



## **OPERATION “TERMINATION OF TRAITORS”: THE IRAQI REGIME THROUGH ITS DOCUMENTS**

By Robert G. Rabil\*

*This article examines the Iraqi regime’s policy toward its Kurdish population during the Iran-Iraq War, which culminated in a military operation codenamed Termination of Traitors. Executed in a methodical and systematic fashion, this operation shows that the regime was not just trying to quell the Kurdish insurgency but had a plan for altering irreversibly the life of the Kurds in northern Iraq. Equally significant, this operation shows the regime’s views and methods in general as well as attitudes toward human rights.*

This article, based on official Iraqi documents, examines the Iraqi regime’s policy vis-à-vis its Kurdish population during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).(1) The long, conflicted Iraqi-Kurdish relationship led to the government’s decision to launch a major campaign against the Kurds at the war’s end. Harsh methods were employed in an operation codenamed Termination of Traitors, personally ordered by President Saddam Hussein and leading into the better-known Anfal campaign. The three-phase effort was designed not only to deal a final blow to the Kurdish rebellion but to ensure no such uprising took place in the future.

The campaign’s aim was also the conscious and deliberate murder of large numbers of Kurds regardless of their gender, age, or civilian status. Even chemical weapons were to be used against them. A special bureaucracy was created to carry out this operation and to meticulously detail every action taken. These activities spanned a gamut from “collectivizing” the families of “saboteurs”, to detaining them, creating dossiers on them, and marking them for death. For this purpose, the regime mobilized a wide range of officials from the lowest- to highest-ranking. All this is sketched in minute detail in the mass of official documents examined by this research to open a

window into the regime’s inner workings, nature and modus operandi.

In its definitive study of the Anfal campaign, Human Rights Watch (HRW) concluded that the Iraqi regime committed the crime of genocide. While seeing no master plan to exterminate the Kurds, HRW emphasized that Anfal was the culmination of the Iraqi regime’s “anti-Kurdish drive [which] dated back fifteen years or more, well before the outbreak of hostilities between Iran and Iraq.”(2) Whether or not this campaign will some day be internationally recognized as genocide, the documentation shows that the regime’s effort to quell the Kurdish insurgency was based on a deliberate plan to exterminate large numbers of Kurds.

### **BACKGROUND**

Modern Kurdish history in Iraq cannot be separated from the Kurds’ struggle for independence or autonomy from government control. In response, Baghdad tried to ensure its power in the Kurdish regions and to suppress periodic rebellions. This relationship was further exacerbated by the presence of vast oil reserves on the fringes of the Kurds’ ancestral land, mainly around the ethnically mixed areas of Kirkuk and Khaneqin. The Kurds repeatedly

challenged the central authorities for control of these areas.

A pattern characterized Kurdish-Iraqi relations since 1958. Each Iraqi government that came to power at first pursued peace negotiations with the Kurds only to fight them at a later date when it felt secure about its rule over the country. Following the Free Officers Revolution in 1958, the new regime, led by 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, pursued cordial relations with the Kurds. In fact, the Kurds helped the regime put down a coup d'etat and the KDP was legalized in 1960. However, once it appeared that Qasim was not willing to grant real autonomy to the Kurds, fighting between the two parties broke out in 1961. When the Ba'th-Nationalist alliance overthrew Qasim in 1963, negotiations between the new regime and the Kurds resumed. Fighting broke out again when the Kurdish leadership realized that the enthusiasm of the new regime for Kurdish autonomy had been assumed for purely tactical purposes. By 1964, the nationalists, led by Abd al-Salam 'Arif, had pushed their Ba'thist partners out of the coalition and negotiated a cease-fire with the Kurds. The cease-fire lasted until April 1965 at which time the central government dispatched virtually the entire Iraqi army to the North in an attempt to reassert its authority there.

This same pattern continued when the Ba'th party government assumed power following a July 1968 coup. The new regime was pragmatic enough to seek political accommodations with the Kurds at a time it felt weak on account of contending domestic political forces. The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the highest authority in the land, issued a manifesto on March 11, 1970 essentially recognizing the legitimacy of Kurdish nationalism and guaranteeing Kurdish participation in government. But it held out on defining the territorial extent of Kurdistan pending a new census. Since the next census was not scheduled until 1977, the regime felt confident of controlling events by then.

