Irreconcilable Differences: Why Some Conflicts are so Difficult to Resolve*

by

Manus I. Midlarsky
Department of Political Science
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Elizabeth R. Midlarsky
Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology
Teacher’s College, Columbia University, NY

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Abstract
Much research on protracted intrastate conflict has either centered on internal conditions characterizing an important protagonist (e.g. grievance, greed), or on dyadic interactions between them that frequently employ game theory. Cross-sectional methodologies often are used in empirical testing. Here, I propose to use the dyad as the principal unit of analysis, but examine each of the actor’s diachronically as they interact with each other. Specifically, the ephemeral gain, a theory integral to Origins of Political Extremism (Cambridge 2011), has been employed in this analysis. I hypothesize that whether as rebel or government, when an actor engaged in intrastate conflict experiences an ephemeral gain, it is more likely to prolong the conflict. If both actors have experienced this phenomenon, then the conflict is even more likely to continue. Important here is the risk acceptance by rebels resulting from the anger attendant upon an ephemeral gain. Research in social psychology strongly supports this variable sequence. The case of the Kurds in the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq is offered as an illustration. Ephemeral gains experienced both by the Kurds and by the Republic of Turkey acted to prolong this conflict to the present day.
Why do some people initiate or prolong conflict when the odds are decidedly against them? We know that the cost-benefit calculations typically underpinning most political decisions do not apply here, or if they do, only in significantly modified form. Two lines of inquiry provide support. One, a detailed analysis of peasant behavior by James C. Scott (1985, 29) concludes that:

Peasant rebellions, let alone peasant “revolutions,” are few and far between. Not only are the circumstances that favor large-scale peasant uprisings comparatively rare, but when they do appear the revolts that develop are nearly always crushed unceremoniously. To be sure, even a failed revolt may achieve something….Such gains, however, are uncertain, while the carnage, the repression, and the demoralization of defeat are all too certain and real.

Extending this type of analysis to the revolts of the Arab Spring, Jack Goldstone (2011) also concludes that most societal conditions do not augur well for the onset of a revolution.

The other, a game theoretic analysis of rebellion, indicates that the preferred strategy of someone contemplating joining the rebels is simply not to do so. The potential costs will be too great, and the gains too meager to justify such a decision. Even in the event of a rebel victory, the bystander can take a free ride on the collective benefits of that unlikely outcome (Lichbach 1995). Consistent with this argument is one based on rational choice considerations using a game tree analysis to explain why secession—another kind of insurgency—is such a rare event (Hechter 1992). Although concepts like selective benefits for individual insurgents (e.g. cooptation into the existing administration; financial gain) have been put forward as solutions to the “rebel’s dilemma” (Lichbach 1994), they do not generalize to situations where no material
gain is evident and the risk of death is palpable. Nor do the claimed economic gains for rebel groups help us understand such risk-taking behavior.

A case in point is the prolongation of the Holocaust by Nazi guards on death marches who were subject to the risk of Allied capture and worse, yet were unwilling to free prisoners who, in gravely weakened condition, posed no threat (Blatman 2011). Indeed, the vexing problem of an increased killing rate of both Jews and non-Jews as the Nazis faced certain defeat in 1945 initially stimulated the current inquiry, but has already been presented elsewhere. Here, I address the protraction of Kurdish insurgency against Turkish and other Middle Eastern governments as part of a larger book length project (including the Holocaust’s end) that analyzes territorial conflicts, which tend to be prolonged (Midlarsky forthcoming).

**Theory: The Ephemeral Gain**

In the search for explanations of long unresolved conflicts, this paper draws upon the theory first put forward in *Origins of Political Extremism*. Specifically, the theory is that of the ephemeral gain that proved to be robust in explaining the rise of political extremism and consequent mass violence in a variety of settings (Midlarsky 2005, 2009; 2010; 2011a, b).

The ephemeral gain theory posits that anger and violent manifestations are more likely when, after an earlier period of subordination, an identifiable social group, often a nation-state, experiences a major societal gain (e.g., territory, population, authority), which is then followed by a critical loss, or the threat of its imminent occurrence. The shadow of the past and the shadow of the future coincide in the bleak expectation that future political conditions easily could be just as oppressive as those of the past. The threat and fear of reversion to a subordinate condition can lead to the anger that fuels the mass murder of putative enemies, most of them innocents.
This theory has been applied to multiple forms of political extremism, including the rise of Italian, Hungarian, and Romanian fascism, Nazism, radical Islamism, and Soviet, Chinese, and Cambodian communism. Other applications include a rampaging military (Japan, Pakistan, Indonesia) and extreme nationalism in Serbia, Croatia, the Ottoman Empire, and Rwanda. Polish anti-Semitism after World War II and the rise of separatist violence in Sri Lanka are also examined.

Ephemeral gains occur within authority spaces. Authority space is understood as the portion of society over which governmental influence legitimately extends. Territorially-based authority spaces are frequently encountered, as in the distance from a central (capital) city that its authority extends. The period of subordination followed by gain, in turn followed by loss, is shown in Figure 1. The dashed line shows a period of decline that can have the same impact as subordination. In some cases, the early subordination followed a still earlier triumphal period, important in surviving narratives, which is shown to the left of the figure in dotted lines.

Figure 1 about here

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Promises of future authority tend to be unstable, for they can be withdrawn, conveniently forgotten, or overridden by later treaties or other agreements. The 1919 Versailles Treaty that nullified the 1915 Allied Treaty promising elements of the Dalmatian Coast to Italy is a case in point, as is the claimed promise of independence or autonomy for Casamance. Both instances led to the rise of prolonged conflict, in one case the aggressive postures of Fascist Italy, and in the other, the still unresolved Casamance insurgency.
Instances of political extremism and conflicts of extraordinary length are rare, suggesting that the dynamics do not follow the cost-benefit calculations so common in other conflicts. Extremist behavior like suicide terrorism is a weapon of the weak in asymmetric conflict. Indeed, extremist groups such as the Nazis and Soviet communists arose in response to defeats that suggested insufficient force capability, which had to be countered by radical means, including mass murder. Examples include the German and Russian defeats in WWI, followed respectively by the Holocaust beginning after the German invasion of Russia in WWII, and Stalinism in the 1930s (Midlarsky 2011b). To this extent, political extremism, mass violence, and prolonged insurgency share a commonality in the experience of asymmetric war.

