

2-2016

Iraqi Kurdistan Independence: Effects on Regional Stability

Zachary R. Fonk

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/theses>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fonk, Zachary R., "Iraqi Kurdistan Independence: Effects on Regional Stability" (2016). *Master's Capstone Theses*. Paper 78.

This Capstone-Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@APUS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@APUS. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@apus.edu.



APUS Library Capstone Submission Form

This capstone has been approved for submission to and review and publication by the APUS Library.

Student Name [Last, First, MI] *	Fonk	Zachary	Robert
Course Number [e.g. INTL699] *	INTL699	Paper Date [See Title pg.]	11/2015
Professor Name [Last, First] *	Leerburger, Marian		
Program Name * See list	National Security and Intelligence		
Keywords [250 character max.]	Iraqi, Kurdistan, Independence, Regional, Stability		
Passed with Distinction * Y or N	Y		
Security Sensitive Information * Y or N	N		
IRB Review Required * Y or N	N	If YES, include IRB documents in submission attachments.	
Turnitin Check * Y or N	Y	All capstone papers must be checked via Turnitin.	

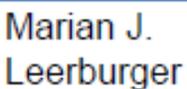
* Required

Capstone Approval Document

The thesis/capstone for the master's degree submitted by the student listed (above) under this title *

IRAQI KURDISTAN INDEPENDENCE: EFFECTS ON REGIONAL STABILITY

has been read by the undersigned. It is hereby recommended for acceptance by the faculty with credit to the amount of 3 semester hours.

Program Representatives	Signatures	Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Signed, 1 st Reader * [capstone professor]	 Digitally signed by Marian J. Leerburger DN: cn=Marian J. Leerburger, o, ou, email=mjleerbu@erols.com, c=US Date: 2015.07.31 05:51:25 -0400	11/04/2015
Signed, 2nd Reader (if required by program)		
Recommendation accepted on behalf of the <u>program director</u> *	 Digitally signed by Nicole Drumheller DN: cn=Nicole Drumheller, o=American Public University System, ou=Intelligence Studies, email=ndrumhelle@apus.edu, c=US Date: 2015.11.19 16:59:53 -0800	
Approved by <u>academic dean</u> *	 Digitally signed by Mark T. Riccardi DN: cn=Mark T. Riccardi, o=American Public University System, ou=Academic, email=mrizarcardi@apus.edu, c=US Date: 2015.12.08 10:21:58 -0700	

* Required

<p>Send thesis submission to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ThesisCapstoneSubmission@apus.edu</p>	<p>Attachments <u>must</u> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This completed form FINAL Thesis document as Microsoft Word file IRB Review docs (if applicable)
---	--

IRAQI KURDISTAN INDEPENDENCE: EFFECTS ON REGIONAL STABILITY

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Public University

by

Zachary Robert Fonk

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

November 2015

American Public University

Charles Town, WV

The author hereby grants the American Public University System the right to display these contents for educational purposes.

The author assumes total responsibility for meeting the requirements set by United States copyright law for the inclusion of any materials that are not the author's creation or in the public domain.

© Copyright 2015 by Zachary Robert Fonk

All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife. Her love, support, and motivation was absolutely paramount to completing this work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my professors at AMU for all their support and wisdom over these past few years. I have watched myself grow as a writer and an intelligence analyst as I progressed throughout my research studies.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

IRAQI KURDISTAN INDEPENDENCE: EFFECTS ON REGIONAL STABILITY

by

Zachary Robert Fonk

American Public University System, November 4, 2015

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Marian Leerburger, Thesis Professor

In the midst of a collapsing Iraqi state lies a peaceful, prospering territory known as Iraqi Kurdistan. Existing as a federal territory in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan has sought independence for decades. A lack of international support and fear of negative consequences has kept independence at bay. The purpose of this research is to determine the effects that an independent, fully sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan would have on regional stability in Western Asia. An Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) is used to test several hypotheses with numerous independent variables that could affect internal stability, regional relationships, and the war with ISIL. The findings indicate that if Iraqi Kurdistan can utilize an earned sovereignty approach to achieving independence, there is a possibility for increased regional stability across Western Asia. One critical factor for greater stability is Turkey's position on independence, which could greatly affect Iraqi Kurdistan's economy and the country's success as a state. Other critical factors include gaining international recognition as a new state and the nature of future relationships between Baghdad and Erbil.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background/History of the Kurds	3
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Turkey a Factor for Instability?.....	9
Iran and Syria as Additional Factors for Instability	11
One Stance: Iraqi Kurdistan as a Stable Nation	12
A Second Stance: Iraqi Kurdistan not Ready for Independence	14
Possible Decrease in Stability as a Result of Independence.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Conclusion	19
III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH STRATEGY	22
Research Design and Data Collection.....	23
Data Analysis.....	25
IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	28
Earned Sovereignty Model	28
Kosovo Case Study	31
Israel Case Study.....	33

Turkey’s Reaction to Independence.....	35
Iran’s Reaction to Independence	38
Syria’s Reaction to Independence.....	40
Stability or Instability within Iraqi Kurdistan?.....	42
The War against ISIL.....	47
V. CONCLUSION	49
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	53

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Initial ACH Matrix	27
2. Final ACH Matrix.....	49

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the Kurdish population has lived and endured as a nation without a state. Under the Ottoman Empire, after World War I, and even today, where over 30 million Kurds live split up amongst the states of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, this ethnic group has lived void of any true self-determination. In no other region have the Kurds come closer to achieving full independence than in northern Iraq, where an autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was born out of a new Iraqi Constitution in 2005. In addition to having a stable government, the region also has its own economy and a standalone military force, known as the Peshmerga. These Peshmerga fighters, often underequipped and outgunned, have shown they can hold their own in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a ruthless terrorist organization who has seized large amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria over the past year. The Kurds in Iraq have also endured countless struggles, even genocide, in their fight for independence, making some consider them quite deserving of their own state. Now, with Iraqi unity being compromised by ISIL, Iraqi Kurdistan has never been closer to achieving statehood. Nevertheless, many countries do not support the Kurds' bid for sovereignty, and independence would not likely come without causing second and third order effects within the international community. For instance, an independent Iraqi Kurdistan could spur turmoil with the bordering nations of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. At the same time, a positive side effect could be increased support in the war against ISIL, since many countries have an easier time supporting a state than a non-state entity. There are many possible outcomes which are difficult to ascertain, which leads one to ask, what would be the effects of a fully independent Iraqi Kurdistan on regional stability in Western Asia?

Purpose Statement

The aim of this paper is to examine the positive and negative effects that an independent, fully sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan would have on the following 1) stability within the already autonomous region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq 2) stability in surrounding countries with significant Kurdish populations, including Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq 3) the US-led coalition's efforts in fighting against ISIL. While the focus will be looking at political, economic, and social stability factors within the aforementioned areas, this paper also examines the feasibility of Iraqi Kurdistan gaining independence. There have already been signs of regional instability at even the thought of independence, and this will provide valuable insight into what stability would look like after gaining statehood.

Significance of the Study

As the chances for an independent Iraqi Kurdistan grow closer and stability within Iraq continues to crumble, determining the effects that Kurdistan sovereignty might have within the surrounding region is very important. By analyzing these potential effects, the possibility exists to determine whether or not Kurdish independence is a positive step in combating a terrorism crisis and creating a more stable region, or if a new found sovereignty would jolt the region out of equilibrium and cause further conflict. The instability that currently reigns in Iraq and Syria is due in very large part to ISIL, one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations to come about in recent years. ISIL's brutal tactics and seizure of large amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria has been garnering worldwide attention and frustrating decision-makers within the United States for over a year. Some see added support for the Kurdish Peshmerga as one of the best ways to contain ISIL in northern Iraq, as the Peshmerga have stood and fought when Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) run and hide. The problem lies in trying to supply a fighting force who is not part of

a recognized state. By analyzing the effectiveness of the Kurdish Peshmerga in the war against ISIL, conclusions may be drawn on whether or not there is value in supporting them further as part of a sovereign nation. Finally, a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan has very large potential to bring about negative repercussions from neighboring states. Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq, all of whom are surrounding neighbors of a landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan, have historically not shown support for independence. If there is a possibility for Iraqi Kurdistan to gain sovereignty without retaliation from neighboring states, further exploration of such a path could prove very significant to increasing stability in Western Asia.

Background/Historical Context

The Kurds are a very old people, whose history spans some 2500 years. The majority of Kurds have lived in the mountainous north of the ancient Mesopotamian region, where they continue to reside today. The problem for Kurdish people today is that they were never able to gain their own state in the modern world. Their ancient history is speckled with brief glimpses of autonomy and political power, but more prevalent are their many attempts and failures at creating a united Kurdistan.

Many scholars agree that, centuries ago, certain areas of large Kurdish populations enjoyed pockets of time where they truly had their own country. Unfortunately, the Kurds would eventually find themselves in the middle of conflicts involving great world powers. In the 16th century, for example, the Kurds chose the side of the Ottoman Empire in the Persian-Ottoman conflict of that time, and from that point up until the present day, the majority of Kurds would find themselves under the influence of the Turks (Nezan 1992). The princes who ruled their Kurdish domains enjoyed a great deal of autonomy under the Turks, but eventually the Ottoman Empire looked to take this autonomy away. This decision by the Ottoman Empire, which came

in the 19th century, cued the more “modern” era of Kurdish uprisings and revolts against higher powers to create a unified Kurdistan. All of these uprisings were brutally suppressed, as the Kurds were not wholly united and the Ottoman Empire was too powerful, receiving aid from several European powers. After a century or so of failed attempts at establishing their own state, the Kurds saw hope in the end of World War I and the Treaty of Sevres.

After the Ottoman defeat in World War I, the vast empire needed to be divided. The Kurds were quick to lay out their claim for an independent Kurdistan at the Conference of Versailles. They nearly had their independence. The 1920 Treaty of Sevres, which broke down the Ottoman Empire, had a specific section endorsing the eventual formation of a Kurdish state (Nezan 1992). Unfortunately for the Kurds, this treaty would not be followed. A new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, succeeded the old Treaty of Sevres in 1923. The problem for the Kurds: there was no mention of territory for Kurdistan. After the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, the Kurds found themselves split up between four different countries. The majority of the Kurds wound up inside the borders of Turkey, where countless uprisings have taken place since the 1920s. All of these have been quelled by Turkey, and in the early 20th century Turkey was even depriving the Kurds of their cultural identity. Kurds were referred to as “Mountain Turks”, and restrictions were placed on their language. As bad as the situation sounds in Turkey, things would get even worse for the Kurds of Iraq in the 1980s.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein tasked his cousin to take care of his Kurdish problem in northern Iraq. The Kurds had sided with Iran, and with Iraqi troops being diverted from the north, the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters had been gaining strength and safe zones within their northern enclave. What followed is known as the Anfal Campaign, Saddam Hussein’s brutal genocide of the Kurdish people. In 1988, an estimated 50,000-100,000 Kurds were killed

by the Iraqi military, some 5,000 of them killed during chemical attacks on the town of Halabja (Johns 2006). The inhumane brutality the Kurds suffered was unfathomable, as young boys and men were herded off, executed, and dumped in mass graves. The Kurds had never been put down so hard. Life would get better for the Kurds after the first Gulf War. A US imposed no fly-zone helped them establish some autonomy in the north. In the early 1990s, the Kurds created a government and began to rebuild their territory. In 2005, the Kurds received greater autonomy through the new Iraqi Constitution, being recognized as a federal territory inside Iraq.