Moreover, following the manifesto, a significant number of Kurdish families were forcibly removed from their homes to reduce their presence in several areas, especially around Kirkuk. In September 1971, thousands of Faili Kurds were expelled to Iran from border areas on the grounds that they were not Iraqis. In 1972, the Ba'th regime began to assert its nationalist credentials and went on to sign a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union and nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company. Following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Iraq's oil revenues soared and provided the regime with the wherewithal to embark on huge projects and to strengthen its police state.

In the meantime, the Kurdish leadership began a process of rapprochement with Iran, Israel and the CIA, which were concerned with Iraq's assertive policies and evolving Soviet-Iraq relations. With Ba'th-Kurdish relations intermittently hostile, the main Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), laid formal claim to the Kirkuk oil fields in June 1973.

Baghdad was furious at what it considered Barzani's audacity on this point as well as his collaboration with Iran, Israel and the CIA. Fighting broke out between the two sides. In March 1974, Baghdad unilaterally decreed an autonomy statute excluding the oil-rich areas of Kirkuk, Khaneqin and Jabal Sinjar from the Kurdish autonomous region, which would include only the three provinces (governates) of Irbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk. In line with the new statute, the Ba'th regime undertook an administrative reform in which the country's sixteen governates were renamed and some had their boundaries altered. Of special importance, the governate of Kirkuk was divided and the area around the capital city Kirkuk was renamed al-Ta'mim (nationalization) governate after its boundaries were redrawn to give an Arab majority.

Meanwhile, despite its persistent offensives that included air strikes on Kurdish positions, Iraqi forces were bogged down by fierce resistance from Kurdish fighters, known as

*peshmerga* (those who face death). Unexpectedly, in March 1975, in the course of an OPEC conference at Algiers, the shah of Iran and Iraq's strongman, Saddam Hussein, signed the Algiers agreement, which put a temporary end to the conflict between the two countries. Iraq granted Iran shared access to the disputed Shatt al-Arab and in return Iran withheld its support from the Kurds. In less than a week, Barzani's rebellion collapsed. He left for Iran, then for the United States where he died in 1979. Consequently, the KDP split in 1975 into two main factions, the KDP-Provisional Command led by Barzani's sons Idris and Masoud, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani.

Immediately following the rebellion's collapse, the Iraqi regime embarked on a campaign to Arabize the areas it had excluded from the autonomous region. Hundreds of Kurdish families were uprooted and Arabs from the south were lured to move to the north. Subsequently, in 1977-1978 the regime began to clear a strip of land along its northern borders with Turkey and Iran, which was expanded several times until it was several few miles wide.

Sharing a long mountainous border with Iran, the governate of Sulaimaniya was deeply affected. Hundreds of villages were destroyed in this border clearance campaign and their residents forcibly relocated to *mujamma'at* (complexes), crude resettlement camps, known also as "modern cities," built near large towns or main highways under the army's complete control. By the time Saddam became president in 1979, Kurdish social and political life had been very much affected by these measures. Army and intelligence units stationed throughout Iraqi Kurdistan continued to control them and suppress their culture and identity.

### **TAKING THE DECISION**

With the onset of the Iraq-Iran war in September 1980, relations between Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad rose to new levels of enmity and bitterness. Baghdad's campaign to circumscribe

and control Kurdish political life had foundered after so many army units stationed in Iraqi Kurdistan were sent to the front. The resurgent *peshmerga* were quick to fill the security vacuum there and many villagers offered refuge to an increasing number of Kurdish deserters.

At first, the regime focused its attention on the KDP's links to Iran, which increased its military and economic support for the Kurdish opposition party. This relationship entered a new dangerous phase in the regime's eyes when Iran, with help from the KDP, seized the important border garrison town of Hajj Omran in July 1983. The initial thrusts of the Iraqi army into Iran had been parried by a successful Iranian counter-offensive. Now Iraq was on the defensive. The regime was furious with the KDP and branded it a fifth column.

At the same time, the regime maneuvered to deepen the rivalry between the KDP and the PUK. Capitalizing on the PUK's opposition to the KDP's role in facilitating the Iranian offensive on Hajj Omran, Saddam Hussein launched a diplomatic initiative centering on offering the PUK leader a renewed commitment of Kurdish autonomy. Talks ensued between the PUK and Baghdad and continued inconclusively until their collapse in January 1985. Although a combination of reasons led to the collapse of talks, one key issue was the regime's rejection of the old Kurdish demand that the oil-rich regions of Kirkuk and Khaneqin be considered part of autonomous Kurdistan.

