

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

tcg-7

Peter Byrd Martin
ICWA/Crane Rogers
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover NH

June 26th 1991

Dear Peter,

Here is an excerpt from my journeys in Kurdistan, an unfinished piece I submit to you without further comment, entitled:

Zakho Days: Travels With The General

by Thomas Goltz

We first met in the Baghdad Hotel, the shabby new home away from home I had arranged for the staff of the International Rescue Committee in Zakho, northern Iraq.

"This is Kek Aziz," my newly appointed manager, Mister Shukri, bashfully informed me, "He is my oldest and dearest friend, and he needs a shower."

The stocky, older man was dressed in baggy shalvar pants, a khaki shirt and wore a skull cap and when he opened his mouth to speak he revealed an upper jaw devoid of teeth.

"Hello," he said, clicking his feet together in some manner of military salute while extending his hand, "I have not bathed in three weeks."

It was only my second night as the director of the hotel, and I was more than a little hesitant about letting in an aging Peshmergah into my showers. A down-town dump, the Baghdad consisted of thirteen rooms and a roof, and prior to my taking possession it had served as the barracks for the last Iraqi troops in the city before they had withdrawn, surrendering the Zakho to the Americans. And in leaving, they seemed to have wanted to make it as uncomfortable as possible for any future tenants.

The place had been trashed--curtains ripped, mattresses defiled, windows smashed. There was no electricity (indeed, there was none in the rest of town, either) and only the running water was that which I had brought in by a tanker I had hijacked from the sprawling refugee camp outside of town to fill the leaking tanks on the roof.

And now Mister Shukri--a curious, multi-lingual Armenian gentlemen with too many "very best friends" for his own good--was bringing home stray refugees to enjoy our limited water resources.

Thomas Goltz is an ICWA fellow investigating the Soviet Republics of Central Asia who is temporarily detoured in Iraqi Kurdistan

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

tcg-7

"Mister Shukri," I said, preparing to take the old boy aside and tell him his friend had to go, "Will you come here for a moment?"

The flicker of the candles in the hall-way sent warped shadows running across the walls as Shukri moved toward me.

"Please, Mister Thomas," he implored in a whisper, "He is truly an old and loyal friend, and was once a general in the army and a minister in the government and all he needs is a bath."

A general and a minister!

Now I had heard it all--and I had heard an awful lot over the past week. Interminable, sad stories about tragic loss and need, some so outlandish I had begun to doubt them all. Refugees who needed travel documents to return to Turkey and collect the bodies of their sons, washed away in the Khabur River but now located and buried by an anonymous Turkish farmer in his field; Shiite deserters from Karbala and Najaf who had worked their way through the cease-fire lines to the safety of the North to seek asylum in Sweden, Norway or Denmark; Turcomen translators from Kerkuk, dressed far too finely to want to work for the standard rate of three dollars for a 12 hour day in the broiling sun; dozens of drivers offering stolen Nissan and Toyota pick-ups for hire straight out of Kuwait, and scores of do everythingers, all of whom had once worked for the American embassy in Baghdad even when there wasn't one but had letters of recommendation to prove it. There were rich and poor and old and young, women and men, Muslim and Christian, Arab and Kurd, would-be Peshmerga freedom fighters and obvious Jash collaborators. They came in ones and twos and threes to my door by day and night, seeking some connection or other with the only non-military American presence in Zakho, hoping to expand their ration ticket, probe the American/coalition defenses or, most usually, to try find a means out and away from Iraq, forever.

It was a depressing job, listening, and I am not sure if I did well or not by even allowing them to air their woes in the short interviews I granted them. Because even if their stories were different, my answer was always the same: I cannot help you. There were too many people professing too many things, and the prospect of now allowing one of their murky number--even if a dignified gentlemen with the title of general or minister or whatever--into my establishment late at night to take a shower gave me certain pause.

"Mister Shukri," I began, "You know the military police have told us not to let in anyone after dark."

"Yes, but--"

"There was a report today that the soldiers stopped a car with Baghdad plates on the Dohuk road, and that the trunk was filled with Dinars, presumably to pay local agents."

"Yes, but--"

"And we still don't know who started the riot yesterday--was it spontaneous or the work of an agent provocateur?"

I didn't even mention the incident of the night before, when a speeding car had sprayed bullets all over the street, sending the entire IRC staff--including Mister Shukri--into huddling positions in the hotel hallway.

"But Mister Thomas," Shukri tried one last time, "He is my oldest and dearest friend--"

"Mister Shukri, everyone you introduce me to is your oldest and dearest friend. I am sorry, but--"

tcg-7

I paused mid-sentence, sensing a third presence nearby, and turned to find the older man emerging from the dancing shadows, pack in one hand, the other extended to me to say farewell.

"Excuse me," said Kek Aziz with polite precision, "If there is a problem, I will go. I understand your security concerns."

I was not embarrassed, but something in the tone of his voice gave me pause. He had extended his hand, and I took it, and found myself locking eyes with the old gent for several seconds.

Fate? Chance? Or just that atavistic sense of intuition that confirms or denies the presence of danger, a sixth sense largely forgotten or lost by modern man?

Whatever the cause, I had a visceral response to the old man's openness and found myself reversing the expulsion order before it had ever crossed my lips.

"No," I was saying, "It is not a problem; it is just that I don't like surprises."

"No one does in such times."

"Mister Shukri says you were once with the government."

"A long time ago."

"I would like to hear about it."

"I am at your service."

"Will you stay the night?"

"No, my place is in my tent, with my people."

"I will find you."

"It will be difficult."

"Will you return?"

"With your permission, for a bath next week."

"The soap is over there."

With that, the older gentlemen once again clicked his heels together and straightened his spine, turned, and then disappeared into the penumbral shadows of the hotel corridor, seeking out the shower by candlelight.

And thus began my relationship with Kek Aziz. He would become my teacher, guide and confidant for the next six weeks in Iraqi Kurdistan, and I cannot think of anyone more capable of the task.

Aziz Aqrabi is many things to many different people. Depending on whom you talk to, he is either a general or a Jash; a hero or a heretic; a mentor or a madman; a poet or a politician; a teacher or a traitor.

Indeed, before appearing at my door looking for a bath, his life has been such series of changing sides and stances that in any other context than that of being a Kurd in Iraq the charge of opportunism, fecklessness and perhaps even psychological instability might seem appropriate.

