

Kurdish leader Barzani dies

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Mustafa Barzani, the exiled Kurdish leader who claimed he was betrayed by the Shah of Iran and the United States, has died, aged 75, just as his people are renewing their quest for autonomy.

Barzani died of lung cancer on Thursday night at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington. He lived his final years an exile in the US, but his home was in the mountainous Middle East region of the Kurds, which includes parts of Turkey, Iraq, the Soviet Union and Iran.

Ironically, his death came at a time when one of those he blamed for his exile, the Shah, is also in exile. And it came when Kurdish nationalists seemed closer to successfully winning autonomy than at any time in recent years.

The revolution in Iran and the weakening of central government control have been accompanied by demonstrations and fighting in the Kurdish areas of Iran aimed at winning the autonomy that Barzani fought for unsuccessfully. Barzani said he never gave up hope. "Of course I have hope. No one can live without hope," he told an interviewer in 1978.

He was born into a family of Moslem zealots and tribal warriors. When he was three, he and his mother went to gaol because of the family's role in the effort to win an autonomous homeland for his Kurdish people. When Barzani's older brother was hanged for his part in a rebellion, the leadership fell to him.

Barzani continued the struggle for better part of the



● Mustafa Barzani: Never gave up hope

next 60 years, fighting from remote mountain hideaways, going into exile, and then returning to fight again.

The final phase of his guerrilla career began in 1961 against Iraq. The fight dragged on for 11 years until the Shah, who was having troubles with neighbouring Iraq, decided it would be useful to back the Kurds in their struggle. According to Barzani, the Shah arranged for his American allies to receive a Kurdish delegation secretly in Washington in 1972. There, the CIA promised to supply arms to the Kurds.

With these weapons, the struggle grew. But in 1975, the Iraqi Government decided to settle its differences with Iran. This mollified the Shah, who decided he no longer had need of the Kurds. Suddenly, Barzani said, the flow of arms stopped, and his army was defenceless.

Most of the Kurds were forced from their homeland to southern Iraq, and some, including Barzani, escaped to Iran. From there, a few hundred came to the United States, including Barzani, who needed treatment at the Mayo clinic in Minnesota.