In Iraq, the Kurds have built for themselves their greatest opportunity in 2500 years to have their own independent state. Iraqi Kurdistan functions more cohesively as a non-state entity than many recognized states do throughout the world. The history of the Kurds has shown a people linked by ethnicity, language, culture, and a long history of oppression. They are a true nation of people. While Iraqi Kurdistan does not house all of the Kurdish population or even a majority of the Kurdish population, this region has the best chance of giving the Kurds a piece of land they were promised long ago. What remains to be seen is whether or not the Iraqi Kurds could gain their statehood without throwing the Middle East completely out of its delicate equilibrium.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The question of Iraqi Kurdistan independence has interested scholars for many years. Many times the argument is over whether or not independence is even feasible for the Kurds. The delicate balance of relationships among Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran could be greatly offset by the addition of a new country. Greater autonomy for the Kurds, some say, is not worth the potential fallout with neighboring countries and the international community. Other scholars question whether an independent Iraqi Kurdistan could even survive as a sovereign nation, with some coming to the conclusion that a failed state scenario would come to pass. Many experts who study Iraq's Kurds fear that independence could trigger greater instability within the Middle East due to neighboring countries' reservations over the idea of greater Kurdish autonomy. Other experts say that stability would largely be a factor of *how* the Kurds went about declaring their independence. Gaining recognition from the international community would certainly make sovereignty reachable, whereas a unilateral call for secession could set off civil war. With a multitude of possibilities, piecing together the puzzle on what regional stability could look like after Iraqi Kurdistan gains independence is no easy task. Nevertheless, with independence becoming more and more feasible, attempting to solve this puzzle is important in order to better inform decision makers on how they should address the issue of independence for Iraq's Kurds. A review of pertinent literature on this subject has revealed several themes regarding stability if Iraqi Kurdistan was to gain statehood.

The first major theme is that Turkey, Iran, and Syria are opponents to Kurdish independence, and regional instability would increase as a result of any greater Kurdish autonomy within Iraq. This a very important theme, as relationships with surrounding countries

would be vital for an independent Kurdistan, which is a landlocked region that would rely on its neighbors for passage of people, merchandises, and, perhaps most importantly, oil. Without the help of at least one neighbor, a new Iraqi Kurdistan could be economically suffocated. Furthermore, the literature has shown that past examples of Kurdish successes in Iraq have spurred violence within neighboring countries between Kurdish populations and government forces, deteriorating regional stability even further. A great deal of the literature looks at instability that occurred in neighboring countries after the signing of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) in 2004 and Iraqi Constitution in 2005. In these years, Iraqi Kurdistan gained greater autonomy, which seemed to reinvigorate calls for Kurdish nationalism within groups like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey and Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran. Fear of this violence reoccurring after any greater Iraqi Kurdish autonomy is one of the most vital reasons Turkey and Iran do not support independence, according to most scholars. Yet, some scholars believe that Turkey and Iran could be beginning to come around toward greater autonomy or even independence for Iraq's Kurds, since they could see a breakup of Iraq support their energy and trade relationships with Iraqi Kurdistan. This second school of thought argues Turkey and Iran could now be weighing the advantages of independence over their ability to quell any resurging nationalist movements within their borders. Just as there are two different ways of thinking about effects of independence on outward stability, some scholars do not fully agree on what would happen to the stability within Iraqi Kurdistan if the territory should gain independence.

A second major theme is that the stability of the KRG adds to overall regional stability in Western Asia. The stability within a country is important, as some new countries, like South Sudan for example, have shown the negative effects that political, economic, and social

instability within a new country can have on overall regional stability. Armed groups thrive within South Sudan's borders, the country became entangled in a civil war less than three years after declaring independence, and regional stability has declined. The main themes from the literature suggest that Iraqi Kurdistan is just the opposite of a country like South Sudan, acting as a bastion of stability and prosperity in an otherwise war-torn Iraq and Syria region. Common cited factors for stability include a prosperous economy, a unified government and people, and a competent military force. However, there are other schools of thought that differ on the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan. A common argument exists that although Iraqi Kurdistan has shown great signs of stability, breaking from Baghdad would cause Erbil more problems than could be handled. The most common evidence cited for this argument is the uncertainty of Iraqi Kurdistan's economy in the face of independence and the prediction that the economy could not survive without revenue from Baghdad. Others scholars argue that a breakaway from Baghdad would cause a host of political, economic, and social issues that would serve to extremely destabilize the former Iraqi state. Shared oil revenue and boundary disputes (like who would get Kirkuk) are frequently cited as evidence that an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would cause greater instability within its borders and risk eventual war with Iraq, should Iraq ever have the ability to fight on two fronts.

Finally, in direct support of the research question, a conviction of many scholars is that, taken as a whole, KRG independence would fuel greater instability within Western Asia. Shared concerns include opposition and possible resulting hostilities with Turkey and Iran, disapproval from prominent international actors like the United States, and unresolved disputes with Baghdad, such as the status of disputed territories like Kirkuk and oil sharing agreements. Even though some schools of thought are beginning to see greater autonomy or even independence as

more feasible and less supportive of instability, the majority of scholars are not under this impression. This review will begin by looking at arguments for instability in surrounding regions like Turkey, Iran, and Syria, continue with schools of thought on the stability within the KRG after independence, and end with overall themes regarding regional stability in a world where Iraq's Kurds have gained their independence.

Turkey: A Factor for Instability?

One of the most discussed themes in current literature is Turkish opposition to independence due to a fear of secessionist violence within its borders. Many argue that Turkey would not support or recognize Iraqi Kurdish independence because Turkey fears the PKK would become more emboldened to once again violently seek independence for themselves (Abdulla et al. 2015; Shifrinson 2006; Tanchum 2015; Gunter 2014). As such, an Iraqi Kurdistan declaration of independence could cause retaliation from Turkey on a political, economic, and/or military front, which would serve to decrease regional stability. Shifrinson (2006) cites past encounters of increased PKK nationalism after Iraq's Kurds gained greater autonomy as examples of how greater power for Iraqi Kurds causes instability between Turkey and Iraq. After the Kurds gained greater autonomy from the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, PKK violence in Turkey did grow, which ended with Turkey attacking PKK bases in northern Iraq and posturing increased forces along the border. Tensions within the region escalated in 2007 to the point where Turkey was threatening to send ground forces into Iraqi Kurdistan and cause further instability (Abdulla et al. 2015). Because of Turkey's historically violent Kurdish conflict within its own borders, many scholars predict that a unilateral declaration of independence from Iraqi Kurdistan would fuel renewed tensions and instability between Turkey and the KRG, resulting from increased PKK nationalism. These arguments use valid historical

logic to predict increased instability resulting from Iraqi Kurdistan independence, but some of these arguments may be becoming outdated due to improving political and economic relationships between Turkey and the KRG. If, for example, Turkey could solve its internal problem with the PKK, some scholars are assessing Turkey may warm up to the idea of a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan and, should Iraq's Kurds go through with independence, a new equilibrium could possibly be achieved. The current violence between the PKK and Turkish troops is unfortunately hindering any progress on this front for the near term.

While historical arguments for tensions with Turkey are still valid, recent literature has introduced the idea that independence could increase regional stability due to strong bilateral Turkish-KRG relationships. Some cite closer energy and trade relations between Turkey and the KRG, along with the ongoing peace process with the PKK, as evidence that Turkey could be coming around toward independence (van Wilgenburg 2012; Eppel 2014; Zanotti 2015; Lowe and Stansfield 2007). While the KRG and Turkey are mutually benefiting in the economic arena from sharing resources, the fragility of the PKK peace process could undermine Turk-Kurd relationships. Stansfield (2013, 2014) suggests Turkey seemed to be on the side of the Kurds when Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Region, nearly attempted an independence referendum last year, and that Turkey's access to the Kurd's oil and gas for their own use and for supply to European nations is increasing stability between the two neighbors. These arguments hold some ground, especially since Turkey's ability to supply European nations decreases Europe's dependence on oil elsewhere, which could increase Turkey's chances of joining the European Union, a goal Turkey has had for quite some time. With the creation of the oil pipeline, Turkey was seemingly preparing for Iraq to dissolve and for the Kurds to gain their independence. Some scholars also see Turkey supporting an independent Iraqi Kurdistan to

counter the growing Iranian influence within Iraq. Overall, though, many scholars agree that Turkey's relationship with Iraq's Kurds relies heavily on how well the PKK is contained within Turkey. If the PKK peace is holding and Turkey's chances for joining the EU are looking good, a logical assertion may follow that Turkey could come around toward Iraqi Kurdish independence and promote greater regional stability from a strong economic relationship.

Iran and Syria: Likely Factors for Instability

Just as Turkey has its own internal issues with the PKK, Iran and Syria's own Kurdish issues could fuel regional instability if Iraq's Kurds gain their independence. In Iran, the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, or PJAK, has been in conflict with Iran for greater Kurdish autonomy within the country. Scholars have noted that just like the PKK in Turkey, PJAK violence in Iran has grown in times following greater autonomy won by Iraq's Kurds. Iran fears this, and some of the literature reveals Iran could retaliate with military action should Iraqi Kurdistan declare independence. Gresh (2009) further argues that instability within Iran could result from the current age of globalization, where high speed communication is allowing Kurdish nationalist groups to better organize and network with Kurds in Iraq. Independence for Iraq's Kurds, therefore, would give PJAK excellent resources and allow them to better organize against Iran and spur greater violence, causing instability with Iran's borders. Furthermore, in Iran's view, any division of Iraq would also limit Iran's influence within the region and jeopardize regional stability (Esfandiary and Tabatabai 2015). Much of the literature reveals that if Iran cannot at least stop independence, Iran would stop at nothing to undermine a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan. These arguments are logical given the rhetoric from Iran's leaders regarding independence for Iraq's Kurds. Other fears of "westernization" of Iraqi Kurdistan,

due to close ties with the United States and Israel, make Iranian support for Kurdish independence unlikely at this time.

Should Iraq's Kurds gain independence, Syria shares in Iraq and Turkey's fears of growing Kurdish nationalism and irredentism from the Democratic Union Party, or PYD, within its borders. Kurdish separatists were inspired to more violently challenge Syrian rule after the signing of the TAL in Iraq back in 2004, and in 2013 the PYD claimed rule over an autonomous region in northeast Syria (Shiffrinson 2006; Eppel 2014). Scholars argue that historical violence and new claims of autonomy from Syria's Kurds will only magnify under an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, which could cause retaliation from Syria or even Turkey. These are logical arguments given that PYD territory runs entirely along Turkey's southern border, although most authors do not try and account for the Assad regime's weakened state when discussing Syria's ability to undermine Iraqi Kurdish independence. Finally, many authors also have not discussed the chances of a more federal Syria existing in the future, which could appease the PYD's calls for independence and help stabilize the region.

A Stable Iraqi Kurdistan Means a More Stable Region

A second major theme from the literature is that the stability of the KRG adds to overall regional stability, especially when looked at in contrast to the Iraqi state as a whole. The main themes from the literature suggest that Iraqi Kurdistan has been a bastion of stability and prosperity in an otherwise war-torn Iraq and Syria region. Common cited factors for stability include the territory's stately characteristics, prosperous economy, unified government and people, and competent military force (Jimenez and Kabachnik 2012; Iraqi Kurdistan 2015; Totten 2015; Glavin 2015; Klein 2009). Scholars argue that if Iraqi Kurdistan can flourish as a new state (which is still a fairly big "if"), stability in the region will begin to increase. On the

contrary, there are competing schools of thought which argue that Iraqi Kurdistan would have a difficult time standing on its own.