But it is exactly in the context of being a Kurd in Iraq that makes his life almost a paradigm of the dilemma of his people. It is a life of contradiction, false hopes, crushed dreams, resilience and survival.

Born in 1924 in a village outside the north-central Kurdish city of Agir ("Fire", although now renamed Acre by the government in Baghdad to remove the Zoroastrian associations of the name), he did not learn Arabic until he began primary school in the city and first confronted the reality

tcg-7

of being a member of a minority group in a chauvinist land. The Arab students had the nasty habit of teasing the Kurds. When Aziz asked why this was so of an older Kurdish schoolmate, the response was simple: "because we are Kurds."

The drop-out rate was high, but Aziz studied hard and was rewarded with a placement in the Military College of Baghdad, graduating with a commission as a lieutenant in the artillery corp in 1945. Rather like young blacks in the American army of today, the Royal Iraqi military was perhaps the best way for a young Kurd to get ahead, and Aziz continued to rise through the ranks. In 1954, he attended the staff college in Baghdad, graduating with the rank of major, followed by a year in England to study aerial photo interpretation.

1955 was also the year that he secretly joined the Kurdish Democratic Party of the late Mullah Barzani, not revealing his true loyalties until 1962. Then, with the outbreak of the first great Kurdish Revolt, he left the Iraqi army and joined Barzani's Peshmergah partisans, or "Those Who Face Death", as a Lieutenant Colonel.

It was a time of extreme political tension in Iraq, which had been a state of turmoil since the Free Officers' Coup of 1958 that had deposed King Faisal, Crown Prince Abdullah and Nuri Said--the Prime Minister who had effectively ruled Iraq since its creation by the British in the aftermath of World War One.

As old-line Arab royalists battled Arab nationalists who in turn battled Arab communists, the Kurds of the North added to the confusion by doing battle with all. Never having felt themselves an integral part of the state of Iraq, the Kurds had been in a quasi-state of rebellion since the 1920s, but in 1962, the revolt against Baghdad began in earnest, and it was to this fight that Aqrabi was drawn.

Aqrabi's adventures as a guerrilla commander in the mountains of the North were many, and are remembered even today by his detractors with a certain awe.

"He was a good commander, one of our best," said Siamand Bana, spokesman for Massoud Barzani and the Kurdish Democratic Party, or KDP, "A little crazy perhaps, but in the guerrilla business, one needs imagination."

One of Aqrabi's exploits was the taking of the Safun mountain range in Arbil province with a mere 60 Peshmergah, thus cutting off much of the North from the penetration by road of government forces. For this, and other exploits, he was rewarded with membership on the KDP political bureau in 1968.

But in Iraq, 1968 is remembered not as the year that Colonel Aziz joined the steering committee of the KDP but as the year of the second Baath Party coup in Baghdad. The first putsch was in 1963, when the party--still essentially a branch office of the Syrian Baath--had seized power in alliance with the communists and officer corps under Abduljasim Arif but had then been purged after a few months of reckless and bloody rule.

The revolution of July 17th, 1968 was different. Stronger, more organized and able to use the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies in the Seven Day War against Israel to maximum political advantage, the Baath executed another bloody coup in the capital and then turned its wrath on all other political forces in the country, eliminating much of the "nationalist" officer corp as well as the "internationalist" communists.

tcg-7

The one force to escape the reign of terror was the Peshmergah, or Kurdish guerrillas in the mountains. With a force of only 22,000 regular partisans, they were able to keep the now virulently nationalistic Baath Party and its army at bay. Then, after two years of hit and run fighting, the Baath finally acceded to the unthinkable--negotiations with the Kurdish leadership to end the fighting and to allow for local autonomy.

The 1970 accords, like those being hammered out in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the failed Kurdish rebellion circa 1991, promised the moon. Democracy, freedom, power sharing, and more. One of the more peculiar points in the accords allowed Kurdish officers who had defected to the Peshmergah to have their time spent as guerrillas count for time spent in the national army, and Aziz Aqrabi emerged from the hills as a Brigadier General.

But no sooner had the 1970 accords been signed than problems began to appear. The parameters of "Autonomous Kurdistan" had been left rather ill-defined, as had the implementation mechanisms of other aspects of the accords. There are those today who say the autonomy agreement was a dead letter from the day it was signed, a mere ruse to get the Kurds out of their mountain strongholds and into the plains where it was easier to kill them; others say that its spirit was only violated after the young Saddam Hussein attempted an assassination of Mullah Barzani by sending him a gift-bomb in 1972.

Whatever time-line one chooses to take, the fact remains that by 1974, the Kurds were once more in open revolt, seeking and receiving covert aid from the United States, Israel and Iran--all of whom thought it in their best interests to destabilize Iraq. The role of Iran, especially, was critical to the continued revolt, with the Shah supplying not only weaponry and logistical support but also deep, cross-border havens for the Peshmergah who might then strike at Iraqi forces and then retreat across the mountainous frontier. The situation was once more devolving into a stalemate when the number two man in the Baath Party organization, a hard-nosed man from the town of Tikrit by the name of Saddam Hussein, sliced through the Gordian Knot by entering into direct negotiations with the Shah of Iran. In what was then regarded as brilliant tactical move, Saddam traded away Iraqi claims to the Shatt al-Arab waterway in exchange for Iran's ending its support for the Kurds. Five years later, though, Saddam would "renegotiate" the Shatt agreement with a surprise attack on Iran, thus initiating the eight year Iran-Iraq War.

The collapse of the revolt was almost as immediate as the results were tragic. Largely ignored by the world, Saddam and the Baath Party forced the KPD leadership into exile while systematically destroying hundreds of Kurdish villages and towns, deporting tens of thousands of Kurds to concentration camps in the arid deserts of the South or reducing them to day-laborers on their own farm lands.

The litany of agony is long and sad, starting with the leveling of Barzan, the home village of the Barzani clan. The non-Muslim Yezidis, or Kurdish Zoroastrians, were next, moved away from much of their ancestral lands near the town of Ain Sifne as well as stripped of their Kurdish identity, being declared "Arab" in the 1978 census. The Dizia clan on the Iranian frontier, too, bore the full-brunt of Saddam's revenge, having their name-sake city of 50,000, Qalat Dizia, razed to the ground. Even the Sulwani clan in the extreme northwest, though never really active against

tcg-7

the government, were stripped of their fertile wheat lands and watched their villages be destroyed and be replaced by fortress-like 'communities' built to house the families of Arab auxiliary soldiers brought in to settle the land. The only Kurds excepted from the resettlement program were the so-called Jash, or collaborators, like the large Zibari clan who had fought against Barzani's Peshmergah forces.

