of the agreement that Kurdistan's security forces should recruit university graduates in order to ensure they remain nonpartisan in the future.
- 13 See GlobalSecurity.org, "Kurdish Security Forces (KSF)," last modified December 1, 2012, www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/ksf.htm.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 According to Peshmerga Affairs Minister Mustafa Sayid Qadir, there are also approximately 60,000 peshmerga members as reservists. Martin Gehlen, "Mustafa Sajid Qadir: Wenn wir Mosul befreien, tun wir das nicht nur für uns" [Mustafa Sayid Qadir: If we liberate Mosul, we do not do this only for us], *Zeit Online*, April 23, 2015, www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-04/peschmerga-irak-mustafa-sayid-qadir/komplettansicht.
- 16 Interview with Jabbar Yawar, peshmerga spokesperson, Erbil, April 2015.
- 17 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict*, Middle East Report, no. 158 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 12, 2015), 10, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.aspx.
- 18 Verena Gruber, "Revisiting Civil-Military Relations Theory: A Case of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq" (master's thesis, Lund University, 2015), 44, www.academia.edu/11961201/Revisiting_Civil-Military_Relations_Theory_-_a_case_of_the_Kurdish_Regional_Government_of_Iraq.
- 19 Interview with Kemal Kerkuki, a prominent KDP politician and peshmerga commander, May 2015.
- 20 Interviews with Araz Abdulqadir, Ninth Brigade commander, May 2015; and Mohammed Haji Mahmoud, head of the Kurdistan Socialist Party and veteran peshmerga fighter, Sulaymaniyah, March 2015.
- 21 "Kurdish Security Fires on Protesters in North Iraq," Al Arabiya, February 18, 2011, www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/02/18/138171.html.
- 22 Scott Peterson, "Arab Spring Crackdown Damages Kurdistan's Image as Regional Model," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 2, 2011, www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0701/Arab-Spring-crackdown-damages-Kurdistan-s-image-as-regional-model.
- 23 This includes Gorran (25 seats), and also Islamic parties such as the Kurdistan Islamic Group (four seats) and the Islamic Union of Kurdistan (six seats).
- 24 Ali Hama Salih, "Challenges Gorran Movement Faces: Rule in KRG's Eighth Cabinet," Kurdish News Network, April 18, 2014, <http://knnc.net/en/full-story-26876-31-False#.VWSFmGSeDGc>.
- 25 "New Ministers Join KRG Cabinet, Others to Keep Their Posts," Rudaw, April 14, 2014, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/140420142>.

- 26 ICG, *Arming Iraq's Kurds*, 9.
- 27 See ICG, *Arming Iraq's Kurds*, 10, and Gruber, "Revisiting Civil-Military Relations," 44.
- 28 According to Verena Gruber's thesis, the General Command Staff consists of KRG President Barzani as head (KDP), with Sheikh Jafar Mustafa head of 70 forces (PUK), Faruq Zirwan head of 80 forces (KDP), Minister of Peshmerga Affairs Mustafa Sayid Qadir (Gorran), Minister of Interior Karim Sinjar (KDP), and Security Council head Masrour Barzani (KDP). This means four out of six are members of the KDP. Gruber, "Revisiting Civil-Military Relations," 27.
- 29 "Kurdistan President Fiercely Criticizes Kurdish Opposition Party," Rudaw, published by *E Kurd Daily*, February 14, 2010, www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2010/2/independentstate3558.htm.
- 30 "Talabani's Militia and PUK Media's Dangerous Plan to Change Election Results," Kurdish News Network, May 4, 2014, <http://knnc.net/en/full-story-27518-28-False#.VWSlxmSeDGc>. Also see "PUK, Gorran Agree on Cooperation, Dialogue," Rudaw, May 7, 2014, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/07052014>. The political row between Gorran and the main parties escalated to very serious levels in October 2015. On October 12, the KDP suspended all Gorran members in the Kurdistan Regional Government. This move came after Gorran had discovered that the KDP had been rallying other parties in secret to support an extension of Masoud Barzani's term in office. In response, Gorran called for a reduction of all of Barzani's power and an amendment of the law to this effect. However, the KDP used civil unrest and the burning of KDP offices in Sulaymaniyah Province as a pretext for imposing a suspension on all Gorran members of government and dismissing the Gorran peshmerga minister and his adviser, Saeed Kakei, from the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. See Sardar Aziz, "The Spectre of the Dictator in the Kurdistan Regional Government," *Pasewan*, October 25, 2015, <http://pasewan.com/blog/2015/the-spectre-of-the-dictator-in-the-kurdistan-regional-government/>.
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