

**CHEMICAL WEAPONS USE IN KURDISTAN:
IRAQ'S FINAL OFFENSIVE**

A STAFF REPORT

TO THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**



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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

SEPTEMBER 21, 1988.

The Honorable CLAIBORNE PELL,
*Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Wash-
ington, DC 20510*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: At your direction, we traveled to Turkey from September 11-17 to assess the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan. This mission followed the sudden influx of more than 65,000 Iraqi Kurds into southeastern Turkey and extensive reporting that Iraq was using chemical weapons on its Kurdish population.

We spent 4 days in southeastern Turkey, traveling along that country's border with Iraq. We visited every major encampment of Kurdish refugees in the region and spoke with several hundred witnesses to the events inside Iraqi Kurdistan.

Essential to the completion of this report were the contributions of Robert Finn of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara and Hamza Ulucay, a Foreign Service National employee of the U.S. consulate in Adana. Mr. Finn, a political officer with long experience in Turkey and fluent in the Turkish language, helped conduct the interviews upon which this report is based, helped evaluate the information elicited, and provided us with a typescript of his copious notes within a few hours of our return to Ankara. Mr. Ulucay, who follows political and economic developments in southeastern Turkey for the Adana consulate, was our translator in the Kurdish camps. At each refugee camp he was able to ferret out quickly important witnesses and to help us elicit the information we were seeking. We would also like to acknowledge gratefully the contribution of Yildirim Yazmur, our driver, who skillfully negotiated some of the most difficult roads imaginable in part of the over 1,500 land miles traversed during this mission.

In addition, we would like to acknowledge gratefully the assistance of Dr. Richard Preece of the Congressional Research Service, who helped prepare the background section of this report. Finally, we would note that, in preparing this report, we were also able to rely on the experience gained by Peter Galbraith during two previous visits to Iraqi Kurdistan.

While the contributions of Mr. Finn and Mr. Ulucay were critical to the preparation of this report, the conclusions are our own. This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Committee on Foreign Relations or any member thereof.

Sincerely yours,

PETER W. GALBRAITH
CHRISTOPHER VAN HOLLEN, Jr.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

● Overwhelming evidence exists that Iraq used chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians in a major offensive in northern Iraq that began August 25, 1988. The offensive is intended to break the Kurdish insurgency and appears to be accomplishing that objective. As reported by Kurdish refugees, cumulative civilian casualties from chemical weapons and other military operations are in the thousands. Information is available only on attacks taking place in a narrow band of territory along the Iraq-Turkey border. Virtually no refugees have been able to escape from deeper inside Iraqi Kurdistan. If the same kinds of military operations are taking place there as in the border regions, the Kurdish death toll could be in the hundreds of thousands.

● Iraq is engaged in a military policy intended to depopulate Iraqi Kurdistan. Elements of the policy include: (1) the destruction of villages and towns throughout Kurdistan; (2) the relocation of the Kurdish population to concentrated new settlements where military control can be exercised; (3) the deportation of Kurds to areas outside Kurdistan; and (4) the use of terror tactics, including chemical weapons, to drive civilians out of the areas to be depopulated. The end result of this policy will be the destruction of the Kurdish identity, Kurdish culture, and a way of life that has endured for centuries.

● The principal evidence for the Iraqi chemical weapons attacks are the eyewitness accounts of the Kurdish refugees in Turkey. The attacks were widely observed and reported in detail with regard to location, timing, and method of attack. The credibility of these extensive firsthand accounts is enhanced when viewed in the context of Iraq's documented 4-year record of chemical weapons use in the Iran-Iraq war and in the context of its brutal Kurdish policies.

● There is physical evidence of chemical weapons attacks but the evidence available in Turkey is limited. Symptoms are hard to diagnose among the lightly injured survivors of the attacks, and only the lightly injured were able to make the rugged trek across the mountains to Turkey. However, the absence of certain physical evidence is more consistent with a chemical attack than with any other form of attack that might have driven the seasoned Pesh Merga fighters and more than 65,000 Iraqi Kurds into Turkey. Had the Iraqis launched a conventional weapons attack against the Kurds, one would expect to see bullet wounds and other evidence of such attack. Chemical weapons, by contrast, leave fewer detectable traces.

● The refugees appear to be protected and reasonably well taken care of in Turkey. However, the influx of 65,000 refugees has imposed a substantial financial burden on the Turkish Government and the country is seeking international assistance. While Turkey risked Iraqi wrath by accepting the Kurdish refugees, it is seeking to maintain cordial relations with its neighbor. Consequently, the Turkish Government is downplaying the poison gas stories—while carefully not denying their accuracy—and local authorities in the border region are following Ankara's lead.

● Since 1984 Iraq has used chemical weapons on a large scale without paying any price in political or economic relations with other countries. Global acquiescence in previous Iraqi use of chemical weapons has undoubtedly been a factor in Iraq's belief it could use gas on the Kurds with no international consequences. The Reagan administration has been denouncing Iraqi use of chemical weapons since 1984. It has not followed up with action to deter such use.



Woman with her possessions at Cigli refugee gathering point near Iraq border.



I. INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW

This report attempts to assess: (1) whether Iraq has been using chemical weapons on its Kurdish population and, if so, the extent of such use; (2) the extent to which Iraq's military campaign against Kurdish insurgents also entails a program of mass killing of Kurdish civilians; and (3) whether Iraq is pursuing a policy intended to eradicate the Kurdish presence in many of the traditional Kurdish areas of Iraq.

Our answers to these questions are based on interviews with Kurdish refugees, interviews with Turkish authorities, examination of such physical evidence as exists, observations made on a previous staff trip through Iraqi Kurdistan, and meetings with U.S. Government officials. In preparing this report, we have not relied on material gathered by the intelligence community but believe our conclusions are consistent with such material. Most important, we have evaluated the information we have gathered in light of Iraq's past behavior, including its documented use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war.