And where was Aziz Aqrawi?

Increasingly disenchanted with Peshmergah guerrilla tactics and the lack of a forward-looking vision for Kurdistan, Aqrawi had retired from the army as a major general in 1972 and resigned from the KDP in 1973, hoping, he told me, to pursue a late-blooming career in letters. His opus included collections of Kurdish proverbs and lore, a Kurdish-Arabic and Kurdish-English dictionary as well as a tri-lingual, Kurdish-Arabic-English study of the human anatomy. In addition to being useful to medical students, the study also had obscure political content: the Kurdish words were written both in the Arabic and Latin scripts. The latter, although the preferred medium for modern Kurdish outside Iraq, is strictly illegal inside the country, and the study was subsequently banned--although not before some 4,000 copies were put into circulation.

Possibly because of the strange mixture of his military/guerrilla past, his rising academic profile and his membership in the Baghdad-based Kurdish Academy, Aqrawi soon started attracting government attention of an uncomfortable kind: as part of the 1970 accords, four token ministerial posts in the Baath government had been reserved for ethnic Kurds, and they needed filling.

Aqrawi says that he had no choice; that the regime had forced him to take up one of the ministries by obliquely threatening his family. This claim of only accepting a position in government under duress might sound a little disingenuous, but in the thug-world politics of Baathi Iraq, it is wholly plausible. Too, prior to the Algiers Accords and the wholesale sell-out of the Kurds, taking a position in the government did not necessarily seem as onerous as it does now: why not try and incrementally influence events from within as opposed to continue armed struggle from outside? The results of 15 years of conflict and confrontation were evident everywhere in Kurdistan: destroyed villages, unschooled children and a growing dependency on the romance of being a militia man in the mountains. None of these were a very good basis for a new society...

And Aqrawi was in good company: one of the other three Kurdish ministers was no-one less than Obeidullah Barzani, son of Mullah Mustafa and brother of the next KDP leader, Idris Barzani. The other two were Hashim Aqrawi (no immediate relation) and Ismael Malaaziz. All but Aziz died in office of unusual cause.

It is hardly surprising that the four Kurdish ministries were political black-holes. Indeed, one might argue that all other ministries and public positions of authority were equally empty of content. In Iraq, only one person counted: the vice president, soon to become head of state: the "Heroic, Glorious Leader", Saddam Hussein.

Still, and despite the severe limitations imposed on Aqrawi during his tenure as first Minister of State and then as Minister of Transportation, there was appreciation for the very fact there was a friendly face in Baghdad to whom one could turn, even if without result. According to Kurdish notables like Abdullah Agha, leader of the large and influential

tcg-7

Sharafhani clan, in the dark-days following the 1975 Algiers Accords and the subsequent deportations from and destruction in Kurdistan, there was literally no-one else to turn to.

"When they were moving us from Sheikhhan we appealed to General Aziz to help us," recalled Farhad Sharafhani, one of Abdullah Agha's many sons, "He wept when he had to tell us there was nothing he could do."

But in the political lexicon of the Kurds, these are mere excuses and window-dressings to conceal a deep, moral crime: General Aziz had become a Jash, a collaborator and an apologist for the regime.

The period of 1975 to the beginning of the Gulf War (with Iran) in 1980 was an period of increasing terror not only for the Kurds of Iraq, but others, too.

First behind the scenes and then, after 1979, at the open helm of the ship of state, Saddam Hussein was systematically creating new enemies and then destroying them. First the communists were accused of being more beholding to Moscow than to pan-Arabism, and liquidated; tens of thousands of Iraqis of Iranian descent were expelled after being accused of creating a fifth column in the country. Even the Baath Party itself was not immune from Saddam's penchant for finding enemies and plotters everywhere. In one of the more celebrated purges decidedly reminiscent of the Roehm trial in the early days of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, Saddam called for a party conference and then surprised the delegates with one of their number, who detailed a plot to unseat Saddam, thoughtfully including the names of all his alleged co-conspirators. The accused were then led off to be shot by the remaining party delegates.

By 1980 and the start of the Iran-Iraq War, things had become too much for Aqravi. Even if it meant becoming a marked man for deserting Saddam and the Baath, he elected to flee the country, and, taking a short leave of absence to visit two of his children in London, he left Iraq--not to return for over ten years.

His public denouncement of the regime came in Damascus; his next move was to try and rejoin the KDP in Iran, but ^{he} was told he would have to start as a man in the ranks again and could not, as he requested, simply reassume his former position as a general in the Peshmergah forces. There was obvious bad blood between old allies. Next came membership in the rival Kurdish Socialist Party of Iraq, also based in exile in Iranian Kurdistan. But Aqravi left the party a year later after he says he recognized that rather than being a vehicle for the advancement of the Kurds in any significant way, it was just another clan-lead coalition with no specific vision or agenda, and increasingly dependent on the mullah-politics of Iran for sustenance.

Some might say it was the sense of shame and dishonor of being associated with the Baath regime for so long; others might say it was the accumulated guilt he felt after deserting his family to Saddam's revenge after he deserted and denounced the Baath Party leader; still others suggest that it is simply the function of becoming a political exile, a man without a country, and a man removed from his cause.

His first taste of exile was in London, where he stayed with two of his children; for reasons he never explained to me, he then left the British

tcg-7

capital (and hotbed of exile politics) and moved to Geneva.

I have not seen his house there, but I cannot imagine it to be the sumptuous, well-appointed abode of other exiled Kings, princes and ministers. I see a small apartment in an unprepossessing part of town, a kitchen, a bath and a room or two, sparsely furnished but filled with books. The abode of a hermit-scholar, working on his never-to-be-published dictionaries and books of Kurdish lore.

The internal exile ended in the Spring of 1991 when the news flashed across the world's television screen that the Kurds, encouraged by the humiliating defeat of Iraqi arms in Kuwait at the hands of the Americans and coalition forces, had once more risen up in one of their cyclical revolts.

But unlike the other figures of the Kurdish diaspora who rushed to the front to claim credit for the post-war intifadah, Aziz did not move until the revolt collapsed. Suddenly, the television screens of the world were no longer showing images of brave Peshmergah leaders like Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani swinging their AK-47s through the streets of Dohuk and Arbil, but relaying the pathetic picture of hundreds of thousands of urban Kurds--doctors, lawyers, teachers, craftsmen--in headlong flight away from the "decimated" Iraqi army to the mountains of Turkey and Iran.