That said, however, the existence of political extremism does not in itself guarantee the protraction of conflict over a long time period. Sometimes extremists can be sufficiently threatening to invite relatively swift intervention as did the Vietnamese in 1979, ending the butchery by the Khmer Rouge. Certainly, the four-year sanguinary reign of the Khmer Rouge does not compare with the decades-long conflicts to be analyzed here.

A somewhat different theoretical tack will be required here to understand how two protagonists engage in lengthy conflict. Instead of a focus on the rise of individual extremist groups like Italian Fascists, German Nazis, or Soviet Communists, the emphasis here is on a minimally dyadic interaction. In other words, it is hypothesized that ephemeral gains will be required for one or both major protagonists in order for a conflict to be prolonged. If only one of the two has experienced an ephemeral gain, there may be a somewhat higher probability of a settlement being reached within a relatively short time period. But if both are driven by the dynamics of ephemera, it may be that much harder to reach a settlement. The Turko-Kurdish conflict is one example of ephemeral gains on both sides, as is the violence over Kashmir. Roy
Licklider (2005) correctly cautions that the circumstances leading to the initiation of a conflict can be different from those prolonging it. Yet in several cases like that of Tibet, an ephemeral gain emphasizing an early triumphal period can serve as a stimulus to insurrection, but several ephemera involving gains during the course of a conflict can propel it along its evolving trajectory.

Here, the purpose differs from the earlier effort (Midlarsky 2011b). Instead of understanding the rise of extremist groups and consequent mass violence within the context of interstate conflict, the intention here is to explain why some intrastate conflicts persist for a very long time, i.e. prolonged conflicts, while others are settled more quickly (e.g. Azar 1990). Although the ephemeral gain turns out to be an antecedent condition for both extremist induced mass violence and protracted conflicts, subsequent pathways differ in important ways. Specifically, the threat and fear of reversion to an earlier subordinate condition that was more consequential than all other pathways to extremism is less prominent here as an explanation of the prolonged conflict, although it sometimes can apply to embattled governments faced with the threat of loss and a consequent return to subordination. Instead, risk acceptance, especially of insurgent groups, is an important outcome of the anger and perceptions of injustice attendant upon the ephemeral gain.

The Salience of Loss

Why do potential insurgents abandon their homes, livelihoods (such as they are), and familiar surroundings to engage in extremely hazardous activity, typically against far more powerful governmental forces? Important here is the salience of loss. Surprise at a sudden loss has an important consequence in the form of vividness (Loewenstein 1996). Both emotional pain and satisfaction can be multiplied substantially by the experience of surprise (Elster 2004, 160).
Or, as George Loewenstein and Jennifer Lerner (2003, 624) suggest, “people respond with greater emotional intensity to outcomes that are surprising – that is, unexpected.”

It is necessary to understand the surprising nature of the loss, frequently because of the unrealistic expectations of insurgents. As we shall see shortly, the emotions stemming from an automatic suppression of doubt and neglect of ambiguity, as well as the overweighting of small probabilities, lead to overconfidence in the face of daunting odds.

Finally, according to prospect theory, developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, losses are more highly valued than gains. Or put another way, the lost entity is psychologically more valued than an entirely identical entity that is gained (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 2000). Experimental evidence has consistently demonstrated the asymmetry between losses and gains, even to the extent that, in contrast to gains, losses can generate extreme responses. Losses as the result of a shrinking spatial environment, therefore, may have a magnified role in the public consciousness, out of all proportion to their real-world consequences. When we add this asymmetry between gains and losses originating in prospect theory alone to the surprise, vividness, and emotional intensity stemming from the contrast between earlier gains and later losses, then these losses can be deeply consequential. Losses also are associated with risky behavior.

**Anger**

Protraction in and of itself suggests futility for the weaker protagonists, typically the insurgents. These lengthy conflicts persist through a succession of gains and losses, each of the later cycles in itself implying hopelessness for the insurgents. Yet the conflict persists despite the negligible probability of an outright insurgent victory. The sacrifice of human life, not to
mention the daily hardships that continue in the face of overwhelming odds, needs to be explained. A consequence of the ephemeral gain, anger, has been importantly linked to risk acceptance. And it is this acceptance of the risk of failure that leads directly to a continuation of apparently hopeless (and at times hapless) insurgent activity.

Why are the events invoked by the ephemeral gain salient? Clearly, national events that are perceived as unjust and anger inducing are important. Oral and written histories praise earlier triumphal periods in which the ethnie overcame obstacles (like subordination) to national greatness. The subsequent loss frequently is unexpected, certainly not consonant with the ascendant period. If the pattern is repeated over time, there occurs a successive reinforcement of memory, hurt, and anger that can lead to a prolongation of the conflict, whatever the odds against victory at its end. This pattern suggests that the victories and defeats may have an outsized presence in the victims’ minds, effectively a distortion of objective reality.

But the intersection between national and personal experience is important. While mortality salience—the exposure to death or its imminent possibility—is an important antecedent of political extremism (Midlarsky 2011b), nonlethal but nevertheless salient humiliations can propel individuals to join insurgent groups. Ethnic subordination can be made manifest in personal experience.

Why does the ephemeral gain yield anger? Most theorists of anger induction suggest that some sense of injustice, humiliation, or other injury lies at the source of this emotion. Anger has been shown to be a significant emotional response to injustice. Aristotle (1991) in his Rhetoric (Bk2, Ch2) defined anger as, “an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or toward what concerns one’s friends.” Commenting on Aristotle’s definition, Jonathan Haidt (emphasis in
original; 2003, 856) notes that “anger is not just a response to insults, in which case it would be just a guardian of self-esteem. Anger is a response to unjustified insults, and anger can be triggered on behalf of one’s friends, as well as oneself.” Thus, anger is categorized by Haidt as one of the “moral emotions”, those “that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (2003, 853).

Summarizing the remarkably consistent picture of anger that has emerged from a large number of studies, Paul Litvak et al. (2010, 290) conclude that “anger has been associated with a sense that the self (or someone the self cares about) has been offended or injured, with a sense of certainty or confidence about the angering event and what caused it, and with the belief that another person (as opposed to the situation or the self) was responsible for the event and with the notion that one can still influence the situation or cope with it” (e.g. Lazarus 1991; Ortnoy, Clore, and Collins 1988; Roseman 1984; Scherer 1999, 2001; Weiner, 1980, 1986).

