

The New Kurdish Protectorate

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lthough it is not exactly what is called a "protectorate" in international law, the regime that the allies established in Iraq in the month of April, north of the 36th parallel, to guarantee the safety of the Kurdish people and to enable them to go back to their homes or to the camps that were built to shelter them, is a protectorate.

If we add the 15 kilometre security area created in the south of the country, at the border between Iraq and Iran, according to Resolution 687 of April 3, which regulates the cease-fire of the Gulf war, and the total control over the Iraqi air space by the US air force, it is obvious that, although great efforts have been made at an international level to avoid the division of the country, the partition of Iraq is now a fact.

This situation is not the product of a secret plan, but rather the unexpected result of the civil war that followed Iraq's defeat in Kuwait, and of the pressing necessity of international society to take action without delay, in order to avoid the death of hundreds of thousands of Kurds and Shi'ites. The general flight in disastrous conditions towards the borders of Turkey and Iran, filmed daily by Western television crews, forced the allied governments, with Great Britain and France on the front line, to break the agreement not to intervene in Iraqi internal problems.

Without television, the destiny of the Kurdish people today would have been the same as that of their fathers in 1974 and 1975, or that of the Armenians in 1915. We have, in a few weeks, found ourselves leaving aside the principle of no interference that was adopted by the post-war international community, and going back to the "duty to intervene", a nineteenth century practice believed to be out of date.

The Bush administration, which led firmly the 39-nation coalition against Iraq, this time has been towed by the events for which, as American National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft said, "we were not ready". The United States was not the only one that was not ready.

Turkey, which was always against the establishing of a Kurdish entity in Iraq because it was afraid of the contagious effect it could have on its 15 million Kurds, is now in favour of the idea. Even Iran and Syria accept the Kurdish protectorate, now, as long as it stays in the hands of the United Nations rather than Western armies and as long as it stays an autonomous region inside Iraq rather than becoming an independent state. These objectives are shared by the Western powers that apparently still do not see Iran and Syria's interest in having a territory such as Kurdistan, if it were to be an ally of Tehran and Damascus against Baghdad, to connect them at the north of Iraq.

The massive revolt of Kurds and Shi'ites against Saddam just after the end of the Gulf war and the brutal repression that stopped the revolts and the exodus of a couple of million Iraqis towards Iran and Turkey for fear of retaliation on the part of Baghdad's army could have been expected, but not the speed and dimension they actually had. It is obvious that there was a lack of precautionary measures, but any possible precaution would have been too little for the human avalanche that escaped from Saddam's soldiers.

The surprise, the lack of adequate means to respond, the fear of Iraq's partition by both the Arabs and the Western countries, Syria's, Turkey's, and Arabia's opposition to a Kurdish regime in Baghdad, either Shi'ite or mixed; the United States' fear to find itself involved in a second Vietnam and the growing pressure on the part of the European allies and of the public opinion to do

something quickly for the victims of Iraqi repression, explain the US government's zigzag policy in Iraq from the moment the international war made for the civil war.

About eighteen thousand Western soldiers (10,000 from the US, 5,000 from Great Britain, 1,300 from France, 1,000 from Holland, 500 from Italy, 500 from Belgium and 500 from Spain) that have been building and protecting the Kurdish refugees' camps in the north of Iraq since the end of April, are to be replaced by United Nations' forces. This replacement will take time, new negotiations with Baghdad's government and intensive debates in the Security Council. The two thousand Germans that were sent to the north of Iran for the same purpose are not part of the same operation; they act independently, according to a bilateral agreement reached between Bonn and Tehran.

After having been left alone to face a much stronger and better armed army, such as the Iraqi army, the refugees will only go back to their abandoned villages and cities in Kurdistan and in the south of Iraq when they feel secure; and this security they can only get from the allied soldiers. They will not trust an UN international police such as the one that the European Community proposed on April 28 at the request of London, unless the role of such a police is made very clear, and unless it is backed by the commitment, on the part of the Security Council, to intervene immediately in case Saddam's soldiers try again to take control of the territory that is now a protectorate. This is the most immediate consequence of the Gulf war. Strangely enough, almost nobody foresaw it.

Wishful thinking

Only a few wars, apart from Second World War, involved the whole world. Therefore, to win a war does not mean to destroy the enemy but rather to reach one's goals, which have no reason to include, and almost never do, the complete and final defeat of the enemy.

If we look at it this way, the Western and Arab allies that faced Baghdad's army in the Gulf war to drive it from Kuwait and eliminated the possibility of it

ever repeating aggressive actions outside the country indeed reached a great victory. They fully complied with the goals they had defined and limited in the Security Council's twelve resolutions that were approved between August 2 and November 29, 1990.

As any other war, the Gulf war had both positive and negative aspects, and it will only have been worth its costs if its negative aspects helped to avoid even worse events.

In a commentary published in the *International Herald Tribune* on April 22, Zbigniew Brzezinski, US National Security Adviser under Jimmy Carter, points out four positive consequences of the war, as well as four negative ones. The positive ones are the non-acceptance and the punishment of the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait, the transformation of the Middle East and of the Persian Gulf into an "area of American preponderance", the role of "simple spectator" played by the USSR and the deterrent effect, on other dictatorships that might be tempted by similar adventures, of the "strategic and military virtuosity" and the firmness shown by the United States.