We believe a compelling case exists that Iraq used chemical weapons on a broad scale against its Kurdish population beginning August 25, 1988. Almost all the Kurdish refugees in Turkey came from regions of Iraq adjacent to Turkey. Among those who lived in villages closest to the Turkish border, there existed a substantial opportunity for escape and we believe casualties for these villagers were limited to those who died in the initial attacks. For those who lived further inside Iraq, the Iraqi Army was able to cut most of the avenues of escape and in this region the casualties could be quite high. The survivors were generally the most fit; that is, the men associated with Pesh Merga or the Kurdish insurgents. Casualties among women and children appear to have been very high. We have no information on the substantial Kurdish population that lives along the Iran-Iraq border and those at a distance of more than 50 miles from Turkey. If Iraq's conduct in the Turkish border regions has been repeated in the interior, the death toll could be very high, with no witnesses to tell the tale.

The chemical weapons attacks on Kurdish villages appear to be part of a broader Iraqi policy of ending the Kurdish insurgency by depopulating Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 1986 Iraq has been systematically dynamiting and leveling all but the largest towns in Kurdistan. The local population has been transferred to lower altitudes, where they can more easily be controlled. At a minimum, this policy is destroying a centuries-old Kurdish way of life. It has also been accompanied by large loss of civilian life, as in the case of August's chemical attacks.

Whether Iraq's policy constitutes genocide, within the meaning of the Genocide Convention, may be debated if the standard used for genocide is that of the elimination of an entire race. However, Iraq's policy in Kurdistan does appear to have many of the characteristics of genocide, as defined by the Genocide Convention. Under Article II of the Convention, genocide is defined to mean, "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

B. METHODOLOGY

To obtain as complete a picture as possible of recent events in Iraqi Kurdistan, we traveled over a 4-day period to each of the locations where significant numbers of Iraqi Kurds were present. These include:

- a refugee camp outside Diyarbakir with a population of 8,000 at the time of our visit, but now considerably larger;
- a refugee camp at Silopi, about 1 mile from the only official crossing on the Iraq-Turkey border, with a population of 10,000 at the time of our visit;
- a refugee gathering point near Cigli, close to the Iraq-Turkey border. At the time of our visit, more than 6,000 refugees were awaiting transport from this gathering area to more secure and habitable locations; and
- two refugee camps, one to the west and the other to the south of the far eastern Turkish town of Yusekova, and now home to some 25,000 refugees.

At each camp, we were able to move freely, talking with whom we pleased. The Kurdish refugees were eager to provide their accounts of the poison gas attacks. As one might expect of a largely rural Islamic society, it was assumed that the men would do the talking and, indeed, most of our accounts came from men. We did, nonetheless, make an effort to interview women and children.

Generally, our interviews were group sessions with other refugees listening to the Kurdish speaker and eagerly awaiting their chance to speak. However, neither we nor our Kurdish translator detected any intimidation or reticence as a result of the presence of the camp leaders or of the Turkish authorities, who on some but not all occasions, followed us around the camps. Frequently, we had an opportunity for private conversations with refugees.

In addition, we examined and photographed individuals in each location who claimed to have been injured by chemical weapons. Some symptoms brought to our attention seemed more related to other health problems—exhaustion, disease, injury—but others seemed plausibly a result of chemical attack. We also visited a hospital in Hakkari and interviewed patients who claimed to be victims of chemical attack, as well as their doctors.

Our itinerary took us for some 50 miles on a dirt road that straddles the Iraq-Turkey border. There we had a chance to speak with Turkish villagers who witnessed the influx of refugees as well as,

in some cases, the chemical attacks on the other side of the mountain. On one occasion we even spoke with a Turkish-speaking Iraqi soldier from Kirkuk who crossed the border for a chat. On the main Iraq-Turkey road, we spoke with Turkish truck drivers who had just returned from Iraq, as well as storekeepers who had been receiving accounts from the Iraq traffic.

Finally, we attempted to find physical evidence of the attacks. In addition to the people who claimed injury by chemical weapons, we were shown animals that were said to have succumbed. We traveled to the remote town of Semdinli—in the rugged mountains where Iran, Iraq, and Turkey converge—to collect samples of bees said to have been poisoned in the attacks.

Overall, we spoke to more than 200 Kurdish refugees who provided eyewitness accounts of the chemical attacks. Chapter III contains excerpts from 40 of these interviews.

C. WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

The most compelling evidence of Iraqi use of chemical weapons is the eyewitness accounts of the refugees themselves. The volume of eyewitness statements by itself is highly persuasive. The accounts are also very specific. The refugee accounts we recorded described the attacks on more than 30 different villages. For purposes of assessing the validity of what we heard, we regarded it as significant that when we found survivors of attacks on the same Iraqi villages at different refugee camps in Turkey, the description of events was essentially identical.

There are some minor discrepancies in the refugee accounts. There were differences as to the time of various attacks, the exact number of planes dropping chemical weapons, and so forth. These discrepancies are hardly surprising given that keeping time is less a part of rural Kurdish culture than of Western life and assuming that the Iraqi attacks produced (as they were intended to so do) confusion and shock.

Obviously, the leaders of the Pesh Merga, the Kurdish insurgents, have an interest in portraying Iraq in the worst possible light. To dismiss the eyewitness accounts, however, would require one to believe that 65,000 Kurdish refugees confined to five disparate locations were able to organize a conspiracy in 15 days to defame Iraq and that these refugees were able to keep their conspiracy a secret not only from us but from the world press. In any event, Iraq has a simple way to disprove the refugee accounts—it could invite neutral international investigators to the villages named by the refugees and allow them the time to make an independent investigation.

The eyewitness accounts occur in a context. This context is one of prior Iraqi use of chemical weapons and of ruthless oppression of the Iraqi Kurds. Since 1983 Iraq has used mustard gas and nerve agents with increasing effect against the armed forces of Iran. Eight separate U.N. investigations have concluded that Iraq used chemical weapons on Iran, the last attack coming in July of this year—after Iran had agreed to a ceasefire in the war. Iraqi officials, including the Foreign Minister, have admitted to the use of chemical weapons.

The eyewitness accounts also occur within the context of a brutal central government policy to suppress the Iraqi Kurds. The key feature of this policy is the depopulation of rural Kurdistan and the relocation of the people to guarded villages that have many aspects of a concentration camp. The depopulation has been accompanied by a considerable loss of life.