Once again, something had gone terribly wrong in Kurdistan. And it was not the Peshmergah leadership who was paying for the miscalculation of Saddam's resilient power but ordinary people, now reduced to living in disease-filled tent cities. It was this image that drove Aziz Aqrabi out of exile.

"I came to be with the people," he told me during the course of our second meeting, "I came to try and understand what happened, to analyze and to advise, if I can. I came to serve in any way I can."

It was two days after our first encounter in the Baghdad Hotel, and we had met by chance in Camp One--one of the three newly established tent cities in the American/coalition "security zone" that had been established on the Iraqi side of the Turco-Iraqi ^{BORDER} in an effort to draw the estimated half million Kurds back down out of the mountains and part-way home. The lines of blue and green tents (the blue ones were summer tents from Sears-Robuck, the green ones winter-wear from the military supply depots of NATO-member forces) stretched across a vast wheat field that was slowly but surely being turned into a huge dust bowl under the churning wheels of hundreds of heavy vehicles and the meanderings of tens of thousands of feet. The whole camp had initially been designed to hold 20,000 people, but had now been expanded to two more tent cities--Camps Two and Three--bringing the total of refugees who had elected to come half-way home to 50,000 in the Zakho area alone.

Among these refugees--now called Displaced Iraqi Persons, or "DIPs" by dint of their physical location within the borders of their own country--Aziz was unique. For rather than come over the mountainous frontier from Turkey, his journey "home" had taken him via the circuitous route from Switzerland to Pakistan and then Iran before he was able to have himself smuggled across the frontier into Iraq.

It was, perhaps, a journey that deserves its own epic treatment.

tcg-7

Arriving with a U.N. passport for stateless people, he downgraded his documents for refugee papers in a different name in Islamabad before making arrangements to have himself smuggled into Iran, 750 miles away from his jump-off point. His contracted smugglers were not there to meet him, and so he traveled back and forth, 17 hours by bus each way, until the third time he was brought into Iran by a smuggler who then dumped him in a strange house and left him there to his own devices. The house servant informed him that he had been dupped by his master, and then dupped Aziz in turn, demanding several hundred dollars to get him further down the underground railway, but only taking him as far as the next bus station. Here, Aziz had two possible roads North and West to Tehran, and he chose that via Meshad on the basis that if he were questioned by the Iranian authorities about why a refugee Kurd should be traveling in eastern Iran, he could say he was making a "ziyara", or pious visit to the shrine of Imam Hussein's head...

At the Tehran bus station for the route west, he ran into someone from his home town in Iraq who recognized him and asked "are you Kek Aziz?" Aqrawi denied his identity, fearing that if the Iranian authorities found out, it would be then end of his journey home. But he felt that the man knew the truth, and rather than risk rumor, he decided to take him into his confidence, pleading with his former neighbor to hold his secret. The man agreed.

Still traveling incognito, Aziz joined the crush of refugees who had fled to Mahabad into western Iran, and then arranged to be brought back into Iraq by a small group of returnees. The Iranians would make no problems at this point in the journey: they were glad to see any refugee returning, and would ask no questions or even look twice at papers.

At Diyana, a Peshmergah stronghold in the northeast of Iraq, Aziz contacted a brother he had not seen in a decade. After reviewing family affairs, the two drove 12 hours over bad roads away from the Barzani/Talabani dominated northeastern sector to Zakho and the coalition security zone in the northwest. Here, he stood in line with the other Displaced Iraqi Persons to receive his tent and rations, and then started going to work.

What sort of work? I asked him as he served me another glass of tea.

His project of the moment, he explained, was gathering as composite a list as he could of the names of thousands of Kurdish boys who had been taken away by the Iraqi army in 1983 and then just disappeared. No one knew of their fate, nor dared enquire too closely. Now, with so many people from so many different areas all concentrated in the camp, Aziz had taken it upon himself to record the names of the missing youths to eventually present to the United Nations representative in the area. It was a tedious process, going from tent to tent, but he was already up to around 4,000 names.

"What else are you doing?" I asked, as if the collection of the names were not enough.

"Political work," answered Aziz.

"Like what?"

"Look around," he said, "There is no other leadership here. The people have just underwent a most awful experience, and if the nightmare is over, the fear remains. Where are the Peshmergah? Where are Barzani and Talabani? Their men are still in the mountains posing with their guns

tcg-7

while the leadership sits in Baghdad, negotiating a new autonomy accord like that of 1970."

Indeed, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani had effectively disappeared in Baghdad, and had not been seen for weeks, save for Iraqi news reports printed in Baath party papers--hardly the sort of source to give much confidence. Some feared that Saddam had done away with the two most prominent Kurdish leaders; others feared neither were up to the task of negotiating with Saddam, and were unknowingly involving themselves in a sell-out; still others feared the very worst: that the reason for the long silence from the two Kurdish leaders was that they were knowingly involved in a sell-out. Sadly, Kurdish history has ample examples of double-dealing, and suspicion is second nature.

"What the leaders do not understand is that the people have been changed," Aziz explained, "In other revolts, it was the Peshmergah who fought and then fled. But this time, it was the people who started the revolt when the Peshmergah leadership was nowhere to be found. They came in later and claimed credit for it. And when the revolt failed, it was not the Peshmergah who suffered; they fled first: it was the people of the cities and towns who were obliged to leave everything behind and flee for their lives. And those days in the mountains changed them all. They arrived as members of clans, but they returned as Kurds. They have a consciousness now, and they will never be the same again. They demand the right to their own self determination, and will not simply accept a dictation from their traditional leaders any more. The days of ideology are through--Islamism, Marxism, Maoism--all are dead letters today. Even the sort of romantic Kurdism proclaimed by Barzani and Talabani. What have they accomplished in over 30 years of armed struggle? They have left the people ignorant and having a greater regard for guns than books."

According to Aziz, the Kurds were being faced with three choices: a resumption of the status quo; an acceptance of autonomy within a unitary Iraq; and independence.

The first, he felt, was impossible: after all their suffering and consciousness raising, the people will not accept a return to where they were before the intifadah.

The second option, autonomy, although the one publicly declared as desirable by the Peshmergah leadership (and in direct contradiction to stated Peshmergah aims for decades) was also a non-starter: the Arabs are unrepentant chauvinists who have no conception of democracy--with or without Saddam. It would just be a matter of time before the talks or statements or accords break down and the Kurds were back to square one again.

