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MUSTAFA BARZANI'S SOVIET EXILE:
POPULAR MYTHS VS. EVIDENCE IN RUSSIAN ARCHIVES
(PART II)

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Abstract: *The second part of the article about the case file of the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, preserved in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) provides information regarding his material support, in particular, the allocation of apartments, including one at an address previously unknown in historical literature. The article also examines information about Mustafa Barzani and the activities of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) contained in the documents, in particular, in KGB reports. In some of them, Mustafa Barzani is characterized negatively – as a reactionary and clerical leader, opposing the integration of Iraqi Kurds into the Soviet society, and being anti-Soviet; in a later reference, the personality of Mustafa Barzani is assessed in an opposite way, due to Soviet Union's support for the Kurdish liberation movement in Iraq. New information about controversies within the leadership of the KDP and various aspects of relations with the communists is presented. Considerable attention is paid to documents regarding Barzani's interaction with his comrades, maintaining control over them, relations with Iraqi public figures, as well as Kurdish activists. Three letters from Barzani to Nikita Khrushchev are studied in detail. The archive materials show that Moscow held Barzani's role in high esteem, so the information about him was reported to the higher tiers of power, where he was regarded as the most influential person in the Kurdish national movement. Almost every document demonstrates his unwavering adherence to the national idea and his resolve to return to Kurdistan to continue the struggle.*

Keywords: Mustafa Barzani, Barzanis, Kurds, Iraqi Kurdistan, Barzani's exile, Soviet policy.

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BARZANI'S LIVING QUARTERS

At a meeting with Voloshin on November 27, 1953, Barzani asked the Soviet representative “whether he would soon be moved from the hotel to an apartment” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 292].

A document dated January 8, 1954 states that “according to the report from 29.12.1953 by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council of Deputies,¹

¹ Corresponds to the present-day Mayor of Moscow.

Comrade [Mikhail Alexeevich] Yasnov”, Mustafa Barzani was allocated a two-room apartment of 36.38 sqm at Apt. 22, 68 Novopeschanaya st. [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 292]. It is notable that there is no mention of this residential address in the literature, or in Kurdish sources. There is a memorial plaque at 50/1, bld. 1, Novoslobodskaya st., with the inscription “The leading figure of the Kurdish national movement, Mustafa Barzani, lived in this building from 1954 to 1958”². The report by Moscow’s head official to the ID of the CC CPSU on accommodation given to Mustafa Barzani evidently shows that the Kurdish leader enjoyed a rather high status in the Soviet capital.

ASSESSMENT FORMS REGARDING MUSTAFA BARZANI AND THE KDP

The documents containing biographical data on Mustafa Barzani provide fascinating insights not only into his biography and personality, but also the Soviet attitudes towards him and his movement. This kind of document is called a *spravka* in Russian and usually constitutes a resumé or brief description and evaluation of a subject by intelligence personnel. The archives contain only two such documents in which the information coincides to a large extent. Another *spravka* relates to a message from the KGB about a plenum of the KDP. The fourth one contains an assessment of Barzani by the Soviet ambassador to Iraq.

The first document is dated January 13, 1954 and is an excerpt from a report of August 19 and September 10, 1953 with a reference to the “Special folder (*Osobaya papka*) 6693” (Document description – “Special folder. Top secret” (*Sovershenno sekretno*), i.e. the maximum level of secrecy in the USSR). Evidently, this concerns a KGB report about Barzani [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 288–291]. The second one is signed by Voloshin. A junior referent (information officer, bureaucrat) of the ID of the CC CPSU, R.S. Varakina,³ notes that it was received from Voloshin on February 7, 1961 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 196–198].

Both documents state that Mullah Mustafa Barzani was born in 1903, a native of the Barzan Region of Iraq, a Kurd by ethnicity, from a family of the sheikh of the tribe (Barzani) [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 196, 288]. The first one gives additional information about Mustafa Barzani’s education, his knowledge of languages and information about his family – he had secondary school education, knew Persian and Arabic, had a limited knowledge of Azeri and Russian,⁴ and his wife and four sons had remained in their homeland [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 288]. With small differences, both documents recount the historical role of the Barzani family and the uprisings organized by them: the father of Mullah Mustafa, Sheikh Muhammed, twice raised an uprising of Kurds against the Turks⁵, in 1880 and 1885, for which he was imprisoned, and the Mullah’s elder brother, Sheikh Abdul Salam, led the uprisings of the Kurds in 1904 and 1914. As the documents indicate, “during the second uprising, he travelled through Iran to Russia and appealed to the Tsarist government for help in the battle against the Turks”. On his return from Russia, he was captured by the Turks⁶ and hanged. After this, Mustafa Barzani’s second brother, Ahmed, became the leader of the tribe and launched rebellions against the Iraqi government three times.