One of the reasons many scholars see Iraqi Kurdistan as a stable entity is that the territory possesses many, if not all, the characteristics of a state. As a model for statehood, this paper, as do many others, turns to the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. According to the convention, a sovereign state must have a permanent population, defined territory, government, and capacity to enter into relations with other states (Vidmar 2012, 698). Most scholars can agree that Iraqi Kurdistan fulfills the criteria of the convention, though there are some who would argue there is a lack of a defined territory (the Kurds really want Kirkuk). With a functioning government and rising economy, Iraqi Kurdistan looks like an independent country everywhere but on paper (Stansfield 2006; Caryl 2015). These arguments are reasonable, given that Iraqi Kurdistan has shown the ability to function just as any other state does (and function better than a great deal of other states, for that matter) for the last 25 years. In addition, the population has shown unity in splitting from Iraq, after a 2005 referendum saw 98% of the population favor independence (Totten 2015). This unity as a people, who also share a common language and brutal history, would help an independent Iraqi Kurdistan function more smoothly as an emerging nation-state. However, the population is not completely uniform in ethnicity or tribal affiliation. Some minority groups are against independence and could cause problems for a new Kurdish state in Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan acts as a functioning state in many ways. The government has shown better unity, with Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK agreeing to settle their differences back in 2003. Unity between these two political factions, who waged civil war in the 1990s, is very important to stability with Iraqi Kurdistan (Shiffrinson 2006). However, literature does not

attempt to analyze what a new power as a state in the international community might do to KDP/PUK relations. All of the newfound power could cause the groups to compete in ways that may undermine the government. In a more positive light, the KRG has opened up embassies and consulates within other nations, showing the ability to enter into relations with other states. Their military force, the Peshmerga, has been able to defend the security of Erbil and maintain stability in the territory (Abdulla et al. 2015; Phillips 2014). While this is partly true today (the Peshmerga needs a great deal of help from allies like the U.S.), the Peshmerga have acted with greater bravery, tenacity, and capability than their counterparts in Iraq. Finally, the Iraqi Kurds created an oil pipeline that runs through Turkey in 2013, which shows they are attempting to stabilize their own economy (Zanotti 2015). By the time independence is achieved, Iraqi Kurdistan will have had plenty of time to “practice” being a state, which, according to most of the literature, bodes well for stability in the region. However, a competing school of thought suggests that Iraqi Kurdistan still has a long way to go in many areas until the territory would be considered a stable entity. This contrasting view argues that breaking from Baghdad would sour relations between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, causing regional instability and making Iraqi Kurdistan unable to stand as a sovereign nation.

Iraqi Kurdistan not Ready to Stand on its Own?

While Iraqi Kurdistan possesses many of the characteristics and attributes needed to make up a healthy state, some scholars argue this would not hold enough weight if secession occurs. Economically, some argue Kurdistan would suffer after secession because many countries refrain from buying the Kurds’ oil, and the Kurds would no longer receive revenue from Baghdad, a figure some have put as high as 90% (Zanotti 2015; Hilterman 2012; Stansfield 2014; Klein 2009). Indeed, many countries refuse to buy the Kurds’ oil as to not

upset relations with Baghdad. While economic decline in Iraqi Kurdistan would certainly lead to a more instable region, many authors do not look at how things would change for Iraqi Kurdistan with independence and freedom from Iraqi laws on sharing oil revenue. The Kurds are working with dozens of oil companies to put their economy into their own hands and may be able to utilize hydrocarbon resources to establish their economy (Rafaat 2008; Tanchum 2015). Many arguments both for and against a weakened Kurdish economy have not been based on substantial evidence, a gap that this research intends to fill. Besides an economic fallout with Iraq, many argue that drawing Iraqi Kurdistan's new borders would not be done without causing conflict. The Kurds have a strong connection with Kirkuk and would not give the city up easily, which could lead to bloodshed and further instability (Abdulla et al. 2015; Stansfield 2014). This is a very sound argument, since the Peshmerga secured Kirkuk last year after the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) abandoned the city during the onslaught from ISIL. As such, the Kurds probably feel now more than ever that they have a right to govern the city and reap its oil revenues. According to most of the literature, disputed territories, especially Kirkuk, could be catalysts for a future Iraq/Kurdistan war, should Iraq's Kurds gain their independence without an agreement on boundaries. Between disputed territories, an uncertain economic future, and risk of war between Baghdad and Erbil, some scholars are finding that an independent Iraqi Kurdistan could be taking on too much.

Stability will Decrease with Independence

The overall theme from the literature is that KRG independence would fuel greater instability within Western Asia. Shared concerns include opposition and possible resulting hostilities with Turkey and Iran, disapproval from prominent international actors like the United States, and unresolved disputes with Baghdad, such as the status of disputed territories and oil

sharing agreements. At the end of the day, many believe Turkey would hesitate to back an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran has and always will be against independence, and the United States will not waiver from supporting a unified Iraq. Couple this lack of support with Iraqi Kurdistan's landlocked predicament, and there is a recipe for political and economic instability (Iraqi Kurdistan 2015). Besides a lack of support from the international community, the Iraqi Kurds would have their hands full in trying to deal with their old parent state. Secession would cause huge conflict with Baghdad, especially if the Kurds claimed Kirkuk, and would exacerbate instability in the region and completely reshape the Middle East (Abdulla et al. 2015; Shiffrinson 2006). The extent of instability could depend on how the political boundaries are drawn for an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. If the KRG claims a great deal of the disputed territories, some with significant minority populations, major fighting could break out within the new country (Howe and Killgore 2006; Stansfield 2006). Many authors will bring up counterarguments and weigh both the positives and negatives of independence, but the typical conclusion is that Iraqi Kurdish independence puts a great deal of risk on stability within the Middle East. Notably, many of these assessments are drawn from the idea that Iraq's Kurds were to unilaterally assert their independence. This research differs by looking at the Iraqi Kurds asserting their independence in an approach that has been shown to provide a much smoother transition to statehood.

Theoretical Framework

This research works under the premise that Iraqi Kurdistan has already achieved independence. The manner in which independence was achieved will be treated as a fixed variable, and this is a very important variable in effecting regional stability. The method for independence that this research utilizes is a theory known as earned sovereignty, which is a

gradual, usually peaceful approach toward sovereignty. The reason an earned sovereignty approach is used can first be justified by explaining the constitutive theory, a widely accepted theory in defining statehood.

Two approaches to looking at sovereignty within a state are known as constitutive theory and declaratory theory. According to constitutive theory, international recognition is required for a state to be considered sovereign (Talmon 2005, 102-05). While declaratory theorists (who argue recognition is not required) would disagree, the fact of the matter is that a lack of international recognition is the primary condition holding back Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming an independent state and cannot be ignored. The reality of achieving international recognition relies primarily on the manner in which the Iraqi Kurds would choose to secede from Iraq. For example, common practice today dictates that unilateral secession is not recognized by the international community (Ker-Lindsay 2015). The KRG in Iraq likely realized this after they stood down from their vote for independence in 2014. For these reasons, this research works under the assumption that Iraqi Kurdistan would attempt to utilize earned sovereignty (or at least a very similar method in theory) to gain their independence, where they could achieve recognition from the international community.

The earned sovereignty approach has been utilized by other states, such as Kosovo, to earn their independence in the past. Earned sovereignty “entails the conditional and progressive devolution of sovereign powers and authority from a state to a substate entity under international supervision” (Williams and Pecci 2004, 4). Earned sovereignty has been argued as a successful, peaceful method that minimizes conflict, and is used within this research because this path is arguably the most logical for the Kurds to take to achieve sovereignty. There are three stages to earned sovereignty, including “shared sovereignty, institution building, and a

determination of final status” (Williams and Pecci 2004, 4). Iraqi Kurdistan has arguably fulfilled the first two of three stages, as pointed out by the region’s heightened autonomy (shared sovereignty with Iraq) and state-like characteristics (institution building). With some patience, this is the path on which the Iraqi Kurds currently tread, which is another reason why this theory was chosen to represent how the Kurds would achieve independence. Earned sovereignty also falls on the opposite end of the spectrum from a unilateral declaration of independence, which often serves to decrease stability within a region. With such a diverse spectrum of options for achieving independence, this research will utilize earned sovereignty to examine the effects of regional stability in a post-independent Iraqi Kurdistan world. Earned sovereignty is a theory that most scholars have not studied in relation to Iraq’ Kurds, which is where this research differs.

Most scholars analyze the effects on regional stability if Iraqi Kurdistan were to achieve greater autonomy within a federal or confederal Iraqi state, as opposed to the KRG achieving outright independence. For instance, Rafaat (2008) argues that Iraq’s ethnic groups do not favor the federal system, and that attempting to instill multi-ethnic federalism would keep Iraq on a path towards instability. The argument here is valid, but Rafaat does not address partition of the country or Kurdish independence. Most scholars are actually addressing what type of federalism should exist in Iraq, not even bringing up a two or three state solution, with some arguing that a confederal reality is most likely (Klein 2009; Eland 2005; Gelb 2014). While the former argument holds more ground historically, times are changing, and Iraqi Kurdish is closer to achieving independence now than even five years ago. The fall of Saddam Hussein and growing destabilization within Iraq, the Syrian Civil War, improved relations with Turkey, the existence of the KRG, and the rise of ISIL are all changes that have increased chances for independence.

That is why this research intends to look only at regional stability effects through a lens of outright Kurdish independence in Iraq, especially since sovereignty is a more talked about topic among Middle East experts and has been a stated goal of Iraqi Kurdistan leadership. Analyzing effects on regional stability requires review on the theory of regional stability itself, a concept that is often left out of academic discussion.

Previous literature fails to utilize any type of theory to aid in testing effects of greater Kurdish autonomy on regional stability. Often, authors will state that “regional stability will decrease” without much explanation on what regional stability really means. This research draws from the two fundamental concepts of Robert Ayson’s definition of stability in the context of international relations, which he derives from multiple other scholars. Ayson (2005, 192) argues that stability requires 1) an achievement of equilibrium (or balance/pattern of behavior) between connected and interdependent parts and 2) that major harm and conflict is being avoided. This stability will be examined in the context of the western Asian nations outlined in the purpose statement, namely Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. As an important note, equilibrium can be disrupted as longed as a new equilibrium can be achieved. Avoiding conflict is looked at as being both internal (within a state) and external (between two or more states).

Conclusion

Current literature identifies a few major themes when discussing the potential effects of Iraqi Kurdistan achieving independence. First, the risk of political, economic, and even military retaliation by both Turkey and Iran is a real possibility. Such retaliation could plunge the Western Asian region into even more turmoil than is currently seen. Some scholars are beginning to argue there is potential for Turkish and Iranian backing of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, but currently these views do not make up the majority. Second, the relative stability

within Iraqi Kurdistan, especially looked at in comparison to war-torn, terrorist-ridden, and sectarian-divided Iraq, is seen as a possible positive effect toward regional stability. The stability within Iraqi Kurdistan, however, will depend on a number of factors, including the KRG's ability to continue its oil exports and the severity of the fallout of Iraqi Kurdistan's relationship with Baghdad. While most scholars agree the region is relatively stable for now, many argue Iraqi Kurdistan's landlocked nature could suffocate a new nation that does not have the backing of its neighbors. Also, disputed territories, especially Kirkuk, provide potential catalysts for an early war between Baghdad and Erbil, which would further destabilize the region. Finally, the overall sense of the literature is that independence for Iraqi Kurdistan would cause regional stability to suffer. The reasons are many, including a lack of international support (especially from neighboring Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria), numerous different possibilities for conflict between Baghdad and Erbil, and the landlocked geography of Iraqi Kurdistan causing an economic collapse if the territory were to become a sovereign state. While the overall themes in the literature are backed by logical, qualitative research, new independent variables have emerged in recent years which could affect the analysis on the subject, causing gaps in the research to become apparent.