This policy now pushed the PUK as well into the Iran's arms. Tehran was more than happy to welcome this new ally in the midst of its war with Iraq. Within two years, Iranian-PUK cooperation improved dramatically, culminating in a sweeping political, economic and military accord signed by the two parties in October 1986. They agreed to fight Saddam until he was toppled and to sign no unilateral deal with Baghdad. The Iraqi government's reaction was to ascribe officially the epithet of *Zumrat Umala'* Iran (Band of Iranian Agents) to the PUK.(3)

With both Kurdish groups helping Iran, Baghdad lost control of the countryside in Iraqi Kurdistan except for the main towns, cities and connecting roads and highways. The regime designated villages falling under the *peshmerga*'s control or those where this militia was active as prohibited for security reasons.

As Iraqi official documents show, it was at this point, at the beginning of 1985, that the regime dropped its hitherto ad hoc counterinsurgency measures and began to pursue a systematic state policy against the Kurds aiming at destroying their political, economic, social and military foundations. Building on its bureaucratic infrastructure in the north of Iraq, the regime began to bureaucratize and institutionalize its policy through a set of decrees and orders which streamlined executions and repressive measures.

At the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy in Iraq Kurdistan was the Committee for Northern Affairs, established in 1979 and headed by Saddam, and the Northern Bureau of the Ba'ath party organization, the regime's main office there. The Committee for Northern Affairs was directly linked to the RCC, which wielded the real power in Iraq and was also presided over by Saddam. Below these two bodies were security committees at the governate, district, and sub-district level. All these were supervised by a central security committee. Finally there was the army, mainly the First and Fifth Corps, and the pro-government Kurdish militias, informally called *Jahsh* (a pejorative name literally meaning mule), but known officially as the National Defense Battalions.

These groups were watched over by intelligence and security agencies to be certain that the RCC's instructions were implemented through an intricate three-layer web:

--The Directorate of Military Intelligence for the Northern Region (Ninawa, Dohuk, Irbil), based in Irbil, and the Directorate of Military Intelligence for the Eastern Region (al-Ta'mim, Sulaimaniya, Diyala, Salahuddin), based in Kirkuk. These two Directorates reported to the

General Military Intelligence Directorate and had branches on the governate and district levels.

--The Directorate of Security for the Autonomous Region which had branches on the governate, district and sub-district levels. It reported to the General Directorate of Security. These apparatuses were part of the office of the President.

--The intelligence units of the First and Fifth Corps.

As illustrated by official documents, the barrage of decrees and orders began systematically on June 15, 1985 with telegram number 3488 ordering the deportation of "women, children and elderly people who were the relatives of saboteurs." Any males who might bear arms were to be arrested and detained.(4) Consequently, many families were forcibly deported and many males arrested. For example, in the Shaqlawa district most families were forcibly removed to the Khoshnaw region.(5) Those detained would only be released if their *peshmerga* relatives surrendered to the authorities.(6)

At the same time, the regime issued orders to fire all saboteurs' relatives from public institutions; confiscate their properties; and remove their telephone lines. Certain villages would also lose access to electric power and shipments of food to them would be blocked. Dossiers were created on all the deported persons and the activities of suspects.(7) The food ration and identity card program would be tightened. Anyone harboring any relative of an oppositionist would be liable to prosecution.(8) In August 1985 an economic blockade was imposed on numerous villages, including Piro, Totma, Khatay, Balisan, Sheikh Wasan, Balokawa, Bilawa—all in the district of Shaqlawa.(9)

As will become apparent, these villages were destroyed later on and some of them attacked by chemical weapons. As a first step, however, the economic blockade was to force the surrender of the rebels whose families would be faced by starvation. Further, by

deporting their relatives to these closed villages, the extent of the suffering would be accelerated and intensified.(10)

In addition to these measures, the regime employed psychological warfare by trying to sow mutual suspicion and conflict among the Kurdish population. In September 1985, the authorities decided to establish a committee to be headed by then secretary-general of the Northern Bureau Muhammad Hamza al-Zubeidi and to include prominent figures from Security and Military Intelligence. The plan was to exempt some Kurdish families and tribes from deportation to make others think these groups were collaborating with the regime.(11)

The measures imposed in the second half of 1985 and into early 1986, however, did not break Kurdish morale. On the contrary, Kurdish-Iranian collaboration intensified and became even more dangerous to the regime. With the help of Kurdish insurgents, Iran continued to launch offensives along the entire Iran-Iraq border. In September 1985, for example, Iran was able to attack the northern sector east of Rawanduz, while the KDP claimed control over most of northern Iraqi territory almost to the Syrian border.