We should add the disappearance of a very important factor of uncertainty in international economics, the renewed security of the financial market and the oil market, and the fact that the American leaders and people have overcome the "Vietnam syndrome".

Some consequences that are more difficult to consolidate but that could exist anyway are: a regional peace conference for the Middle East like the one promoted by the American Secretary of State, James Baker, during his three trips in the area between February 28, the day when President Bush ordered the cease-fire, and April 26; a plan, like the one suggested by the British Prime Minister John Major, to limit the exportation of arms, according to a United Nations register; the drive towards democracy and the requests for freedom and for a multi-party system in absolutist royalist regimes like the Kuwaiti one and in a nationalist and secular totalitarian system, disguised as pan-Arabism to conceal the expansionist interests, like the one represented by the Iraqi Ba'th Party. Even King Fahd in Saudi Arabia was able to have the signatures of 43 important

businessmen and intellectuals in a letter asking him to create municipal and national consultative councils to allow a better administration of the kingdom.

Among the negative consequences of the war, Brzezinski gives the revival of Iran as the "most immediate regional beneficiary" of Iraq's collapse; a permanent military presence of the United States in the area; the intensification of ethnic, religious and tribal tensions in the area, and the consequent danger of a situation analogous to that of Lebanon, and the possible excesses of the air offensive that, in the opinion of the professor of Polish origin, "can be seen as evidence of the fact that Americans do not care much about the Arabs' lives".

This last possibility excluded a measured allied military response to Iraqi aggression, but, still, it is what Americans call "wishful thinking". The documented evidence that Brzezinski (championed by him and many others throughout the crisis—the possibility of an indefinite embargo instead of a military intervention) used most is the report on the Iraqi internal situation written by Marti Ahtisari (Finland) after an observation mission at the beginning of March, as soon as the war ended.

According to the delegation directed by the Finnish diplomat "most of today's means of survival such as food supplies, electrical generating systems, water purification systems, waste removal and sewerage treatment plants have either been destroyed or unused". Their conclusion is that "the almost apocalyptic effects of the bombs brought Iraq back to the pre-industrial era".

The catastrophe described by Ahtisari not only in Iraq, but also in Kuwait, was tragically aggravated, in March and April, by the Kurds' and Shi'ites' unsuccessful revolts, and by the new huge violations of human rights carried out by Saddam Hussein's regime. These violations were openly reported by the head of the United Nations' Human Rights Committee, Enrique Ballesteros, in a personal letter to the tyrant that was published on April 26 as a means of moral pressure.

What are the real dimensions of the tragic "escape-saga" the Kurds and Shi'ites have gone through after the Gulf war? Who is responsible for this tragedy?

What are its causes? Why did the allies refuse to give military support to the revolt? Why did the Bush administration take such a long time to comply with the rebels' requests for help when the Iraqi army put an end to the revolt?

What are the risks and limits of the solutions given in April, among which stands out the building and the military protection of refugee camps in the north of Iraq at the hands of Western military forces? Until when will these forces have to stay in Iraq? What does their intervention mean for the sacrosanct principle of non-intervention in a state's internal affairs?

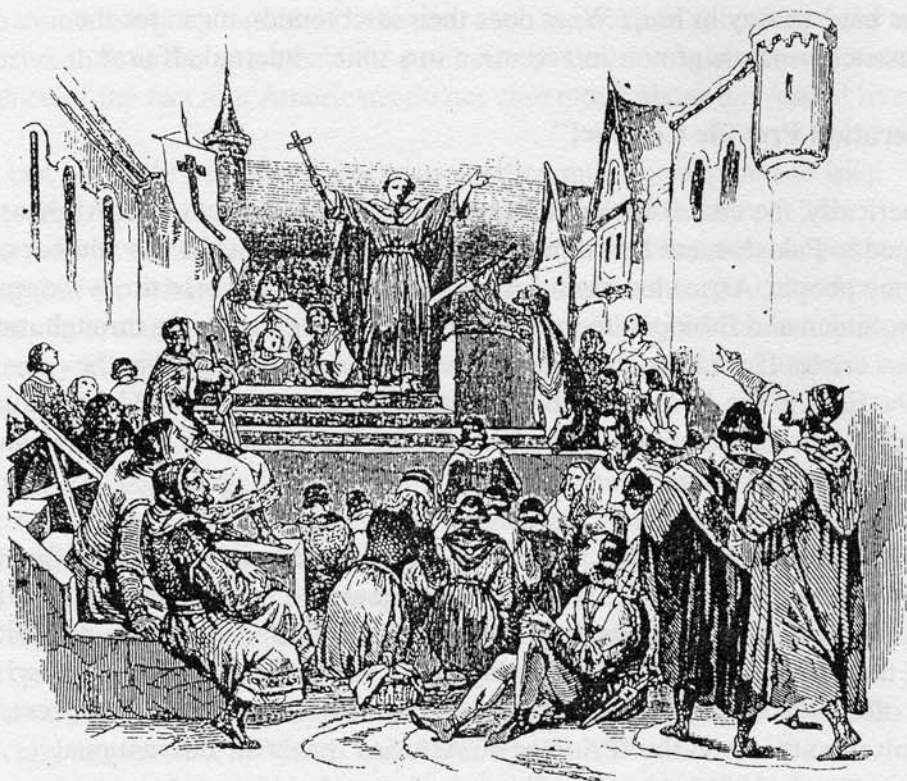
"Operation Provide Comfort"

Numerically, the crisis of Iraqi refugees is not as bad as that of the Afghans that escaped to Pakistan and Iran during the 1980s. If we consider the number of starving people, Africa has most certainly been through worse times—even today, Sudan and Ethiopia, to mention two examples, are going through more serious crises. If we look at the number of deaths, we can say that the Cambodians in the 1970s, and the Armenians that were deported by the Turks in 1915 (with the exception of the Jews during Second World War) have had even worse experiences.

