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

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Abstract: *The article examines the case file of the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, preserved in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). The dossier was opened in 1953, when Barzani began studying at the Higher Party School (HPS) under the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU and was compiled by the International Department of the CC of the CPSU. In addition to a large collection of press materials, primary sources such as Soviet internal reports, transcripts of conversations, surveillance records, and personal correspondence bring to light previously unknown episodes in the biography of the renowned Kurdish leader, including detailed information about his residence in Moscow in 1953–1958, training at the HPS, meetings with friends and associates, and maneuvering to maintain his leadership while in exile from Kurdistan. The dossier materials are also critically compared with information presented in previously published literature about this period of Barzani's life. The article also provides information about employees of the International Department who were involved in relations with the Kurdish leader. Archive materials allow us to reassess elements of the Barzani legend, such as his purported rank as an officer in the Soviet Army, and to better understand Soviet policymakers, who did not view Barzani as ideological ally and yet chose to continue supporting him. Although Barzani was driven by nationalist rather than Marxist goals, he was neither anti-communist nor anti-Soviet. The documents demonstrate time and again Barzani's unwavering adherence to the national idea and his resolve to return to Kurdistan to continue the struggle.*

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

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INTRODUCTION

Mustafa Barzani has been called the father of modern Kurdish nationalism¹ and even a “legendary super-hero” [van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 316]. *The New York Times* declared him

¹ Without discussing the genesis of Kurdish nationalism, we would like to quote the words of Martin van Bruinessen that it was the “military and political successes of Mullah Mustafa Barzani”, and not “nationalist propaganda by

“the heart and brains behind the rebellion of the Kurds” [Schmidt, 1962, p. 1]. His struggle is inextricably associated with the “first Kurdish republic”, the Mahabad Republic (1946), which embodies aspirations for independence in the Kurdish collective consciousness, well preceding the era of the “Kurdish Revolution” in Iraq in the 1960s and the present semi-independent position of Iraqi Kurdistan². His legacy continues in the most literal way, as the rulers of South Kurdistan are his direct descendants³.

After the Second World War, Barzani was forced to take refuge in the USSR. The conditions of the Kurdish leader’s sudden arrival on foreign soil are described by Soviet intelligence officer Pavel Sudoplatov:

In 1947, after a military engagement with the Shah’s forces, armed Kurdish detachments commanded by Mullah Mustafa Barzani crossed our border with Iran and entered the territory of [Soviet] Azerbaijan...

Barzani’s military detachments numbered up to 2,000 fighters,⁴ accompanied by as many family members. Soviet officials at first placed the Kurds in an internment camp, but in 1947 Abakumov⁵ ordered me to start negotiations with Barzani and offer him and his people political asylum and temporary resettlement in the agricultural regions of Uzbekistan near Tashkent [Sudoplatov, 1997, p. 432].

Thus began the Kurdish leader’s 11 years of Soviet exile, arguably the least studied and most mythologized period of his life. His reported rise to the rank of Soviet general during this time has become an integral part of the Kurdish national myth. Barzani’s time in the USSR is actively promoted by the leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan to emphasize the “historic” nature of Kurdish relations with Russia and other countries. This article examines the persisting legends surrounding Barzani’s Soviet exile against the records preserved in the archives of the Russian Federation and strives for a soberer assessment of the nature and impact of the leader’s Soviet period. This article also presents a detailed account of the rich holdings in Barzani’s Soviet case file which remained unstudied before.

Also leveraged here are published works by Barzani’s son Masoud Barzani [Barzani, 2005; 2003], Pavel Sudoplatov [Sudoplatov, 1997, p. 423–430], Yevgeny Primakov [Primakov, 2006, p. 325], and Ordikhane Dzhalil (in Kurdish *Ordixanê Celîl*) [Dzhalil, 2003, p. 45–51], who recounts his personal meetings with the Kurdish leader. Olga Zhigalina’s book [Zhigalina, 2013] contains little new information and is based primarily on the work of Masoud Barzani.

Barzani’s long stay in the Soviet Union may be divided into three parts:

- 1) roughly a year in Azerbaijan (first in Nakhchivan, then near Baku) beginning in mid-1947,
- 2) in Uzbekistan, until Stalin’s death in 1953,
- 3) in Moscow until October 1958.

MUSTAFA BARZANI’S STUDIES IN MOSCOW, HIS CASE FILE (DOSSIER) IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY’S ARCHIVE AND THE INDIVIDUALS WHO ACCESSED IT

We will begin with the last period, as many of the most persistent myths concern this time. When Mustafa Barzani came to Moscow after Stalin’s death in 1953,⁶ he was sent to study at the

intellectuals” that made Kurdish nationalism a mass movement [van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 316].

² Mustafa Barzani’s role is perceived somewhat differently in the Sulaymaniyah Region, a zone under the influence of the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), but his place in Kurdish history is nonetheless difficult to overestimate.