Thus, loss generates anger at the injustice of the loss, especially when that loss occurred after a period of gain—the ascendancy that was preceded by subordination. The gain of that ethnic group has effectively been rendered null and void by the later loss. It is as if the gain had never occurred.

Justice as Fairness

Ever since the writings of John Rawls (1971, 1999, 2001), justice as fairness has been increasingly used as a basis for understanding the genesis of conflict or cooperation. At the same time, we may note the obverse. Lack of fairness can be perceived as an injustice. Hence, it is to our advantage to understand the conditions under which fairness evolves in dyadic relations. It turns out that in the Ultimatum Game, fairness evolves as a stable solution when the past
behavior or reputation of individual players becomes available (Nowak, Page, and Sigmund 2000; Sigmund, Hauert, and Nowak 2001).

Even animals have been shown to react badly to perceived injustices in the form of inequities. When dogs were paired with one receiving a reward and the other not, the latter refused to obey already learned commands (Range et al. 2009). In earlier studies of primates, Capuchin monkeys displayed similar behavior, reacting even to unequal reward distribution (Brosnan and de Waal 2003). If even animals will refuse to cooperate under conditions of inequity, then how much more intensely will humans react to similar circumstances?

Related to justice as fairness but still forming a conceptually distinct category is justice as the freedom to pursue capabilities (Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Sen 2000). From this perspective, the discrimination against minorities and women that prevent their freedom to pursue capabilities is understood as a form of injustice. Here, the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles on Germany and those of the later Naval Treaties of 1922 and 1930 limiting Japanese building of capital ships, even heavy cruisers, can be understood as injustices. And the social psychologist Paul Rozin and his colleagues (1999) found that violations of autonomy tended to be most directly associated with the emotion of anger.

When distinguishing among the consequences of violating the ethics of three fundamental realms, autonomy, community, and divinity, violations of the ethics of autonomy were more clearly associated with anger than were violations of the ethics of the remaining two. Between 74% and 85% of American and Japanese respondents reacted with anger to scenarios invoking the encouragement of a child to hit another, a drunken wife beater, and the theft of a purse from a blind person (Rozin et al. 1999, 578).
Justice inheres in the possession of personal rights; their violation stimulates anger and rebellion, as we shall see. And in virtually all of the cases examined, not only is the autonomy of a group violated, but if that violation occurs after an earlier period of ascendance that followed a still earlier subordination (in some cases following an even earlier triumphal period), then the anger can be augmented many times over. Especially if repeated over time in successive ephemeral gains, the strength of that anger can account for the repeated emergence of violent dissidence, even against overwhelming odds. This is especially true if there are successive ephemeral gains occurring over time, as in the case of the Kurds.

An important finding relevant to the prolongation of intrastate wars is the differential perceptions of perpetrators and victims. Using autobiographical narratives of those who were angered (victims) and the offenders who angered the victims (perpetrators), systematic patterns emerged. “Both perpetrator and victim accounts involved broken promises and commitments; violated rules, obligations, or expectations; betrayal of secrets; unfair treatment; lies; conflicts over money; and similar incidents” (Emphasis added; Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman 1990, 998).

**Emotion, Anger, and Risk**

There are many studies that examine the “faint whisper of emotion” called affect (Slovic et al. 2004, 2). They follow from the dual-process model of human cognition put forward in contributions by Epstein (1994), Sloman (1996), Chaiken and Trope (1999), Haidt (2001), Kahneman and Frederick (2002), and Lieberman (2003), among others. According to Seymour Epstein (1994, 710), among the first to systematically examine this model, “There is no dearth of evidence in everyday life that people apprehend reality in two fundamentally different ways, one variously labeled intuitive, automatic, natural, nonverbal, narrative, and experiential, and the other analytical, deliberative, verbal, and rational.”
In his extensive review of dual-process theories, Jonathan Evans (2008, 255) distinguishes between cognition processes that are “fast, automatic, and unconscious” (System 1) from those that are “slow, deliberative, and conscious” (System 2). Based on the literature (Evans 2008, 257), a breakdown of this contrast is as follows:

Table 1 about here

Although there are refinements of the items in this list, they are useful as a guide to understanding the bases of dual-process theorizing.

Recently, the Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman (2011, 105) has detailed several of the elements of System 1 relevant to the present inquiry. In his enumeration of the characteristics of System 1, he notes that automaticity occurs quickly with little or no effort, and that System 1 establishes a “cognitive ease to illusions of truth, pleasant feelings, and reduced vigilance.” That system also “neglects ambiguity and suppresses doubt.” Most important for present purposes is the creation of a “coherent pattern of activated ideas in associative memory,” a greater sensitivity “to changes than to states,” and the “overweight[ing] of low probabilities.”

According to Kahneman (2011, 85):

The measure of success for System 1 is the coherence of the story it manages to create. The amount and quality of the data on which the story is based is largely irrelevant.
When information is scarce, which is a common occurrence, System 1 operates as a machine for jumping to conclusions.

Elsewhere, he elaborates: “The combination of a coherence-seeking System 1 with a lazy System 2 implies that System 2 will endorse many intuitive beliefs, which closely reflect the impressions generated by System 1” (Kahneman 2011, 86). The importance of this emphasis on coherence without much evidentiary support appears in several instances of protracted conflict.

The sensitivity to change is inherent in the ephemeral gain, which requires at least two major changes in socio-political condition: a gain followed by a loss (see Figure 1). Overweighting of low probabilities stems from the experiential bases of System 1 decision making (see Table 1). Instead of a reliance on evidence that typically consists of data and numerical probabilities characteristic of System 2 decisions, subjective experience is dominant. Whether or not later facts contravene a particular hypothesis, that belief continues to be the modus operandi. Kahneman (2011) provides numerous examples of this subjective reliance on experience from his own history as a military trainer of troops. Economic decision making, especially stock market practices, also tends to proceed in this System 1 denigration of facts, or at least the ignorance of salient evidence.

More directly, there has been considerable research on the emotional sources of risky behavior. Emotional reactions to risks often diverge from the cognitive assessments of those risks. And “emotional reactions are sensitive to the vividness of associated imagery, proximity in time, and a variety of other variables that play a minimal role in cognitive evaluations” (Loewenstein et al. 2001, 280). While George Loewenstein and his colleagues reviewed substantial evidence for the proposition that the emotional and cognitive reactions to risk differ, they did not provide additional empirical evidence. More recently, X. T. Wang (2006) found that
the emotional choice preference was more risk seeking than the rational choice preference in two experimental studies.