"What makes the Iraqi crisis an unprecedented tragedy is the combination of such negative factors: a high number of refugees in a very short period of time, and in such awful conditions once they get to the border exhausted, and with what they are wearing as their only luggage", said Alfredo Witschi-Cestari, a high official of UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), an organisation that won the "Principe de Asturias" prize for International Cooperation in 1991.

"Never, in the forty-year history of UNHCR, had there been such a fast-growing number of refugees", said the Japanese high commissioner Sadako Ogata after visiting the improvised camps at the Turkish and Iranian borders, in the third week of April. On April 26, in a Security Council meeting behind closed doors, UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar bitterly complained that the international community responded too late and too little

to the request for the \$580 million that the organisation put forward at the beginning of April. Not even a fourth of this amount had yet been given at the time, while from a thousand to two thousand refugees died every day in the camps by the Turkish border and, most of all, by the Iranian border, although the Iranian situation has been less publicised.



Preaching the First Crusade

Dozens of aircraft, hundreds of helicopters and some ships were mobilised by the West, but it was still not enough. The difficulty of reaching the refugees in the Iraqi mountains, the bad weather, the lack of coordination among rescue workers, bureaucracy, the Turks' decision to stop the Kurds from leaving the mountains to reach the valley inside Turkey, and Iran's isolation from the

international community, all contributed in making the whole operation much more complicated.

It is still not possible to give the exact number of victims, but more than 700,000 refugees, mostly Kurds, found themselves crowded together at the Turkish border, halfway through the month of April. About another million of them, mostly Kurds too, entered Iran. Unlike Turkey, Iran has given a great example of solidarity, but because of the extension of the tragedy, it ended up leaving behind its isolation and opening the borders to the main international humanitarian organisations, to German military forces and even to direct help from the United States.

It would be unfair to condemn Turkey for its lack of solidarity. Ankara's authorities refused to take in more refugees because of their bitter experience. In August 1988, about 60,000 Kurds came in from the Iraqi border, escaping Saddam's troops who had been gassing the Kurdish cities, with the compliant silence of the international community. The West promised to help but then did not keep its promise, and Turkey had to face an intensification of its economic crisis and of its problem with the Kurdish minority, due to the fact that about 30,000 Iraqis have since then stayed in the country.

No matter how many planes full of food, blankets or how much medicine the West may send, it is obvious that the only definitive solution is to relocate the refugees in other countries, which nobody will do, or find a political solution which would allow them to go back to their houses without fear of a new genocide. If they chose this option, Turkey and the great Western powers would have to intervene inside Iraq and assure the refugees' safety. A *coup d'état* in Baghdad and the replacement of Saddam by a more flexible and moderate leader would make things easier.

On April 27, the first American aircraft since the revolution that overthrew the Shah in 1979, landed in Iran. For the first time since the Second World War, Germany sent its military forces to a non-NATO member-country. The Spanish government, who refused to send any land forces to the Gulf, immediately approved the proposal to send 500 volunteers to the north of Iraq. This decision

was backed by all the political parties and by public opinion, even though it was a NATO humanitarian operation rather than one organised by the UN.

Maybe because of some of its members' atavistic fear of anything coming from NATO, the Spanish government suggested that the military help to the Kurds should come from the European Union rather than from NATO, but this proposal was rejected in the Paris European Union meeting of April.23 This was inevitable because of the legal dependency of the European Union on NATO's leadership. The American wish for the intervention in the north of Turkey not to interfere with the quick withdrawal of their troops from Iraq and Saudi Arabia, explains why control of refugee aid stayed in the hands of Eurcom (European Command) commanded by General John Shalikashvili, rather than in those of Centcom (Middle East Command), which was so brilliantly commanded by General Norman Schwarzkopf during the Gulf war and crisis.

In this way, the imposition of a protectorate in the north of Iraq—a plan which Iran would like to be applied to the south, too, for the Shi'ites—did not stop the quick withdrawal of American troops from the south, where they had occupied about 15 per cent of Iraqi territory since the end of the war. The area of Iraq that is now a protectorate amounts to one fiftieth of the country. Iraq stretches for about 435,000 square kilometres, a bit less than Spain.

As an indirect consequence, NATO extended its field of action across the limits fixed in Section 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty; the American administration had been making pressure in this sense for quite a number of years. The "out of area" intervention was now a reality in defence of a humanitarian cause.

Saddam strikes back

For the four million Kurds who survived the unsuccessful rebellions of 1988, 1975, 1970, 1966, 1945 and the barely interrupted ones of the 1920s and 1930s inside Iraq, the revolt that got a promise of freedom—never fulfilled—by the winners of First World War in the Treaty of Sevres, which finally dismantled the Ottoman Empire in 1920, was one of the most tragic ones.