One of the most important new independent variables is the conflict with ISIL. The Iraqi Kurds have proven their ability to withstand ruthless assaults by ISIL, while the ISF have lost immeasurable amounts of territory to the terrorist group. The Peshmerga have been holding ground since the start of the fighting while mostly being underequipped and outgunned. Also, and perhaps most importantly, many countries are not arming the Kurds due to Baghdad's wishes. This means the ISF, who has lost countless vehicles, ammunition, and weaponry to ISIL, receives most of the aid. If Iraqi Kurdistan can gain international recognition and

statehood, the Peshmerga may have a good chance of becoming better equipped to fight and have even better effects against ISIL. As ISIL is one of the most destabilizing forces in the region, improving the Peshmerga's ability to fight ISIL could provide positive effects on stability.

The existing research tends to end at two main points. First, current research mainly addresses only the feasibility of Iraqi Kurdistan gaining independence, with few articles addressing the potential effects if independence were to happen. Second, and in direct relation to the first point, most of the research looks only at the possibility of Iraq becoming a more federal or confederal state, without much thought given to the actual secession of Iraqi Kurdistan. This is because current literature sees a confederation as the most likely future scenario for Iraq, causing little attention to be paid on thoughts of independence. This research analyzes regional stability effects through a lens of Kurdish independence through earned sovereignty, because the Iraqi Kurds are arguably closer to achieving independence now than they have ever before. By performing this research, policy makers will be better informed on future decisions to make regarding support or opposition of Iraqi Kurdistan's independence. These future decisions will have a great impact on the stability of one of the most volatile regions in the world today.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This framework utilizes multiple qualitative methods in order to answer the research question. The research is essentially building a future scenario where an independent Kurdistan exists. The scenario is founded in the theory of earned sovereignty, which is a proven method of gradually gaining sovereignty in a mostly peaceful manner. This theory is used because Iraqi Kurdistan is arguably going through the process of earned sovereignty, whether the territory knows or not. Due to the large amount of variables involved, an Analysis of Competing Hypotheses is used in an attempt to avoid cognitive bias, which results from errors in human processing of large amounts of information. The research question is asking how regional stability in Western Asia could be affected by the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. The overall goal is to explain how the independent variable, Iraqi Kurdistan Independence, will affect the dependent variable, stability in Western Asia. Three hypotheses have been generated in response to the research question.

Hypothesis 1: Regional stability will increase as a result of Turkey and/or Iranian acceptance of Kurdish independence, KRG government and economy enduring, and international recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan as a state, providing added support to the Kurds in fighting ISIL.

Hypothesis 2: Regional stability will decrease due to Turkish, Iranian, and/or Iraqi retaliation, no international recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan statehood, or KRG inability to endure on its own.

Hypothesis 3: Regional stability will stay relatively the same as a new equilibrium is achieved with regional actors like Iran and Turkey, but no evidence is found for increased Peshmerga abilities to fight ISIL post-independence.

Research Design and Data Collection

The primary method to test the hypotheses will be a qualitative analysis of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, news articles, magazine articles, books, and secondary literature. Due to constraints on time and limitations on funding, there will be no primary research carried out, such as first-hand collection of interviews and quantitative data. For example, while conducting a survey on the Iraqi Kurdistan population's views on independence would be beneficial, the time, funding, and logistics to accomplish such a survey are outside the realm of possibility for this research. While a lack of primary research acts as a limitation and could create gaps in data, these gaps are intended to be filled by reviewing secondary literature. In the case of the population's views on independence, several surveys have been conducted in the past which can serve as secondary research.

The primary research design will be a case study of Iraqi Kurdistan independence through earned sovereignty. A case study is appropriate given the specificity of the research question, the current reality that such a case may exist in the near future, and the multitude of variables and evidence involved. Independence through earned sovereignty is a very particular case which has not been given much study in the academic community. Too often, case studies involving the Iraqi Kurds focus on a possible federal or confederal Iraq, in which Iraqi Kurdistan only gains small measures of greater autonomy. In light of Iraqi Kurdistan's ability to maintain stability while a war is raging on in Iraq, along with the KRG leadership's expressed desire for independence, a case study on independence for Iraqi Kurdistan is absolutely warranted. The type of case study being performed is known as a *plausibility probe*, which is defined by George and Bennett (2005, 75) as a study "on relatively untested theories and hypotheses to determine whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted." A plausibility probe is a very

suitable case study for the research question, especially since this research will be exploring new questions and hypotheses that have not had much attention in the past. If the research reveals that more testing is required to gain suitable answers, then the findings of this research can serve as a starting point for future research. This case in particular also gives an excellent opportunity to test out the theory of earned sovereignty to see if this theory may be a viable option for Iraqi Kurdistan, though this is not the focus of the research.

Two other cases will provide insight into an independent Iraqi Kurdistan's possible effects on regional stability: Israel and Kosovo. Israel is chosen because of similarities along geopolitical and ethnic lines. If Iraqi Kurdistan were to gain independence, there would finally exist another non-Arab state in Western Asia, similar to Israel. Independence for Iraqi Kurds could cause the same type of instability that a country like Israel spurred amongst its neighbors. This is because, geopolitically, Iraqi Kurdistan is surrounded by countries who have historically (and mostly currently) been against an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. The similarities between these two countries (Israel also happens to be one of the Iraqi Kurds' biggest allies) can provide good insight into what independence would do to stability near a new Iraqi Kurdistan. Kosovo was chosen because this country is a good example of earned sovereignty being used successfully (Williams and Pecci 2004). In Kosovo's case, as is predicted to be with Iraqi Kurdistan, involvement by the international community was needed to move the process along. This similarity will provide valuable insight into what the process may look like for Iraqi Kurdistan.

Other means of collecting data for the research include content analysis of documents and analysis of archival data. These two non-intrusive methods will primarily aid in collecting the secondary research upon which this paper relies. Analysis of archival data is particularly

helpful because understanding past events where the Iraqi Kurds have gained greater autonomy provides insight into what even greater autonomy can mean in the future. The regional instability that resulted from the signing of the 2004 Transitional Administrative Law, which gave greater autonomy to the Kurds, is one such example.

Data Analysis

This research will utilize an Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH), as defined by Richards J. Heuer, Jr. in his book, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, to analyze the collected data. This method allows for “simultaneous evaluation of multiple, competing hypotheses” rather than focusing on trying to prove just one (Heuer 1999, 96). Utilizing ACH helps an analyst determine likely outcomes to complex questions by minimizing cognitive bias, which stems from human errors in attempting to process large amounts of information. Using ACH also helps limit personal bias since evidence is analyzed in the context of multiple hypotheses instead of just one hypothesis that may have been favored. The ACH process totals eight steps.

Steps one through three have already been accomplished. The hypotheses have been identified (1), a list of evidence for and against the hypotheses has been generated (2), and a matrix has been prepared to compare the evidence to the hypotheses (3). Ideally, step one would be done by brainstorming within a good sized group of analysts with different backgrounds. For the purposes of this paper, and as one limitation to utilizing this methodology, these hypotheses were brain stormed by the researcher alone. A critical part of step three is identifying those pieces of evidence or assumptions which are the most diagnostic, which means these pieces of evidence are the most helpful in judging the likelihood of a particular hypothesis (Heuer 1999, 102). The current matrix, which continues to be refined (step four), can be found in Figure 1 below. The evidence that has been chosen thus far is based primarily off of the literature review.

Filling out the matrix gives a way to measure the variables and pieces of evidence against each hypothesis. If a piece of evidence is found to support a hypothesis, a plus is put in the column under that hypothesis. If the opposite is true, a minus is put in the column. If a piece of evidence is found to no longer be valid, then that piece of evidence can be discarded. To draw conclusions about the likelihood of each hypothesis (step five), the ACH will be completely filled out. There is a good chance that the hypothesis with the least amount of minuses will be the most likely hypothesis, although just because one hypothesis has five minuses and another has four minuses, the latter should not immediately be considered the better of the two hypotheses. This is where step six comes in, which forces the analyst to consider whether or not there were any critical pieces of evidence upon which the conclusion depends. If these piece of evidence or assumptions are wrong or misleading, the conclusions drawn may be skewed (Heuer 1999, 106). In step seven, the final conclusions are drawn and the likelihood of *each* hypothesis is discussed, not just the most likely hypothesis. Step eight allows the analyst to identify future events which may lead to a change in the likelihood of the hypotheses.

A final way of measuring the independent variable, Iraqi Kurdistan's independence, against the dependent variable, regional stability, is through Robert Ayson's definition of stability in the context of international relations. To summarize, Ayson (2005, 192) argues that stability requires 1) an achievement of equilibrium (or balance/pattern of behavior) between connected and interdependent parts and 2) that major harm and conflict is being avoided. In order to argue whether or not Iraqi Kurdistan's future independence would cause any type of effect on regional stability, a baseline stability must be gauged for the region and Iraqi Kurdistan's relationship with neighboring countries. This baseline can be partly derived from the literature review, and this baseline is limited by a subjective and qualitative nature. By

establishing a baseline of stability, effects on regional stability can at least be measured in terms of increasing or decreasing stability.

Figure 1: Initial ACH Matrix

Evidence	H1	H2	H3
E1. Turkey-PKK peace showing signs of faltering	+	-	-
E2. Turkish intent to retaliate	+	-	+
E3. Turkey-KRG energy and trade relations in good standing	+	-	+
E4. Iran-PJAK unrest showing signs of worsening	-	+	-
E5. Iranian ability/intent to retaliate	-	-	+
E6. Iran-KRG energy and trade relations in good standing	-	-	+
E7. Iraqi ability/intent to retaliate	-	+	-
E8. Assumption that Syria is too weak and preoccupied to retaliate	-	-	+
E9. Syria-PYD unrest showing signs of worsening	-	+	-
E10. KRG ability to field a competent military force	+	-	-
E11. Unity of KRG and its citizens	-	-	+
E12. Iraqi Kurdistan economy able to endure without Iraq	-	+	-
E13. International support for Iraqi Kurdistan independence	-	+	-
E14. Assumption Iraqi Kurdistan utilizes earned sovereignty	+	-	-

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Earned Sovereignty: A Model for Independence

Iraqi Kurdistan could greatly benefit from utilizing the model of earned sovereignty in achieving independence. As explained in the literature review, earned sovereignty gives a territory the chance for a peaceful, gradual approach to independence through the international community's supervision. This model is also one of the most feasible ways Iraqi Kurdistan could go about achieving independence, since unilateral secession would likely only begin civil war between Baghdad and Erbil. Iraqi Kurdistan has arguably been on the path toward earned sovereignty for many years, whether Erbil recognizes this or not. For these reasons, this model is used to put Iraqi Kurdistan independence into context for the rest of the research and aids in the discussion on the feasibility of a future independence scenario actually occurring. The earned sovereignty approach is broken into three elements: shared sovereignty, institution building, and determination of final status.