Focusing now on the specifics of anger and risk that motivate the present inquiry, there are several major analyses of this relationship. They typically focus on the differential impacts of fear and anger. Whereas fear leads people to be risk-averse, anger has the opposite consequence; anger yields considerable risk acceptance (Lerner and Keltner 2000, 2001).

These findings mapped onto reactions to the events of 9/11. Angry respondents expressed greater optimism about the future after 9/11; fearful respondents were more pessimistic (Lerner et al. 2003). Anger yields perceptions of certainty and control, thereby suggesting a more optimistic future. Fear has the opposite effect (Lerner and Keltner 2001; Lerner et al. 2003; Lerner and Tiedens 2006; Litvak et al. 2010). The optimism that stems from perceptions of control among angry people can lead them to take greater risks than more fearful individuals. As will be seen in the accounts of insurgencies (Midlarsky forthcoming), anger stemming from an ephemeral gain can yield risk-taking that appears to defy any rational conception of cost-benefit analysis.

The events surrounding 9/11 also are instructive. Although earlier (Midlarsky 2011b, 375-6) I comprehended 9/11 as the loss component of an attenuated US ephemeral gain—a difficult Cold War period including defeats like Vietnam (but no subordination) giving way to the extraordinary gain of the Soviet implosion, followed by 9/11—I did not fully appreciate the critical element of surprise. In an incisive analysis of 9/11 on its 10th anniversary, George Packer (2011, 66) observes that “the attacks of 9/11 were the biggest surprise in American history, and for the past ten years we haven’t stopped being surprised.” A small group of radical Islamists had successfully attacked the American heartland in its largest city, inflicting thousands of deaths. A
major consequence was that “the Republican Party fell completely under the control of its most extreme elements, and ‘traitor’ became a routine term for its opponents” (Packer 2011, 69). And indeed it appears as if “the decade since the attacks has destroyed the very possibility of a common national narrative in this country” (Packer 2011, 67).

The Domain of Inquiry

A word or two on nomenclature. Since the pioneering work of Diehl (1998, 1999), Goertz and Diehl (1992), Hensel, Goertz, and Diehl (2000), and others, the term “enduring rivalries” has been used to describe interstate conflicts of long duration. More recently, the term “enduring internal rivalries” was coined by Karl Derouen and Jacob Bercovitch (2008), and employed by Matthew Fuhrmann and Jaroslav Tir (2009). Here the concept of protracted interstate conflict has been transported to the intrastate arena, where it has been profitably employed. But in the careful analyses of William Zartman (2005) and Louis Kriesberg (2005), protraction is seen as part of a larger picture of “intractability,” which has been suggested to comprise a syndrome of characteristics. For Zartman (2005, 48), intractability consists of protraction, identity denigration, profit-seeking, absence of conditions for peacekeeping, and polarization. Kriesberg (2005, 60) includes protraction, but emphasizes destructive behavior by adversaries and failures by the protagonists or third parties to transform these behaviors. The term “intractable” also has been used to describe such conflicts in a major study of these long wars that includes both interstate and intrastate varieties (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2005).

Here, I concentrate only on protraction, or the duration of long intrastate conflicts. The word “protracted” has a long and honorable history in this domain of inquiry (Azar 1990). But unlike those that employ this concept of intractability, I examine only prolonged intrastate conflicts, broadly defined as those occurring within or focusing on contested territory governed by a state or imperial authority. The following case study of the Kurds is offered as an
illustration. Other cases included in Midlarsky (forthcoming) are: the Basques and Catalans, the Karen of Burma, Cabinda in Angola, Eritrea and the Oromo of Ethiopia, Northern Ireland, Israeli settlement policy, Kashmir, the Moro of the Philippines, Casamance in Senegal, Sudan, Tibet, the Naga and Tripuri of Northeast India, and the increased killing rate of the Holocaust at its end.

The Kurds

In contrast to modern perceptions of the Kurds as tribally governed historically, the first history of Kurdistan, Sharaf-nāme, "was written during the flourishing of the system of principalities in [the] late sixteenth century. Significantly, it is written not as a history of tribes, but rather as a 'history of the rulers of Kurdistan.' The author, Sharaf Khan, was the prince of the powerful Bidlis principality. He was familiar with the political situation in Western Asia, a region suffering from the incessant scramble of the Safavid and Ottoman states for the control of the Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and the Persian Gulf territories" (Emphasis added; Hassanpour 2003, 111-12).

The book is centered on the history of Kurdish dynastic rulers and their relations with the Ottomans and Persians. Much is made of the concept of the rule of about 40 large and small independent emirates. The author’s criteria for independence were: "striking coin, reciting the name of the ruler in the khotbe, i.e. Friday prayer sermon, and ‘not obeying any sultans’" (Hassanpour 2003, 113). On the orders of Kurdish rulers, the Sharaf-nāme was twice translated into Turkish, the language of the Ottoman court. Kurdish governance was thereby legitimated.

Sharaf Khan’s work was a deliberate effort to assert Kurdish statehood. The organization of the chapters in itself reveals the centrality of this purpose. Dynasties which “have raised the banner of royalty (saltanat) and historians have treated them as sultans” (quoted in Hassanpour 2003, 112) comprise the first of four parts. “The second part deals with the ‘great rulers of"
Kurdistan who, although they have not independently claimed royalty and have not intended ascension (‘oruj), nevertheless have at times had coins struck and the khotbe read in their own names.' Part three deals with ‘other emirs and governors (omarā va hokkām) of Kurdistan,’ and the last part is about the rulers of Bidlis” (Hassanpour 2003, 112-13).

Writing in the mid-16th century, Mustafa ‘Ali, an Ottoman official, complained that the Kurds were as powerful as the Arabian Hashemite rulers: “Turk[oman]s and Kurds, if they possess silver and gold coins, are rated higher even than the champions of the Hashemites” (quoted in Hassanpour 2003, 111). As early as 1076, a central Asian cartographer labeled today’s Kurdish regions as “the land of the Kurds.” And a Seljuq sultan who died in 1157 called his Kurdish territories “Kurdistan” (Hassanpour 2003, 114).

Modern political history of the estimated 24-27 million Middle Eastern Kurds, especially their fitful moves toward autonomy and hopefully independence, really begins in the Ottoman Empire. Even today, approximately 18% of Turkey’s population is Kurdish, comprising 14 million individuals and roughly half of all Kurds living in the Middle East. Another 5.5 million make up 18% of Iraq’s population. Iran has approximately 5.5 million, comprising 7% of its population. As the result principally of migration across the border from Turkey to escape the repressions following WWI, the current Kurdish population of Syria is roughly 2 million (10%; all estimates drawn from the CIA World Factbook 2011).