Finally, doubters of the poison gas attacks would have to provide an alternative explanation for the very sudden exodus of the Pesh Merga from Iraq. The Pesh Merga are seasoned guerrilla fighters who have held out against various Iraqi regimes for 30 years. Suddenly, between August 25 and September 5, 1988, the resistance totally collapsed and the insurgents fled. Something catastrophic happened and every piece of evidence points to the use of poison gas.

In sum, the eyewitness accounts occur in the context of prior Iraqi use of chemical weapons, of a brutal Kurdish policy, and of a sudden, otherwise incomprehensible collapse of the Kurdish resistance. It is in this context that we sought to evaluate the eyewitness accounts of Iraqi chemical use on Kurdish civilians, and it is this context that we found the accounts compelling and conclusive.



Diyarbakir refugee camp.

D. NOTE ON NAMES

Many of the proper names and place names in this report are phonetic spellings from the Kurdish. With regard to places, many have a Kurdish, a Turkish, and an Arab name. Where feasible, we tried to use the Turkish or Arab name. Most villages, however, did not appear on even the fairly detailed topographic map that we took with us. For these villages the only name the refugees used was the Kurdish place name (there being no Arab name or the Kurds not knowing the Arab name). We did ask the camp leaders to locate the villages on the topographic maps and in many case they were able to do so.

With the aid of our Kurdish-speaking interpreter we attempted to apply a consistent system for phoneticizing the Kurdish proper names and place names. However, this did not always work out in practice and there may be discrepancies between our spelling for proper names and place names, and those that others might use.

II. BACKGROUND

A. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

Kurdistan is a crescent-shaped region encompassing the mountainous region surrounding the junction of the borders of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, with extensions into Soviet Armenia and into northern Syria. The greater part of this area is inhabited by the Kurds who, from antiquity, have been portrayed as a tribal people possessing their own language and cultural traditions and a historical reputation for resistance to outside rule.

The total number of Kurds is estimated at 20 million. Of these, some 15 million live in Turkey, between 2.5 and 3.5 million in Iraq, and 2 to 3 million in Iran. The majority are Sunni Muslims but there are some Shiites in Iran and Turkey. The Kurdish language is of Indo-European origin, making the Kurds linguistically and ethnically more akin to the Persians than the Arabs or the Turks.

Iraqi Kurds are concentrated in the mountainous northeast of the predominantly Arab country and represent about one-fifth of the total population. Of all Iraqi minority groups, the Kurds have been the most difficult to assimilate because of their numbers, geographic concentration, inaccessibility, and cultural and linguistic identity. The mountain Kurds are tough, hardy warriors with a tight-knit, semifeudal organization. In recent history, Kurds have migrated to the foothills and plains, many settling in and around Mosul, in the north, and in towns along the Diyala River, in the south, and these have become essentially detribalized. A smaller but increasing proportion of the Kurds is urban. They have settled mainly in Sulaymaniya and Halabja, virtually wholly Kurdish cities, and in Arbil and Kirkuk.

B. THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Kurds have never formed an independent political entity. From the 16th to the early 20th century, Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman (Turkish) and Persian empires. The Kurdish tribes enjoyed extensive autonomy until the 19th century when there occurred repeated Kurdish uprisings against both the Ottomans and the Persians that were put down harshly. During a revolt of 1880, led by Shaikh Ubaidullah al-Nahri, the concept emerged of uniting the Kurdish people as a nation separate from the Ottomans and Persians. However, Kurdish society is essentially tribal and on this point unity efforts have essentially foundered. In Iraq, Kurdish nationalists have always faced at least equal numbers of Kurdish tribesmen fighting on the government side (thereby receiving arms and financial aid and maintaining a degree of independence from outside interference).

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Treaty of Sevres, signed in August 1920 by the allies and the Turkish sultan, created the independent Arab states of Hijaz, Syria, and Iraq, and offered the Kurds their first and only prospect of a separate Kurdistan. After the overthrow of the Turkish monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic in November 1922, however, the new regime under Kemal Ataturk refused to recognize the Sevres provisions. Ataturk concluded a new treaty with the allies in June 1923 in Lausanne, and this agreement contained no mention of the Kurdish question. The fixing of new national boundaries, which divided the Kurds among five states with no regard to ethnic, cultural, or economic principles, created further complications for Kurdish aspirations.

In recent years, Kurdish nationalist movements in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey have functioned largely independent of each other, although considerable cross-border activity has taken place. While both Iraq and Iran have sought to pacify their own Kurds, each has maintained an obvious interest in keeping alive Kurdish resistance in the neighboring country. Only in Iraq has the movement had the strength to pose a significant internal threat to the central government in Baghdad. Since the end of World War I, therefore, the Kurdish question increasingly has been centered in that country.

C. IRAQI KURDISH REBELLIONS IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Following British occupation during World War I and the subsequent establishment in 1920 of the British mandate which created the Iraqi state in its present boundaries along with the beginnings of modern government, the Iraqi Kurds became involved in recurring conflict with the central authorities. An underlying cause for such rebellion was the progressive erosion of promises for Kurdish statehood or, at the least, Kurdish cultural and administrative autonomy in the north. Unlike its neighbors, Iraq both under the mandate and as an independent state after 1930, was faced with constitutional requirements by the League of Nations for a degree of Kurdish autonomy.

The first rebellion, led by Shaikh Mahmud Barzinjah of Sulaymaniyya, began in 1919 and was put down in a month. Shaikh Mahmud, with Turkish support, declared himself King of Kurdistan in 1922 and it took the British until May 1924 to subdue the rebellion. Shaikh Mahmud continued until 1926 to conduct guerrilla warfare in mountainous terrain near the Persian border. With Iraqi independence in 1930, the Kurds, fearful of their status, demanded specific safeguards from the League of Nations. Several uprisings in the north, one led by Shaikh Mahmud in October 1930, and another led by Shaikh Ahmad Barzani in the Barzan district in November 1931 had to be put down by military force with the help of the Royal Air Force. Peace was never fully maintained in Iraqi Kurdistan and local rebellion continued, particularly in the Barzan area, until World War II. Such insurrections in the interwar period appeared in large measure to be expressions of traditional aspirations for tribal independence from the imposition of Arab central government rule, as well as of the ambitions of local leaders.