The first element in earned sovereignty, known as shared sovereignty, has arguably been happening for a number of years between Baghdad and Erbil. In shared sovereignty, "the state and substate entity may both exercise some sovereign authority and functions over a defined territory" (Williams and Pecci 2004, 9). The Iraqi Kurds have been promised greater autonomy since the 1950s, but no such autonomy came until after the first Gulf War in 1991. Prior to this, there had been decades of fighting between Peshmerga and Iraqi troops, along with several failed attempts at signing peace accords and autonomy agreements. In 1991, the establishment of a no-fly zone in northern Iraq allowed the Peshmerga to push out Iraqi troops and consolidate their grip on the northern region. The Kurds' ability to hold the territory in the absence of the Iraqi troops gave them de facto autonomy. In 1992, the Iraqi Kurdistan region officially began self-

governance with the formation of the KRG. This de facto autonomy was the first step in sharing sovereignty between the state (Iraq) and substate entity (Iraqi Kurdistan), even though the agreement was not mutual. According to Williams and Pecci (2004), while mutual agreement is usually a part of the earned sovereignty strategy, sometimes the international community might initiate a phase or two. In this case, the US helped to initiate with the no-fly zone. Shared sovereignty between Baghdad and Erbil did not mutually occur until 2005, when the new Iraqi Constitution officially recognized Iraqi Kurdistan as semi-autonomous region within Iraq. Article 117 of the Iraqi Constitution (2005, 35) states, “This Constitution, upon coming into force, shall recognize the region of Kurdistan...as a federal region.” This designation allows Iraqi Kurdistan to continue with its own governance, enact its own laws, utilize its own police and military force, maintain its own embassies, and essentially have power over the territory the KRG governs. Since 2005, Baghdad and Erbil have been mutually sharing sovereignty over the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

The second element in earned sovereignty is institution building, which has arguably been happening in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1992. During institution building, the substate entity “undertakes to construct new institutions for self-government, or modify those already in existence” (Williams and Pecci 2004, 9). As previously mentioned, the Kurdistan Regional Government was officially formed in 1992. The KRG was only the beginning of Erbil’s institutions for self-government. In 2006, the KRG created the Department of Foreign Relations to coordinate international relations. There are 13 representative offices across the globe, including locations in the United States, United Kingdom, and many other European countries (KRG 2015a). Stunningly, this representation is all for a territory that has still not gained recognition for statehood within the international community. There are 23 foreign embassies

and consulates located in Erbil, along with several other honorary consulates (KRG 2015a). Some of the more powerful embassies and consulates belong to the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, Turkey, Iran, and China. The diplomatic interaction between these countries and the KRG is enough for some to consider de facto recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan as a sovereign nation. However, the argument from these states can be made that their consulates and embassies are still serving Iraq, and the locations of the buildings are merely located in one of Iraq's federal regions (Kurdistan). Besides institutions for foreign relations, past KRG cabinets have been busy creating a possible future state. This includes building infrastructure (such as international airports and critical oil infrastructure), improving health care and education, and spurring greater foreign investment (KRG 2015a). With help from the United States and other countries, Iraqi Kurdistan has built itself a fully functioning, self-governing state, fulfilling the second element of earned sovereignty.

The final element of earned sovereignty, determination of final status, is where Iraqi Kurdistan has been dormant for a number of years. The determination of final status may be solved by referendum or perhaps international mediation between the state and substate (Williams and Pecci 2004, 9). This is the step where the substate can finally become a state itself. By today's standards, the final status as a sovereign state is almost always resolved by gaining recognition of statehood from the international community, such as a United Nations resolution. In Iraqi Kurdistan's case, international recognition of statehood has been very difficult to achieve. As one of Erbil's greatest allies, the United States has adamantly reaffirmed that the current administration does not support the breakup of Iraq. In a May 2015 meeting with Kurdish President Masoud Barzani, both President Obama and Vice President Biden reiterated the United States' commitment to a united, federal Iraq and to the 2005 Iraqi constitution (White House

2015). Currently, the determination of final status for Iraqi Kurdistan is seemingly at a standstill. No one wants to admit Iraq as a failed state (especially the US), and no one wants to recognize independence for the Kurds out of a mostly fallacious, slippery slope fear that such recognition would invigorate secessionist movements across the globe. At the same time, the Iraqi Kurds have come so close to achieving independence that their leadership and populace will likely never back down in their determination for outright sovereignty.

The variable which will likely be of utmost importance in an earned sovereignty model for Iraqi Kurdistan is time. As time passes by, administrations, viewpoints, opinions, and political relationships all change. Major world events happen (like a regional war on a terrorist group) that can reshape the geopolitical landscape. Of course, the assumption in this research is that independence will occur one day for Iraqi Kurdistan. However, predicting the time Iraqi Kurdistan gains outright independence is impossible to do. Whether independence could be in a few months, a few years, or a few decades from now is difficult to say. If independence is achieved by utilizing earned sovereignty, the research in the next several pages shows that the chances for successful independence and greater stability within Western Asia are much higher. Each piece of evidence is analyzed under the assumption that Iraqi Kurdistan's independence is able to be achieved through earned sovereignty.

Kosovo: Earned Sovereignty in Action

Kosovo is a prime example of earned sovereignty in execution. In a very similar circumstance to Iraqi Kurdistan, Kosovo needed added support from the international community to initiate certain phases of earned sovereignty. The interesting part in comparing the two cases is that Iraqi Kurdistan desperately needs international support for the last element of the process,

while Kosovo likely would not have succeeded in the process without international support through the first two elements.

In order for Kosovo to achieve shared sovereignty (the first element in earned sovereignty), the territory needed help from the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG). In 1998, the PILPG proposed a gradual reduction in Serbian control over Kosovo with certain stipulations (Williams 2003). The idea was that if Kosovo continued to meet these stipulations over a number of years, then Kosovo could seek international recognition for statehood. While this exact agreement did not work out, a new agreement would be made shortly after by the international community. In 1999, the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo was drafted, containing many of the elements of earned sovereignty (Williams 2003). Operation Allied Force commenced after President Milosevic rejected the agreement and tried to ethnically cleanse Kosovar Albanians, which ended with Milosevic's defeat and his acceptance of a transfer of authority over Kosovo. Shared sovereignty was now complete, with the United Nations and NATO looking over the newly de facto sovereign Kosovo.

The second element of earned sovereignty, institution building, occurred immediately after the UN gained control over Kosovo. After Allied Force, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) "began the process of building Kosovar institutions" (Williams 2003, 392). While this process evolved quite slowly, the second element of earned sovereignty had nonetheless begun. Over the next few years, Kosovar institutions would gain power and divide themselves from any kind of Serbian control. All that remained for Kosovo's independence was a determination of final status. The SRSG came up with a similar idea to the original PILPG initiative, called "standards before status" (Williams 2003, 394). In order for Kosovo to finally

become independent, the government institutions would have to prove themselves capable of running a country. Finally, in 2008, Kosovo unilaterally asserted independence. Because of support from the UN and the greater international community, Kosovo's independence was recognized as a legal move. While earned sovereignty had many ups and downs with Kosovo, the process proved successful.

Looking at Kosovo's case, earned sovereignty was not completely peaceful. Milosevic rejected shared sovereignty and attempted an ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians which left many dead. Iraq's Kurds could have a chance of seeing violence if they were to pursue an earned sovereignty approach, though violence would likely occur during or after the final step. The violence would likely stem from Iraqi military intervention due to an unwillingness to accept an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. This could happen right after independence or perhaps years later. The only thing that may be able to stop such violence is mediation from the international community, which is why Iraqi Kurdistan needs to somehow gain international support for independence.

Israel: A Short Case Study

Just as Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq have historically been against the formation of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, the Jews in Palestine were surrounded by Arab neighbors who were in extreme opposition to the formation of a Jewish state within Palestinian borders. In Israel's case, independence has been followed by years and years of war with neighboring Arab states and Muslim terrorist groups, with some of the most intense fighting occurring immediately after independence. There are many differences between Israel's case and the current case of Iraqi Kurdistan, and some of those more prominent differences will be highlighted. The unequivocal similarity of opposing neighboring countries serves as the primary foundation for the case study.

Before independence, the Jews in Palestine were involved in civil war with the Palestinian Arabs, which began after the first UN vote for the partition of Palestine. When Israel declared independence six months later, war erupted with the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria (and Iraq as well). Eventually, other states became involved and the war lasted on and off for about a year, ending in Israeli victory. Even after the Israeli victory, instability with surrounding nations did not end. Ever since Israel's independence, the Arab League has maintained a boycott of Israeli companies and goods made in Israel (Weiss 2015). Today, this boycott is not as strictly enforced and arguably does not have a large impact on Israel's economy. However, the boycott still serves as a marker for instability between Israel and surrounding Arab states, nearly 70 years after independence. The main point to take away is that when neighboring states do not support independence, there is a strong likelihood that some form of instability will remain for many years to come. In Israel's case, several wars occurred, and neighboring states are still trying to undermine Israel to this day. Another similarity between Israel and Iraqi Kurdistan is that both countries have a city that can be considered a major "sticking point" between two or more sides. Jerusalem is of utmost importance to all Abrahamic religions and has been fought over for hundreds of years. In Iraq, the oil rich city of Kirkuk serves a similar position of economic value to Baghdad and Erbil. In fact, Kurdish leaders have referred to Kirkuk in the past as "their Jerusalem" (Abdullah et al. 2015). Kirkuk will likely always serve as a major point of contention between Baghdad and Erbil since both feel entitled to the city.

There are several important differences to highlight between Israel and Iraqi Kurdistan's paths for independence. First, the Jewish people had much stronger international support for independence than the Iraqi Kurds do today. United Nations Resolution 181, which

recommended splitting Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, was passed with 33 UN member states voting in favor, showing an inherent support by a significant portion of the international community for the establishment of an independent Jewish state (UN 1947). Among those countries in favor was the United States, whose support for independence is a must for Iraqi Kurdistan. Currently, however, the U.S. does not support a breakup of Iraq. Second, the Jewish people were already involved in a civil war with their Arab neighbors before declaring independence, so all-out war was almost guaranteed when Israel officially claimed independence. This means the regional equilibrium was not affected as much, whereas Erbil's generally peaceful relationship with Baghdad would likely be completely thrown out of equilibrium if independence were declared. Finally, while there was not complete harmony among Arab states who fought against Israel, they were at least banded together better than any of the states surrounding Iraqi Kurdistan. Trying to picture Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria coming together to militarily put down an independent Iraqi Kurdistan is next to impossible.

Despite the differences, and of course there are many more, Israel's case can serve as a lesson for any future attempts at independence by Iraqi Kurdistan. The main lesson that Iraqi Kurdistan should take from Israel's case is that some form of international support for independence is absolutely necessary, especially when surrounding states are in opposition to independence. Israel's case shows that there will likely be some form of instability should Iraqi Kurdistan gain independence, which could materialize in the near term, long term, or both.

Turkey's Reaction to Independence

The research findings suggest that an earned sovereignty approach may largely hinge on Turkey's support or opposition towards Iraqi Kurdistan's independence. Additionally, out of all of Iraqi Kurdistan's neighbors, Turkey is the only one showing real signs of future acceptance of

independence. Rhetoric from Turkish leadership regarding potential independence for Iraqi Kurdistan has softened in recent years, with less language indicating independence as an impossibility. Perhaps more importantly, trade relationships between Ankara and Erbil have greatly improved. There is one main factor that stands in the way of Turkish support for independence, and that is the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK. As discussed in the literature review, Turkey fears that independence for Iraq's Kurds may act as a catalyst for the PKK to renew the fight for Kurdish independence within Turkey. If, however, a lasting peace accord with the PKK came into existence, Turkey may be more willing to support independence for Erbil as Ankara would no longer have to worry about the PKK. Despite the breakdown in the recent ceasefire, the violence between Turkey and the PKK since 1984 has declined overall and will likely continue to do so, giving way to the possibility of future Turkish acceptance of Iraqi Kurdistan independence.