² Memorial’naya doska Barzani Mustafe, Portal of open data of the Moscow Government. <https://data.mos.ru/opendata/2801/row/2812948?pageNumber=48&versionNumber=1&releaseNumber=6> (accessed: 10.01.2024).

³ We have not yet been able to find out the full name, only the first letters of his name and patronymic are indicated in the materials.

⁴ However, in Iraq at the height of the Kurdish uprising, he spoke with correspondents of Western news agencies in Russian. See for example the AP report of 1 March 1963 that Mustafa Barzani was interviewed by an AP correspondent, talking to him in Russian (in the TASS translation). See [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 101].

⁵ About this and Abdul Salam Barzani in general see also [Barzani, 2005, p. 18–23].

⁶ It must be noted that Abdul Salam was treacherously captured by the head of the local Kurdish clan Sufia Badalla, who lured Abdul Salam to visit him after his return from Tiflis, which he visited with another renowned Kurdish leader Ismail-agma Shikak (Simko). See [Barzani, 2005, p. 22].

After an uprising in 1932, Ahmed and Mullah Mustafa were exiled to the south of Iraq, where they remained until 1942. In 1943, they once more led a rebellion that was once more crushed [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 196, 288]. The 1953 *spravka* states that the rebels were amnestied and the uprising itself had been staged by the British, who gave the rebels weapons, ammunition, and money [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 288], while the 1961 form states that the uprising was raised against the British and Nuri Said, and was brutally crushed [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 196]. Thus, the role of the British in the 1943 uprising of the Kurds, led by Mullah Mustafa and Ahmed Barzani, is assessed in contradictory ways.

Both documents state that in 1944, Barzani established contact with the Soviet troop command in Iran [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 196, 288]. The 1953 assessment indicates that in his letters to Soviet command, Barzani condemned “the policy of the British, who tried to use the Kurds for their own interests, and asked for assistance in organizing a new uprising” [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 288]. Both documents state that in 1945, Mullah Mustafa stood against the Iraqi government and enjoyed considerable military success, but due to the intervention of the British troops, he was forced to retreat to Iran. Barzani was sentenced to death in absentia for organizing this uprising [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 196, 289].

Both documents concur that “in Iraq, Mullah Mustafa Barzani was a member of the progressive Kurdish organization ‘Hiva’ and later headed the ‘Kurdish Freedom Committee’, which sought to unite the Kurds of the Middle East in an independent Kurdistan”. Regarding Iran, the reports note that “Barzani led the forces of Democratic Kurdistan, the government of which awarded him the title of general” [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 196, 288, 289].

The size of Barzani’s detachment that entered the USSR in 1947 is recorded as 499 people in one document [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 289], and 500 people in another [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 197].

The first document also indicates that “in 1950–1953, foreign press, including American and British publications, featured portraits of Mullah Mustafa Barzani in a general’s uniform with articles describing him as a person commanding great authority among the Kurds, and therefore dangerous for the governments of Turkey, Iraq and Iran” [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 289].

Beyond this, the contents of these two *spravka* differ considerably. In the 1953 assessment, Barzani is portrayed in a rather negative light, as a reactionary and clerical leader, opposing the integration of the Iraqi Kurds into the Soviet society and harboring an anti-Soviet mindset: “Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his close allies from among reactionary authorities and the clergy cultivate the morals of blind obedience to the Kurdish chieftains, a code of silence and observation of the Sharia Law and the Koran; they are forbidden to have contact with Soviet citizens, seen as a way to preserve their influence among the Kurds” [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 289]. In Moscow, Barzani was essentially cut off from his allies living in Uzbekistan by the Soviet authorities. He regularly sent letters asking them to raise funds and send two entrusted representatives to Moscow, to whom he could give strictly confidential instructions to be reported to the members of his detachment, and also to increase control over them. Furthermore, in letters to his inner circle, Barzani discussed the issue of his detachment leaving for Iraq, emphasizing that when he returned to Iraq, he would not live by ‘Soviet law’ [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 289–290].

The 1961 *spravka* also contains information about the activities of Barzani after 1953, but here Barzani is portrayed in a very different light, a turnaround largely prompted by Soviet Union’s support of the Kurdish liberation movement in Iraq, although the personal views of the authors surely also played a role. As we noted earlier, the 1953 document is an excerpt from KGB reports, while the second was prepared by Voloshin of the ID of the CC CPSU, who has seemingly been in regular contact with the Kurdish leader and felt a certain sympathy towards him.