D. THE MATURING OF KURDISH NATIONALISM

The Kurdish rebellion of 1943, led by Mully Mustafa Barzani, brother of Ahmad, compelled the Baghdad government to consider administrative reforms and Kurdish cultural autonomy in the north. The rebellion flared up again in 1945 and, as government forces moved to suppress the uprising, Barzani retreated to Iran in October together with several hundred Pesh Merga and women and children of his tribe. In Iran, they joined the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (established in 1945 in the Soviet zone) where Barzani was granted the rank of general. The republic collapsed in 1946 when the Soviets withdrew their forces from Iran and the Iranian Army moved in. Barzani and his men were forced into exile in the Soviet Union where he remained until 1959.

Comparative tranquility prevailed in Iraqi Kurdistan during the years of Barzani's exile. A Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was formed in the latter 1940's by intellectuals and tribal elements that sought to lead the Kurdish national movement and to achieve Kurdish aspirations within the framework of Iraqi national unity.

E. THE KURDS AND THE IRAQI REPUBLIC

The July 1958 overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy by military officers brought to power a regime that was characterized, at least initially, by a change in the attitude of the central government toward the Kurds. Kurds were given key roles in administration, and the provisional constitution gave official recognition to Kurdish national rights within Iraq. Mulla Mustafa Barzani was welcomed back to Iraq in 1959 and the KDP was legalized. Within a year, however, relations between the Baghdad regime and the Kurds deteriorated as the regime proved unwilling to give the latter the self-rule to which they aspired. In July 1961, Barzani sent an ultimatum demanding a substantial degree of autonomy to the central government which responded at first by inciting Kurdish tribes hostile to Barzani and subsequently launching an offensive by the army. The Iraqi military failed in attempts to suppress the rebellion and a growing number of tribesmen joined Barzani's forces.

With the frequent changes of Iraqi regimes during the 1960's, the rebellion continued until 1970, interrupted by ceasefires, openings of negotiations, failures of negotiations, and resumption of hostilities. Many Kurdish villages were destroyed in the fighting and the rural population suffered heavy losses but the Kurdish rebels never relinquished their control of the mountainous region. In effect, they achieved de facto autonomy with the institution of a Kurdish administration in the region. The KDP played a central role by integrating into the rebel forces and building a national consciousness in its ranks and among the rural population.

After the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1968, the government, faced with a stalemate and under pressure to end the war, negotiated a "Manifesto on the Peaceful Settlement of the Kurdish Issue" on March 11, 1970. It promised that the Kurds would be granted self-rule, to be exercised by a local administrative council and an elected legislative assembly. Guarantees were provided to recognize the Kurdish language as officially coequal with Arabic in

the Kurdish district and to promote Kurdish culture and traditions. The manifesto constituted a compromise between Kurdish national and Ba'athist pan-Arab aspirations. But the compromise was not destined to materialize in large part because of continuing and substantial disagreement among Kurdish leaders who were divided on the matter. An increasing number of younger Kurds were prepared to accept self-rule as embodied in the manifesto. Barzani, however, rejected the Ba'ath offer and insisted on autonomy as he understood it. In so doing, he sought external assistance from Iran, Israel, and the United States.

F. THE 1974 REBELLION

Between 1970 and 1974, the Ba'ath regime, as it consolidated its position in the country, did little to strengthen Kurdish confidence in Baghdad. Measures for achieving autonomy specified in the 1970 manifesto, including determination of Kurdish districts by census and decision as to jurisdiction over the Kirkuk oil center, were never carried out. Because of a worsening internal political situation and deteriorating relations with Iran, the Baghdad regime proclaimed unilaterally determined autonomy statute on March 11, 1974, demanding at the same time that Barzani accept the statute within a 2-week deadline and join the so-called National Front. Barzani rejected this demand and issued a counterultimatum, declaring that failure to meet Kurdish demands within 2 weeks would result in a renewal of hostilities. Behind Barzani's rejection were the promises of aid from Iran and the United States.

During the spring of 1974, the Iraqi Army moved gradually into the Kurdish area, relieving besieged garrisons and opening roads. In July and August, the Pesh Merga was pushed into the mountains along the Turkish and Iranian borders. From this time, the Pesh Merga had to rely on Iranian assistance, without which it could not resist the Iraqi offensive. The offensive resumed in the spring of 1975 but the prospect of victory by either side appeared uncertain. The Shah of Iran realized that the war appeared stalemated and there were limited prospects for a change of regime in Baghdad. With Algerian mediation, Iraq and Iran signed an agreement in March 1975 settling a series of disputes between the neighbors and closing the border between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. This proved disastrous to the Kurdish rebels. Barzani and the KDP leadership took refuge in Iran.

G. GUERRILLA WAR AFTER 1976

With the collapse of the Kurdish movement in 1975, Baghdad embarked on a two-pronged policy of coopting large numbers of Kurds and, at the same time, implementing drastic measures against a revival of Kurdish hostilities. The government-created autonomous region comprised only a small part of Iraqi Kurdistan, but it was favored with economic development projects benefiting much of the population. "Arabization" measures continued in the oil-producing districts by the resettlement of Kurds and their replacement by Arab peasants. In 1976 the government began evacuation of zones along the Iraq-Iran border, destroying villages, and

resettling the inhabitants near urban areas. These measures instigated a resumption of small-scale guerrilla warfare.

At the same time, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was established, with Syrian support, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani in 1976. The PUK and the KDP engaged in a number of clashes in disputes over territorial control following its move to Iraqi Kurdistan 1977.

H. THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Following the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980, military operations in the south forced the Iraqi military to relinquish its close control of Kurdistan. Thousands of resettled Kurds were permitted to return to Kurdistan but many escaped to areas controlled by the Kurdish parties. The Iranian revolutionary regime gave military and financial support to the KDP, but guerrilla activity initially was at a low level. Competition for control of land and people became increasingly violent between the Kurdish parties, notably the KDP and PUK.