³ The first president of Kurdistan (2005–2017), Masoud Barzani, was his son. The second president of Kurdistan (from 2019) Nechirvan Barzani, who was the prime minister of Kurdistan for a long time, is his grandson and married to his granddaughter. Another grandson of Mustafa Barzani, Masrour, has been the prime minister of Kurdistan since 2019.

⁴ In reality, the number of men with Barzani was 500.

⁵ Viktor S. Abakumov, Minister of State Security of the USSR from 1946 to 1951.

⁶ Here we avoid repeating the story about Mustafa Barzani’s appearance at the Spassky Gates of the Kremlin which

Higher Party School (HPS) under the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), a special educational institution⁷. The HPS trained senior staff members and only accepted applicants already possessing a higher education. The duration of study varied from 2 to 3 years at different periods. The school was located at Miussskaya Square, only 500 meters from Barzani's residence⁸.

Documents produced by the Communist Party and its corresponding educational institutions were stored in the Central Party archive, which in 1991–1999 was known as the Russian Center for Recording and Studying Contemporary History, after which it acquired its present name: The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (*Rossiysky gosudarstvennyy arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoy istorii* (RGASPI)).

This is the archive that houses the personal case file of Mustafa Barzani (Mamedov), containing 296 pages⁹. The dossier was opened in October 1953 [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 294]. With the exception of one form from 1968, the pages are numbered from newer materials to older ones (i.e. numeration starts with materials of TASS from 1964 and ends with documents from 1953). This dossier was compiled by the International Department (ID) of the CC of the CPSU. The dossier is classified as “top secret.”

We should note that it is not possible to examine in detail the entire personal dossier of Mustafa Barzani in one article, although many materials contained therein shed light on the strategy and dynamics of world powers in relation to the Kurdish issue and the region generally. Our task was to leverage documents hitherto not engaged by international scholarship in order to analyze certain aspects of Barzani's Soviet period.

The first document in the dossier is dated September 1953, and the last dates back to 1968, although the majority of materials are from no later than 1964. The materials in the dossier may also be divided into four parts.

The first section of the case file comprises materials produced by the main media outlet of the USSR, TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union): translations of articles from foreign publications (newspapers and journals), information agencies, items prepared on the basis of news reports published in various newspapers, and a small number of reports by TASS' own agents, also based on reports of foreign press and radio stations. The translations of articles from foreign newspapers and publications include extensive articles published in *Le Monde* by a renowned French journalist specializing in problems of the Middle East, and subsequently the French ambassador in Tunisia and Turkey, Eric Rouleau¹⁰; and by another renowned French journalist, Edouard Sablier, from the weekly *Le Courrier du Parlement* [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 192–195]. There are extensive reports from the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly from Mustafa Barzani's own headquarters, by Dana Adams Schmidt in *The New York Times*¹¹, who also wrote

is well-known in the literature and has become a kind of legend. See: [Barzani, 2005, p. 178; Primakov, 2006, p. 325].

⁷ In 1978, the Higher Party School was merged with the Academy of Social Sciences.

⁸ 50/52 Novoslobodskaya st., apt. 125.

⁹ [Dossier] *Mustafa Barzani (Mamedov)*, in RGASPI, Fund 495, Inv. 216, Case 141, 296 p. (further – RGASPI-Barzani).

This dossier was declassified several years ago but has since again been closed to the public.

RGASPI also contains personal files of some of Mustafa Barzani's associates. See: [Mossaki, 2021].

¹⁰ The dossier contains a TASS translation of three articles by Eric Rouleau: “Vera v ispytanie” (La confiance à l'épreuve) [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 1–12, 91–92] (translated from [*Le Monde*, 7 juillet 1964; 8 juillet 1964; 8 mars 1963]).

It is notable that these articles were well known in Soviet Kurdish studies and used in research. See, for example: [Mgoi, 1977, p. 223–224].

Here and subsequently, the publication data of articles published in foreign newspapers has been found by us. In the descriptions by TASS, all information is given in Russian.

¹¹ [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 84–87, 97–99, 112–115; 117–121, 135–137; 156–163] (translated from *The New York Times*, 7 March 1963, p. 6; 2 March 1963, p. 1; 20 February 1963, p. 1; 18 February 1963, p. 1; 15 January 1963, p. 3; 10 September 1962, p. 1).

an informative book about the Kurdish uprising [Schmidt, 1964]. Additionally, there are editorial articles published in popular European newspapers and reports from several British and Middle Eastern newspapers. Among the reports by news agencies, contained in Mustafa Barzani's dossier, that were translated by TASS into Russian, the most numerous are by *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), followed by Reuters and other agencies, for example, *Associated Press* (AP)¹². There are around 120 separate materials from TASS occupying over 210 pages, i.e. the bulk of the dossier.