Terrified by the massacres such as the one in 1988, the people did not wait for the soldiers who were loyal to Saddam to return. Columns of thousands of human beings and overcharged vehicles went towards Turkey and Iran, through the mountains. Only half-empty ghost towns were left behind. Amnesty promised by the dictator of Baghdad to make them go back to their houses, fell on deaf ears.

The refugees do not trust Saddam's promises. Nor do they easily believe in the Western certainty that, with their protection, nothing will happen to them if they go back to their homes. For the Kurds and the Iraqi Shi'ites, the West has lost that small amount of credibility it had had. It betrayed them once again. That is why it is so difficult to convince them that they can go back to their houses or to the camps that the Western armies started building at the end of April in the protected area.

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El mundo fue noticia, Madrid, 1986.**

In the "Pike Report", written by a US House of Representatives committee in 1975 about the American secret services' failures and abuses after the Vietnam War, it is made very clear that since 1972, on Henry Kissinger's initiative and with the consent of the Shah, the United States had used the Kurds to destabilise the Ba'th regime in Baghdad.

Washington never claimed it would lead the rebels to the victory, even though the Kurdish leader Mustapha Barzani thought it would. He was used, and when, in 1975, the Shah and Saddam signed the agreement of Algiers about their borders, Washington stopped supporting the Kurds and left them at the mercy of Saddam Hussein.

Between February 28 and April 3, 1991, Saddam got rid of the main sources of

the Kurdish and Shi'ite rebellion because the Western allies left more than twenty Iraqi divisions nearly untouched during the two months of war, and because, according to the March 3 agreement with Iraqi military commands—General Schwarzkopf later expressed regret over this agreement in his declarations to David Frost—they let the Iraqi dictator crush the rebels with his helicopters.

When on the night of April 6, Bush forbid the Iraqi army any action north of the 36th parallel and extended to helicopters the threat made at the beginning of the war to knock down any Iraqi airplane in the air, the rebellion had already been silenced.

This new tragedy, whose roots are to be sought in historical hatreds, is the direct consequence of the "Operation Desert Storm", but Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish leaders and President Bush share the responsibility for it. Saddam Hussein, because his unkept promises for autonomy and his indiscriminate terrorism are the main causes of discontent inside the country. The Kurdish leaders took for granted the support of the West and the attrition of Baghdad, which in reality never came to pass.

With regard to President Bush, *New York Times* columnist Leslie Gelb makes an excellent point that his mistake was not to push for Saddam's fall, nor to have ordered, against the opinion of his own generals at the front, the end of the land offensive at five o'clock in the morning on February 28. His biggest mistake may have been, as Gelb said on April 15, to have allowed Saddam use of his helicopters against the rebels, and not to have kept the allies' air offensive in operation for another few weeks after the end of the land offensive.

To declare, as Bush did, that when he supported the rebellion, he was thinking of the soldiers rather than of the Kurds and Iraqi Shi'ites, shows a huge lack of information about Iraqi internal affairs. The liberation of 20,000 Iraqi prisoners (by the American Command settled in Saudi Arabia from the beginning of the war, in August 1990), to be commanded by officers chosen because of their evident disposition to lead a military coup against Saddam, ended in nothing. Most of the Iraqi army chose to stay loyal to its leader.

The joke about “the 7.62 millimetre retirement plan” for Saddam that could be heard in the Pentagon’s corridors did not come true.

The American administration still believes that the keeping of the military embargo and the very strict conditions set by the April 3 cease-fire Resolution 687 that was accepted, although “not agreed on” by the Iraqi regime after two weeks, are an unbearable humiliation for the dictator. In his declarations to the ABC television network (US) on March 17, Secretary of State James Baker admitted the impossibility of considering Saddam’s days numbered, perhaps no more than eight months worth.

It might be so, but this analysis still considers Saddam as a normal autocratic leader, which he is not. We must consider Saddam as the godfather of a mafia family, the family from Takrit, his native village. Like in the mafia, the more the godfathers are intimidated, the more their followers back them, for they all know that if the “boss” disappears, they disappear too.

Why did Bush refuse to support the rebels from a military point of view? Why did he refuse to employ American land forces to support the Kurdish refugees until April 16, and accepted to do so only under pressure from Turkish President Turgut Ozal and the main European leaders, after James Baker’s trip to Turkey on April 6 and 7?

Winning is everything, but...

In his victory speech in a joint session of both houses of Congress on March 6, President Bush defined the four American objectives in the post-war period: first, to put an end to the conflict between the Arab countries and Israel; second, to safeguard peace and stability in the Middle East; third, to check the production of arms and missiles of massive destruction; and fourth, to foster economic development for the sake of peace and progress.