The last alternative, and admittedly the toughest option, was independence--the only long-term solution to the national problem of the Kurds.

And what a problem that was.

It is said that the Kurds are one of the few peoples in the modern world who have devolved from near-nation status backwards to the rule of the clan and the tribe. Just how real the putative "near-nation" status ever was is open to debate, but certainly today the clan, or ashiret, reigns supreme. What this means in real terms is an extreme loyalty to one's kinsmen and the concomitant ability to stab one's neighbor in the back for immediate gain.

tcg-7

But even the clans are often divided against themselves, a state of affairs encouraged by the traditional division of the inherited leadership into two areas--an Agha (or baron), responsible for daily, organizational matters and a Sheikh responsible for religious affairs (although in today's secular reality the Sheikhly class act suspiciously like surrogate Aghas much of the time). It comes as no surprise that this internal division of power has allowed various outland leaders (notably the Heroic Leader Hussein) to manipulate the diverse tribes and clans and subfactions therein to an extent an outsider could scarcely believe possible.

A simple example is that of the non-Muslim Yezidi leadership: the "prince" of the clan is one Mir Tahsin, who for long years was in opposition to his brother Mir Khairi, regarded as flunky of the regime. I lack the details of the process, but a complete flip-flop has taken place, with Mir Tahsin now ensconced as the official, hereditary leader of the Yezidis while Khairi, the former Jash, has become an exile in the mountains in noble opposition to Saddam Hussein.

A more complicated case concerns the relationship between the Zibari and Barzani clans. The former stands for quislingism in all its repulsiveness while the latter exemplifies noble self-sacrifice in all its glory. In two words, the Zibari are Jash and the Barzani are Peshmergah.

But is it not of passing interest that the Barzani and Zibari clans have contiguous "estates" and just might have a rivalry based in something a little more concrete than politics, like land ownership? And despite the public, political chasm between them, the two have managed to work out a formula to share this year's wheat harvest, with the primary buyer being the state. Perhaps this ability to conduct "business as usual" has something to do with the decades long blood feud between the clans, allegedly over one woman, and then resolved with another: After scores of killings on both sides, peace was finally established by tying the two families together by means of the marriage of a Zibari woman to the head of the Sheikhly side of the Barzani clan, Mullah Mustafa, founder of the Kurdish Democratic Party. Their off-spring? None other than Massoud Barzani, current head of the KDP...

I had just dispatched another fraudulent character--a young man who had showed up at the Baghdad Hotel reception requesting that I replace a play-money \$100 bill he said he had received from an American soldier in a Black Market deal--and was making up the day's menu with the new cook (another of Mister Shukri's very best friends) when Aziz arrived.

"Chouani," he asked in Kurdish.

"Bashi," I replied, "Alhumdillah," adding the standard praise to God understood throughout the Muslim world.

"Kek Thomas," said Aziz, "if you want to learn Kurdish, I will teach you, but you must stop using the Arabic words--especially those with religious content."

"Why? People all over the Muslim world use such epithets."

"Hmph!" Aziz snorted with near indignation, "What gives you the idea that I am a Muslim?"

"Well, you are wearing a skull cap, and the Kurds are known to be Muslims, and you are a Kurd," I pointed out several obvious reasons.

tcg-7

"True," considered Aziz, removing the skull cap, "You have made an honest mistake."

"Well, if you are not a Muslim, then what are you?"

Aziz thought for a moment, and then replied.

"Have you ever heard of the Yezidis?"

"Yes, they are the so-called devil worshippers, descended from the Zoroastrian belief in a dichotomous world, split between light and darkness and goodness and evil."

"Exactly so," said Aziz, "But did you know that that is the original religion of the Kurds?"

This I did not know, I confessed.

"I say I am a Yezidi, now," he began, "Not because I believe in it or follow its rules and rites, but because it is our national religion. Islam is an Arab religion, imported and imposed on us by force. It is one of the roots of evil and backwardness in our society, a major one. Maybe the primary one. It has polluted our language and polluted our souls, forced our women behind the veil and forced our men into wasting their lives in mosques and meaningless discussions. It has also confused our sense of identity. I ask you, how many Jews believe in Judaism? Yet it is their national religion, the tie that binds Jews together from all over the world. We need the same, and we have the same. That is why I have become a non-believing, non-practicing Yezidi. It is the religion of our forefathers, and should be our religion now."

It was a theme that Aziz would return to again and again within the course of the next month: Islam equaled Arabism, and both were totally inimical to the very concept of Kurdish culture. Although he and his brothers had all received "Islamic" names from his father, Aziz himself had purposely named all of his eight children with "pure" Kurdish names. Especially provocative were those phrases and epithets that evoked the name of God, such as "Inshallah," which would send the old nationalist general into a paroxysm of ethnic rage.

The entire thought process, I considered, was remarkably similar to that of early Kemalism in Turkey, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had in effect declared a cultural war on Islam and Arabism, meaning to extirpate those two potent forces from the Turkish body politic. Whether Aziz was aware of the antecedents of his Kurdish anti-Islamic/Arabic campaign is unclear, but the goals seemed much the same.

If religion was one aspect of the Islamic/Arabic attack on Kurdishness, language was the other, and Aziz was equally emphatic about the need to rid Kurdish of all traces of Arabic. As such, Aziz took great pains to teach me only "pure" Kurdish words--even if these had an extremely limited usage among the population as a whole. As an example of the proposed but non-implemented language reforms, I can give the following: in street Kurdish, "I understand" is rendered "(Ez) Fahm dakim", a compound verb derived from the Arabic root Fahama (to understand) and the basic Kurdish helping verb of Kir (to make or do). The preferred, "pure" Kurdish alternative is rendered "(Ez) de gehishtim", and although understood by all, is very rarely used in casual conversation. I even caught him correcting other interlocutors when they used a particularly Arabized verb, noun or phrase.

Another interesting aspect of this politics of language was his adaptation of the "New Kurdish" alphabet, a version of the modern Turkish

tcg-7

(Latin) script promoted by Kurdish intellectuals in Turkey and Europe. Curiously, those same intellectuals were conspicuous by *their* absence in the security zone despite the obvious fact that if they truly wanted to effect a cultural and educational revolution, there was no better place to organize than under the protective umbrella of the coalition forces. But the many years of howling and ranting and raving against American Imperialism had apparently left the intellectual class more than a little reluctant to participate in the nation-building process in Iraq and, aside from a handful of volunteer Kurdish doctors and a whirl-wind appearance by the singer Shivan, the Kurdish elite had stayed home in the comfort and safety of the salons of London and Paris, leaving the edification of the masses in the hands of others.