When Iran opened a northern offensive in 1983, the KDP joined the Iranians while the PUK declared it would resist the invasion and opened negotiations with Baghdad. After the offensive, the government took severe reprisals against Kurds associated with the Barzanis. The military presence was stepped up and Kurdish tribesmen were recruited into irregular units designed to protect their districts against Iranian invasion as well as against the nationalist forces. Negotiations with the PUK broke down in 1985 and hostilities between the government and the PUK resumed. The KDP and PUK put aside their differences in efforts to inflict damage against Iraqi territorial control and economic facilities in the region, thereby tying down a significant proportion of the Iraqi ground forces. In 1987 and 1988 Baghdad resumed its campaign of destruction of outlying villages and the relocation of large numbers of the Kurdish population to other areas of Iraq. In March 1988, Iranian forces captured Halabja, where a cyanide and mustard gas attack caused the deaths of hundreds of civilians. Subsequent reports alleged that both Iraq and Iran were responsible for using chemical weapons at Halabja.

Following Iran's acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 598 on July 19, Iraqi forces stepped up their campaign aimed at crippling the Kurdish insurgency in the north and extending government control over the region, particularly in the border areas.

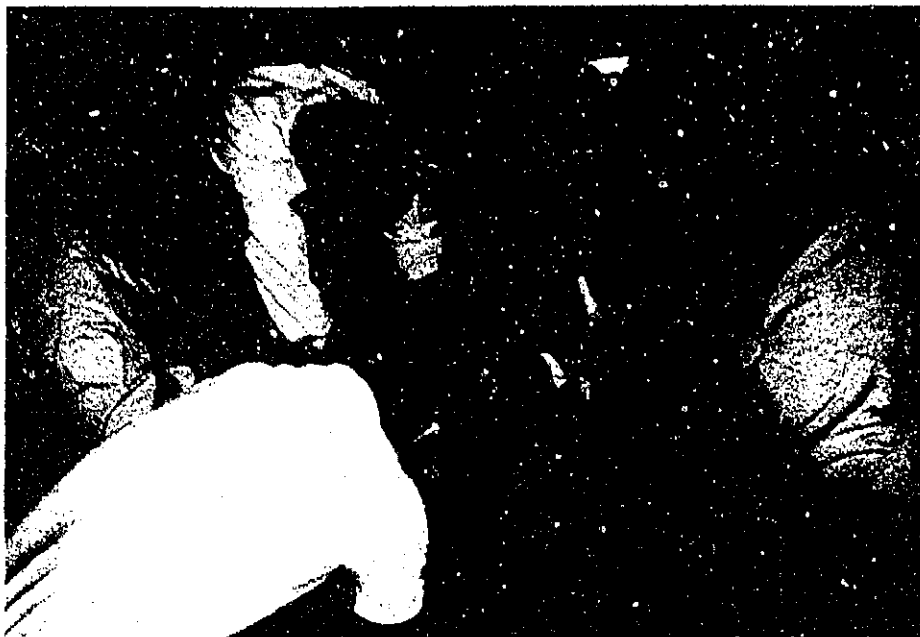
III. IRAQ'S FINAL OFFENSIVE

A. A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

With the August 20 ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq initiated what it termed the "final offensive" to end the Kurdish insurgency. The following is a narrative account constructed from eyewitness accounts of Kurdish refugees who fled from Iraq to Turkey.

On August 20, 1988, the day the Iran-Iraq ceasefire went into effect, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein turned his forces against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq. Some of Iraq's most battle-tested forces were dispatched to wrest control of the area from Kurdish fighters, drop poison gas on Kurdish villagers, and destroy Kurdish villages. On August 21, the Iraqi military began building up its forces along the major roads in Iraqi Kurdistan, and on August 25 launched chemical attacks against scores of Kurdish villages. On August 28, Iraqi forces began to destroy evacuated Kurdish villages.

During the early morning hours of August 25, 1988 Iraqi warplanes and helicopters dropped chemical weapons on a series of villages in regions of Iraqi Kurdistan. In each of these regions, the Kurdish fighters, or Pesh Merga, had established camps outside of villages to protect them. For the most part, however, Iraqi bombs did not fall on these camps, as might have been expected, but on the villages themselves. In the Dihok region alone, more than 30 villages were exposed to various concentrations of poison gas. Among the villages in the Zakho, Dihok, and Amadiyah regions that suffered the most severe attacks were: Vermil, Bergini, Tika (Duka), Ekmala, Hese, Xirabe, Blecane, Siyare, Meze, Afuke, Belut, Serna, Sivye, Zeweshkan, Mergeti, Zinawa, Dergel, Dubanche, Ermisht, Berkevire, Bergabore, Borghule, Bilejane, Warneze, Zavita, Nazdure, Berkule, Rudaniyo, Sarki, Berchi, and Ruyse.



Locating Kurdish villages subject to chemical weapons attack on the topographical map.

As described by the villagers, the bombs that fell on the morning of August 25 did not produce a large explosion. Only a weak sound could be heard and then a yellowish cloud spread out from the center of the explosion and became a thin mist. The air became filled with a mixture of smells—"bad garlic," "rotten onions," and "bad apples."

Those who were very close to the bombs died almost instantly. Those who did not die instantly found it difficult to breathe and began to vomit. The gas stung the eyes, skin, and lungs of the villagers exposed to it. Many suffered temporary blindness.

After the bombs exploded, many villagers ran and submerged themselves in nearby streams to escape the spreading gas. They placed wet cloth over their noses, eyes, and mouths to block the gas. Many of those who made it to the streams survived. Those who could not run from the growing smell, mostly the very old and the very young, died.

The survivors who saw the dead reported that blood could be seen trickling out of the mouths of some of the bodies. A yellowish fluid could also be seen oozing out the the noses and mouths of some of the dead. Some said the bodies appeared frozen. Many of the dead bodies turned blackish blue. Most of the villagers quickly abandoned the contaminated areas, leaving the bodies unburied in the sun. In some cases, they later returned to the poisoned villages to bury the bodies. The few who ventured to look at the shattered pieces of the bomb casings said they were colored green.