The 1961 *spravka* notes that in June 1948, Barzani and his detachment were moved from Baku to the Uzbek SSR, where the leader lived until 1953. In the autumn of 1953, Barzani enrolled

as a student at the HPS in Moscow, where he studied until 1958. In August 1958, he left for Iraq [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 197]. In other words, returning to the question of Barzani's education in the USSR, we can see that only the HPS is mentioned, not any military academy, let alone the Frunze military academy.

The document also mentions Barzani's desire to "establish contact with the Communist Party" and even his request "for the Communist Party leadership to accept him into their ranks. But Barzani's request was turned down" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 197]. This statement is an invention and was evidently intended to form a positive image of Barzani in the USSR, especially as it also discusses Barzani's conflict with communists.

According to this *spravka*, in the summer of 1959, i. e. soon after he returned to Iraq, Barzani had a conflict with former members of the CC KDP, who, as is stated in the document, were secret members of the Iraqi Communist Party, in particular Salih al-Haidari, Hamza Abdulla, Hosrov Taufik, and Nazar Akhmed, who strove to force Barzani out of the party leadership. The Communist Party claimed that Barzani distrusted these people and accused them of "betraying the Kurdish people and attempting to subjugate the party to the communists." He made efforts to gather a KDP congress in order to hold re-elections for leading party positions. Although the activity of political parties was banned in Iraq, Barzani was able to secure Abd al-Karim Qasim's permission to hold the congress. The former members of the KDP political bureau opposed the idea of the congress, fearing that the party leadership could be joined by "active opponents of the KDP's cooperation with the communists." Yet in October 1959, with the assistance of the majority of KDP members, Barzani was nonetheless able to hold the congress, which took place in the context of a bitter struggle between Barzani's supporters and the communists. Barzani criticized the activity of the communists in Iraq but stressed that he was not opposed to communists in general, only to those who undermined the Kurdish party's leadership. Barzani's supporters who spoke at the congress claimed that the communists had made cooperation with democratic parties impossible. However, despite these disagreements, the congress still recognized that the KDP needed to cooperate with the Communist Party and the National Democratic Party [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 197–198].

Several years later, influential Western media outlets did not neglect to make note of Barzani's deep suspicions regarding the communists in the United KDP and his wish to exclude them from the leadership. Barzani believed that "the communists could sacrifice the interests of the Kurds for the interests of the Communist Party" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 136–137]. The communists themselves called him "the most inveterate anti-communist force among the Kurds" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 84]. It is notable that in Barzani's case file, there is also an interview with Jalal Talabani from an Arab newspaper, in which he describes Barzani as a "devout Muslim who hated communism" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 109]⁷. A Reuters piece states that Barzani had never been a communist [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 103].

Another document was compiled from a report by the chairman of the KGB Vladimir Semichastny on the plenum of the KDP CC held on December 12–31, 1962. The document emphasizes that the report of the KDP's Politburo stated "the need to maintain and strengthen relations with Moscow", although it also criticized the CC CPSU [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 134].

⁷ In this context, we can also mention Mustafa Barzani's answer to the question as to whether the Soviet authorities had tried to convert the Iraqi Kurds to communism during their stay in the USSR: "We are Moslems and good Moslems cannot be communists" [Schmidt, 1964, p. 112].

We should note that only a small part of Barzani's group in the USSR adopted communist ideas. As Dana Adams Schmidt writes, one of them, however, was Mustafa Barzani's nephew, Sheikh Suleiman, which led Mustafa Barzani to break off all relations with him [Schmidt, 1964, p. 112]. Sheikh Suleiman was the son of Abdul Salam Barzani.

The next document (*spravka*) appears to be an excerpt (*vypiska*) from a KGB report from March 30, 1963 on a discussion with the ambassador of the USSR in Iraq, Mikhail Yakovlev. The ambassador reports that “in the military sense, Barzani is an acknowledged leader, but he has poor political training, he needs advice, and now he should be told that, taking into account the situation, he should put pressure on the government and force it to make concessions. For this purpose, anti-government protests must be organized, leading to wide resonance and undoubtedly receiving support throughout the country” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 81]. The evaluation of the Kurdish leader by the Russian diplomat concerning the problems of political training was not quite accurate, and, to a significant degree, based on the wish to promote Soviet interests. Obviously, launching countrywide protests was not an option for Barzani, who was fixated on Kurdish goals. Soviet Union, nonetheless, tried to involve Barzani in its general policy towards Iraq, using him to put pressure on Baghdad if necessary.

Yakovlev’s political attitude to Barzani, whose military authority was recognized by the USSR as undisputed, inevitably influenced the conflicts between Mullah Mustafa and the communists. As Yakovlev noted, “Barzani does not like communists, and in 1959–1960 he helped Qasim to drive the Iraqi Communist Party underground” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 81]. It is significant that at approximately the same time, Western news agencies reported that Mustafa Barzani had sent his representatives to Moscow with a request for weapons delivery, but the USSR refused [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 80].