Indeed, it was only during interregnum periods that political space opened up. When the Ottoman Empire imploded after its defeat in WWI, such opportunities were presented to the various minorities still present on its territory. Even the Armenians, by now vastly depleted in number as the result of the genocide of 1915-16, sought to establish their own independent state in eastern Anatolia under Allied auspices. Kurds too lost nearly as many civilians and
combatants (roughly 800,000 compared to 1 million Armenians), but slightly more numerous than the Armenians before the war, they remained a demographic presence in eastern Anatolia (McDowall 2004, 109). The Treaty of Sèvres (1920) imposed on the defeated Ottoman government independent states for the Armenians, Kurds, and Greeks, the precise borders of which were to be decided by referenda. Superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) after the Turkish defeat of the Greeks and their expulsion from Anatolia, the Sèvres Treaty never was implemented. Nevertheless, like other ethnic groups during this period, the Kurds began asserting their independence from Ottoman rule. They were supported in this effort by elements of the Lausanne Treaty that, like Sèvres, advocated respect for minority rights.

**The Hamidiya cavalry**

An integration process was begun under Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who saw Islam as the cement that would hold the Turks, Arabs, and Kurds together as Islamic peoples left within the now truncated, majority Muslim Empire (Karpat 2001). A sop to Kurdish nationalism and at the same time, the blunting of the Armenian nationalist threat in eastern Anatolia, was found in the formation of the Kurdish Hamidiya cavalry by Abdul Hamid II. Modeled after the Cossack regiments in the tsarist army that had been effective in the Russo-Turkish War, the Hamidiya cavalymen had resplendent uniforms and a warrant to commit mayhem against recalcitrant Armenian communities flushed with their own nationalist possibilities. Muslims forced to flee from Balkan Christian territories that were now independent or from the Caucasus now firmly under Russian control were relocated to those areas with large Armenian concentrations in eastern Anatolia, providing additional Christian-Muslim frictions. Effectively, a militarization of the Kurdish tribes had been sanctioned by the Ottoman administration at the highest levels, an experience that could be turned against non-Kurdish authorities at a later time.
Here lies the beginning of the first modern Kurdish ephemeral gain: a gain of authority within the Ottoman Empire and its loss upon the formation of the Republic of Turkey and the later repudiation of the early Republican commitments to Kurdish autonomy. But first, we will examine the initial gain in territorial authority in British Iraq after WWI and then in Mahabad in Iran after WWII.

**Sulaymaniya**

Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji was the leader most strongly associated with the unique status of Sulaymaniya. When after WWI the British began asserting their authority in what had become Iraq, they appointed British political administrators. Not so in Sulaymaniya, because of the preference for autonomous Kurdish entities along the edge of Mesopotamia by Arnold Wilson, a British political officer. They were to be centered in Sulaymaniya, Rawanduz, Amadiya, and possibly Jazira bin Umar, now located just within Turkey (McDowall 2004, 121). In December 1918, Wilson confirmed the appointment of Shaykh Mahmud as governor of Sulaymaniya division, a large tract of land between the Greater Zab and Diyala Rivers. According to David McDowall (2004, 156), “Shaykh Mahmud was the single most influential leader in Sulaymaniya. As far afield as Rawanduz, Koi-Sanjaq and Raniya there was a willingness among impoverished communities anxious for aid to accept him as Britain’s appointed Kurdish paramount.”

For the first time, a Kurdish leader arose who saw himself as something more than a tribal landowner or shaykh anxious for his own autonomy. He filled governmental posts with his own relatives, tribesman, and sycophants, but not merely in support of his own tribal constituency, but also to buttress the coming effort to establish his rule over all available Kurdish areas. When the British began to understand his extraordinary ambitions (at least for this period), they attempted to rein him in. Anticipating this event, Mahmud recruited 300 tribal followers on the Iranian side of the border and imprisoned all British personnel within his purview. He now
proclaimed himself “Ruler of all Kurdistan.” His status was further elevated by his successful ambush of a lightly armed British column.

Unfortunately, this unprecedented military success against a European colonial power was to prove his undoing. Despite further recruitment from both sides of the border, Mahmud was defeated by a larger British force. According to McDowall (2004, 158), “the scheme for a ‘free united Kurdistan’ suggests that Shaykh Mahmud was a nationalist, as indeed he was. Not only did he believe in a Kurdish political entity under his own authority but he justifiably believed that Kurdish self-determination was effectively what the Allies had promised. Strapped like a talisman to his arm was a Quran on the flyleaves of which was written in Kurdish the texts of Woodrow Wilson’s twelfth point and the Anglo-French Declaration of 7 November [1918].” Wilson’s twelfth point was:

The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development (quoted in McDowall 2004, 115).

And the Anglo-French Declaration of November 7th expressed the goal of

the complete and final liberation of the peoples who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks, and the setting up of national governments and administrations that shall derive their authority from the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations (quoted in McDowall 2004, 163).
Sulaymaniya itself was not to remain outside of the Kurdish consciousness. Major disturbances occurred in 1930 in connection with an election in Sulaymaniya. In addition to other grievances, the Kurds were upset over the lack of implementation of the Local Languages Law that would have allowed the Kurdish language to be taught in the schools. Now in Iran, Shaykh Mahmud presented a petition from tribal leaders demanding a united Kurdistan under a British mandate. Virtually all of the British colonial gains at the end of WWI were in the form of League of Nations mandates; hence, a mandatory Kurdistan would have the same status as the remaining Middle Eastern mandates. Upon raising military forces from the Iranian Kurdish tribes, Shaykh Mahmud crossed the border, gaining additional adherents in Iraq. Although initially he fought successfully, holding off the British for several months, he was again defeated, this time exiled to southern Iraq.

Nevertheless, “unnoticed at the time, September 1930 had been a watershed for it marked the awakening of national consciousness among the first generation of secular educated and urban Kurds. In the words of Ibrahim Ahmad, then sixteen, ‘from that day I thought it my duty to work as a Kurd’” (McDowall 2004, 288).