In every village where chemical bombs were dropped the livestock—mostly donkeys and goats—died. Birds are also reported to have "fallen out of the sky." Bees in the area are also said to have been killed by the gas.

The Iraqis continued to drop chemical weapons on Kurdish villages on August 26. Turkish villagers living less than a kilometer from the Turkey-Iraq border could see the Iraqi helicopters flying above a mountain ridge. Iraqi Kurds living close to the Turkish border left their contaminated villages to seek refuge in Turkey. Those from villages farther from the Turkish border did not immediately flee to Turkey. They first sought safety in nearby areas that had not been bombed. Many fled to the Pesh Merga camps outside the villages.

On August 27 the chemical bombs continued to fall on villages in the Zakho, Dihok, and Amadiyah regions. Villagers who had fled to nearby villages after their own had been gassed found themselves again under attack. No area in the northeastern reaches of Iraqi Kurdistan was safe from chemical attack. As a result, thousands of Iraqi Kurds from the Zakho, Dihok, and Amadiyah regions began to make their way on foot and animal back across the rough mountain terrain to Turkey.

On August 28 villagers fleeing from areas farther from the Turkish border found their escape routes almost fully impeded by deployments of Iraqi soldiers. The key east-west road from Amadiyah to Zakho was effectively blocked. Kurdish villagers south of the road suddenly found themselves trapped inside of Iraq. Those Kurds who attempted to cross the road were fired on by Iraqi soldiers. An Iraqi Kurd who managed to cross the road said, "Whatever they saw they shot—children, women, young, and old." Some still managed to make their way across the road. By September 5, however, the Iraqi troops had established camps all along the Turkey-Iraq border and the flow of refugees slowed to a trickle. More than 65,000 Kurdish refugees had arrived in Turkey. No one knows how many remain trapped on the other side. One Pesh Merga estimated that 70 percent of those who lived south of the Zakho-Amadiyah road found their way blocked by Iraqi soldiers. Information is available only on attacks that took place in a narrow band of territory along the Iraqi-Turkish border. The fate of those left behind is uncertain. If the same kind of military operations are taking place deeper inside of Iraqi Kurdistan as in the border regions, the Kurdish death toll could be in the hundreds of thousands.

In at least one village where Kurds remained—the village of Baze—survivors report that Iraqi forces opened fire with machine-guns on everyone in the village and then used bulldozers to push the bodies into mass graves.

On August 28, the day the Iraqi soldiers sealed off the Zakho-Amadiyah road, the chemical bombings stopped. Iraqi forces began to destroy the evacuated villages. Turkish truck drivers who regularly use the roads in Iraqi Kurdistan report that all the villages along the road have been destroyed and the trees have dried out. Kurdish fighters said the Iraqi soldiers entered the contaminated areas with gas masks.



Children at Cigli refugee gathering point.

B. EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

1. Accounts from Kurdish Refugees

The Iraqi chemical attacks on Kurdish villages from August 25 through August 27 were witnessed by thousands of Kurds. Their descriptions of these attacks provide the best evidence that the attacks took place. The following are representative excerpts from interviews with eyewitnesses to the attacks. They include Pesh Merga leaders, Pesh Merga fighters, villagers, a few professionals, women, and several children.

1. Ekrem Mai of Dihok city: "I am a Pesh Merga and have spent 27 years fighting. Many have been martyred and killed. Since the Iran-Iraq war, fighting with Iraq has continued. After the Iran-Iraq ceasefire, all the chemical weapons that Iraq had were turned against the Kurdish people.

"On the 25th of August, at 6 a.m., Iraqi warplanes came to Amadiyah valley in the region of Zakho and dropped chemical weapons on four of our villages. They killed everything: ani-

mals, ladies, children. Young and old died from the weapons. We couldn't even bury them.

"The planes dropped bombs. They did not produce a big noise. A yellowish cloud was created and there was a smell of rotten parsley or onions. There were no wounds. People would breathe the smoke, then fall down and blood would come from their mouths.

"We didn't have anything to protect ourselves, not even to cover our faces. With our own means, sometimes on foot, sometimes on animal back, we made our way across the mountains to the border.

"On the 25, 26 and 27 of August, only chemical weapons were used. From the town of Beguva, on August 28, they deployed forces to the border, so that people could not escape. When the people tried to pass, they were shot. Whatever they saw, they shot—women, children, young, and old.

"The Iraqi troops occupied the road between Zakho and Beguva. Twenty-four crossing lines were cut. Most of the people south of the road remained under Iraqi control. The people on the north all crossed.

"The villages of Ruyse, Nazdure, and Zavita north of the road were attacked, but few people died. Thirty percent of the people from the south made their way across, and the rest were stuck.

"There were 20,000 to 25,000 people in the villages altogether. On August 25, at least 300 people were killed near us. I have no idea what happened in the other villages.

"Some families stayed with the Pesh Merga, because they couldn't make their way out. Then the government dispatched more troops. The Pesh Merga fought to make their way out. We are worried about the people in this region and we are afraid that most have been killed.

"We have been dealing with this government for 28 years, and we have had very bitter experiences with Saddam and his government. We know the truth about his regime. His policy is to leave no Kurds in our region. His purpose is to wipe out Kurdistan on the maps—to leave no Kurds in Iraq.

"We have come to this conclusion with the experience of the past 20 years and what he has been doing. His announcement of amnesty is just a lie and he will destroy these people. He has killed thousands of our people and we do not believe the amnesty. He destroyed our villages. It is impossible for us to meet with him. We are not going to try for Iraq with Saddam Hussein."

2. Iskender Ahmad from Bergini village: "My eyes do not work. I have trouble with my legs, and itching.

"At 6:20 in the morning, I was up. We had just woke up to have our breakfast. Six planes flew over our village and dropped 18 bombs. I saw 24 people die in front of my eyes. When I recovered a little, I got a scarf and put it over my nose and face. From my family, eight people died. From the village, 80 died, in open spaces. I wish you could provide a plane so I could show you the dead bodies."