The course of the war took a sharp turn in February 1986. Iran launched back-to-back-offensives, code-named respectively Wa al-Fajr-Eight and Nine, on the southern and eastern sectors of the Iraqi border. In the first offensive, Iran tried to capture Basra and the Fao peninsula to cut off Iraq's access to the Gulf. In the second, Iran advanced into Iraqi Kurdistan to a line only 14 miles from Sulaimaniya, the capital city of Sulaimaniya governate. By March, despite Iraq's attempts to halt the Iranian onslaught by using chemical weapons, Iran captured the Fao peninsula.

These setbacks reinforced Iraq's determination to implement a tough policy against the Kurds, especially as both the KDP and PUK increased their attacks deep into Iraqi Kurdistan and even in the Kirkuk oilfield region. The regime was badly shaken by these events. It increased the number of villages

deemed prohibited for security reasons, cutting off all government services and banning access to them.

In letter number 15076 issued on August 2, 1986, al-Zubeidi, head of both the Central Committee for Security Coordination and Northern Bureau, circulated a directive from the office of the President numbered 28189, instructing all heads of the security committees in the governates to "continue the blockade and tight control on the villages and areas that are prohibited for security reasons." The directive added that "Foodstuffs and other provisions are totally prohibited from reaching these villages and areas."(12) The Commands of the First and Fifth Corps, all Commands of Northern Bureau branches, and the Northern and Eastern Regions' Directorate of Intelligence were to participate in executing this directive.

#### **OPERATION TERMINATION OF TRAITORS**

Still, these measures did not stop the Kurdish attacks and Iraq's loss of territory to the insurgents. By the start of 1987, the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan had become critical for the regime which could not even guarantee the situation in the main towns and cities. For example on March 4, 1987, Iran launched an offensive, codenamed Karbala-seven, which brought its forces to within a few miles of Rawanduz. Both KDP and PUK *peshmerga* participated in the offensive. At this point, the regime began to consider measures powerful enough both to quash the Kurdish insurgency and permanently destroy any basis for Kurdish resistance.

The resulting plan was to carry out one sweeping operation, codenamed Termination of Traitors.(13) In line with the name's implication, that operation was designed to implement the highest possible level of punishment and physical liquidation on both the Kurds and their villages. The method was to destroy villages and even towns, and then forcibly deport their inhabitants to tightly supervised camps. The first step would be

against population centers in government-controlled areas, followed by another phase to eliminate villages prohibited for security reasons wherever the army could reach or even politically passive villages in areas where guerrillas might operate.

In this way, most of rural Kurdistan was declared prohibited, and villages were marked for destruction regardless of whether the villagers abetted, harbored, or supported the saboteurs. The first phase ran from April 20 to May 20 while the second was conducted from May 21 to June 20. The final phase culminated in the Anfal campaign, characterized by the use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish population and lasting from February to September 1988. The word Anfal is mentioned in the Koran (eighth sura) and literally means spoils. It is cited within the context of a hard battle won by the first Muslims who perceived it as vindication of their new faith.

The inauguration of operation Termination of Traitors coincided with the appointment of Ali Hasan al-Majid, the infamous cousin of Saddam, as Secretary-General of the Northern Bureau of the Ba'ath Organization. On March 29, Saddam Hussein issued decree number 160 authorizing Majid to take charge of all military, security and civil affairs in northern Iraq.(14) Majid became the undisputed lord of northern Iraq, including the Kurdish autonomous region. This overarching decree was followed by another issued by Saddam on April 20. Decree number 244 authorized Majid to discharge all missions of the Committee of Northern Affairs for the purpose of executing decree 160.(15)

The comprehensive nature of the operation and the swiftness with which it was executed indicate that Majid was not necessarily its main architect. He was appointed to this position because Saddam knew he would implement the operation without reservation. His predecessors, Sa'di Mahdi Saleh and especially Zubeidi had failed to bring the Kurds people to their knees. Thanks to his brutality, al-Majid would succeed in doing so.