The second section consists of 12 clippings of items from socialist newspapers, ten of which are from *Pravda*, and one each from *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, *Rabotnichesko Delo*. Almost all of these materials date to 1959–1964, i. e. the time during which Mustafa Barzani resided in Iraq and the uprising of the Kurds began. In particular, most of these materials date to 1963.

The third section includes several photographs of the Kurdish leader, most of them well-known, such as the aforementioned photograph [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 62] of Barzani in the uniform of a general of the Mahabad Republic¹³. While the vast majority of documents from parts 1–3 of the dossier are reports initially published in various media outlets, this in no way diminishes their importance to researchers. The transcriptions and summaries of radio reports are especially valuable.

The fourth section comprises various forms, transcriptions of conversations, surveillance of Mustafa Barzani, and his letters.

The so-called “control card” attached to the dossier is also of interest as it reveals when and by whom the dossier was accessed: not only by archive staff and researchers but by officials such as the desk officer of the ID of the CC CPSU. Mustafa Barzani's file was accessed five times, by four people, and twice by F.F. Voloshin¹⁴, who is well-known in connection with Mustafa Barzani's Moscow period. Two people from this list are not known to have any connection with Kurdish issues. The fourth is Grigory N. Nechkin, known as the curator from the ID of the CC CPSU for a number of Arab countries. The dossier was accessed four times before 1960, and by Nechkin in 1968.

Taking into account the professional activities of Voloshin and Nechkin, it is worth providing some information about them. In Masoud Barzani's book, “Voloshin” is only mentioned by his surname, as a person who was appointed by the CC CPSU to be “responsible for contact with Barzani”, and is erroneously described as being “among the trusted individuals and staffers of Nikita Khrushchev” [Barzani, 2005, p. 182]. Zhigalina develops this error, calling “Voloshin” (also without his first name) Khrushchev's assistant [Zhigalina, 2013, 126]. Assistant to the First Secretary of the CC CPSU was a position of high importance, held by people who were well known both in the USSR and abroad, and “Voloshin” never held it. In fact, he was an employee of the Department of the CC CPSU for Ties with Foreign Communist Parties (from 1957, the ID of the CC CPSU), although in the notes preserved in the case file, Voloshin signed his name without indicating his position. Masoud Barzani's account is vague as at the time of writing he simply could not have known for certain the position of someone in the CC CPSU, and his statement that Voloshin was appointed as the person responsible for connections with Barzani is technically correct.

As for Nechkin, in the mid-1950s he was the attaché of the Soviet embassy in Egypt; in the late 1950s – early 1960s, the first secretary of the Soviet embassy in Iraq on cultural issues; and

¹² At that period, reports for AP were prepared by the agency's correspondent in Tehran David Lancashire, and the Chief of Middle East Services in Beirut, Webb McKinley.

¹³ This photograph can be found here: <http://www.saradistribution.com/mustafabarzani.htm> (accessed: 10.12.2023).

¹⁴ 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.

later, the referent of the ID of the CC CPSU, responsible for these countries and for the communist parties of Jordan and Sudan. He authored and co-edited various scholarly works about Iraq and the Iraqi communist party, writing a series of articles about the socio-economic transformations in Iraq published soon after the important Soviet-Iraqi treaty of 1972. This Soviet diplomat and Arab Studies scholar edited several works on the Arab countries published by the Institute of Oriental Studies (prior to 1968, the Institute of the Peoples of Asia) of the Academy of Sciences (AS) of the USSR. We should note that Ordikhane Dzhilil, in his extensive article about Mustafa Barzani, recalls that in the spring of 1974, when he was a research fellow at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, he was summoned to Moscow by the director of the Institute, Bobodzhon Gafurov. Gafurov told him about his recent trip to Iraqi Kurdistan and his conversations with Mustafa Barzani and his sons, Masoud and Idris. Dzhilil believed that this trip was organized by the ID of the CC CPSU and either intended “to clarify the Kurds’ position on their view on a peaceful solution of the Kurdish problem, or to reconcile the hostile sides” [Dzhilil, 2003, p. 50]. Dzhilil then writes that the delegation included the “staff employee of the KGB, Nechkin (here and subsequently Dzhilil refers to Nechkin only by his surname), responsible for Iraq at the International Department [of the CC CPSU]”. Dzhilil, who from time to time traveled from Leningrad to Moscow, especially when he visited the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) Aziz Mohammed who was living with his family in Moscow at the time, met with Nechkin. Dzhilil considered “Nechkin’s role in Kurdish affairs” to be “negative and officious”. As Dzhilil wrote: “he [Nechkin] did not know the most basic facts from the history of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. It was with people like Nechkin that [Mustafa] Barzani had to associate” [Dzhilil, 2003, p. 50].