Formed in the late 1970s and considered a terrorist organization by the United States, the PKK has been fighting against the Turkish government for greater autonomy, and at times independence, since 1984. Since the beginning of the fighting, 40,000 people have died, many homes have been destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of Kurds have become internally displaced within Turkey (BBC 2015). Despite Turkey currently being in a state of war against the PKK, the violence between the two sides has declined overall since the end of the 20th century. With casualties numbering between two to eight thousand per year from 1992-1999, those numbers have dropped off severely in the 21st century (Sener 2010). Violence has been interrupted by attempted ceasefires several times throughout the last 30 years, and even though none of the ceasefires have lasted, they have helped to soften the demands of the PKK. At the outset of the violence, the PKK was strictly fighting for independence, but in the 1990s those

demands relaxed to desiring only greater autonomy for Turkish Kurds. By the early 2000s and today, the PKK is appealing mainly for more political involvement and cultural rights for Kurds within the country (BBC 2015). The PKK's numbers have also been shrinking. With an estimated force of approximately 50,000 fighters back in the 1980s, the PKK is estimated to have 4,000 to 5,000 members today (Bruno 2007; U.S. Department of State 2014). At 10% of their original strength, the PKK has been putting a greater effort into politically solving its desires for greater autonomy. Turkey's renewed airstrikes against the group's members in Iraq has disrupted the peace process, but in the strategic outlook this may only be a small speed bump as PKK numbers continue to dwindle along with their resolve for outright independence. If Iraqi Kurdistan is patient and waits for a return to relative peace between Turkey and the PKK, they may find themselves with *at least* Turkish acceptance of independence, which could mean a more stable region. Other factors that show Ankara's possible acceptance of independence include closer trade relations with Erbil and more relaxed rhetoric on the topic of independence.

While Turkey has not come out and voiced support for Iraqi Kurdistan's independence, the rhetoric today is nothing like what has been said in the past. Turkey's response to the question of independence for Iraqi Kurdistan used to be a resounding "no". Now, Turkey has turned more to talking about maintaining the unity of Iraq than saying independence for Iraqi Kurdistan will not be allowed. Regarding Turkey's stance on independence, Masoud Barzani was quoted in 2014 as saying, "I do not expect to receive active assistance or opposition" (Candar 2014). Passive acceptance of Iraqi Kurdistan independence from Turkey is becoming more and more a realistic scenario, and passive acceptance would aid in maintaining regional stability just as much as active assistance. This is due in large part to the increased economic relationship between Ankara and Erbil, specifically regarding oil exports, which was discussed in

the literature review. According to Turkey's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, as of August 2015, exports from oil fields inside Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey were averaging over 600,000 barrels per day (Lihony 2015). As long as Baghdad does not grow too irritable over these oil sales (Erbil is not sharing the oil revenue with Baghdad), Iraqi Kurdistan could utilize this increased trade with Turkey to foster more friendly relations in the future.

Turkey may never want to internationally recognize Iraqi Kurdistan as an independent state, but the country may very well be heading toward a passive acceptance of independence. If the KRG can fulfill the third element of earned sovereignty at the right time (when Turkey has relative peace with the PKK) and declare independence, Erbil may find itself an ally in Turkey. A positive relationship between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey would be extremely beneficial to regional security in Western Asia.

Iran's Reaction to Independence

Iran's stance on possible Kurdish independence has not appeared to change at all in recent years. Iran's leaders have frequently reminded Iraqi Kurdistan that the Iranian administration does not support a break up of Iraq. Right now, the war with ISIL makes determining Iran's reaction to a declaration of Iraqi Kurdistan independence very difficult. The analysis shows that Iran would at the very least react negatively to Iraqi Kurdistan independence. The scope of the reaction is more difficult to determine, but there is a possibility for several scenarios.

Looking at recent statements from Iranian leadership, Iran's support for an independent Kurdish state is lacking. As is the case with Turkey, rhetoric concerning independence should be looked at carefully, as words can sound much firmer than the actual resolve of the state. Keeping this in mind, Iranian officials have frequently commented on maintaining Iraqi unity.

For example, in June of 2014, Iraqi Kurdistan's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, met with the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani. Shamkhani remarked, "I intentionally met with Nechirvan Barzani in uniform so that he would understand that for us the integrity of Iraq is important" (Namazi 2014). This is not the only time high ranking figures in Iran have expressed their distaste with the possibility of a breakup of Iraq. When Barzani moved for a referendum on independence in 2014, Iran was definitely not supportive. Iran's deputy foreign minister of Middle Eastern and African Affairs commented, "We have stated that violating the progressive and comprehensive constitution of Iraq... would not benefit anyone" (Namazi 2014). The growing relationship Erbil has begun to enjoy with Ankara has not been replicated with Tehran. Since there is not much for Iran to gain as a result of Kurdish independence, Iran's stance on independence does not seem to have softened at all.

While Iran does not have much to gain from Kurdish independence, there is definitely something to lose. Another reason Iran looks to remain opposed to independence for Iraq's Kurds is that, like Turkey, Iran fears a strong uprising by its own Kurdish population. Since 2004, the PJAK (similar to the PKK in Turkey) has waged a violent campaign for greater Kurdish autonomy within Iran (Brandon 2006). While the PJAK has absolutely no chance of overcoming the Iranian military, their fighters have caused a number of Iranian military casualties since 2004. The PJAK is also greatly inspired by the PKK and the successes of the Iraqi Kurds. For instance, when the Iraqi Kurds were able to achieve greater autonomy through the new Iraqi Constitution in 2005, PJAK violence grew in Iran. The PJAK were likely inspired to try and gain their own concessions from Iran. The PJAK killed over 100 Iranian military forces in 2005, according to the Iranian government (Brandon 2006). Violence continues to this

day. In Iran's line of thought, if Iraqi Kurdistan were to gain independence, the PJAK would likely be more inspired than ever to rise up and try to achieve greater rights within Iran.

Because of this, there is even less Iranian support for Kurdish independence in Iraq.

Looking at the earned sovereignty model, Iran would likely not be part of the international community's backing of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. However, since Iraqi Kurdistan would have some support and independence would at least initially be agreed upon by certain world players (maybe even Turkey), full-scale Iranian military intervention is unlikely to occur. Quite possibly, the U.S., Israel, or even Turkey may draw a "red line" around an invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan by Iran. Exactly what the consequences of crossing that red line would be are unknown, but this would likely deter any full scale Iranian invasion. On a lesser scale, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force, Iran's special operations forces, has been deployed to Iraq in support of the efforts against ISIL (Rosen 2015). If Iraqi forces were to invade a newly independent Iraqi Kurdistan, the possibility exists that Quds Force personnel could be used in covert support of Iraqi military personnel. Iran would have cause to support Iraq in order to undermine Turkish, Israeli, and likely American influence within an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. A growing Iraq-Iranian relationship as a result of the mutual support in defeating ISIL could prove to be a critical factor for instability in a post-independent Iraqi Kurdistan world. This would, at the least, greatly disturb the equilibrium between Iraq, Iran, and Iraqi Kurdistan, causing further conflict.

Syria's Reaction to Independence

The Assad regime's ability to do anything regarding Iraqi Kurdistan's independence is severely limited. The Syrian Civil War has greatly affected Assad's ability to project regional power on neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan. The Syrian government has become so weak that

controlling its own territory against opposition groups and terrorist organizations has become a number one priority. Syria could become a factor in Iraqi Kurdish independence if the Kurdish minority in northeast Syria attempts or succeeds in establishing any type of de facto governance, which could irritate Turkey to the point of completely opposing independence for Iraq's Kurds.

Civil war in Syria has been going on for nearly five years with no end in sight, and the Syrian government has suffered to the point where the administration is just trying to endure. The Assad regime's ability to govern in certain border regions has been greatly reduced (Lawson 2014). The Syrian military has also been stretched thin. The military is much too preoccupied with fighting ISIL and opposition groups for the country to have any type of military reaction to a Kurdish independence in Iraq. Very similar to Iraq, ISIL has been able to take over large amounts of territory in Syria, mainly in the country's east. What started as civil disobedience back in 2011 from opposition groups has spiraled into an all-out civil war that is mixed in with a fight against terrorism. Whether the Syrian government's main problem is the Syrian opposition groups or ISIL is now very difficult to tell. What can be said is that Syria's ability to affect change in Iraqi Kurdistan through economic or military action will be very limited for the foreseeable future. However, there may be some indirect effects as a result of the regime's inability to maintain governance of the Kurdish population in the northeast.

As the Syrian regime focuses on maintaining control of a few key hubs on the western side of the country, Syria's Kurds (known as the PYD) have been able to expand their control on the territory they "own" in the northeast. The scenario sounds oddly familiar to Iraq's Kurds during the first Gulf War. The Syrian military evacuated the northeast to be utilized in other areas of the country, and the PYD asserted de facto autonomy of the region they call "Rojava".

Any support for Syria's Kurds runs the risk of upsetting Turkey, who has made things clear that the establishment of any type of Kurdish state in Syria is unacceptable. In comments made by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Turkey warned the Kurdish PYD group in Syria about crossing red lines. The PYD was told to "not violate Syria's territorial integrity" (Zeyrek 2015). There could be some strategic effects of Syria's Kurds gaining more ground and more power in northeastern Syria. If Syria's Kurds push Turkey too far, Ankara may decide that any future support for Iraq's Kurds may be too costly to their goals in curbing Syria's Kurds. This reasoning goes back to the slippery slope of Kurdish independence that Turkey fears. If Turkey believes the Syrian Kurds are gaining momentum and motivation from Iraq's Kurds, they may discontinue their support for Iraq's Kurds to prevent greater Kurdish power on its southern border. This would deny Iraqi Kurdistan its only potential ally among bordering states, which could in turn cripple their economy and lead to greater instability in the region. However, the likelihood of Syrian Kurds establishing their own state in northeastern Syria is not very high at this time. Talks between the Syrian government and the PYD are mainly over greater autonomy for Syria's Kurds, instead of outright independence. For now, the PYD should not adversely affect Erbil's relationship with Ankara.

Iraqi Kurdistan Stability

The relative stability within a new Iraqi Kurdistan state will be dependent on a number of different variables. Three critical variables include how healthy the political relationship is between the KDP and PUK, the state of Iraqi Kurdistan's economy, and the level of hostility between Baghdad and Erbil. First, past political differences have led to civil war within Iraqi Kurdistan, and while the two main parties seem to get along alright now, sovereignty could drive the parties to fiercely compete with one another for control over a new state. Second,

many fear that without revenue sharing from Baghdad, Erbil's economy will suffer terribly. Third, despite utilizing earned sovereignty, Iraq is likely to never fully accept the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan and may potentially go to great lengths to undermine the new country in every aspect (economically, politically, militarily, etc.). One other critical variable has already been discussed, which focuses on the relationship between Erbil and Ankara. A healthy relationship with Turkey could mean added economic wealth for a new Iraqi Kurdistan, while an unhealthy relationship could result in Erbil being completely landlocked with no friendly neighbors. The first two critical variables are further examined to provide insight into the future stability of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan.

The political relationship between Iraqi Kurdistan's two main parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), is currently quite healthy. This relationship has not always been this way. In 1994, civil war broke out between Masoud Barzani's KDP and Jalal Talabani's PUK. Before the civil war, just as they are today, the two parties co-existed relatively peacefully and functioned almost as if they were one. Eventually, lust for control over the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan would end up dividing the two parties (Gunter 1996). This made some sense, as the two parties had equal governing power and each only needed a slight edge to tip the scales in their favor. Small skirmishes broke out between the KDP and PUK as a result of deepening partisanship, and before long all out civil war was occurring. The civil war officially ended in 1998 when each side signed the Washington Agreement, which was brokered by the U.S. and Turkey (Makovsky 1998). Because of the bloody history between the two parties, the concern with independence is that the old lust for power could return. While Barzani and Talabani are still the respective heads of the KDP and PUK, several factors show that a relapse is unlikely to occur. First, since the Washington

Agreement was signed, the KDP and PUK have been sharing power quite well, with each party having enough strength to compete against the other in a healthy manner. Second, in addition to the KDP and PUK, a new movement called Goran (Change) is gaining popularity and lessening the bipartisan split in the KRG (Makovsky 1998). Third, during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the KDP and PUK grew closer in their alliance in order to ensure a unity of effort against Saddam Hussein. Finally, today's fight against ISIL looks to have brought the sides even closer together due to their resolve to defeat the terrorist group. The evidence suggests that for the time being, a KDP-PUK fallout is not imminent. The emergence of Goran has also leveled out power even more in Kurdish politics, making a two sided competition for power between the KDP and PUK in a post-independent Iraqi Kurdistan less likely.