Immediately after his appointment, Majid set about issuing orders increasing the arbitrary power of the heads of the security committees and suspending all rights for residents of villages prohibited for security reasons. As illustrated by the Northern Bureau's letter (confidential and personal) number 18/2397 of April 6, 1987, he authorized the "heads of the security committees in the northern governates to confiscate the movable and immovable properties of the saboteurs, provided that their properties are liquidated within one month of the date of issuance of the confiscation decree."(16)

Prior to this decree only the central security committee had the power to issue and delegate orders concerning the saboteurs. With most of rural Iraqi Kurdistan considered prohibited for security reasons, the heads of local security committees acquired significant personal powers to do whatever they wanted. This, as will be made clear below, was part of a larger policy aiming at loosening government restraint on the behavior of Iraqi officers.

On April 20, operation Termination of Traitors proceeded with a swift pace and wide scope. As documents reveal, the regime aimed at the elimination of villages located in an area extending from north Sulaimaniya to Zhako in northwestern Iraqi Kurdistan. This area, encompassing hundreds of villages, constituted roughly the middle, northeast and northwest of Iraqi Kurdistan. It ran from near the border of the Ninawa governate south of the important oil-field region of Mosul to the Iranian border and from north of Kirkuk to Zakho. All the villages considered prohibited for security reasons in this area were to be destroyed. But villages not designated as prohibited could also be destroyed with the approval of Majid.(17)

Such a comprehensive operation required concerted efforts among the regime's apparatuses, special equipment and a detailed plan. The regime's meticulous documentation of the execution of the first two phases of the operation in al-Gouli sub-district of Zhako district offered a full picture of how the

operation worked. Majid's Northern Bureau in coordination with the central security committee provided the names of villages to be destroyed to the military, mainly the First and Fifth Corps, which in turn passed them on to the command of sectors, military outposts located in strategic and sensitive areas throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. The security committee, which supervised the deportations, generally included the heads of a district and/or sub-district as well as high-ranking officials from the General Directorate of Military Intelligence and the Northern Bureau.

As illustrated by the documents, (18) usually at 7:00 am, the armed forces of the sector, in this case the sector of Batofa in al-Gouli sub-district, accompanied by National Defense Battalions, would storm the villages. Depending on expected or actual resistance in the villages, these forces would ask for reinforcements from Emergency Forces, Intelligence Detachments, Air Force and Tank Battalions. For example in the case of the village of Ser Solaf in Batofa region, the Batofa Military sector, along with National Defense battalions 38 (500 fighters) and 143 (150 fighters), attacked the city on April 22 and were met by stiff *peshmerga* resistance. The sector thus called for air cover and reinforcements including tanks. The village finally fell at 2:30 pm.(19) Iraqi forces then gathered all its residents and destroyed it with bulldozers, bombs, fire, or a combination of these methods. The goal was to leave no trace of its existence so as to make it very hard for residents ever to return.

Following the destruction of villages, Iraqi forces would deport the families to government-built complexes situated next to main towns or highways under the complete control of the government. A complex included within its confines mini-complexes each containing shanty houses or tents. In al-Gouli sub-district, according to the documents, the residents of the destroyed villages were relocated—in the regime's parlance

“collectivized”—to three complexes, Avegni, Batofa and Bekova.(20)

Batofa complex, for example, had five mini-complexes, Tarwanch, Toler, Suria, Shilan and Kosindar. Each household, sometimes comprising more than one family, was assigned a house. The regime founded a committee to every complex called the Committee to Resettle Deported Families.(21) On the surface, these committees were to accommodate and facilitate the relocation process. In reality, these committees were security organs created to supervise, watch, and recruit agents among the families.