Leaving aside the question whether Nechkin – an Arabist who had been associated with the Arab world and Iraq for decades – had pro-Arab sympathies, it is clear that Dzhilil’s negative report was driven, as is often the case, by the Kurdish scholar’s nationalist/patriotic convictions. The Soviet Kurdish specialist could not countenance that Nechkin acted primarily in the interests of the USSR, as a purveyor of Soviet policy. Many of Nechkin’s articles in the scholarly journals Dzhilil was familiar with were written from this standpoint. Nechkin either described the “progressive nature” of Baath Party policy [Nechkin, 1973] and the “extremist elements... in the Kurdish movement” seeking to stop the ICP and KDP from uniting “in a progressive national front” [Nechkin, 1974, p. 115], or completely ignored the Kurdish problem in Iraq [Nechkin, 1984, p. 135–139].

According to a HPS document of March 11, 1968, Barzani studied at this school from October 1, 1953 to August 1, 1958, but he did not sit for “state exams, received no diploma, and did not complete any documents in his own handwriting” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 293]. It may seem that he audited classes. The Soviet authorities’ goal in attaching him to this institute was not to teach Mustafa Barzani communist ideology but to give him a certain legal and honorary status, a position in the so-called “anti-imperialist reserve”.

The case file also contains Barzani’s student identification from the HPS at CC CPSU № 202, valid until October 1, 1958 (initial validity until December 31, 1956, then until December 31, 1957 and October 1, 1958) under the name of “Mamedov A.A.” [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 254–255]¹⁵. It is notable that Barzani did not wear his customary moustache on the ID photograph.

ALLEGED PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SOVIET GENERAL

Mustafa Barzani’s personal dossier contains nothing that would indicate that Barzani had ever studied at a military academy. Although the dossier dates to the time when the Kurdish leader

¹⁵ E.M. Primakov also notes that “Barzani lived in the USSR under the surname of Mamedov” [Primakov, 2006, p. 325].

began studying at the HPS, if Barzani had previously studied at a military academy, this would have been reflected. Furthermore, F.F. Voloshin, reporting on a meeting with Barzani that took place on December 13, 1954, wrote that he had had a discussion in the HPS building with the HPS student Mustafa Barzani [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 287]. Yevgeny Primakov also relates to a statement by Barzani that, after having moved to Moscow, he had been sent “to study at the Higher Party School” [Primakov, 2006, p. 325] – no mention of any military academy. It should be noted that Primakov was perhaps the best-informed individual in the USSR, and later the Russian Federation, about the Kurds and Mustafa Barzani.

Sudoplatov, however, writes that in the spring of 1953, when he was at a “military academy”, he accidentally met Barzani, who was attending lectures there [Sudoplatov, 1997, p. 428]. Uncharacteristically for a high-ranking Soviet officer, Sudoplatov neglects to provide the exact name of the academy. The Russian edition of Masoud Barzani’s book contains a photograph of his father with the caption “General Mustafa Barzani during his studies at the Frunze Military Academy. Moscow, 1957” [Barzani, 2005, 185]. Evidently, the image of Barzani at a “military academy” was an appealing one to his supporters; while the image of him at a Communist Party educational institution must have been less so, since this documented fact was dropped out of the myth. Perhaps this is because Barzani has been seen largely as a military leader, or for ideological or some other reasons. Yet nothing in the case file excludes the possibility of Barzani having audited lectures at a military academy, which KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) supporters have assumed to be the famed Frunze Military Academy. Even if this were the case, Barzani could not have attended lectures at a military academy for very long – only during the spring of 1953, as he had already enrolled at the HPS in the autumn of that year.

While Western media and even scholars studying Barzani have repeatedly erred on the side of credulity regarding the leader’s links with a “military academy” in the Soviet Union, Roham Alvandi, though referring to a US State Department document stating that the Kurdish leader was “attending the Soviet military academy” [*Research Study RNAS-10*, 1972], also takes other sources into account, including Primakov’s book, and correctly states that Barzani studied at the HPS [Alvandi, 2014, p. 69, 198].

Another peculiarity of the myth connected with Barzani’s studies at the military academy and concerning his life in the USSR was that he was given the rank of “general”, although never with any more precise indication of rank: major general, lieutenant general, colonel general or army general. In a collection for the centenary of Mustafa Barzani published by the “Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government Representation in Russia and the CIS countries”¹⁶, one author writes that Barzani “graduated from the Frunze military academy and received the title of general” [Komarov, 2003, p. 15]¹⁷. Zhigalina repeats this claim with minor changes and no source, stating that Barzani “graduated from courses at the Frunze Military Academy and received the rank of Soviet general” [Zhigalina, 2013, p. 122]. Dzhalil likewise informs readers that Mustafa Barzani enrolled at the “Frunze Military Academy” [Dzhalil, 2003, p. 48].