Two Poets

I had the chance to meet two of these "others" the following day when, in the midst of my language lesson with Aziz, Mister Shukri announced that I had two visitors--a pair of local poets who just happened to be his very best friends. My was head aching from twisting verbs (Kurdish has the bizarre aspect of evincing tense by changing the pronoun in transitive verbs), and I thought it a fine time to take a break and so invited the two poets in for tea.

"Chouani?"

"Bashi! Serchava!"

The pair introduced themselves as Mister Masouri and Mister Ahmad, the former a clean-shaven, balloon-faced and rather boyish-looking man in traditional Kurdish attire and the latter an untypically tall, square-jawed man with a moustache trimmed to military specifications. Again, that peculiar, brutal intuition: I cannot explain it any better than just "feeling", but instantly I knew that I was dealing with a couple of state-supported bards, men who had formerly enjoyed the favor of the Baghdad regime. They scarcely bothered to glance at Aziz, whom I introduced simply as "my translator," a low-profile identity that seemed to suit him.

No sooner had they sat down for the obligatory cup of tea than one of the two, Masouri, launched into his most recent opus--a poem that had something to do with comparing the strength of the battleship Missouri in the Gulf War (I am not even sure it was there) and the strength of his own pen. The connection was pretty obscure. Then followed the familiar panegyric to George Bush and the United States and their eternal love and devotion to the Kurdish people, and vice-versa.

"The Kurdish people love the United States, we love you!" cried Masouri, acting a like I was Bush's personal viceroy in Iraq, an emissary who would bring the Masouri/Missouri poem to the attention of the White House, "Communism is impossible now! We can never be communists!"

It was a little odd, this sudden passion for capitalism and hatred of communism, and all because Bush punched Saddam in the nose over Kuwait. The only conclusion I could come to was that Masouri was an old CP party member (or probably a communist-turned Baathist) who had now turned--along with 99% of all Kurds in Iraq--into an ardent, johnny-come-lately "Americanist". Depending on circumstances and patronage, it was clear, he would be composing odes for Gorby or Saddam or Rafsanjani.

tcg-7

Mister Ahmad was a different story. More than just a poet, he had announced that he was the Regional Director of Youth and Culture in Dohuk Province--meaning the entire Kurdish Northwest. I had seen the type before--half cultural mayvin, half mukhabarat, or secret police. As clear as day, he was a Baathi, even if being a Kurdish member of the Arab Renaissance Party might seem a contradiction in terms.

The only real question that remained was what the pair really wanted: were they agent provocateurs or merely pathetic opportunists?

Despite my disinterest in listening to another hour of Kurdish suffering at the hands of every other nation on Earth save the United States, I thought it best to find out and accepted an invitation to lunch at Mister Ahmad's house in order to learn more, taking Aziz along as my translator.

Ahmad's place was in the better part of Zakho and pleasant if new--meaning that no effort had been made to conceal the recently poured concrete additions around the small lawn and garden. Most notably, the place had not been sacked like many other houses in Zakho, suggesting that Ahmad's contacts with the Iraqi army had been such that the troops had refrained from looting his abode when they left town. One happy aspect of this, though, was that all of Ahmad's many books remained on the shelves. The very fact that the man collected books was unusual, because the sad reality is that most people in the Middle East simply do not read.

As his wife prepared our lunch of yaprak, or stuffed vegetables (including onions), Ahmad took me on a tour of his library. Most books were in Arabic, or Kurdish written in the Arabic script, although there were a few volumes of Mister Ahmad's own work in transliterated Cyrillic--presumably for the edification of the Kurds in the Soviet Union (most of whom are communist exiles from Iraq).

What about modern Kurdish works in New Kurdish? I asked.

Oh! That is forbidden! came the reply.

By whom? I asked.

By the government.

But the government is gone, now, is it not?

Yes, and it is time to establish a free and independent Kurdistan, with the help of the Great People of the United States!

Why not do something now, on your own? I asked.

Like what?

Like opening schools in the tent cities to teach kids the new Kurdish alphabet.

But school is out on summer recess!

Sez who?

Sez the government.

To be fair, Mister Ahmad was not alone in this dependency on the parameters of the school year set by the state. School had been in effective recess since February 15th, when the Americans had started bombing Iraq, and half of the Kurds had been playing hookie in the mountains of Turkey and Iran since mid-March. But because the Arabs had taken their exams and had been sent out on summer vacation the Kurds felt that this applied to them as well, and had demanded an extension of the year-end exams so that their children might be tested on such edifying and important subjects as the Life of Young Saddam and other material published by the Baath for the nation's school children. Again, I had that

tcg-7

funny feeling that I was watching a dog chase its tail: demand independence but continue to matriculate in a system you no longer believe in or belong to. It was all rather sad and pathetic, but I decided to pursue the conversation by a different tact.

Before the intifadah, you were the Director of Youth and Culture in Dohuk province?

Yes, came the proud reply.

What were your duties?

To coordinate cultural activities and publish the writings of young Kurds, as well as to oversee Kurdish language newspapers and magazines.

Was there any sort of government censorship?

Oh, no.

You were perfectly free in publishing what you wanted.

Oh, yes.

I decided to go for blood.

Was yours a Baath party position?

Well, yes...

And you were a Baath Party member?

Well, of course, but it wasn't as simple as that...

Why not?

Well, a friend arranged it, his membership in the Baath, although he didn't want to, or believe in it, and although it didn't mean anything in the way of his work or his art, but he had to in order to get the position.

Well, did he intend on returning to the same position in the future?

Of course! When Kurdistan is free!

When will that be?

When the United States helps us!

But in the meantime, what was he doing in the way of Youth and Culture?

Well, waiting.

Waiting for what?

Well, there were no directions yet from the Regional Director of Youth and Culture in Arbil, of course, and no new budget. You can't do anything without a budget...

But Arbil is still under Baghdad government control, ergo, the regional director for Kurdistan is still Saddam's man, ergo, any directives that come out of Arbil now will resemble those that came before--like the continued banning of the New Kurdish Script.

No! It will be different!

Why?

Because the United States is here!

The United States will not remain here forever, and will certainly not interest itself in the politics of Kurdish education when the Kurds aren't even interested in the subject themselves... 'If not now, when; if not me, who?' I asked rhetorically, citing some familiar, Kennedyesque quotation.