There is some concern the Iraqi Kurdistan economy may not be able to function without assistance from Iraq, and in today's economy, these concerns may hold some weight. However, if the price of oil rises back to the triple digits, the Iraqi Kurdistan economy could have a very good chance of succeeding without Iraqi assistance. Iraqi Kurdistan has been recently taking the initiative of exporting oil through Turkey to the Port of Ceyhan. In September of 2015, the KRG exported an average of 620,000 barrels of oil per day (KRG 2015b). With oil prices around \$50 per barrel, this means a revenue of over \$11 billion a year. With 45 billion barrels of oil estimated in reserves, Iraqi Kurdistan could supply oil for the next 200 years at this current rate (KRG 2015b). The KRG's goals are much more ambitious than their current outputs. The original goal was to have 1 million barrels of oil per day by 2015 and 2 million barrels per day by 2019 (KRG 2015b). While the Kurds haven't met their 2015 goal, if they can get up to 1 million barrels per day and if oil prices rise back to \$100 per barrel, they could be making \$36 billion annually from oil sales. The other factor which needs to be reviewed is the amount of

revenue from Baghdad that Erbil would lose if independence were to occur. Under the Iraqi Constitution (2005), 17% of the Iraqi budget is to be paid to the KRG. Iraq's budget revenues totaled approximately \$100 billion in 2014 (CIA 2015). This means approximately \$17 billion should be going to Iraqi Kurdistan. However, Kurdish officials typically proclaim they are receiving far less than the 17% they are owed (KRG 2015b). Some put the actual percentage below ten, which means less than \$10 billion is going into the KRG's pocket. Baghdad blames this on the economic crisis Iraq is going through, since oil revenues make up a majority of their budget as well. With revenues only at \$11 billion for Iraqi Kurdistan, losing out on even a portion of the Iraqi budget could be quite devastating. Iraqi Kurdistan has also taken on hundreds of thousands of refugees and is finding a hard time in paying for the war against ISIL. If Iraqi Kurdistan can wait until the price of oil rises and can increase production, they may very well be able to sever themselves from the Iraqi economy. Besides oil, the relative calm and stability within Iraqi Kurdistan's borders has drawn in heavy amounts of foreign investment. When looking at economic effects on Iraqi Kurdistan after independence, timing looks to be a very important variable once again.

Despite utilizing an earned sovereignty approach, which usually takes form by gaining mutual acceptance between the parent state (Iraq in this case) and the substate entity (Iraqi Kurdistan), Iraq is likely to never truly accept the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan. This means a newly independent Iraqi Kurdistan is likely to encounter a number of problems due to a deteriorating relationship with Iraq. The case could be similar to Kosovo, where Serbia did not accept any plans for greater Kosovar sovereignty until they were forced to do so by Operation Allied Force. Several factors show that some form of violence is likely to occur between Baghdad and Erbil should the Iraqi Kurds gain their independence by any means. Those factors

include control over Kirkuk, setbacks in the Iraqi economy by losing revenue from Kurdistan, and the simple fact that Iraq would be losing nearly 20% of the size of its landmass (CIA 2015). As mentioned in the literature review, Kirkuk is a very significant city to both Baghdad and Erbil. The Kurds feel they have ancestral ties to Kirkuk (Ritz 2014). In June of 2014, the Kurds were able to gain control of the city of Kirkuk when the Iraqi Security Forces abandoned the city in the face of onslaught by ISIL. The Kurds are not likely to give up the city easily, however they could also utilize Kirkuk as a bargaining piece for independence. If the KRG decides they can live without Kirkuk in an exchange for Iraq to more easily bend to the idea of independence, then they may use the city in this way. As of right now, however, they are unlikely to waiver. Besides Kirkuk, there are a host of other border disputes between Baghdad and Erbil as well. In addition to Kirkuk, Iraq is facing its own budget problems with the declining price of oil. Even though the KRG is not actually sharing oil revenues with Iraq right now, they are supposed to be. This means Iraq would lose a significant portion of oil reserves if Iraqi Kurdistan were to become independent, and this is something that could inevitably cause future war between the two sides. War between Erbil and Baghdad does seem unlikely to occur as long as ISIL is currently wreaking havoc on Iraq, as the Iraqi Security Forces are not equipped well enough to fight on two fronts. Eventually, however, Iraq would likely find a way or an excuse to attack Iraqi Kurdistan, no matter how peacefully independence is initially achieved.

Stability within Iraqi Kurdistan after independence appears fairly elusive for the time being. While the people inside the borders get along, relative peace exists, and the political scene is mostly tranquil, the economy could take a huge hit without being under the wing (albeit a broken, dilapidated wing) of Iraq. Baghdad is also not very likely to allow Erbil to achieve

independence without some form of military or economic consequences, even if those consequences may not be immediate.

The War against ISIL

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant has proven to be one of the most destabilizing forces in Western Asia, and no counter-force has stood up to this group with more courage than the Peshmerga. When Iraqi Security Forces drop their weapons and run, the Peshmerga have stood their ground against this terrible foe. Last year, when ISIL was able to fight their way dangerously close to Erbil, the Peshmerga (along with air power provided by the U.S.) were able to push ISIL back and regain lost territory. The will to fight is prevalent among Peshmerga soldiers, but they are often times underequipped to fight to the level of their capability. While the United States attempts to equip the Peshmerga, laws require resupply to go through Baghdad first, who would rather soak up most of the aid themselves. This draws into question what independence would do for the fight against ISIL, as there would be virtually no restraint on lethal aid to the Peshmerga.

The head of the Kurdish intelligence services, Masrour Barzani, believes independence would significantly help in the fight against ISIL. He explains that with independence, Erbil “would be able to make our own agreements to purchase our own weapons in quantity, quality and on time” (Zaman 2015). Barzani brings up a good point about timeliness of deliveries. Not only do the Peshmerga receive less arms, ammunition, and equipment, but the time taken for resupply to arrive is also a limiting factor on their ability to fight ISIL. The actions of the U.S. have implicitly shown who they see as a credible fighting force. In October of 2015, the U.S. airdropped 50 tons of ammo and supplies in northeastern Syria, which appears to have gone mostly to the Kurdish fighters there (Rogin and Lake 2015). In that same month, the Obama

administration announced the first permanent “boots on ground” in Syria in the way of U.S. advisors. The area those advisors are scheduled to be staying is the Kurdish controlled northeast. So the Kurds, out of any other fighting force in the ISIL war, have the most control over their territories. They are the obvious force to back in the fight, but being a stateless people limits that backing. Clearly, having a fully sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan would allow the Peshmerga to show their true fighting potential. The KRG could also more easily back the Kurdish fighters in Syria, and the war against ISIL would move on more efficiently. Defeating ISIL would be one of the most stabilizing factors in Western Asia.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Revised ACH Matrix

Taking the analysis into account, the ACH matrix (Figure 2) has been revised to show less ambiguous evidence statements. The hypothesis with the most supporting evidence statements is hypothesis one (8 supporting statements vs. 5 contradicting statements). Coming in second was hypothesis three (7 supporting statements vs. 6 contradicting statements). Hypothesis two had the least supporting evidence (5 supporting statements vs. 8 contradicting statements). The earned sovereignty assumption, along with evidence numbers three, six, nine, eleven, and twelve have been identified as critical pieces of evidence. Three pieces of critical evidence support hypotheses one and two, while only two pieces of critical evidence support hypothesis three. Based on hypothesis one having the most supporting evidence, least contradicting evidence, and the most pieces of critical evidence, this hypothesis is arguably the most likely to occur. This means that there is a possibility that Iraqi Kurdish independence could result in increased regional stability in Western Asia. There are several important caveats that must be regarded when talking about the possibility of hypothesis one coming to fruition.

Figure 2: Revised ACH Matrix. Bolded items are critical evidence.

Evidence	H1	H2	H3
A1. Iraqi Kurdistan earns independence via earned sovereignty	+	-	+
E1. Overall violence between Turkey and the PKK is declining	+	-	+
E2. Turkey-KRG energy and trade relations in good standing	+	-	+

E3. Turkey moving toward passive acceptance of independence	+	-	+
E4. Iran-PJAK unrest showing no signs for improvement	-	+	-
E5. Iranian rhetoric is completely against independence	-	+	-
E6. Iran is postured for SOF retaliation within Iraqi Kurdistan	-	+	-
E7. Syria is too politically and militarily weak to retaliate	+	-	+
E8. Political relationship between KDP/PUK is healthy	+	-	+
E9. KRG economy too weak to sever from Baghdad	-	+	-
E10. Unity of KRG and its citizens	+	-	+
E11. Iraqi retaliation is likely after independence	-	+	-
E12. Independence would likely aid in the fight against ISIL	+	-	-

First, this research has revealed that the effects Iraqi Kurdistan independence would have on regional stability in Western Asia very much depend on the manner in which Iraqi Kurdistan asserts its independence. An earned sovereignty approach, which works to gain recognition from the international community on sovereignty, would cause considerably less instability in the region. A unilateral assertion of independence, on the other hand, greatly increases the chances for regional instability. This is why the assumption that Iraqi Kurdistan has gained independence through earned sovereignty is identified as a critical element, perhaps the most critical to hypothesis one. Without gaining international approval and recognition as a state, Iraqi Kurdistan's assertions of independence will mostly fall on deaf ears and do nothing more than irritate and possibly provoke negative reactions from neighboring countries.

Second, if Iraqi Kurdistan is to stand a chance at keeping any type of economy afloat, the administration will need to rely on friendly relations with Turkey. The KRG should not expect support from Iran, Syria, or Iraq after independence. This leaves Turkey to help out the landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan, which is why even a passive acceptance from Turkey has been identified as a critical element. This help will come from continued use of the Kurds' oil pipeline that runs through Turkey to the Port of Ceyhan. Relations have slightly soured as of late, with Turkish airstrikes occurring within the Iraqi Kurdistan territory against PKK fighters. Iraqi Kurdistan absolutely *must* find a way to scale back the PKK's extremist actions within Turkey. Ankara will not want to support an independent Iraqi Kurdistan so long as the PKK is still creating unrest within its borders.

Third, timing is of utmost importance when attempting to claim independence. With the majority of Iraqi Kurdistan's budget stemming from oil revenue, the price of oil needs to rise significantly before Iraqi Kurdistan thinks of taking on life as a new state. The KRG should also consider the war with ISIL in timing any type of referendum on independence. If independence can be achieved while ISIL still has Iraq cornered, Iraq is unlikely to be able to militarily retaliate in the short term. This could give the KRG some breathing room to attempt to establish a new state. However, Iraqi Kurdistan must realize that no matter what the method used to achieve independence, Iraq will eventually retaliate in some fashion. Even if the U.S. or the UN has brokered an earned sovereignty deal and Baghdad "accepts" Kurdish independence, this acceptance is not likely to last long. Instability with Iraq very likely cannot be avoided.

The Kurds have literally been waiting hundreds of years for a state of their own. If they want to succeed, they will have to continue to be patient and wait for the right time to declare independence. This research has identified over a dozen variables that could influence stability if

the Kurds were to achieve independence, but there are likely many more to consider. Future research should attempt to identify other critical variables and possible future scenarios which revolve around independence for Iraq's Kurds. Since timing has been identified as a critical factor for the Kurds in achieving independence, another possible avenue for future research could examine possible timelines for independence and what each would mean for regional stability. Iraqi Kurdish leadership has made things fairly clear that independence is a real future possibility. Therefore, attempting to predict the effects of independence on regional stability should continue to be analyzed in the near term. With an earned sovereignty model, a little help from Turkey, and just the right timing, Iraqi Kurdistan may be able to gain independence and increase regional stability within Western Asia.