The source of this oft-repeated rumor seems to have been accurately pinpointed by Primakov: Barzani bought a military uniform at a military supply shop in Tashkent in 1951:

Neither he [Barzani] nor anyone who crossed the border with him and ended up in our country served in the Soviet armed forces. So, the rumors that Barzani was a general of the Soviet army are false from start to finish. These rumors are, however, linked to one episode that Barzani later told me about himself. When he

¹⁶ We should note that officially this representation did not exist, especially since in Kurdistan at the time there were two regional governments. This was essentially just a representative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

¹⁷ We should note that the name “Denis Komarov”, along with the degree “PhD in history” attributed to him, is fictitious.

was in Moscow, he bought a general's uniform at a military shop (this was possible at the time), and had his photo taken in it. This photograph came into the possession of British intelligence [Primakov, 2006, p. 325].

Masoud Barzani has also called the Soviet general story an invention, noting that "at a time when he and his allies were experiencing the hardships of true exile.... *The New York Times* published an article that Barzani had been awarded the title of Soviet army general and commanded an entire detachment stationed on the Soviet-Iranian border" [Barzani, 2005, p. 174].

The depiction of Barzani in the western media as a Kurdish leader allegedly made a general in the USSR would certainly have served to discredit him as a Soviet agent, a tool of the USSR in the Middle East for furthering its influence and counterbalancing Western powers. Sometimes he was called a colonel or simply an officer, but these mentions of rank in the Soviet army were almost always accompanied by a description of him as a pro-Soviet leader of the Kurds. Sometimes he was simply the "communist Kurdish leader"¹⁸.

Similar materials, directly or indirectly containing information about Mustafa Barzani's high-ranking service in the Soviet Army, are available in Barzani's case file, in the TASS translations of reports from Baghdad correspondents (that is, people who should know Iraq well) of Western media. A TASS document from July 22, 1958, a translation into Russian of a report by an *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) correspondent from Baghdad on July 21, 1958, titled "France Presse on the Problem of the Kurds in Iraq", states that "Mullah Mustafa Barzani, it is reported, is now serving as an officer in the Soviet army" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 253a]. The dossier also has a TASS report from September 21, 1958, i.e. shortly before Barzani's return to Iraq, when he was in Czechoslovakia (from July to 7 October 1958), citing reports by *The Sunday Times* correspondent in Baghdad. He stated that "the British authorities have photographs of him wearing the uniform of a Red Army colonel" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 250]¹⁹. *The Sunday Times* did not formally claim that Barzani was a Red Army colonel, only that the authorities had a photograph of Barzani, but readers were clearly meant to understand that Mustafa Barzani had been awarded the title of colonel by the Soviet government, and that upon returning to Iraq, he would somehow represent the USSR. *Agence France-Presse* reported on an event organized by the heads of Kurdish tribes and wrote in passing that Mustafa Barzani "wore the uniform of a Soviet general" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 236]. This report consists of doubtful and even fantastic assertions intended to discredit the leader and devalue his role, evidently fueled by his 11-year Soviet exile and concerns over increased Soviet influence in the region. Barzani provided some fodder for such attempts by combining anti-imperialist and pro-Soviet rhetoric upon returning to Iraq [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 238–239].

Some of the assertions are so far-fetched that they require no commentary: "Although the heads of the Kurdish tribes consider Mustafa Barzani... to be a communist, the people feel hostile to the return of the former leader, as they believe him to be a 'feudal lord', paradoxically enough. Twelve years of emigration outside of Iraq have completely changed the social position of this Kurdish leader. During this time, Iraqi Kurds have achieved economic prosperity through building dams and factories, which has freed them from being overseen by feudal lords. As regards the Barzani tribe itself, the position of Mullah Mustafa is not what it was prior to 1946..." [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 236].

Edouard Sablier, in the above-mentioned article, wrote that "'Mullah' Barzani, head of the Iraqi Kurds... found refuge in the Soviet Union for 11 years, where he acquired the title of

¹⁸ See, for example, the report by the American news agency *United Press International* (UPI): [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 220].

¹⁹ This report by *The Sunday Times* also contains serious errors. Barzani was called the "prime minister of the Azerbaijani republic in Persia after the end of the [Second World] war" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 250].

Red Army general..." [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 194]. Sablier claimed that agents scattered in the mountains of Kurdistan wanted to "create difficulties for the West and... put pressure on local governments" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 195]. The bulletin "*Foreign Report*" of *The Economist* (October 11, 1962), also noted that "although the time has perhaps passed when Barzani was simply labelled a 'communist', the Americans cannot forget that... throughout his time in the Soviet Union as a refugee, from 1947 to 1958, he held the rank of general" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 149].