Another document (*spravka*) was compiled by R.S. Varakina in June 1964 on the basis of a KGB report⁸. The document states that “serious disagreements have arisen in the KDP on the issue of a truce with the Iraqi government. As a result, two groups have arisen, one of which is headed by Mustafa Barzani, and the other by Jalal Talabani. Barzani favors a truce, Talabani – the renewal of military operations” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 26.].

COMPROMISED CONVERSATIONS: INTELLIGENCE REPORTS ON BARZANI’S MEETINGS

An excerpt (*vypiska*) from a report by the Head of the Second Main Directorate (*Glavnoe Upravlenie*) of the KGB,⁹ Pyotr Fedotov,¹⁰ of January 3, 1955 (“Special Folder 0029”¹¹ and classified as top secret) [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 283–284] appears to be the result of a wiretap on Barzani’s apartment. This document concerns Barzani’s interactions with his close ally As’ad Khoshavi¹², one of the most influential people in Barzani’s detachment.

In September–October 1954, Khoshavi accompanied Barzani in Moscow to resolve the issue of transferring his group from Uzbekistan to one of the central regions of Russia or Ukraine. In conversations with Khoshavi, Barzani said he had raised the issue of transferring the detachment with the Soviet government several times, not having received any definite answer [*RGASPI-*

⁸ At the end of this document, it is stated that it was compiled based on a report by “Comrade Ivashutin” from May 18, 1964. In 1963–1987, Peter (Pyotr) Ivanovich Ivashutin was the Head of the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) of the USSR Defense Ministry and Deputy Head of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR. Evidently, Ivashutin sent a report to the KGB, and from there, the material was sent to the ID of the CC CPSU, which had already compiled its own document. In 1964, he was Colonel General, and subsequently General of the Army.

⁹ The Second Main Directorate of the KGB was responsible for counter-intelligence. Evidently, the 8th Department of this Directorate, the division which carried out surveillance of foreigners in the USSR, dealt with the Iraqi Kurds.

¹⁰ Pyotr Vasilyevich Fedotov (1901–1963) was a renowned figure in the Soviet Special Service, a lieutenant general. In 1954–1956, he was Head of the KGB Second Main Directorate. In 1959, he was dismissed from the KGB and expelled from the party “for breaking socialist lawfulness in the Stalinist period”, and deprived of the title of lieutenant general.

¹¹ Numbers beginning with “00” in a document’s heading indicated the classification “top secret”.

¹² During his stay in the USSR, Barzani had two close allies – Mir Haj and As’ad Khoshavi.

Barzani, p. 283]. For Barzani, it was critical that the detachment be moved away from the periphery, i. e. out of what he saw as a kind of oblivion. Practically all of Barzani's activity after Stalin's death and his move to Moscow was directed towards this aim.

The report further states that Barzani "told As'ad Khoshavi fictions about how he often met with the heads of the [Communist] party [of the Soviet Union] and the Soviet government, received as much money as he wanted in Moscow, and had access to the shop of the CC CPSU. Barzani said he had recently been summoned by one of the leaders of the Soviet government, who showed him statements and letters written by the Kurds about Barzani and Khoshavi's inappropriate behavior. Barzani said that the Soviet government considered the Kurds writing statements against him to be enemies just like American and British spies, and therefore, they should be arrested" [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 283].

The memoirs of KGB officer Alexander Kiselyov shed light on this. In 1959, Kiselyov accompanied "the Barzanis" on the "Gruziya" steamer from the USSR to Iraq¹³. The Kurds generally spoke very respectfully of their leader, but some were critical, believing that while living in Moscow and enjoying benefits ordinary Kurds lacked, Barzani had "lost touch with his community" [Kiselyov, 2003, p. 42]. It is not difficult to imagine the challenges Barzani faced maintaining his leader status abroad. When he talked with his allies about the importance the USSR attached to him, exaggerating his status, he was trying to maintain his credibility and authority from a distance.

According to information gathered by the KGB, Barzani tried to undermine the authority of Sheikh Suleiman¹⁴, former head of the council of detachment. Through Khoshavi, Barzani gave orders that neither Sheikh Suleiman, nor Khakim Yasin and Khalil Ibrahim were to be obeyed. Khakim Yasin and Khalil Ibrahim had previously served on the council and been opposed to moving the detachment out of Uzbekistan. The majority of the men heeded Khoshavi, while the others, according to the intelligence, were frightened with the threat of murder. In November–December 1954, Khoshavi's allies were elected to the Council [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 283–284].