Mister Ahmad was becoming flustered and defensive and finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his posture as a gracious host. Then, happily, lunch arrived and we were able to busy ourselves with eating rather than talking about the amorphous politics of Kurdistan and even managed to make a smiling egress from Mister Ahmad's house, replete with never-kept promises to return.

As we left, I turned to General Aziz.

tcg-7

"The man is a Jash," I said, using the all-encompassing word for turn-coat, quisling and tribal buffoon.

"No," said Aziz, shaking his head, "He is merely one of us."

"What do you mean," I asked the obvious, leading question.

"He is just one of hundreds of thousands of confused individuals here who have never had the chance to think for themselves," said Aziz, nearly wistfully, "I cannot blame him personally for his lack of imagination because it has been the consistent, government policy to deprive Kurds of their ability to think. He may have the title of being the director of youth and culture, but he was never had the chance to be young and never had the chance to acquire anything even vaguely resembling culture. It is the system, and it is the system that we must change."

"How so?"

"There is only one way, the hardest way of all--independence."

"But even Barzani and Talabani say they are willing to settle for autonomy."

"I know, and that is their crime. Because without true independence, we will always be subject to systems of thought and education designed to keep us ignorant, avaricious and divided, pitting one Kurd against the next."

Out of Sector

But if I was attempting to get to the bottom of the Kurdish Problem, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Zakho was not the place to do it. The city was slowly but surely becoming an artificial entity, no longer reflecting anything of Kurdish reality but only a caricature of it. Although the Peshmergah had a representation office in town, the roving HumVee jeeps of the American Military Police provided the real security force, and one so impartial that even the few, remaining Iraqi policemen had begun to rely upon it for their safety. Even the refugee tent cities outside town were becoming so sanitized and dependent on free-bee supplies that they were beginning to resemble holiday camps, replete with running water, swings and what-chronic-illness-we-might-have-today type medicine.

The front was elsewhere, and if I were to learn anything more about Kurdistan, it would have to be outside of Zakho and the camps and down the road south toward the frontier of the security zone. That was defined by the city of Dohuk, still under Iraqi control, although the United Nations was in the process of "negotiating" a partial withdrawal so as to encourage more Kurds to go home.

I could think of no better guide than General Aziz.

Our first foray was into the Chiya Spee, or White Mountains south of Zakho. The range defines the eastern edge of the rich and fertile Sulwani Plain and the western edge of what might be referred to as "wildest Kurdistan"--the towering mountains and sheer cliffs of the Zagros Mountains that have been the traditional base of Kurdish nationalism.

Passing through an allied check-point on the outskirts of Zakho, we proceeded down the main highway to Dohuk, Mosul and Baghdad. On every hill there were military guard-posts--looking like so many dog-houses--and on every ridge of significance, a fort. These I had dubbed "Saddam Castles" due to their resemblance to French Legionnaire forts in the desert epics of the silver screen, like Beu Geste, and one nearly expected to see

tcg-7

Humphrey Bogart or some other 1940s star stick his head out of one of the crenellated turrets, and wave.

Aziz was not possessed by any similar romanticism.

"Occupied Kurdistan," he said as we passed each fortress.

But now the forts and guard posts guarding the highway were empty, and all the barricades and check-points controlling access to the by-roads unmanned. It was a golden opportunity to take a detour into areas that had formerly been off-limits even if it meant delaying our arrival in Dohuk. So, in a totally arbitrary manner, we selected a paved road leading off the North-South highway, and followed it where it led.

It was a long, lovely drive through beautiful if neglected countryside, marred only by reminders of the military: here a series of trenches dug into the hillside; there another group of dog houses for guards, often charred by fire where a rocket or grenade had hit. Remarkably, there were no villages--at least none that one could immediately identify as such. We had to look for the remains of orchards and tended trees, which would then lead the eye to lumps of concrete and stone, now overgrown with weeds: the sad remnants of villages that once were.

Then, standing by the side of the road we saw a man, and stopped.

Where are you from, I asked through Aziz.

Dohuk, came the reply.

Then why are you here?

Because they told me to go home.

Who is they? The Peshmergah?

No, the Americans.

And where is home?

Here.

It was the first hint of a major wrinkle in the allied plans for Kurdish repatriation: while people were heeding the call to leave the mountains and camps and go back to their previous lives, the allied perception of "home" related to the apartment buildings and intra-muros dwellings deserted by the Kurds when they fled in March whereas for the Kurds it was to the rubble of the farms and villages they had been forced off following the collapse of the 1975 (and then 1988) revolts.

This was, and will be, a major problem for the well-meaning Americans and the United Nations folks due to take the place of the soldiers. In a sense, it is as if peace--or some semblance thereof--were finally established between Israelis and Arabs, and Palestinians were given the green-light to go "home." But rather than return to the West Bank, they started showing up in Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv, camping in the parking lots created over the ruins of their former homes, circa 1948. The Iraqi context is only different in the sense that the diaspora is slightly more recent--starting in 1975--and that due to the Iraqi defeat in Kuwait and the subsequent Kurdish revolt, most of the Arab settlers on Kurdish lands had abandoned their new estates, leaving homes and lands vacant.

But not all. Further down the road, we ran into one of the Majmuma, or planned communities for exactly those Arab settlers. It was a nasty-looking place--rows of nasty looking buildings, set behind barbed wire, and guarded by several trenches for tanks and another of the ubiquitous Saddam Castles. With all the double concertina wire fences and guard towers around the place, it looked like a concentration camp but was

tcg-7

exactly the inverse: the fortifications were designed to keep the good guys in, and the bad guys out.

The town was called Beetal and looked dead and deserted, but on a chance and out of a sheer sense of voyeurism, I pulled the car in around a busted road block and drove in beyond the perimeter fence to take a look.

It was not the sort of place I would like to live: a couple of two story, official-looking buildings (cop-shop? hospital? school?) with busted windows and doors stood in the middle of what should have been the town square, had there been any place for shops, while the dreary, planned town spread out from the center in a grid pattern. All the houses were made of identical brick and mortar and glued to each other like so many ghetto store fronts. The windows were filled with mud--either as an adobe addition to keep out the heat or a means of securing greater privacy. All in all, the town was a filthy, claustrophobic dump, and I had to wonder just who would chose to live here and why.

My answer was not long in coming.