The extensive Turkish commentaries on this topic are understandable, reflecting their fear of any success by the Kurdish movement and possible state formation in neighboring ethno-geographic Kurdistan. In February 1959, the journalist Kışlalı²⁰ called Mustafa Barzani "a new element of unrest in the Middle East" in the newspaper *Yeni Gün* published in Ankara, and mentioned in passing that he had been awarded "the title of general" by "Soviet Russia." Kışlalı claimed that Soviet Russia supported the Kurds' aspirations for independence in order to gain the opportunity to "create disturbances in the Middle East", which in his opinion would be caused by "movements for the creation of an independent Kurdish state" [RGASPI-Barzani, p. 232]. In any case, this depiction of Barzani by Western and Turkish journalists in influential media evidently reflected his unquestioned special status in the Kurdish movement, his undisputed leadership in mobilizing support, his value as a symbol, and his conflicts with the Iraqi authorities over the possible creation of a Kurdish nation. In this period, other renowned Kurdish politicians, who even challenged Barzani from time to time and disputed his leadership, lacked the weight to challenge the Iraqi authorities and the symbolic international status of the Kurdish leader.

This leads to another motivation for the Soviet general myth: Barzani himself claimed in an interview that the Iraqi soldiers who were incapable of vanquishing him justified themselves by the "fact" that he had "learned his military science in Russia"; Iranian generals similarly excused their lack of success by claiming Barzani had studied at the London University – even personally under Lord Montgomery [Schmidt, 1964, p. 110–111]. But in fact, as Barzani said, he had obtained "training by fighting". He added that he had been awarded the title of general by the Mahabad Republic, and the general's uniform that resembled a "Russian" (Soviet) one, in which he was photographed, was in fact the uniform of the Mahabad Republic, and not the USSR [Schmidt, 1964, p. 111].²¹

In the same interview, Barzani spoke of having requested to be sent to the "Academy of Languages in Moscow" to study [Schmidt, 1964, p. 110], but no educational or academic institute of this name has ever existed in Moscow. To the question of whether he had studied at the "Soviet Military Academy", Barzani "insisted that the only school he went to was the 'Academy of Languages', where he learned not only Russian but had an opportunity to study economics and geography and science" [Schmidt, 1964, p. 110]. Schmidt also writes that Barzani received permission to move to Moscow in 1953 and attend the "Academy of Languages", it is clear that the HPS is under discussion and the "Academy of Languages" was simply a euphemism for the party school so as to avoid an overt association with Communism. Derk Kinnane also wrote that Barzani studied at the "Moscow Institute of Languages" and had a "comfortable" life in the USSR "with the rank of a general in the Soviet army", without giving any sources [Kinnane, 1964, p. 59].

²⁰ Although in the TASS report he is mentioned only by his surname, this is evidently the renowned Turkish journalist, observer on international relations Mehmet Ali Kışlalı (born in 1933), brother of the more famous journalist, political scientist and politician and professor Ahmet Taner Kışlalı (1939–1999), who held the position of minister of culture in Ecevit's government in 1978–1979.

²¹ However, we should note that in the Soviet press, after his return to Iraq and during his leadership of the Kurdish movement, Mustafa Barzani was called a general (see for example: *Izvestia*, October 21, 1963; Primakov Ye. "Na samom severe Iraka," [In the northernmost Iraq]. *Pravda*. January 15, 1967), which, however, of course does not mean that he was awarded this title in the USSR.

Perhaps it is a fitting conclusion to this summary of fictions to linger briefly on a document from another archive, the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF): a report by the Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Sergei Kruglov, to Stalin on February 10, 1949 with information about Soviet military training for Barzani's detachment. The report states that in connection with Barzani's intention "to continue fighting against the Iranians" and his request for the Soviet government to "give his detachment a chance to rest for several months and rearm itself, for the commanders to undergo military training, and then return to Iraq", the leader of Azerbaijan, Mir Jafar Bagirov, offered to "station the detachment in one of the camps on the shore of the Caspian Sea, provide food, equipment and military training of personnel". Moscow decided to form "three shooting battalions, an artillery battery, a mine battery, an engineering platoon, communications and tank platoons. The Ministry of Armed Forces assigned 25 Soviet Army officers to provide military training for Barzani's detachment". In 1948, the detachment was moved from the region of Baku to a former interior ministry camp in the Uzbek SSR (the Verkhne-Komsomolsk Station on the Tashkent railroad), where it was provided with good conditions and continued military training"²².

We do not know whether Barzani himself trained in these camps, but – evidently for the first time – Kurdish fighters have enjoyed professional military training. Certainly for the first time in the history of the Kurdish movement, a tank unit has been created.

CONVERSATIONS

The personal dossier of Mustafa Barzani in RGASPI contains a record of various conversations that are of interest to us from the point of view of his activities in Moscow.

The documents comprise records of conversations between Voloshin and Barzani, transcribed for Igor Vinogradov²³ and the ID of the CC CPSU.

