

# 1972-1975, Iraq: The Fine Art of Betraying Kurds

At the end of World War II, Kurds in northern Iran briefly set up their own republic. But the government in Tehran soon crushed this experiment, with the backing of the U.S. and Britain.

In the early 1970s, as tensions between Iran and its neighbor Iraq increased, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger agreed to support a plan devised by the Shah of Iran to encourage an uprising by Kurds in Iraq. By 1975, Kissinger had secretly channeled \$16 million in military aid to the Kurds, who believed that Washington was finally supporting their right to self-determination.

But the following year, the U.S. House Select Committee on Intelligence issued the Pike report, which revealed that the U.S. never had any intention of supporting a Kurdish state. "Documents in the Committee's possession clearly show that the President [Richard Nixon], Dr. Kissinger and the foreign head of state [the Shah of Iran] hoped that our clients [the Kurds] would not prevail," the report concluded. "They preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighboring country [Iraq]. This policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting."

However, in 1975, after Iran and Iraq resolved their border dispute at the summit of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Iraqi government was told that U.S. support for the Kurds would now be withdrawn. The Iraqis immediately launched an aggressive campaign against Kurdish rebels. "The insurgents were clearly taken by surprise," the congressional Pike Commission



Mustafa Barzani

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reported. "Their adversaries, knowing of the impending aid cut-off, launched an all-out search-and-destroy campaign the day after the agreement [with Iran] was signed. The autonomy movement was over, and our former clients scattered before the [Iraqi] central government's superior forces."

As Iraq wiped out the remaining rebels, the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani sent a message to Kissinger. "Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way, with silence from everyone.... We feel, your excellency, that the United States has a moral and political responsibility towards our people, who have committed themselves to your country's policy." Kissinger, however, thought otherwise, and sent no reply.

According to the Pike report, "Over 200,000 refugees managed to escape into Iran. Once there however,

neither the United States nor Iran extended adequate humanitarian assistance. In fact, Iran was later to forcibly return over 40,000 of the refugees, and the United States government refused to admit even one refugee into the United States by way of political asylum, even though they qualified for such admittance."

As usual, Kissinger had no trouble justifying this cold-hearted behavior. "Covert action," he explained to a congressional staffer, "should not be confused with missionary work." As the Pike report concluded, "Even in the context of covert actions, ours was a cynical enterprise."

**Source:** "The West's long record of betrayal: Will a U.S. war free the Kurds?" January 17, 2003. <[www.socialistworker.org/2003-1/436/436\\_10\\_Kurds.shtml](http://www.socialistworker.org/2003-1/436/436_10_Kurds.shtml)>

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