“The problems of this area of the world (the Middle East) do not have only one possible solution and the response must not come from America only”, said Bush. “We wish a new order in the world... A world where the United Nations,

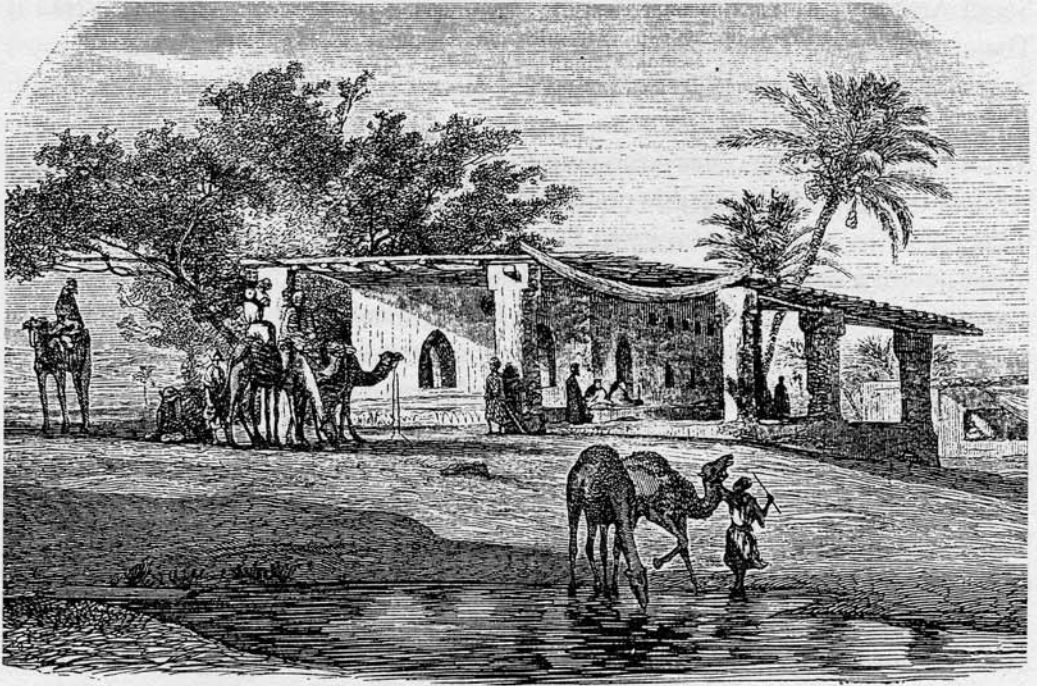
free from the Cold War 'impasse', can make the historical vision of its founders come true".

Thirty-eight days later, on April 13, the American president, at Maxwell Airbase, in Alabama, answered the harsh criticisms to his passivity in front of the Kurdish drama. "Iraq has been torn apart by internal conflicts for several years", he said. "We are helping and we shall go on helping these refugees. But I do not want a single soldier or parachutist pushed towards an Iraqi civil war that has been smouldering since eternity. I won't allow it".

There are four main reasons to explain Bush's resistance to help the rebels and, later on, to make the army intervene in favour of the refugees: the risk of getting involved in another Vietnam; the opposition of the allied Moslem countries to any kind of intervention; the deep existing division among the Iraqi rebels and the danger of turning Iraq into another Lebanon.

Bush's National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, suggested not to intervene because the necessary conditions for success were not available. These conditions were an explicit UN mandate; clearly defined objectives; an overwhelming military superiority, and the public opinion support. The four conditions were present for the intervention in Kuwait. There was nothing to justify an intervention in the Iraqi civil war.

As a consequence, on March 26, Bush summoned the eight "big wheels" of his administration—Quayle, Cheney, Baker, Sununu, Scowcroft, Powell, Webster and Gates—to the White House, and after a long and intense discussion, made two decisions: the American troops that were still occupying 15 per cent of Iraq in the south of the country, were to leave as soon as possible and the United States was not going to help the Kurds and Shi'ites. This was two weeks after the Shi'ite rebellion in the south had been silenced. On the same day, the leader of one of the two main Iraqi Kurdish groups, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani, had been welcomed by a huge crowd in his native city, in the north of Iraq. This was the end of a three-year exile and it let the Kurdish people and the rest of the world believe that a Kurdish victory was at



Food and shelter in the desert

hand. Having silenced the Shi'ite rebellion, Saddam sent the best of his 300,000 soldiers and 2,000 tanks left over from Kuwait or passed up by the United States, to fight the Kurds.

In one week, Kurdistan had been conquered again, its main cities destroyed, 30,000 Kurds had entered Turkey and a quarter of a million more were on their way to the border. Ozal started moving and France tried to help him by introducing in the Security Council a resolution proposal, according to which Saddam was forced to put an end to his offensive, but it did not get enough support. London, Washington and Moscow were more interested in moving forward the cease-fire resolution, which was finally approved on April 3, than in paying attention to the Kurdish drama.

The United States' main Moslem allies during the war were against an American intervention in favour of the Kurds and Shi'ites. Those allies are

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and, even though in a smaller proportion, Syria. The support to the Kurds and Shi'ites would have easily destroyed such a fragile and, in the case of Syria, unnatural alliance.

Saudi Arabia, like the other Arab countries, was afraid of a democracy near its borders because of its possible contiguousness. It was just as afraid, or maybe more, of a Shi'ite state or entity in favour of Iran in the south of Iraq. It was not interested in a coalition government in Baghdad either, because the Shi'ite majority, sixty per cent of the 18 million Iraqis, would have ended up taking control of it. It was aware of the fact that any intervention in the Iraqi civil war would have postponed indefinitely the withdrawal of US forces from the Arabian desert, which would most certainly complicate the Arabian regime's internal situation.