The first is dated September 14, 1953, is a record of a conversation held in the Sovetskaya Hotel²⁴ on September 14, 1953 and classified as "top secret" [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 295]. The context of the conversation was that Barzani had come to Moscow from Uzbekistan after Stalin's death because of his deep discontent with the situation there. He and his people had been sent to a remote province without any prospects for returning to the struggle for national liberation. He was demanding an end to the restrictions on his men – "the Barzanis", freedom of movement and the opportunity to receive an education [Barzani, 2005, p. 182], all intended as preparation for their return to Iraq. Barzani ratcheted up the pressure on Voloshin by telling him about a 28-year-old comrade who had slit his own throat when he lost all hope of returning to Iraq. Barzani was quick to add that other "Barzanis" were prepared to do the same, as each had "children, wives, brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers" there. Dozens of similar incidents might occur. In Barzani's opinion, in Iraq only 15–20 people could face repressions, while the rest would not face any charges by the Iraqi authorities. Furthermore, Barzani told Voloshin that if he (Barzani) had been in Tashkent, he himself would have taken this tragic step [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 295]. It is highly unlikely that he actually considered suicide, as the most important thing for him was to return to Iraq and continue the struggle, not to disgrace his hosts and abandon his allies with

²² Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Sergei Kruglov, to Stalin, February 9, 1949, in: [*GARF*, F. R9401, Inv. 2, Case 234, p. 180–181].

²³ Igor T. Vinogradov was an employee of the Department of the CC CPSU for ties with foreign communist parties, and in 1955 became the deputy head of this department. He is mentioned in Masoud Barzani's book only by his surname. He is mentioned as a person who came to Tashkent on September 1, 1951 to regulate the problems of the Barzanis. See: [Barzani, 2005, p. 177].

²⁴ The "Sovetskaya Hotel" was one of the most famous in Moscow at that time. It was located at 32 Leningradsky Ave., near the Dinamo metro station.

a desperate theatrical maneuver. But Barzani had employed bluffs before: for example, in 1947, immediately upon arrival in the Soviet Union. Kruglov's letter to Stalin states that "in late 1948, Mustafa Barzani requested an audience with the [First] Secretary of the CC CP of Uzbekistan, Comrade [Usman] Yusupov, to whom he expressed his dissatisfaction with the situation of the detachment, and asked for a meeting to be arranged with comrade Stalin to explain his position and his plans". At the end of the conversation, Barzani announced that "if he was not permitted to travel to Moscow, he would commit suicide"²⁵.

Another meeting between Voloshin and Barzani took place on the next day, September 15, 1953, in which the latter discussed "his meeting in the autumn of 1934 with Winston Churchill... at a reception with the Prime Minister of Iraq, Yasym-Pasha" [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 294]. The main guests at this reception were Churchill and the King of Iraq, Faisal,²⁶ but it was also attended by ministers, leaders of Iraqi tribes, generals, and Mustafa and Ahmed Barzani, who at that time were in exile in Baghdad. According to Mustafa Barzani, during dinner Churchill came to him and said: "Many love you, and many hate you. But you are the first Kurd who has announced the creation of a Kurdish autonomous state in the Middle East, and taken up arms to fight for it. Your brother is better than you. He is a calm and sensible person" [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 294]. Barzani was presenting himself through this episode as the first to announce to the world that the Kurds aspired to statehood — certain to enhance his prestige among his Soviet hosts. Perhaps this is why a resolution is written on this note: "A personal dossier on Barzani must be drawn up" (20.10.1953) [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 294] (although perhaps also because this document is one of the earliest in the file). The Soviet leadership perceived him as the leader of the Kurds from the beginning. Kruglov's report to Stalin represents Barzani as an individual with "the intention of organizing and leading a territory for the Kurdish tribes", who regards his "stay in the Soviet Union as temporary and carrying no obligations" [*GARF*, F. R9401, Inv. 2, Case 234, p. 181].

The next meeting between Voloshin and Barzani took place on November 27, 1953 at the hotel "Moscow" (near Red Square). At this meeting, Barzani presented numerous letters from his companions in Uzbekistan emphasizing the need for the Kurds to be moved from the area of Tashkent to one of the provinces of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), and requested to negotiate this with the Soviet government. Voloshin especially notes the "tone of the letters and way they state their case". Barzani is called the "chairman of the Kurdish democratic movement" and the "leader of the Kurdish people". Barzani attempted to have one letter sent to the Kremlin through Voloshin, signed by a group of Kurds and addressed to the chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, Georgy M. Malenkov, but the Soviet representative refused to do so, claiming he had no contacts that high in the Soviet government. At this meeting, Barzani also presented to Voloshin three letters in Kurdish sent to him by his allies, in which they threatened suicide if they were not permitted to travel to Moscow for 2–3 days to see Barzani, whom they called their "dear father" [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 292]²⁷. The suicide threats were clearly Barzani's way of strong-arming Soviet representatives into allowing him to return to Iraq and continue to fight for the rights of the Kurds.