A lone dog crossed the road, avoiding the tangle of barbed wire in front of one of the burnt out houses on the street; then a single goat. There were people here, somewhere, and it was time to find them.

At the end of one of the rows of cement shacks, the paved road opened into a large, denuded field. In the middle of it, for reasons known best to themselves, sat three gentlemen, dressed in Arab garb. I honked the horn and raised my hand over the roof of the car and waved. They stirred, conferred, and then waved back. Protocols performed, I thought it now safe to approach.

"Assalam Aleikum!" I offered as I pulled the car to a stop.

"Wa Aleikum Assalam!" came the standard reply.

How're'ya doin'? I asked in Arabic.

The three, now joined by a fourth man who emerged mysteriously from the landscape, needed no prompting to answer. Like they were starved of speech for a week, they instantly began rattling in a machine-gun Iraqi Arabic so fast and furious that I had trouble following it, and was obliged to ask Aziz to intercede and interpret the litany of their travails.

"We are people, only people! We have nothing to do with the government! Our lands were swamped by the Mosul dam and then they brought us here and told us we had to live here in these houses and farm these lands and we knew that there were owners before us but we didn't know who and then came the war and then the revolt and now they want us to go away and we sent our families for fear that the Kurds would kill them the Goddamn Kurds! and they went but we stayed and there are only a few of us here to guard our lands because of the wheat which we planted and after the harvest we will go away or stay or do anything that the government of Autonomous Kurdistan tells us to do."

"Difficult," I said, commiserating with the four men over their fate, but offering no solutions. I had none.

"Peace, we want peace, that's all!" babbled one fellow.

"And our wheat. We planted it, its ours--let the Kurds have the land! God curse this country!"

"We are people, just people! But now the Kurds think we are best dead! We are only poor people!"

I waited for Aziz to make some sort of gesture, revealing himself to be who he was, but none came.

tcg-7

"Well?" I asked Aziz once we were back on the main road again.

"They must go," said the general, sounding like a Kurdish Ariel Sharon. "They have stolen Kurdish lands, or participated in the theft. So what if they planted this year's wheat? They reaped wheat sown by Kurds when they arrived! They must go, and go now."

We drove in silence for awhile, each lost in our own train of thought, and slowly but surely, the good, tarmac road began to disintegrate: first into a gravel lane, and then into a dirt and rock path. Quail and partridge began springing from the shallow ditch to either side, and wild pigeons swooped from the trees. I wished that I had my 12 gauge along, to supplement the rancid Meals Ready To Eat rations still purveyed by the military to the tender-tummies in the region with some fresh game.

Then, as we reached the crest of a hill and as if in answer to my gun-powder fantasies, I noticed a box of ammunition lying by the side of the road. A few bullets were sticking out of the tin like stiff sardines out of an oversized can, and they weren't designed for a shooting birds.

"Aziz", I said, pointing at the 30 caliber machine gun rounds, glistening red and nasty under the afternoon sun, "take a look at that."

"Yes," said the general, "And look over there."

My find was paltry compared to his.

There, on a knoll above the road, lay stacked some 100 rockets, most still in their casings, and all pointed at us. I slowed the car and looked around: everywhere now, crushed and half-buried in the dust on the road, behind bushes and bits of grass lay shells, casings and cartridges, all apparently live.

We stopped the car and got out, as much to check for mines and live amo in front and behind us as for curiosity's sake. The path seemed clear (although you could never tell with crank mines and Bouncing Betties) and so we decided to inspect the cache of rockets on the hill, approaching the stack of grey demons with extreme care and respect.

The deadly stuff was strewn everywhere. In addition to the rockets--all shipped from Iran, according to the markings on the casings, which included greetings like "Death to America"--there was a small arsenal of perhaps 500 mortar rounds and self-propelled grenades, all primed and charged and ready to be plunked into a mortar sleeve to rain hell on any approaching foe or even on distant Zakho.

Who had left the rounds here, and why? Given the Iranian markings on the rockets we assumed that the material had been purchased by or donated to the Peshmergah by the good mullahs to the East. The presence of special packing paper manufactured in Cincinnati put an even stranger twist on the providence of the supplies. Shades of Irangate at our feet. It was also possible that the munitions had been seized by Iraq during the eight year Gulf War with Iran, and was now being used against the Kurds--although the presence of armor-piercing rockets militated against this interpretation for the simple fact that the Kurds had no armor to pierce. The mortar rounds, in contrast, appeared to have been of Chinese manufacture--at least the blasting caps set in them and strewn all over the ground--were made in the PRC.

One thing, though, was perfectly clear: whoever had brought all the amo up to the heights and primed the explosives for use had left in a great hurry, so precipitously, in fact, that they had apparently not even fired a shot. There were no empty or spent cartridges or casings around.

tcg-7

Stranger still, the American MPs whose job it was to collect and then detonate all discarded war materials in the area had apparently not even bothered to come up this far in the hills, and if we had just stumbled on a road-side arsenal, what else was there out of sight?

The general shook his head in disgust and distress.

"We love war, we do," he sighed, "We love it more than life."

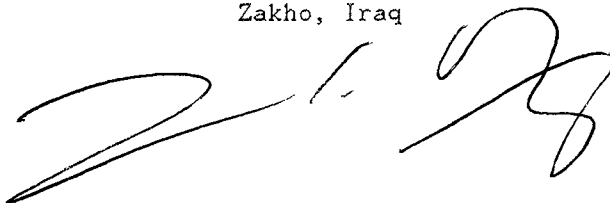
There was, really, only one thing to do, although it would mean the end of our journey to Dohuk: we turned around and headed back to Zakho to report the cache to the American MPs,

lest some child or group of children stumble upon the deadly toys. Already, some dozen kids had been killed or maimed by playing with landmines or live ammunition rounds in and around the city, and we didn't want to be responsible for more. But I also had to wonder about a future group of Peshmergah, who, with no American forces around to protect their loved ones and with the vengeance-driven army of Saddam Hussein hot on their trail, would discover that their mountain cache of armor-piercing missiles and mortar rounds--their means of defense and survival--was gone.

In the next installment: a visit to Dohuk and Aziz's long-lost brother; conversations with local Aghas; Project Farm and the Sulwani plain; Camp closing; Disappointments; Barzani; American withdrawal; Interviews with others about Aziz; parting thoughts

Best Regards,
June 26th 1991

Thomas Coltz
Zakho, Iraq

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Thomas Coltz, is written over the typed name and location.

Received in Hanover 7/10/91