Today, it is hard to understand the precise reasons for the conflict between Barzani and Sheikh Suleiman, but, based on the above report, we may assume that the latter was evidently under some degree of influence or control by the Soviet authorities, cooperating with them, while Barzani opposed any USSR control over the detachment. For Mustafa Barzani, his time in the USSR was temporary, and his main goal was to return to Iraq and continue the struggle. To do this, Barzani needed to maintain sole control over the detachment.

Excerpts from conversations between Barzani and Khoshavi (and Hassan Husami), which took place in July 1959, are provided in a document¹⁵ prepared on September 9, 1957 by the head of the 9th Department (*otdel*) of the Second Main Directorate of the KGB¹⁶, Colonel Voronin¹⁷, in which Barzani spoke of the future of Kurdistan, favoring its independence:

Kurdistan must become an independent autonomous republic. The British should leave. We do not want to see them there. The people do not want to accept them. The people want to gain independence... If I am given 30,000 soldiers and weaponry, then I will be able to defeat Iran and Iraq..." [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 280].

¹³ Alexander Viktorovich Kiselyov, KGB officer, major general, was the head of the 8th Department (direct operations) of "S" Directorate (special operations) of the 1st Main Directorate (Foreign intelligence) of the KGB. In the 1960s, he was a Soviet resident in "North Iraq" (Iraqi Kurdistan).

¹⁴ Sheikh Suleiman – Mustafa Barzani's nephew, son of Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani.

¹⁵ Document classified "Special folder. Top secret".

¹⁶ The 9th Department of the Second Main Directorate of the KGB was the investigative department.

¹⁷ Voronin refers to a KGB agent who reported to him the content of Barzani's negotiations, i. e. with his inner circle.

In the talks with his inner circle (primarily with Khoshavi) in July 1957, Barzani “began to talk more often... about his role as the leader of the Kurds” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 280], announcing that if the USSR “does not recognize him as the leader of the national liberation movement of the Kurds, then he would prefer to go to one of the Arab countries (Syria or Egypt), even if death awaits him there.” Thus, Barzani’s main goal was to resume the struggle of the Kurds under his own leadership, and not to live in the USSR under certain privileged conditions. As Voronin reports, Barzani informed his circle that he allegedly had discussed this issue with a functionary of the CC CPSU on July 27, 1957 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 280–281].

In conversations with his inner circle, Barzani also discussed problems of life in the USSR. On July 15, 1957, at a meeting with As’ad Khoshavi and several Kurdish students who were visiting Moscow during their holidays, Barzani said that if it were not for fear, the majority of the Soviet people would be against the decision of the Communist Party passed by the CPSU Central Committee Plenum in June 1957 on the so-called “anti-party group” (Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov, who were opposed to Khrushchev) [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 280–281]. That is, Barzani believed that the Soviet people as a whole were opposed to Khrushchev.

KGB REPORTS ON MUSTAFA BARZANI’S MEETINGS WITH IRAQI PUBLIC FIGURES

In mid-1957, the renowned Iraqi public figure Aziz Sherif came to the Soviet Union as part of an Iraqi delegation of Partisans of Peace. On July 13, 1957 he visited Barzani in his apartment. The information about this meeting was given in the above-mentioned document of September 9, 1957, signed by KGB Colonel Voronin.

In the discussion that took place in Kurdish, they did not speak out against the USSR or the Iraqi Communist Party, according to the KGB report. As this fact was mentioned, it may be assumed that the Soviet authorities allowed for the possibility of such statements. Aziz Sherif declared the need for the collective struggle of the Arabs and Kurds against imperialism and the Baghdad Pact, and for Leninism, noting that if such an authoritative person as Barzani returned to Iraq, “more people would join the struggle against reactionism”. Mustafa Barzani, speaking very modestly about himself, nevertheless asserted that with tens of thousands of tanks and weapons, he would conquer all of Iraq in a day. If he were allowed to incite all the Kurdish tribes, there would be no question of his being able to accomplish this. At the same time, Barzani pointed out that it was premature to talk about a Communist Iraq, where people were “backward” and “rural”, especially the Kurds. Sherif, hoping to convince Barzani to join a united Iraqi national front, was disappointed by this position, the goal of which was solely to struggle for Kurdish rights. As Voronin writes, Sherif was dissatisfied with the meeting and told one of the Kurds:

I wanted to talk to him (Barzani) about the movement in Iraq, about the activity of the [Iraqi] communist party, about the creation of a national front, but he constantly talked about the Kurdish religious figure Qazi Muhammad, in whom no one is interested at the moment... [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 279–280].

KGB REPORTS ON BARZANI’S MEETINGS WITH KURDISH POLITICAL AND PUBLIC FIGURES FROM ABROAD

In late July – early August 1957, the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students was held in Moscow. Among those attending were Jalal Talabani¹⁸ and Qadri Jan Abdul Kadir Aziz

¹⁸ 24-year-old Jalal Talabani was already a member of the KDP Political Bureau.