3. Son of Iskender Ahmad: "Animals and children died. Blood came from their mouths and a yellow liquid from their mouths and noses. The noise did not sound like regular bombs. They would just drop and make a very weak sound and then this cloud. Always expanding: a yellow cloud. Those who escaped managed to go into the water."

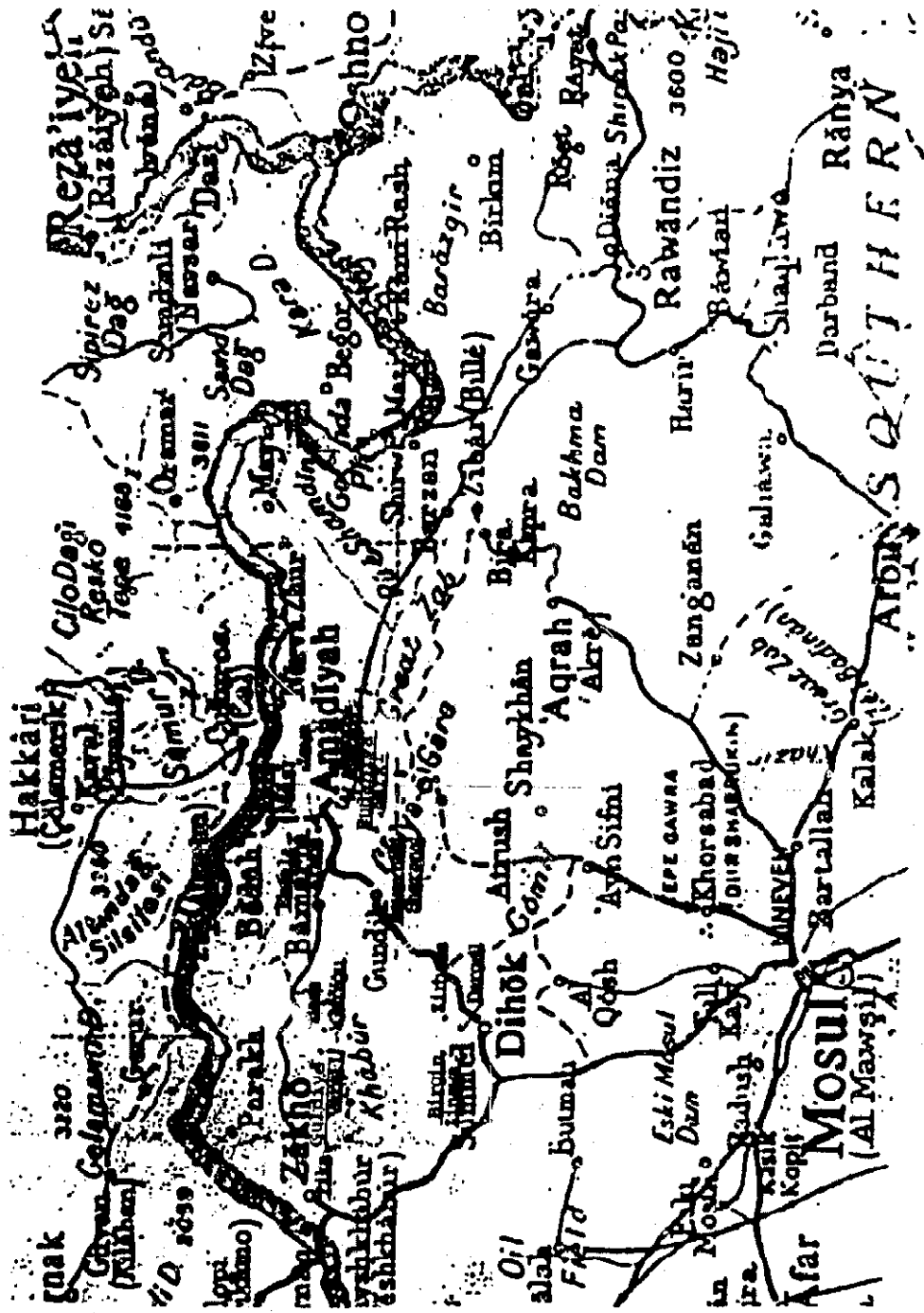
4. Behchet Naif from Berkule village: "At 6 a.m. on August 25, eight planes flew over our village. All eight dropped weapons. They dropped 32 chemical bombs. We counted them later. When they dropped the bombs, a big sound did not come out—just a yellowish color and a kind of garlic smell. The people woke up, and some of them fainted. Those who poured water on themselves lived: those who could not reach the water, died. I went into the river. Almost 50 women died. Some died who went to help their families. Seventy-five people died. My brother died. My children are OK. I won't go back as long as Saddam Hussein is there."

5. Mohammed Shefik: "On August 25, I was in the Pesh Merga camp in Dihok. At 6 a.m., six planes bombed the villages in our area—Dergel, Bergin, Zinawa, Zirhawa, Telagru, Tika (Duka), Vermil, and many others. On the 28th, the government army began its attack on the Zakho and Dihok areas. The families came to Turkey, but the Pesh Merga are still fighting. We do not know what has happened to them. I was 3 kilometers from the Bergin. There was no sound of bombs.

"They also bombed Zinawa village. The villagers fled uphill to Bergin. The people began to vomit and could barely see. There were 20 blind people in Bergin. The planes did not attack the Pesh Merga camps, only the villages.

"Fifteen people died in the village of Ekmala. The wounded stayed behind in the village. In the village of Baze, 4 to 5 hours walking from Ekmala, 1,300 people were all killed. Witnesses saw graders and bulldozers burying the bodies in a mass grave later."

6. Masih Ibrahim: "On the 28th of August, around 1 or 2 p.m., I was standing on the mountain above Baze with the Pesh Merga. I saw soldiers machinegunning the women and children in the village. Bulldozers then pushed them into mass graves. I stayed until night and then escaped."



Towns and villages in the Iraqi-Turkish border area.

7. Minase from Bergini village, holding her child Hejar: "All the animals died. There were four bombs from each plane. Anyone who could not make it to the river died because of the smell. After the use of weapons, we lost our vision. We are still vomiting. He wanted to kill all of us—babies, old people, children."