The dossier contains information about another meeting between Voloshin and Barzani over a year later, on December 13, 1954, set up as per the instructions of the CC CPSU [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 287]²⁸. During this conversation Barzani tried to persuade the Soviet representative of

²⁵ Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Sergei Kruglov, to Stalin, February 9, 1949, [*GARF*, F. R9401, Inv. 2, Case. 234, p. 181].

²⁶ Faisal I died on September 8, 1933. He was succeeded by his son Ghazi bin Faisal, who ruled until 1939.

²⁷ Classified "top secret".

²⁸ Classified "top secret".

the unreliability and anti-Soviet sentiments of Qazi Muhammad's nephew – Rakhim Qazi²⁹, who had been appointed deputy chairman of the Democratic Party of Iranian Azerbaijan. Barzani cited several renowned Kurds (Salmasi, Rakhman Germani, Aziz Shamzini, and Khasan Khesami³⁰) who had studied with Qazi at the military academy in Baku. He claimed that in 1947, when they heard the news that the democratic movement in Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan had been crushed, Qazi said to his comrades: “Down with the Soviet Union. Long live Kavam es-Saltane”. Barzani added that on the same day, Qazi visited the Iranian consulate in Baku, requesting a visa to enter Iran, and persuaded his comrades to do the same [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 287].³¹

Qazi's appointment, Barzani continued, showed that the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party was not aware of the “true face of this man.” Qazi was put forward by the chairman of the presidium of the supreme council of the Azerbaijan SSR, Mirza Azhdar-ogly Ibragimov, who had received generous presents from Qazi's uncle – Mohammed Qazi (Qazi Muhammed) in 1946–1947, according to Barzani [*RGASPI-Barzani*, p. 287].

Masoud Barzani writes about the Congress of the Kurds of Iraq and Iran which was held on January 19, 1948. He does not state where the congress took place, but based on the mention of the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, Mir Jafar Bagirov, it was held in Azerbaijan. Here, the political leadership of the Kurdish liberation committee was elected. Bagirov, Masoud Barzani writes, tried to make the Kurds submit, making use of the methods of interaction that he used with Qazi Muhammed and the Kurdish and Azerbaijan republics in Iran, but Mustafa Barzani “resisted Bagirov's pressure” [Barzani, 2005, p. 171–172], who, as Eagleton wrote, told Qazi Muhammed during his visit to Baku in 1945 that he suspected Mustafa Barzani “was a British spy” [Eagleton, 1963, p. 45–46]³². At the same time, Masoud Barzani continues, “the Iranian Kurds elected at the congress broke its principles and became a weapon in the hands of Bagirov and his special services... they were used for subversive activity, to provoke a split and to spread false rumors”. This was “the beginning of new troubles for Barzani and his allies, and the end of the political leadership of the Kurdish liberation committee, which split into factions. This took place as a result of the opportunism shown [by the Iranian Kurds], the complete submission to the Azerbaijanis and Bagirov, and a departure from shared political leadership” [Barzani, 2005, p. 173]. Here, he had Rahim Qazi in mind.

ARCHIVES

GARF. State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R9401. Inv. 2. C. 234. Pp. 180–182; 183–185 (in Russian) [*ГАРФ*, Государственный архив Российской Федерации. Фонд Р9401. Опись 2. Дело 234. Лл. 180–182; 183–185].

RGASPI-Barzani. The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. Fund 495. Inv. 216. C. 141. Dossier: Mustafa Barzani (Mamedov) (in Russian) [*РГАСПИ*, Российский государственный архив

²⁹ In the scholarly publications, his name was written in Russian as Rakhim Gazi (Gaziev). In Kurdish his name is *Rehîmê Qazî*.

He was born in 1925 in Iranian Kurdistan, the brother of Muhammed Huseyin Seyfi Qazi, defense minister of Kurdistan and the cousin (the son of the uncle) of the head of the Mahabad republic Qazi Muhammed. In 1946, he was sent with several dozen other people from Mahabad to Baku to study. After the fall of the Mahabad republic, several months later he remained in Baku. In November 1954, Rahim Gazi defended a dissertation and earned his *kandidat nauk* degree (PhD). Gazi is considered to be the author of the first novel in Sorani – Pêşmerge, first published in Yerevan in 1960, and shortly afterwards in Baghdad and Baku.

³⁰ Obviously this is Mustafa Salmasi (Salmashi), Rahman Garmiani and Hasam Hesami mentioned by Eagleton [Eagleton, 1963, p. 85].

³¹ Classified “top secret”.

³² About the Soviets' distrust of Mustafa Barzani see also [O'Balance, 1996, p. 30].

социально-политической истории. Фонд 495. Опись 216. Дело 141. Название дела: Мустафа Барзани (Мамедов)].

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