(in Kurdish – Qedrican)¹⁹. On August 10, they met with Barzani²⁰ and other Kurds living in Moscow. Barzani and Talabani also met on August 12²¹.

Two main issues were discussed at the meeting on August 10: “on broadcasting radio programs from the USSR in Kurdish, and preparing a congress of Kurds”. A letter was written to the Soviet government requesting for broadcasting to begin in the Kurdish language [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 275]. It should be noted that broadcasting in Kurdish had already begun in test mode in Yerevan in 1955. Wide-scale radio broadcasting began in 1957, and we may assume that this letter had played a decisive role.

Preparations for the congress, which was planned to be held within one to two years, were entrusted to three Kurds who had studied in London.

In conversations with Talabani and with Kurds who were in the USSR, Barzani expressed dissatisfaction with his position, comparing it to a prison sentence, as “he did not have the right even to give orders to members of his detachment,” to visit cities, in which members of the detachment lived; while Nazim Hikmet, according to Barzani, was able to act at his own discretion. Barzani was also unhappy that the Soviet authorities underestimated his role.

In response, Talabani called for Mustafa Barzani to be patient towards the attitude of the Soviet authorities. Taking into account the subsequent important role of Talabani in Kurdish, Iraqi, and international politics, including relations with the USA and the UK, we quote his words in full:

...we do not have another country besides Moscow. We need it, if they throw us out the door, we will enter by the window, and if they throw us out the window, we will crawl in through another window. If they don't help us this year, they'll help us next year...

We have ruined our relations with the Americans and the British so much that they can never be fixed. Apart from here, we have nowhere to turn to... [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 275–276].

BARZANI'S LETTERS TO KHRUSHCHEV

Barzani's personal dossier contains three letters from the Kurdish leader to the First Secretary of the CPSU, Nikita Khrushchev. The first letter is handwritten (but not in Barzani's hand), signed “Barzani Mustafa” and dated October 30, 1957 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 272], with an envelope where the sender's address was stated as 50/52 Novoslobodskaya st.²², apt. 125²³, Moscow, and with the signature of A.A. Mamedov [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 273]. According to a note made on the letter, it was received by the secretariat of the CC CPSU on November 3, 1957.

The context of the letter is the Syrian crisis of August–October 1957, in which Turkey threatened to invade Syria and the Soviet Union supported the latter country. The situation presented an opportunity for Barzani to increase the role of the Kurdish factor for the Soviet leadership, to confirm himself as the leader of the Kurds and to resume political activity in the Middle East. This letter is interesting not only historically, but in the context of the present situation in Syria. As the letter is not very long, we reproduce it in full:

¹⁹ Qedrican (1911–1972) was one of the most famous Kurdish poets of the 20th century. During this meeting in Moscow, Qedrican dedicated the poem “Serdarê Kurdan Barzani” (The leader of the Kurds is Barzani”) to Mustafa Barzani. Talabani and Qedrican came to Moscow from Syria.

²⁰ Masoud Barzani also gives information about this meeting in his book [Barzani, 2005, pp. 183–184]. However, it contains certain errors, although these are not the subject of the present work.

²¹ A report on this meeting was sent to the CC CPSU by the Second Main Directorate of the KGB on October 5, 1957 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 275–276].

²² As noted above, now this address is 50/1, bld. 1, Novoslobodskaya st., Moscow.

²³ It is this address (although adding that the apartment was located on the 5th floor) that Ordikhane Dzhilil also indicated in his work [Dzhilil, 2003, p. 45].

To the First Secretary of the CC CPSU

Comrade N.S. Khrushchev

As we know, the Turkish ruling circles, nurturing the absurd idea of restoring the Ottoman empire, have thrown Turkey into the nets set by American imperialism. Acting behind the back of the Turkish people, they are dragging Turkey into a reckless enterprise against freedom-loving Syria. The Kurdish people along with all peoples of the world are indignant at the brazen action of the American vassals – Turkey. The 5 million Kurds who live in Turkey, like the Turkish people, may be deceived by force or through the lying propaganda of the West and act against their own interests.

At this important moment, we, Kurdish political émigrés living in the USSR, cannot stand aside and do nothing. We are prepared to resort to any measures and sacrifices to restrain the aggression.

With these considerations, I appeal to you and ask for your assistance so that our voice can reach the Kurdish people to explain the truth to them, and if war breaks out, to volunteer on the side of the Syrian people.