The Arabian Royal Family had been supported for years by Iraqis in exile, some of whom are former close collaborators of Saddam. This group has considerably grown in numbers and power from the beginning of 1991. With dozens of thousands of Iraqi prisoners in its hands at the end of the war, many of whom will not go back to their country, Saudi Arabia has got a huge potential to destabilise the political situation in Iraq. Some Western diplomats in Riyadh believe that the United States and Great Britain have been training, for the last weeks, a selected group of these prisoners for future special operations inside Iraq.

Radio Free Iraq, the Iraqi exiles' radio station in Saudi Arabia, keeps broadcasting just as aggressively as during the war. Its influence and that of the British special forces that got in contact with the Kurds in the autumn of 1990, have been far more decisive for the creation of false expectations of an allies' support among the Kurds, than President Bush's public incitement to revolt. This may explain British Prime Minister John Major's personal interest in aiding to the refugees.

He was the one who, after he receiving an SOS from Turkish President Turgut Ozal, suggested the creation of security zones protected by international military forces in the north of Iraq. The EEC approved the proposal on April 8 and President Bush finally accepted eight days later, with a few small changes.

It was also Major who took the initiative to create an "international UN police force", which had already been requested by Ozal, to replace the NATO forces; this initiative was approved by the EEC Council of Ministers on April 28.

Ozal's SOS, championed by US television in an interview on April 7, was a desperate move to mobilise the world to insure that the Kurdish refugees remained in Iraq. Thousands of them entering Turkish Kurdistan could only, in his opinion, inflame the separatist feelings of Turkey's 15 million Kurds. At the same time, not to let them into the country and allowing them to die like animals in front of half the world's television cameras, would be a serious setback for Ankara's possibility of fully joining the European democracies' club.

To get out of this muddle, the Turkish prime minister cleverly invited the Iraqi Kurdish leaders to Ankara and promised to help them in any possible way if they helped to stop the crowds of refugees entering Turkey. At the same time, he put pressure on Bush and the European leaders, until they accepted the idea of "safe shelters" for the Kurds in the north of Iraq.

In the declarations published on March 27, the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party leader (PKK), Abdala Ocalan, who has been staying in Lebanon for months, training an army under Syria's benevolent eye, told the *El Pais* reporter Juan Carlos Gamucio how he was afraid that Ankara might use the Iraqi Kurds in the next few months to exterminate Turkish Kurds who are in favour of independence.

"Any agreement with Saddam, to be feasible, must be safeguarded by the international community and by the UN Security Council", says Kendal Nezan, head of the Kurdish Institute in Paris. In his opinion, "after they won the Gulf war, the Americans decided to keep Saddam's dictatorship because the other countries in the area, such as Saudi Arabia and the oil kingdoms, do not want a democratic Iraq. Democracy is contagious, it's a bigger danger than Saddam's planes and Scuds". As other Kurdish leaders, Nezan also complains about the Arabs' and Palestinians' silence with regard to his people's tragedy.

The Turkish government set two conditions to create security zones for the refugees inside Iraq: NATO and the international police force that will finally

replace NATO forces, shall protect Kurdish camps and villages, but not the whole Kurdistan; the new Kurdish entity that might be formed, shall go on being part of a single Iraqi state rather than an independent state.

Behind these political objectives, there also was the pressing need for an economic, humanitarian aid to take care of the refugees.

Arabs divided

This division makes it very difficult for the opposition to get international support or to become a serious threat for Saddam. Seventeen separate powers, with no common objective, took part in December 1990's "summit" in Damascus. What they agreed on during their Beirut meeting of March this year is the creation of a coalition government to replace Saddam. Washington saw this action as a show of strength to the rest of the world, rather than as an official engagement to secure a stable and united Iraq without the Sunnite Ba'th which has been leading the country since independence.

For the Syrian president, Hafez el Asad, who is worried about the half a million Kurdish in his own country, about the kingdoms in the Gulf and Iran's ayatollahs, about the declarations in favour of democracy, about the presence of several parties and press freedom in an Iraq free of Saddam, must have sounded even more dangerous than Baghdad's leader's uncontrollable expansionism.

It would not be fair to blame the lack of coordination or unity in the Iraqi opposition on Iraqi leaders' infinite ambitions or natural incapacity. Twenty-three years of systematic prosecution and of atrocities carried out by the "mujabarat", Saddam's secret police, are difficult to forget.

Whatever doubts Bush and his assistants might have had on the democratic sincerity of the Iraqi Kurds and on the limits of their objectives were strengthened by the provisional agreement reached on April 24 in Baghdad, after a five-day negotiation between Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish leaders. According to Talabani, Baghdad's dictator promised to give the Kurds vast

autonomy, free elections, and freedom of the press, plus the right to several political parties.

Four days later, Saddam still had not confirmed. Apparently the final agreement depended on Baghdad's acceptance of Kurdish control over the oil rigs in Kirkuk, the same obstacle that made an agreement impossible twenty-one years ago.

The experience of the 1970 agreement that Saddam never maintained and the indiscriminate killings of Kurds by the Iraqi army in the following years, explain the scepticism with which the news was received both in the Kurdish mountains and in the Pentagon's corridors. For the Shi'ites, this was yet another treachery, and it opened the way to a new offensive carried out by the Hammurabi Division against the Shi'ite cities, where, according to some exiles who live in Riyadh, all the male inhabitants over twelve who did not manage to escape to Saudi Arabia or to Iran were executed in the first two weeks of March.