Important as another ephemeral gain was the British proclamation of December 1922:

His Britannic Majesty’s Government and the Government of Iraq recognize the right of the Kurds living within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish Government within those boundaries and hope that the different Kurdish elements will, as soon as possible, arrive at an agreement between themselves as to the form which they wish that that Government should take and the boundaries within which they wish it to extend and will send responsible delegates to Baghdad to discuss their economic and political relations.

But by 1926, the British government was singing a different tune: “Both His Majesty’s Government and the Government of Iraq are fully absolved from any obligation to allow the setting up of a Kurdish Government by a complete failure of the Kurdish elements even to attempt, at the time this [the above] proclamation was made, to arrive at any agreement among themselves or put forward any definite proposals” (quoted in McDowall 2044, 171). Whatever the failings of Kurdish tribalism, again the Kurds had been promised autonomy and then abandoned.

Mahabad

As WWI set the stage for Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji’s uprising in Sulaymaniya, WWII in the end gave rise to the Republic of Kurdistan (RK) in Mahabad, Iran. The leader of that republic was Ghazi Muhammad, who belonged to the prominent Ghazi family that enjoyed political, religious, and social influence in that city. He also was more widely known and respected prior to the declaration of the Republic in early 1946. The political space necessary for its occurrence was opened by the collapse of Iranian authority in Iranian Kurdistan. Instead of the pervasive assimilationist policies of Reza Shah directed at all Iranian minorities, especially the Kurds, the Anglo-Soviet occupation of that country allowed Kurds to move freely, both within Kurdish areas of Iran and across the Iraqi border.

Crucial to the Kurdish ability to initiate political activity was the presence of Soviet troops in the region. As a result of increased German diplomatic activity in Iran, the Soviets and British agreed to a coordinated occupation. Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, German armies could threaten the Caucasus region to the north of Iran and possibly Iraq.
just to the southwest. In August 1941, British and Soviet troops invaded, partitioning Iran into three zones that the Iranian army was powerless to prevent. The Soviet zone was in the north, centered in Iranian Azerbaijan, while the British held the southern portion of the country. Mahabad was in the neutral zone, allowing for Kurdish political activity to develop. Yet the mere fact of Soviet forces nearby protected that activity.

In 1942, shortly after these occupations, the first signs of Kurdish political organization were seen. The Komala (Association for the Resurrection of the Kurds) was formed in August 1942 in Mahabad. Note the use of the term “resurrection” as a reference to an earlier valued socio-political condition. Although an earlier organization of a similar sort had been formed in 1939, it failed to establish a political program. Komala was an avowedly nationalistic organization, although it did support a social program. A memorandum to the Iranian government made several demands, including official recognition of the Kurdish language in areas of Kurdish habitation and the use of locally derived funds for Kurdish needs. Most important was: “If the Kurdish people are enabled to determine their future, then Iran should be dealt with as a neighbor” (quoted in Yassin 1997, 166-67). This point intimated correctly that beyond autonomy in Iran, a more distant goal was the establishment of a united Kurdistan. Indeed, this aim was reflected in the title of Komala’s newspaper, Nishtimân, meaning “Homeland.”

Two breakaway republics were now proclaimed. Because of the absence of sufficient Iranian force as the result of Soviet obstructions, an almost bloodless coup erupted in Iranian Azerbaijan. In November 1945, the rebels occupied Tabriz, the center of Azeri political activity, and on December 12, the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan was established. By this time, Ghazi Muhammad had crystallized his authority in Mahabad. Inspired by the Azeri example, a Kurdish uprising took place on December 17, and the last symbol of Iranian authority in
Mahabad, the Department of Justice, was occupied. As head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Ghazi Muhammad, along with tribal and religious leaders, proclaimed the establishment of the republic on January 22, 1946 (Yassin 1997, 180-81).

Ghazi Muhammad formed a war council on December 5, 1946, with the understanding that the future of the RK would depend on events in Azerbaijan. On December 13, the Iranian army entered Tabriz; the major Kurdish tribes, the Shikâk and Hurki, moved toward the cities of Urumiya and Tabriz to “claim their share of the Iranian victory,” as the American diplomat William Eagleton averred (quoted in Yassin 1997, 203). Kurds began abandoning the city of Mahabad as the forces of the central government entered on December 17, ending the RK. Like the captain of a doomed ship at sea, Ghazi Muhammad remained in Mahabad and was hanged by the Iranian authorities.

**The Road to the PKK**

Continuation of the post-RK violence has been centered principally in Turkey. The Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK), the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, has been responsible for much of the violence. It is difficult to understand the rise of this party without indicating the impact of prior events in the Kurdish areas within the newly constituted Republic of Turkey (1922). According to McDowall (2004, 198), “Only one out of the 18 Turkish military engagements during the years 1924-38 occurred outside Kurdistan. After 1945, apart from the Korean War, 1950-53 and the invasion of Cyprus, 1974, the only Turkish army operations continued to be against the Kurds.”

How did this situation come about? Ephemeral gains for the Kurds after WWI, i.e. the rising at Sulaymaniya, could have been partly responsible. However, as we shall see, a Turkish ephemeral gain was likely responsible for the draconian response of the Turks to the 1925
uprising led by a revered religious leader, Shaykh Sa’id of the Naqshbandi Kurds in Piran. As a result of Turkish efforts to arrest perceived conspirators against Turkish rule, a clash between Turkish gendarmes and the Shaykh’s supporters led to further disorders, which either by design or the result of popular discontent, quickly spread. Up to 5,000 rebels began attacking Turkish dominated towns with the intent of liberating them. Ankara’s reaction was to respond in force, quelling the rebels with great loss of life.

Although the Shaykh’s motives may have been primarily religious, nevertheless the Turkish authorities were greatly alarmed. The Caliphate had just been abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the previous year and religious Muslims were reacting. Kazim Karabekir, a vigorous critic of Mustafa Kemal, was said to declare, “They [the Kemalists] are attacking the very principles which perpetuate the existence of the Muhammadan world” (quoted in McDowall 2004, 197). Shaykh Sa’id himself in his fatwa proclaimed that “the ‘jihad is an obligation for all Muslims without distinction of confession or tariqa’ [Islamic path]” (quoted in McDowall 2004, 197). And the Shaykh was even willing to nominate a non-Kurd as king of Kurdistan in the event the revolt succeeded.

These religious motivations attacked a core secular principle of Kemalist government. The Caliphate was not to be resurrected, and Islamic leaders would no longer be politically influential. That they were Kurds who rebelled made the situation even more threatening, for they were the only large non-Turkish ethnicity (nearly 20% of the total population) remaining in the Turkish republic.