30.10.1957. Mustafa Barzani [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 272].

In Barzani's second letter to Khrushchev, written on June 9, 1958 and received by the CC CPSU on the same day, the Kurdish leader writes that he is sending the First Secretary of the CC CPSU a "letter from the Committee of Kurds in Europe" that he has received, adding that he asks to examine the Kurds' request and take necessary measures to help the Kurdish people [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 257].

Two further letters are attached to this letter, both in Russian.

The 1st letter, 2 pages long, from the "Committee of Kurds in Europe... To the Great Kurdish Commander Mustafa Barzani", is typewritten [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 257–258]. In this letter, 25 Kurdish students from different countries, who gathered in London on January 2, 1958, highly valuing the activities of Mustafa Barzani, report that they have created an organization named "Scientific and Cultural Association of Kurdish Students in Europe", designed to spread information about Kurdistan and have published the journal "Kurdistan". The letter states that the members of the organization appeal "to gather patriotic Kurds from different countries, people of different political convictions and professions, at a congress devoted to Kurdistan in order to develop a common and unified path for all Kurds" that will meet a broad approval. They have begun preparing for the congress. As the authors of the letter state, they have appealed to the "Organization of Countries of Asia and Africa, which met in Cairo,²⁴ for permission... to take part in the work of the conference," but received a refusal because of the absence of a Kurdish state. They asked Barzani to pass on their request that the Soviet authorities organize regular radio broadcasts in Kurdish from Moscow or another city. The Committee of Kurds goes on to praise the Soviet Union and state its anti-imperialist position. Perhaps Barzani himself was involved in writing this letter, given his great desire to persuade the Soviet government to begin broadcasts in Kurdish.

The second, handwritten letter, from June 4, 1958, is addressed to the "leader of the Kurds" and signed by 15 fourth-year students at the Tashkent Agricultural *Tekhnikum*²⁵. They had completed

²⁴ At the 1st Conference of Solidarity of Countries of Asia and Africa, held in Cairo from December 26, 1957 to January 1, 1958, the Solidarity Council of the Afro-Asian Countries was created. At the 2nd Conference in 1960, this organization was renamed the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization.

²⁵ In the USSR – secondary specialized (professional, vocational) educational institutes (Technical schools). The study period in them was 3–4 years on the basis of incomplete secondary education and 2–3 years on the basis of full secondary education. *Tekhnikums* trained technicians and specialists for various sectors of industry and agriculture.

their studies and were soon to become qualified junior agriculturalists. Wishing to continue their studies, they asked Barzani to petition for them to be sent to the Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 260–261].

Barzani wrote his third letter to Khrushchev before returning to Iraq from a trip to the USSR in November 1960 to take part in the celebrations of the October Revolution. He stayed in the USSR until early January 1961. The letter is dated January 10, 1961 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 201–202].

Barzani expresses his gratitude to Khrushchev “for the hospitality provided during his... stay in the USSR”, and the hope that talks with Khrushchev’s “deputies”²⁶ would “be of serious support in the struggle of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan and the Kurdish people against imperialism and reactionism.” He also expressed his hope of shaking Khrushchev’s hand at their next meeting [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 201–202]²⁷. Most likely, Barzani’s rather lengthy trip to the USSR was aimed to meet with Khrushchev in connection with a possible escalation in Iraq and the assistance of the Soviet Union to the Kurds. Soon afterwards (some 8 months later), Barzani’s supporters sent a telegram to Khrushchev asking him to submit the Kurdish issue to the UN for review and to cease supplies of weapons to the Iraqi army, which was employing them against peaceful citizens in Kurdistan [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 190].

Masoud Barzani also writes about the visit of his father to the USSR “at the invitation of the Soviet government to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution”. He dates his father’s visit from November 5, 1960 to January 13, 1961 [Barzani, 2005, p. 297–298]. The *Pravda* reported briefly: “On November 6, at the invitation of the Presidium of the Union of Societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, the prominent public figure of the Iraqi Republic, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, arrived in Moscow” [*Pravda*, 07.11.1960]. It is significant that in this report Mustafa Barzani is presented only by his Iraqi identity, which is somewhat comic, as it was well known that he was the leader of the Kurds and the Kurdish movement. From this report, we may already guess the results of his visit to the USSR. However, in his book, Masoud Barzani notes that the Kurdish leader was “met in Moscow with exceptional warmth, and held extensive talks, including with Khrushchev” [Barzani, 2005, p. 298]. Although as Mustafa Barzani’s letter to Khrushchev shows, during this visit he was not able to meet with the Soviet leader²⁸.

It is significant that in September 1962, Barzani criticized the USSR, seeming to engage in the classic game of playing the superpowers off of one another. He proposed that the US make the Kurds the main ally of the West in the Middle East, and yet at the same time threatened to “accept assistance from the communists” should the Americans fail to lend the desired support [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 156–157].