This danger is closely linked to the opposition's division and is easily understandable when looking at modern and contemporary history of the country known as Iraq from the 1920s. It would grow if the Western allies were to intervene in the civil war. If they had done so, all the neighbouring countries from Turkey to Iran, including Syria and all the oil kingdoms, would now feel perfectly entitled to get as much as possible out of this confused—and very rich in oil—Iraq.

The only possible alternative to the reproduction of the Lebanese situation in Iraq, seemed to be the Iraqis' communal and, even, physical destruction through the main ethnic and religious groups' intolerance and incapability to live together peacefully. In face of the catastrophe, Bush's policy of keeping his distance almost became a death sentence for the four million Iraqi Kurds.

Saving the neighbourhood

The solutions, that were improvised each time they became necessary were to limit in numbers and in time the international forces that were protecting both

the Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq; to keep the sanctions and military threatens to Iraq as a means of making pressure; to prohibit the presence of the army and of any kind of Iraqi aircraft in the protected areas; to try to obtain the approval and cooperation of the Iraqi government with the international aid to the refugees and to promote or provoke dialogue between the Kurds and Baghdad's Sunnite regime.

Military intervention is neither huge nor direct. Unless the Iraqi army intervenes, there shall be no danger of the mission to help the refugees becoming an open war. If an "international police force" to replace NATO's forces is created quickly enough, the risk of the new Kurdish protectorate becoming a permanent protectorate and of consolidating Iraq's partition will be smaller.

The refugees will not leave the mountains to settle in the seven camps that the allied forces planned to build in the north of Iraq unless all Iraqi security forces—police, army or secret agents—have been sent away. And if they do come down from the mountains, the refugees will not go back to their houses unless they are quite sure that they will be protected from new army attacks.

If they let months or years go by, and hundreds of thousands refugees are still crowded in the camps, the international community will have managed to create a perfect cultural medium for more guerilla and terrorist wars. What happened in Gaza is the best example of this. It could also become another Peshawar, the focal point of the Afghan resistance in Pakistan.

If they ever become a permanent protectorate, the camps could easily become the native place of a new "resistance" that could hold Baghdad's regime at bay for years. They would then be, which is more serious, the focal point of nationalist and independence movements for the Kurds of all neighbour countries: five million from Iran, half a million from Syria and nearly fifteen million from Turkey. Eliminating such a threat could provoke wars or a series of isolated incursions of any army.

The allied or international forces would then have to use an iron hand to keep the camps from being used for Kurdish guerilla actions and to protect them

from the military attacks of others. Nothing could be further away from Bush's idea of a "new international order".

These risks explain the reserves about the war winners' improvised solutions that UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar has been expressing since March. On April 16, when he was told about Bush's decision to send some soldiers to the north of Iraq, he said that, in his opinion, such a decision



The Arabs at the window

required a "new Security Council resolution". Without admitting it publicly, Perez de Cuellar was warning that this could have meant the opening of a new Pandora's box.

Why protect Iraqi Kurds and not the Kurds from the neighbour countries, the Tibetans, the people from the Baltic countries or the Georgians?

The Soviets, the Chinese and the representatives of Third World countries, all with similar internal problems, are well aware of this risk. That is why none of them in the Security Council has backed the right to intervene claimed by the Western allies in order to save the Kurds.

Nevertheless, according to Resolution 688 of April 5, the Security Council condemned "the Iraqi repression of the civil population" and demanded from Iraq "immediate access to the international humanitarian organisations for all who needed help in any part of Iraq". Although many people think that this "duty to intervene" is in contrast with the principle of non-intervention decided in article 2.7 of the UN Charter, the Western allies consider Resolution 688 for the creation of the Kurdish protectorate in the north of Iraq, the initial 4,000 square kilometres surface of which had already been doubled before the end of April, a sufficient legal cover.

Resolution 688 is a historical legal precedent against any government or dictator who may try in the future to hide behind the principle of non-intervention to abuse or eliminate his political enemies. It is a further step forward in the way opened by UN General Assembly when, on December 8, 1988, on the initiative of the French origin movement "Médecins Sans Frontières", it approved a resolution (43-131) against the application of the principle of "non-interference" in the case of natural calamities or other similar emergency situations.

No matter this new legal cover, everybody agrees on the fact that the solution for the Kurdish and Shi'ite refugees is not to be found in these camps, nor in a permanent protectorate, but rather in an Iraq free from Saddam Hussein, where all the inhabitants can live peacefully with no fear of being gassed, prosecuted

or tortured. No protectorate, no matter the intensity of foreign military forces, will manage to make the refugees go back to their houses as long as there still is a possibility of those who protect them today leaving them in the hands of the dictator in the future. They have had to face too many disappointments to be able to believe in promises again.

Saddam has now changed his ways because he urgently needs substantial aid for reconstruction.

From the very first moment, he disapproved of the international intervention in the north of the country, but as he is aware of his own extreme weakness, and as he needs funds to import products of bare necessity, he gave into almost all the allies' conditions, although this did not stop him from resenting them. He is now helping to track down the mines.