REFERENCES

- Abdulla, Namo, Henri Barkey, Steven A. Cook, and Meghan L. O'Sullivan. 2015. The time of the Kurds. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/time-kurds/p36547#!/#New%20Resources> (accessed July 31, 2015).
- Ayson, Robert. 2005. Regional stability in the Asia-Pacific: Towards a conceptual understanding. *Asian Security* 1, no. 2: 190-213. <http://goo.gl/DxQu9y> (accessed July 27, 2015).
- BBC News. 2015. Profile: Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). *BBC News Europe* (July). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20971100> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- Brandon, James. 2006. Iran's Kurdish threat: PJAK. *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 12. http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=805&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=181&no_cache=1#.VihP_H6l2ko (accessed October 21, 2015).
- Bruno, Greg. 2007. Inside the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). *Council on Foreign Relations* (October). <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/inside-kurdistan-workers-party-pkk/p14576> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- Candar, Cengiz. 2014. Will Turkey midwife an independent Iraqi Kurdish state? *AL Monitor* (July). <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/candar-isis-iraq-kurds-krq-independence-turkey-barzani.html#ixzz3ogIJTVMV> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- Caryl, Christian. 2015. The world's next country. *FP Magazine* (January). <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/21/the-worlds-next-country-kurdistan-kurds-iraq/> (accessed August 12, 2015).
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). 2015. The World Factbook: Iraq. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html> (accessed October 31, 2015).
- Eland, Ivan. 2005. The way out of Iraq: Decentralizing the Iraqi government. *International Journal on World Peace* 22, no. 1 (March): 39-81. <http://goo.gl/3pCqWZ> (accessed August 12, 2015).
- Eppel, Michael. 2014. Kurdish nationalism's moment of truth? *Current History* (December): 362-368. <https://goo.gl/sktwH0> (accessed July 25, 2015).
- Esfandiary, Dina and Ariane Tabatabai. 2015. Iran's ISIS policy. *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January): 1-15. <http://goo.gl/xDMznF> (accessed July 25, 2015).
- Gelb, Leslie H. 2014. Best hope for Iraq is a loose confederation. *The Boston Globe*. <http://goo.gl/CAIHrr> (accessed August 12, 2015).

- George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2004. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press.
- Glavin, Terry. 2015. No friends but the mountains: The fate of the Kurds. *World Affairs* 177, no. 6 (March/April): 57-66. <http://goo.gl/EsP8ic> (accessed July 30, 2015).
- Gresh, Geoffrey. 2009. Iranian Kurds in an age of globalization. *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1: 187-196. <http://goo.gl/vPrxCF> (accessed July 25, 2015).
- Gunter, Michael M. 1996. The KDP-PUK conflict in northern Iraq. *The Middle East Journal* 50, no. 2 (Spring): 225-241. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/211452215?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=8289> (accessed October 29, 2015).
- Gunter, Michael M. 2014. Unrecognized de facto states in world politics: The Kurds. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20, no. 2 (Spring/Summer): 161-178. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1649692495?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=8289> (accessed August 14, 2015).
- Heuer, Richards J. 1999. *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*. Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence.
- Hiltermann, Joost R. 2012. Revenge of the Kurds: Breaking away from Baghdad. *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November/December): 16-22. <http://goo.gl/jEYOsv> (accessed August 13, 2015).
- Howe, Russel Warren and Andrew I. Killgore. 2006. Should Iraq be partitioned? *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 25, no. 5 (July): 38-39. <http://goo.gl/UCI2VX> (accessed August 5, 2015).
- Iraqi Constitution. 2005. Sec 5, Ch. 1, Article 117. http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf
2015. Iraqi Kurdistan: The essential briefing. *Strategic Comments* 21, no. 2: 3-5. <http://goo.gl/HCEjWA> (accessed July 25, 2015).
- Jimenez, Jeremy and Peter Kabachnik. 2012. The other Iraq: Exploring Iraqi Kurdistan. *American Geographical Society's Focus on Geography* 55, no. 2 (Summer): 31-40. <http://goo.gl/xNIibt> (accessed August 12, 2015).
- Johns, Dave. 2006. The crimes of Saddam Hussein: The Anfal Campaign. *Frontline World* (January). http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq501/events_anfal.html (accessed October 17, 2015).

- Ker-Lindsay, James. 2015. Engagement without recognition: The limits of diplomatic interaction with contested states. *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March): 267-285. <http://goo.gl/Olt4p2> (accessed August 4, 2015).
- Klein, Janet. 2009. A potential Kurdistan: The quest for statehood. *The Emirates Occasional Papers* 73: 1-61. <http://goo.gl/YOa4fp> (accessed July 25, 2015).
- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). 2015a. Foreign relations. <http://cabinet.gov.krd/?l=12> (accessed October 13, 2015).
- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). 2015b. Monthly Export Report. *Ministry of Natural Resources*. <http://mnr.krg.org/images/pdfs/Sept%20Monthly%20Export%20Report%20ENG%20updated.pdf> (accessed October 31, 2015).
- Lawson, Fred H. 2014. Syria's mutating civil war and its impact on Turkey, Iraq and Iran. *International Affairs* 90, no. 6: 1351-1365.
- Lihony, Hemin. 2015. Turkey's energy minister gushes over KRG oil exports. *Rudaw*. August 15. <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/15082015> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- Lowe, Robert and Gareth Stansfield. 2007. Raising the stakes. *The World Today* 63, no. 12 (December): 12-14. <http://goo.gl/CL2Qrj> (accessed August 5, 2015).
- Makovsky, Alan. 1998. Kurdish agreement signals new U.S. commitment. *The Washington Institute* (September). <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kurdish-agreement-signals-new-u.s.-commitment> (accessed October 30, 2015).
- Morelli, Massimo. 2014. The Turkey-KRG energy partnership: Assessing its implications. *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 1 (Spring) 107-121. <http://goo.gl/YrptJj> (accessed August 12, 2015)
- Namazi, Marjan. 2014. Why Iran fears Iraq's Kurds. *IranWire*. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/12/why-iran-fears-iraq-s-kurds.html>
- Nezan, Kendal. 1992. A brief survey of the history of the Kurds. *Kurdish Institute of Paris*. http://www.institutkurde.org/en/institute/who_are_the_kurds.php (accessed October 17, 2015).
- Phillips, David. 2014. ISIS crisis. *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36, no. 6 (November/December): 351-360. <http://goo.gl/h0IZKi> (accessed August 12, 2015).
- Rafaat, Aram. 2008. The Kurds in post-invasion Iraq: The myth of rebuilding the Iraqi state. *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 33, no. 4 (Winter): 405-425.

- Ritz, Janet. 2014. Historic: The Kurds seize Kirkuk. *The Huffington Post* (June). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/janet-ritz/historic-the-kurds-sieze-kirkuk_b_5488220.html (accessed October 31, 2015).
- Rogin, Josh and Eli Lake. 2015. U.S. airdrop in Syria ends up arming the Kurds. *BloombergView*. <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-10-15/u-s-airdrop-in-syria-ends-up-arming-the-kurds> (accessed November 1, 2015).
- Rosen, James. 2015. Quds force leader, commanding Iraqi forces against ISIS, alarms Washington. *Fox News*. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/03/05/iran-quds-force-leader-commanding-iraqi-forces-against-isis-alarms-americans/> (accessed October 21, 2015).
- Sener, Nedim. 2010. 26-year bloody sheet. *Milliyet News*. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/26-yilin-kanli-bilancosu/guncel/gundemdetay/24.06.2010/1254711/default.htm> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- Shiffrinson, Joshua R Itzkowitz. 2006. The Kurds and regional security: An evaluation of developments since the Iraq war. *Crown Center for Middle East Studies* 14 (December): 1-9. <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/people/gradstudents/papers/shiffrinson.MEB14-1.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2015).
- Stansfield, Gareth. 2006. Divide and heal. *Prospect*, no. 122 (May). <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/divideandheal> (accessed August 3, 2015).
- Stansfield, Gareth. 2013. The unravelling of the post-First World War state system? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the transformation of the Middle East. *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (March): 259-282. <http://goo.gl/5nqADu> (accessed August 10, 2015).
- Stansfield, Gareth. 2014. The Islamic State, the Kurdistan Region and the future of Iraq: Assessing UK policy options. *International Affairs* 90, no. 6: 1329-1350. <http://goo.gl/QR0iAQ> (accessed July 30, 2015).
- Talmon, Stefan. 2005. The constitutive versus the declaratory theory of recognition: Tertium non datur? *British Year Book of International Law* 75, no. 1: 101-181. <http://goo.gl/6zfr9q> (accessed July 27, 2015).
- Tanchum, Micha'el. 2015. The Kurds' big year: The political conditions that favor Kurdish independence in Iraq. *Foreign Affairs* (January). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-01-12/kurds-big-year> (accessed August 3, 2015).
- Totten, Michael J. 2015. Let Iraq die: A case for partition. *World Affairs* 177, no. 6 (March/April): 17-23. <http://goo.gl/EsP8ic> (accessed July 30, 2015).

- United Nations. 1947. *Resolution Adopted on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question*. 181 (II). Future government of Palestine.
[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/181\(II\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/181(II))
- U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism. 2014. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*. Chapter 6: Foreign Terrorist Organizations.
<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239413.htm> (accessed October 15, 2015).
- van Wilgenburg, Wladimir. 2012. Breaking from Baghdad: Kurdish autonomy vs. Maliki's manipulation. *World Affairs* 175, no. 4 (November/December): 47-54.
<http://goo.gl/CtHSZM> (accessed July 26, 2015).
- Vidmar, Jure. 2012. Territorial integrity and the law of statehood. *The George Washington International Law Review* 44, no. 4: 697-747. <http://goo.gl/1fXfj4> (accessed July 27, 2015).
- Weiss, Martin A. 2015. Arab League boycott of Israel. *Congressional Research Service* (June).
<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33961.pdf>.
- White House. 2015. *Readout of the President and Vice President's Meeting with Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani*. Office of the Press Secretary.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/05/readout-president-and-vice-presidents-meeting-iraqi-kurdistan-region-pre> (accessed October 13, 2015).
- Williams, Paul R. 2003. Earned sovereignty: The road to resolving the conflict over Kosovo's final status. *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy* 31, no. 3 (Summer): 387-425.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=4&sid=faedff85-e657-47f7-b40a-e93742d33a5a%40sessionmgr115&hid=124&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=12593633&db=aph> (accessed October 27, 2015).
- Williams, Paul R. and Francesca Jannotti Pecci. 2004. Earned sovereignty: Bridging the gap between sovereignty and self-determination. *Stanford Journal of International Law* 40, no. 2 (Summer): 347-385. <http://goo.gl/c5iQEF>
- Zaman, Amberlin. 2015. Masrour Barzani: Kurdish independence would help defeat IS. *Al Monitor* (July). <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/turkey-iraq-syria-kurdish-independence-help-war-against-isis.html#>
- Zanotti, Jim. 2015. Turkey: Background and U.S. relations. *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 6, no. 1: 131-215. <http://goo.gl/9xagb4> (accessed July 27, 2015).
- Zeyrek, Deniz. 2015. Ankara warns PYD over 'demographic change' in northern Syria. *Daily News* (June). <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ankara-warns-pyd-over-demographic-change-in-northern-syria.aspx?pageID=517&nID=84296&NewsCatID=510> (accessed October 26, 2015).