Immediately after the arrival of the deported families to the complexes, every president of a committee would write a morning and nightly report to the Directorate of Intelligence in his sub-district containing the name of the father of the deported family, number of family members, name of the village from which they were deported, and name of the complex in which he resided. According to official documents, the villages destroyed in al-Gouli were Gre, Khezafa, Khandak, Khol Gouli, Sirktuk, Kelkhar, Berki, Merge, Akha Kharab, Avonak, Bahnuna and Avatoka.(22) At one time, the population at Batofa complex numbered 3,712 while that of Begova was 3,791. In another sub-district of Zhako, Sahl al-Sindi, 27 villages were destroyed and the complex there housed 4,021 individuals.(23)

Although an exact number of destroyed villages cannot be currently provided, the scope and extent of this “collectivization” process was clear. At the same time the villages of the Dohuk governate were eliminated, a similar and broader process was befalling the villages in Irbil governate. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and their residents relocated. In an urgent and confidential telegram, number 456 of April 17, 1987, the Security Lieutenant of Shaqlawa Directorate of Intelligence informed all intelligence branches in his governate about the decision concerning where to relocate the families deported from their areas. His telegram read as follows:

The families in the sector of Koisinjaq and the sub-districts of Shores and Tataq were to be relocated to the modern city of Darato; in the sectors of al-Zibar, al-Sadeek, Shaqlawa, Choman and sub-districts of Diyana, Rawanduz, Mergeh Sur, Hareer, Khoshnaw and Khlefana to the modern city of Sibaarm; in the city of Korkosak and the sector of Sahahuddin to Jaznikan; in the sector of Qoshtaba to Barhoshtar; in the sector of the sub-district of Khabat and part of the sector of Qoshtaba sub-district to Tobzaw; in the sector of Ainkawa to Jaznikan; in the sector of al-Kuwair to Tobzaw; and in the sector of Makhmur and the sub-districts of Qoraj and Kandina to Faraj.(24)

The number of families deported, and by implication the corresponding number of villages destroyed, had to be staggering given the fact that the areas mentioned in this telegram covered a significant portion of Irbil governate and north of Kirkuk. In fact, the sheer quantity of the families to be deported from so many areas compelled the regime to establish more committees for resettlement than had originally been envisioned. For example, Irbil's security committee established one central deportation committee and seven deportation committees corresponding to the number of Irbil's sectors.(25)

Several documents set the magnitude of this "collectivization" process in sharp relief. Responding to Irbil Security's confidential and urgent telegram number 1929 of April 29, 1987, Shaqlawa Security officer listed the names of 32 villages eliminated, the names of their village chiefs, and the date of elimination. All villages, among which were Balisan and Sheikh Wasan, were destroyed in April and May.(26) These two particular villages, located south of the town of Rawanduz, had already been the target of an Iraqi chemical attack on

April 16, shortly after PUK forces had captured the regime's military posts in the area.

Several official documents confirm the regime's use of chemical weapons on Kurdish villages other than these two. Letter number 2396 of June 17, 1987, from the Shaqlawa Directorate of Security reported, "On May 27 the villages of Malkan, Talitan, Kandour, Yali al-Ulya and Yali al-Sufla of Khlefana sub-district were attacked by Iraqi planes. As a result, a number of saboteurs were killed and approximately 30 persons lost their eyesight."(27) Blindness is a symptom produced by chemical weapons. In the meantime, Iran began providing protective masks to the Kurds and training them how to handle chemical attacks.(28) A more specific admission of the use of chemical weapons was in telegram, number 159650 of May 25, 1987, from Military Intelligence which reported, "Four chemical bombs were dropped but only one detonated, inflicting four women with tearful eyes. They were taken to Belkchar hospital for treatment."(29)

Why did the regime use chemical weapons on a few villages at this time? For example, it dropped such weapons on Balisan and Sheikh Weisan on April 16 then went on to destroy the villages on April 20. Why not destroy them in the first place without chemicals? The documents suggest that the regime was experimenting with the use of these weapons on a purely practical basis to see whether they would facilitate operation Termination of Traitors. If the chemical weapons made the villagers flee or killed them all, capturing these places would be easier and the task of deportation would be reduced.

### **THE PATH TO ANFAL**

Even Operation Termination of Traitors, while energetically implemented, did not meet the regime's goal. *Peshmerga* attacks on Iraqi military posts and cooperation with Iran only continued to escalate. Now these forces were even hitting strategic positions near Sulaimaniya and Halabja as well as helping



Iran launch offensives against towns near Dukan Lake such as Qala Diza.