He gave the list of his strategic arms and missiles that can reach further than 150 kilometres in the agreed time. Nevertheless, Washington, London and the International Atomic Energy Agency think that the first data on his nuclear power are either insufficient or incorrect. On March 18, the UN Secretary General was to introduce the committee that had to check and destroy the Iraqi arsenals in a forty-five day term, and the mechanisms according to which they had to operate.

On April 18, Baghdad and the UN signed an agreement to create help offices and centres for the refugees all around the country. On April 25, the new Iraqi Prime Minister, Saadoun Hammadi, promised some democratic reforms, better relations with the neighbouring countries and the scrupulous compliance to UN conditions for lifting the economic sanctions. The initial agreement with the Kurds goes beyond the 1970 agreement and, if it succeeds, will be a hope-giving basis for a permanent political solution of the Kurdish problem in a stable and united Iraq.

Knowing his past, very few people believe in Saddam's promises. Only rarely do wolves become vegetarians. It is very unlikely that Saddam will manage to survive the tragedy he caused for his people and neighbours. The Iranian

leaders and mass media forgot his neutrality and good manners and, once again, turned him into the ferocious wolf he always was.

Some of the Iraqi airplanes that were taken to Iran during the war, were painted and are now part of the Iranian airlines. Tehran says they only have 22 of them now, while Baghdad says they sent 148. The military incursions and skirmishes at the border between the two countries have increased in the last weeks. Iranian leaders do not hide the fact that they support the Shi'ite resistance.

The European Community leaders believe that only Saddam's replacement by someone more flexible and trustworthy could give the country its stability and peace back. During the special summit in Luxembourg on April 8, they approved the imprisonment of the Iraqi dictator and his trial for war crimes by an international court.

To seize or to kill Saddam Hussein would probably be an illegal action, and even if it were not, it would turn him into a hero or a martyr for the Arab masses, which he himself did not manage during the Gulf war, no matter how hard he tried. His elimination at the hands of some of his people or the negotiation of his exile with the Western governments that want him to be tried for war crimes would be more probable and effective.

As long as Saddam stays at the head of his country, the international community can but keep the recently created protectorate or mini-states. This is a consequence of the Gulf war that nobody wanted, and a tragic irony for those who refused to help the Kurdish and Shi'ite rebels for fear of Iraq's partition or disintegration.

As the BBC International News Service director, John Simpson, wrote on April 28 in the British weekly magazine *The Observer*, war and revolts changed the whole situation in Baghdad. There is more information about this. Saddam keeps negotiating with his long-standing enemies; censors are now far more milder and many people dare to criticise the dictator openly, which only a few weeks ago would have been unthinkable. The new Iraqi prime minister now declares that during the war for Kuwait, less than a hundred thousand soldiers

died. A high official assures that in the revolts that followed the cease-fire four times as many soldiers lost their lives.

It is going to be very difficult to build the four columns of the new order that Bush thought could be set up in the Middle East after his victory, on these hundreds of thousands Iraqi corpses: the negotiations on a peace conference for the Arab countries and Israel are now moving on unstable grounds and the Bush administration will have to start being much more firm if it wants to get any worthy results; the desirable control of arms exportations towards the area seems to be an impossible wish. In spite of the good intentions, the idea of a UN register and the intense debates on the Capitol Hill, there was a new race for arms in the Middle East during the first weeks after the war.

Saudi Arabia decided to double its armed forces and it submitted a list of items to purchase, worth 14,000 million dollars, from Washington. The United Arab Emirates wanted to keep 330 M-1A1 tanks, 160 Bradley armoured vehicle and 18 helicopters. Syria recently received some new Scud missiles from North Korea.

Quoting Jordanian sources, *The Observer* says that Saddam, breaking the embargo, has been receiving large amounts of arms and ammunitions from China and North Korea. Even worse is the news reported on the first page of the *Sunday Times* of April 28. According to the weekly newspaper, without disclosing its source, "China is helping Algeria to produce its first nuclear bomb".

Apparently, the work is being done in a plant on the Atlas mountains, about 215 kilometres south of Algiers, in a military area strictly protected by Soviet-built anti-aircraft batteries. Captain William Cross, a British Embassy attache, was sent away from Algeria shortly after he was caught taking photographs of the plant.

The new regional security force, which was supposed to become a mainly Syrian and Egyptian Arabic multinational force, that could replace the American army in the Gulf, still is just a piece of paper signed in Damascus on

March 6 by the six Arab countries in the Gulf, and by Egypt and Syria. At the end of April, the future of the American army presence in the area was also still unresolved. Pentagon spokesmen say that Bahrain accepted the installation of the US general headquarters for the Middle East on its territory, but no final agreement has yet been reached.

The regional economic development that was to be promoted and administered by a new regional bank, financed by the rich to help the poor, will have to wait for a better occasion for the rich, especially the Arabians, who would rather go back to their traditional policy of directly helping those who help them, forgetting about what is then done with that money.

The "window of opportunity" that James Baker thought he saw in February, after the Gulf war, may have been a simple reflection. Many Arabs and Israelis will not consider that the war is ended as long as Saddam Hussein is still in power. They shall go on paying more attention to Baghdad's dictator's moves than to the concessions they all should make to establish a new security and peace order in the Middle East.

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