A Turkish Ephemeral Gain

Yet another issue intervened that generated an ephemeral gain for Turkey. This was the status of the Mosul Vilayet (province), at that time within British dominated Iraq. Precisely at the
moment that the Shaykh Sa’id rebellion broke out, a League of Nations Commission was conducting an inquiry into the status of that vilayet (Jwaideh 2006, 204). So determined were the British to retain Mosul that to gain US support in 1923, they were willing to cede half of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company’s 70% holding to Standard Oil (McDowall 2004, 143). At some level, the Turks must have been aware of these activities, if only in the fact that as one of the Allied victors in WWI, Britain would have had considerable international influence, to the detriment of the Turks. The Ottoman Empire, as the predecessor of the Republic of Turkey, had been an enemy of Britain, and was defeated in that war.

The retention of Mosul by British Iraq would contravene one of the basic principles of the Turkish National Pact. This resolution by the national assembly specified that in addition to Turkish independence, all non-Arab Ottoman territories should be part of the Turkish republic (McDowall 2004, 130). This, of course, included the heavily Kurdish Mosul Vilayet. The expectation that this territory was about to be permanently lost under conditions of Kurdish rebellion that necessarily impeached the legitimacy of Turkish rule over the Kurds must have been a bitter pill. “The events of 1925-26 had produced an almost genocidal state of mind in Ankara. In May 1925 the journal Vakit had announced ‘There is no Kurdish problem where a Turkish bayonet appears’” (McDowall 2004, 200). And Turkey’s foreign minister declared to the Cabinet:

In their [Kurdish] case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic...they will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and cultured Turks...as many as can will emigrate into Persia and Iraq, while the rest will simply undergo the elimination of the unfit (quoted in McDowall 2004, 200).
Mass deportations ensued, recalling the earlier deportations of the Armenians, yielding a figure of not less than 20,000 persons relocated (McDowall 2004, 199).

Note the similarity with the declaration of Konstantin Pobedonostsev, reactionary advisor to Tsar Alexander III, that one-third of the Jews would emigrate, one-third convert to Russian Orthodoxy, and the remaining third would die out (Byrnes 1968, 206). Exactly how this dying-out would occur, of course, is crucial. Ante Pavelić, head of the murderous Croatian Ustaša, expressed similar views concerning Serbs in greater Croatia under his governance during WWII with Hitler’s support. In this case, the one-third who survived in greater Croatia would do so only as Roman Catholics.

Although massacres occurred in 1925-26, and again in 1930, they did not rise to the level of genocidal activity. That would come later in the Turkish response to the 1937 Kurdish insurrection in Dersim, to be examined shortly.

Khoybun

Up to the mid-late 1920s, Kurdish exiles in Paris, Cairo, Tabriz, Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus were quiescent. But the unwillingness or inability of the British (in Cairo and Tabriz) and France (in Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus) to intervene alarmed these nationalists, many of whom fled Istanbul upon the approach of Kemalist forces in 1922. The Turks appeared to be enjoying free reign in their efforts to annihilate Kurdish identity. Taught only in the Turkish language, many Kurds were being alienated from their heritage, leaving few to resurrect Kurdistan in the future.

Thus, late in 1927, a gathering of exiles took place in Bhamdoun, Lebanon, which established the Khoybun (Independence) Party. They were committed to a military solution, but
one that was to be properly conceived and executed. A permanent headquarters was established in Aleppo that saw funding from various forces, including the Soviet-sponsored International Minority Movement in Odessa. These exiles also allied with the Armenian Dashnak Party, one member of which actually helped establish Khoybun. Much of this international activity was in the service of avoiding dependence on tribal leaders who either had religious and/or parochial tribal interests. Despite France’s 1928 prohibition of Khoybun’s activities in Aleppo upon Ankara’s urgings, Ihsen Nuri raised the flag of revolt in Agri Dagh (Ararat) in the summer of that year. The Ararat location was chosen because tribes in that region already were in revolt.

As in previous revolts, the rebels initially experienced success. In September, Baiyazil was captured, and in February 1929, a Turkish battalion was destroyed by a Kurdish force estimated at 5,000 strong. Kurdish forces now occupied a considerable area from Ararat in the north to areas south of Van. The Iranian border to the east facilitated Kurdish military movement. But after major military engagements, the Turks pursued Kurdish forces into Iran, surrounding them. Turkish forces, over 50,000 strong, destroyed villages on the Zilan Plain. In this process, more than 3,000 non-combatant men, women, and children were killed (McDowall 2004, 206).

In June 1934, a law was enacted dividing Turkey into 3 zones: “1) localities to be reserved for the habitation in compact form of persons possessing Turkish culture; 2) regions to which populations of non-Turkish culture for assimilation into Turkish language and culture were to be moved; 3) regions to be completely evacuated” (McDowall 2004, 207). This legislation allowed the state to deport populations deemed to require assimilation, and transfer them to other regions which had few of their kinfolk. In this fashion, minorities, especially the Kurds, would be forcibly assimilated simply by dilution of their concentrated numbers.
Numerous complaints began to arise concerning the deportations and their associated massacres where resistance occurred.

**Dersim**

A particular focus was Dersim. Between 1876 and 1932, 11 military expeditions were required to quell rebellious activity in Dersim (McDowall 2004, 207). Location in a remote mountainous region made these military incursions hazardous for the Turkish forces because of the nearly ideal opportunities for defense and ambush. In late 1935, for the first time, Dersim was designated a Vilayet, and its name changed to the Turkish *Tunceli*. A state of siege was declared for this Vilayet in 1936, and a new military governor appointed. When the Dersim Kurds sent emissaries to the Turkish General Alp Dogan in an appeal for Dersim’s continued autonomy, he had them executed. In revenge, the Kurds ambushed Turkish forces, leaving 10 officers and 50 troops dead. Turkish troops also were suffering losses from Kurdish snipers.

Despite the use of aerial bombing, gas, and artillery bombardment, the Kurds of Dersim continued to resist under the leadership of the Alevi cleric Sayyid Riza. He even appealed to the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, but to no avail, despite the presence of British troops in nearby Iraq. By now the Turks had over 50,000 troops in the Dersim region that spelled the end of the revolt. According to the British government’s “Memorandum on Military Operations in Dersim” of September 27, 1938,

> It is understood from various sources that in clearing the area occupied by the Kurds, the military authorities have used methods similar to those used against the Armenians during the Great War: thousands of Kurds including women and children were slain; others, mostly children, were thrown into the Euphrates; while thousands of others in less
hostile areas, who had first been deprived of their cattle and other belongings, were deported to vilayets in Central Anatolia (quoted in McDowall 2004, 209).