Against this background and given Saddam's deadline to complete the "collectivization" process by June 21, the authorities moved to the level of deliberate murder to accelerate the depopulation of the Kurdish areas. Majid issued two directives on June 3 and 20 giving an order that Kurds should be shot on sight in all areas prohibited for security reasons.(30) Clause five of the first directive instructed the armed forces to kill any human being or animal present in these rural areas. In much the same vein, the second directive stressed that all the villages in which saboteurs were still to be found shall be regarded as prohibited for security reasons and required that all persons between the ages of 15 and 70 captured there must be executed. Clause four instructed the corps commands to bombard the prohibited areas at all times in order to kill the largest number of persons there. It should be noted that bombardment of these areas had been occurring on a regular but random basis since the beginning of 1987.(31)

Equally significant, responding to a proposal by the chiefs of staff, the Committee for Northern Affairs, through its letter number 4151 of June 15, 1987, agreed that "the families of saboteurs should be deported to their side."(32) Although it had been applied previously, this measure acquired a far reaching deadly dimension this time because these families were now being forced into villages where no human life was allowed. In other words, the regime not only no longer made a difference between military and civilian targets but wanted to concentrate and murder the maximum number of people. A glimpse of the brutal enormity of this new phase was revealed in a chilling rejoinder made by Majid to the First Corps in letter number 5083 of August 22, 1987: "We do not object to the decapitation of traitors. But it would have been preferable had you also sent them to Security for the purpose of interrogating them [beforehand]."(33)

Taking all these directives together, a clear picture emerges. By creating a death zone while allowing Kurds there to move to towns or *mujamma'at* under the strict control of the armed forces, the regime was giving Kurds a choice between death and submission. Creation of the death zone made sure no middle ground existed for them.

This plan became sharply defined by Majid in a meeting held at the Northern Bureau on September 6, 1987. As transcribed by an urgent and confidential letter dated September 15, 1987 and bearing reference number 4198, three important decisions were taken at that meeting:

First, the security committees must submit a survey of the families of the saboteurs within one week. Immediately after the survey's completion, these families would be deported to the areas where the saboteurs were to be found, except for the male members, age 12 to 50 inclusive, who must be detained. All those so deported could then be murdered since they were present in the killing zone.

Second, public meetings must be held to emphasize the importance of the upcoming census, which had been scheduled for October 17. Those who would not participate in the census, without a reasonable excuse, would lose their citizenship and be considered as army deserters, in which case RCC decree 677 would apply to them, that is the death penalty. This meant that anyone who tried to evade government forces would be a legitimate target for killing.

Finally, the saboteurs could return to the "national rank" between September 6 and October 17 on the condition they brought their weapons with them.(34) It is noteworthy that throughout its history the regime issued amnesties to insurgent Kurds. Those who took advantage of the pardon were classified as returnees to the national rank. However these people could be arrested and subsequently, in the regime's parlance, "disappear."(35)

This meeting leaves no doubt that the regime was dividing the Kurds into those who accepted its domain and those who were

traitors. The census would define those two groups.(36) Kurds in areas where government forces could not penetrate would face an economic blockade and would be killed if possible.

In a study prepared by Shaqlawa Directorate of Security and approved by Majid (attached to letter number 10427 of November 27, 1987), harsh measures were proposed to tighten the economic blockade, among which were strengthening the control of complexes (presumably to prevent smuggling of food or other goods to the prohibited areas), stepping up security on checkpoints, supervising workers who handle foodstuffs, and limiting the amount of provisions supplied to owners of restaurants and bakeries.(37)

Four months after the census, the regime culminated its final phase of Operation Termination of Traitors with the Anfal campaign. Executed in eight stages, the campaign lasted from February to September 1988. Seven of those stages were directed at areas under the control of the PUK in central, eastern and southeastern Kurdistan. The final stage was directed against the KDP-controlled area in the northwest. The Iraqi regime glorified every stage of the campaign, portraying its advances as equivalent to victories on the Iran-Iraq battlefield. Official documents described the campaign as heroic and eternal, a campaign that brought about the "collapse of the band of saboteurs." (38)

Nevertheless, this was not a campaign against an armed foe but a concerted program of deliberately murdering thousands of innocent civilians. Chemical weapons were again one of the tools used. An urgent and confidential telegram in July 1988 shows the villagers' pitiful attempts to protect themselves: "Information has been provided to the effect that oil (brake fluid) has been smuggled to the villages that are prohibited for security reasons and to the saboteurs for use during chemical attacks because the oil protects the body after exposure to chemical material. The oil has disappeared from the market and the price of a

box of oil has increased from 30 to 120 dinars."(39)