²⁶ We should note that Khrushchev, as the First Secretary of the CC CPSU, to whom Mustafa Barzani’s letter is addressed, did not have deputies. However, from 1958 Khrushchev also held the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Prime Minister), but the Council of Ministers, as is widely known, did not deal with the Kurdish issue, which remained the prerogative of the CC CPSU and the KGB. So the word “deputies” should not be understood literally, but interpreted as high-ranking members of the CC CPSU, primarily from the ID and the KGB.

²⁷ We should note that the letter was addressed to the Head of the ID of the CC CPSU Boris Ponomarev [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 200].

²⁸ Of course, theoretically this meeting may have taken place between the date on which the letter was written (January 10, 1961) and Mustafa Barzani’s return to Baghdad (January 13, 1961), but given the time required for traveling (at least 1 day) and the tone of the letter, which was evidently written directly before his departure, this meeting was no longer envisaged.

^{On} the topic of Mustafa Barzani’s meeting with Khrushchev, it must be noted that in Mustafa Barzani’s personal dossier, there is no information that this meeting ever took place. As well as in his book, Masoud Barzani also said that his father had met Khrushchev in an interview with a Russian newspaper. See, for example [Dunaev 2001].

INFORMATION ON KGB SURVEILLANCE OF BARZANI

Barzani's dossier contains a document signed by the deputy head of the 2nd division of the 9th Department of the KGB Second Main Directorate, Colonel Chaikun, from February 8, 1957 [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 264–271], under the name “List of connections of the head of the Kurdish detachment for Moscow”. This list contains 48 people with whom Mustafa Barzani interacted from July 18, 1953 to September 1956. As we can see, Barzani was under the constant KGB surveillance. In this document, Barzani is called “Mamedov” or “Mikhail”. The Kurdish leader used some of the people on the list to contact fellow tribesmen. One acquaintance who was leaving for a trip to the Saratov Region brought him a “letter from Kurds studying at the Pugachevsk's²⁹ *Tekhnikum*.”

Evidently, this is the Pugachevsk's Hydromeliorative *Tekhnikum*. Its website states:

“In 1957, a group of 25 Kurds, members of the national liberation movement in Iran, studied at our *Tekhnikum*. They were sent for training by higher authorities... The training was conducted in Russian. They took an active part in the social life of the *Tekhnikum*, assisted the collective (*kolkhozs*) and soviet farms (*sovkhozs*) of the Pugachevsk District. In March 1959, they left for their homeland”³⁰.

Masoud Barzani writes that after Mustafa Barzani had come to Moscow, his men were given the opportunity to study at various universities, such as Saratov University [Barzani, 2005, p. 182]. Perhaps Masoud, knowing that some of the Kurds had gone to study in Saratov, or rather in the Saratov Region, erroneously identified their place of study as Saratov University instead of the Pugachevsk's Hydromeliorative *Tekhnikum*.

CONCLUSION

Even though information about the life of Mustafa Barzani in the Soviet Union is contained in the book by Masoud Barzani and partially in other works, several circumstances remain unknown, as archive documents show. Archive materials allow us to gain more specific information about the nature and place of study of the Kurdish leader in Moscow and about his title as officer of the Soviet army, or rather the lack thereof.

Although Moscow saw Barzani as a possible ally in the region, and as an ally of the Iraqi communists, the Kurdish leader did not enjoy the complete trust of his hosts. Furthermore, the archive contains reports by Special Services officers, in which Barzani is almost openly described as an anti-communist. It is also true, however, that the Soviet leadership took a pragmatic approach and realized that Barzani's primary motives were not ideologically problematic (i. e., anti-Soviet) but that he was driven by a natural nationalism. Moscow had a very high estimation of Barzani's role, so information about him was reported to the higher tiers of power, where he was regarded as the most influential person in the Kurdish national movement. Moscow obviously took the greatest interest in Barzani during the escalation of the Kurdish problem. The archive materials also reflect the tactical maneuvers Barzani and his allies resorted to in order to maintain his leadership while far from home.

Despite Barzani's relatively elevated status and living standard (this especially concerns the period he spent in the Soviet capital), almost every document demonstrates his unwavering adherence to the national idea and his resolve to return to Kurdistan to continue the struggle³¹.

²⁹ Pugachevsk is a town in the Saratov Region.

³⁰ <http://www.sgau.ru/filialy-universiteta/pugachyovskii-filial/osnovnye-svedeniya/istoriya-filiala>

³¹ In this sense, Martin van Bruinessen's description of Mustafa Barzani as an adherent of “simple and pragmatic

The materials contained in the dossier are highly important to the research in the Kurdish history of the 20th century and the process of forming the Kurdish policy of the USSR after WWII.

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