Minase (on left) from Bergini village holding her child, Hejar.

8. Omer Dibaba from Bergini village: "Eight planes attacked on the 25th. Fifteen people from my family died. We left their bodies in the sun."

9. Bashir Shemseddin and his father from Vermil village: "Four planes came over on August 25 and dropped bombs. We did not know what happened. We ran outside. We got dizzy and could not see. We fell down and threw up. In our village, 200 to 300 people died. All the animals and birds died. All the trees dried up. It smelled like something burned. The whole world turned to yellow."



Bashir Shemseddin from Vermil village, showing burns from chemical weapons.

10. Mohammed Ahmad for Guldiye village: "I am 20 years old. I am from Guldiye village near the Kabur river in Zakho. We were attacked on August 25 at 6 a.m. There were 45 people in my village. I am the only survivor."

11. Farouk Abdullah from Ekmala village: "I cannot see if there is bright sunlight. At 6:26 a.m. on August 25, five planes attacked. My friends died in the village. I saw three people die—my friends Sari Abdullah, Ekrem Sari his son, and Amina Mustafa his wife. Many people fell down, but I could not see clearly. They attacked by chemical bombs. I tried to run away from the smoke, and the wind was against me but then the wind changed. I tried to run back, but I fell and began to vomit. It is hard to breathe. My friends came and tried to take me to a safer place. There are no more animals. The leaves fell off the trees. The fish in the brook died. Anyone who touched the clothes of the dead people became blind."



Farouk Abdullah from Ekmala village.

12. Osman Khalid from Tika (Duka) village: "I left the village and 5 minutes later 14 people died—Mehdi from Kurki, Ismail Tabir, Osman Ibrahim, Ahmad Mela, Murat Ahmad, Samih Ahmad, Suleiman Hadji Haydar, Muhammad Tatar, Shahid Sadik, Suleiman Shemsettin, Azad Murad, Fatma Ali."

13. Mohammad Tahir from Berizon valley: "On August 28, my wife Asma Tahir and my brother-in-law Mohammad Mahmood were killed while trying to escape to Turkey."

14. Selam Ahmadi from Amadiyah: "I saw planes bombing the villages of Vermil, Banka, Ekmala, Biliwane, and Tika (Duka). In the morning and at 3 p.m., six planes came to these villages and destroyed them with bombs. I was in Kanabalaw in the mountains near these villages. In Tika (Duka), 50 people

were killed and all the animals died. The people left the village.

"On the 27th of August, planes and helicopters attacked the same village and nearby villages of Bergin, Zinawa, and Osmanbaze.

"I came on the 28th after all these places were covered with chemicals. Two of my friends died on the road—Mir Bazi from Berwari and another man. I saw four dead people in Ekmala: two old men and two children—one 11 years old and one 5 years old. They were all black. In Vermil, I saw 10 people dead. The Iraqi Government took them after they came to the village. I do not know where my family is. They were in a village called Haventhea. I was working at Berwari."

15. Hikmet Said from Vermil village: "August 26, 3 p.m. I was far from the village shepherding when four airplanes came and started bombing. I ran into the mountains because I was scared. Two days later, I had spots on my face. They are growing larger. I feel darkness in front of my eyes and feel shortage in my breathing. My stomach had been upset, but this has stopped."

16. Selva Ismail from Berwari, close to Vermil village: "The planes attacked between the two villages. Six planes came early in the morning. They dropped bombs that smelled of garlic and I saw a cloud, but fainted from fear. I hid myself and left the village that evening. All the animals died right away; many people died."

17. Abdulressak Salih from Banka village in Amadiyah: "I saw an attack on August 25th at breakfast time. Some say there were 15 but I saw 6 planes. They dropped in Vermil, which is very close to our village. When they dropped, a cloud of fog was formed and a smell like garlic and cologne. I didn't see any dead bodies but after I got back I saw some wounded people and dead animals."

18. Ibrahim Kurdi from Bannasira: "I cannot see and I have a sore throat. Fifteen airplanes dropped bombs in Vermil, Bilejane while I was on the back of the mountain. I ate grapes, and as I ate, threw up, had diarrhea and blood came from my mouth. Many in Bergin died and they could not bury the dead. I saw 13 dead in Duka. All the animals died. All the vegetation dried up. I fell and could not get up, and now I have a pain in my knees."

19. Ramazan Ali and his son Kurdistan from Ekmala village: "The attack began August 25. We have shortness of breath and some muscle spasms. Six planes dropped yellow clouds. Animals fell down and died. I still feel dizzy. My wife feels dizzy. We ran to the mountains. My son Emin died. He was 2 years old. He turned blue and black and he died. We could not save him."

20. Berwan Sophe from Kani Masi village: "I have small sores that keep getting bigger. Five planes attacked my village

on the morning of August 25. There was a yellow cloud from the bombs. It smelled of rotten fruit."

21. Musimi Kitani, cousin of Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations: "I saw with my own eyes. On the morning of August 25 at 9:10 in the region of Beregari, the villages of Rudaniyo, Sarki, and Shernae were attacked. People went into the river. One person died and 300 were injured. Approximately a 2- by 15-kilometer valley was bombed. The lightly wounded are here, but we have no idea what happened to the severely wounded. The villages belong to the Amadiyah area.

"On the 25th and 26th, 10 helicopters came. They bombed the whole region and the roads with chemical weapons. We were not affected when they used regular weapons, but, in the face of chemical weapons, we began to move on the 26th.

"With 50 to 60 members of my family, we reached the village of Dizga, in the region of Nerwa of Amadiyah. When they saw our fire, they fired at us with regular and chemical weapons at 10 p.m., but the wind blew the opposite way. When we awoke, we ran across into Turkey. Twenty minutes later, they bombed where we had camped. As we walked along to the border, we saw many dead birds, foxes, and more.

"If there were a committee formed outside Iraq, we could show them hundreds of dead people and animals. Since 1976 we have been fighting and were not affected by weapons, since we could go into the caves in our region and hide. But the chemical gas goes into the caves as well, and that's why we left."