Citing Lucien Rambout (1947-39), Jwaideh (2006, 216) offers an estimate of some 40,000 Kurds killed during the insurrection. Up to 8,000 innocents were massacred afterwards (van Bruinessen 1994, 147). Referencing The Times of London (1946), Jwaideh (ibid.) indicates that 3,000 families were deported. So sensitive has this issue become that the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan felt the need to apologize for the massacre in Dersim province, saying on November 23, 2011: “If there is need for an apology on behalf of the state, if there is such a practice in the books, I would apologize and I am apologizing. Dersim is the most tragic event in our recent history. It is a disaster that should now be questioned with courage” (quoted in Shorash 2011).

Dersim was the last of the major tribal revolts. Although the Alevi were among the most stubborn resisters of Turkish assimilationist efforts, they still were a religious minority among the Kurds who could not elicit direct military support from the majority Sunnis. More generally, under the June 1934 law permitting the relocation of ethnic minorities, deportations continued from many areas of Kurdish concentration to those with few of their ethnic kin.

With this history of extreme violence against the Kurds in Turkey, continuing into the 1970s and beyond, one can better understand the sources of the PKK’s rise beginning in the 1970s. Its founder, Abd Allah Öcalan was born in Hilven-Severek, a region to the south of Tunceli from which his family may have been relocated. Influenced by the Turkish revolutionary Left, he still retained his Kurdish identity despite speaking only Turkish, initially not learning the Kurdish language. Dissatisfied with his expectations for change in the future of status of the
Kurds in Turkey, even under a socialist regime, he gathered likeminded Kurds into areas from which they originally came: Urfa, Elazig, Tunceli, Gaziantep, and Maras (McDowall 2004, 420).

Although heavily influenced by Marxism-Leninism, Ocalan’s followers separated themselves from the Turkish Left. Many like Ocalan did not speak Kurdish, having been educated in assimilationist Turkish schools. But perhaps because of the sense of forcible deprivation, their Kurdish nationalism was all the stronger. Class warfare was a staple of the PKK’s ideology. Not only were the dominating Turkish landlords targeted, but also local Kurdish landowners who kept the peasantry in a parlous state. Many of these landowners were targeted for assassination. The PKK also eliminated competing nationalist groups. This organization was, and in many respects still is, an extremist group using terror and guerilla warfare against all enemies, putative and real. Yet because of the frequently inordinate and almost always draconian responses of the Turkish government to Kurdish dissidence, popularity of the PKK grew slowly over time among the Kurdish peasantry (for a different view of the sources of the PKK’s radicalization, see Tezcür 2010).

Initially only local Kurdish notables and Turkish neo-fascist groups were targeted. But in August 1984, the PKK organized a series of ambushes of Turkish forces in Kurdish regions. The following decade saw the deaths of approximately 12,000 people (McDowall 2004, 420). From 1984 until the present upwards of 40,000 people have died in PKK-related activities (Stack 2011, N 6). Battles raged within Turkey, especially along its borders with Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Indeed, Syria was a supporter of the PKK from 1979-1999, and allowed safe haven for the PKK fighters when hard pressed by Turkish forces. Iran initially supplied weapons and funds. And since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the rise of the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq yielded another safe haven for the PKK. In October 2011, 24 Turkish soldiers were killed and 18 wounded, leading to a massive response involving more than 10,000 Turkish troops. At least 270 PKK fighters were
killed and another 210 wounded, according to a rare interview with Turkey’s top military commander on a Turkish news channel (Stack 2011, N6).

The complexity of Kurdish political history has included several ephemeral gains for the Kurds ranging from the 16th century through 1946, as shown in Figure 1. Although the rise of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein constitutes a gain, we do not yet know in what form this entity will survive now that US forces are withdrawn.

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Figure 2 about here

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At the same time, one cannot fully understand the more recent inordinate and near-genocidal Turkish responses to Kurdish dissident activity without considering a Turkish ephemeral gain. Kurdish insurrections began almost immediately after the proclamation of the Turkish republic in 1922, loss of the Mosul Vilayet, and elimination of the Caliphate in 1924. The gain of Turkish independence and territorial integrity after a grueling war with Greece was threatened by a combination of Muslim reactions to the loss of the Caliphate and emerging Kurdish nationalism. As we saw earlier, the threat of imminent loss can have the same consequence as loss itself. Figure 2 illustrates this Turkish ephemeral gain. Note how the intensity and duration of the conflict can be augmented by joint ephemeral gains of the protagonists.

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Figure 3 about here

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Conclusion

While most political activity is subject to rational choice analysis, exceptions are found in the extremes—mass violence and protracted intrastate conflict. Here, the emotions are engaged, frequently yielding anger and excessive risk-taking upon experiencing an ephemeral gain. The surprise at a renewed subordination after the experience of autonomy or independence (or promises of the same when repudiated) yield the affective response that leads to the battlefield, even when critically outnumbered and outgunned. Indeed, the case of the Kurds combines both actual losses of gained authority in Sulaymaniya and Mahabad (neglecting for the moment the earlier 16th century principalities) with unfulfilled promises by the British in 1922 and the Republic of Turkey in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The successive ephemeral gains of the Kurds propelled the conflict forward. But the intensity of the Turkish response, especially the violence at Khoybun and Dersim, resulted in part from the Turks’ own ephemeral gain. Violation of the Turkish National Pact in the loss of heavily Kurdish Mosul Vilayet combined with ongoing Kurdish resistance threatening the integrity of remaining Turkish territory generated this ephemeral gain. Mass political violence committed by a state was the consequence, later giving rise to the PKK. The violence continues to this day.
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### Table 1 Characteristics of Systems 1 and 2

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*Autonomous Set of Systems*
Figure 1: Trajectory yielding protracted intrastate conflict.
Figure 2. Changes in Kurdish authority space over time.
Decline since 1774; defeat in WWI and Greek invasion

Decline since 1774; defeat in WWI and Greek invasion

Loss of Mosul Vilayet, 1923; threat of early losses to Kurds (Khoybun and Dersim)

Victory over Greece, founding of the Republic, 1922

Figure 3. Changes in Turkish authority space over time.