## CONCLUSION

Examining the official Iraqi documents dealing with anti-Kurdish operations during the 1980s provides a first step in analyzing the history of these events and the government's brutal campaign against civilians. An effort to fight the Kurdish insurgency during the Iran-Iraq war expanded into a premeditated extermination campaign to alter irreversibly Kurdish political, social, economic and cultural life in northern Iraq

This campaign to exterminate a large number of Kurds was comprehensively planned at the highest levels of the Iraqi government and systematically implemented by its institutions. The pressure was gradually escalated until reaching the mass murder operations of the Anfal campaign. On a military level, the goal was to end the rebellion by destroying most villages in the Kurdish countryside in order to deny them to the opposition fighters and deprive the *peshmerga* of provisions. Yet it also had the longer-run intention of forever ending any Kurdish challenge to the central authorities.

In order to take the steps deemed necessary for its survival, the regime recognized no limits of morality, human rights, or legality. There was no sign of any debate over moral questions or future punishment at the hands of the international order. Barring the survival of the regime, nothing was sacred, forbidden or inviolable. The full extent of the crimes committed has still not been brought to light, and the treatment of the Kurds during this specific period gives a small example of the regime's overall treatment of its citizens during its entire reign.

*\*Dr. Rabil served with Red Cross in Lebanon, taught at Suffolk University and currently is the project manager of Iraq Research and Documentation Project at the Iraq Foundation, Washington, DC. He is the author of the*

*forthcoming book* Embattled Neighbors: Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Elusive Peace by Lynne Rienner Publishers. The author extends his thanks to IRDP research team.

#### NOTES

1. During the March 1991 uprising in Iraq, Kurdish opposition groups captured huge quantities of Iraqi government documents primarily belonging to Iraqi intelligence. Thanks to efforts by Kanan Makiya and Human Rights Watch, these documents were transferred to the U.S., where the Senate Foreign Relations Committee took charge of them. Along with government officials, Human Rights Watch/Middle East first examined these documents, which were subsequently given in digital format to Iraq Research and Documentation Project (IRDP). Supplementing documents possessed by Makiya, this collection of documents numbering approximately 2.4 million pages is available at URL: <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~irdp>>

2. Human Rights Watch/Middle East, Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 1.

3. Iraq Research and Documentation Project-North Iraq Data Set [hereafter IRDP-NIDS] [1027970-75], available at URL: <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~irdp>>

4. IRDP-NIDS [735456].

5. IRDP-NIDS [735410-17].

6. IRDP-NIDS [711051, 717546]; See also translated documents on IRDP-NIDS website.

7. IRDP-NIDS [735449-51].

8. IRDP-NIDS [735453].

9. IRDP-NIDS [735450].

10. IRDP-NIDS [814978].

11. IRDP-NIDS [735436].

12. IRDP-NIDS [750693].

13. IRDP-NIDS [641507, 641562-63, 641552-53].

14. IRDP-NIDS [814769].

15. IRDP-NIDS [812453].

16. IRDP-NIDS [701406].

17. IRDP-NIDS [859954].

18. See documents cited in endnote number 12.

19. IRDP-NIDS [641563].

20. IRDP-NIDS [641505, 641503-04, 641506, 641513-15, 641567, 641556-57, 641547, 641534].

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. IRDP-NIDS [641511-12].

24. IRDP-NIDS [812146].

25. IRDP-NIDS [860012-14].

26. IRDP-NIDS [862113-17].

27. IRDP-NIDS [856511-12].

28. IRDP-NIDS [812015].

29. IRDP-NIDS [645554].

30. Human Rights Watch/Middle East translated the two documents containing the directives. See Human Rights Watch, Iraq's Crime of Genocide, pp. 53-56.

31. IRDP-NIDS [645717-18, 645685, 645674, 645571-3].

32. IRDP-NIDS [862090, 862236].

33. IRDP-NIDS [2379420].

34. IRDP-NIDS [868435].

35. IRDP-NIDS [750491, 750500-01].

36. IRDP-NIDS [731946-51]. It is noteworthy that the format of the census contained over 70 categories leaving almost no conceivable question not included.

37. IRDP-NIDS [814977-79].

38. IRDP-NIDS [855182, 657500].

39. IRDP-NIDS [749405].