

Why the Kurds are friendless

If the Palestinians, why not the Kurds? The practice whereby legitimate rights are recognised only if those who claim them can cause enough international turmoil is well established. It is probably essential to the sanity of foreign secretaries, whose work-load would otherwise know no bounds. But it is hard to justify on any other grounds. The Kurds have been fighting for autonomy since before the Second World War (longer, but that is about as far back as the present link goes) and their periodic defeats have restored the blissful normality. They kill no ambassadors. They hijack no planes. They live in the hills. Who cares?

The Kurds are once again pressing hard the authorities under whom they live. They are concentrating especially on Iran (keeping Iraq for relief and supplies) and every success calls forth more determined vows of vengeance from the conclave of

ayatollahs. There is no noticeable dissent. Indeed the only people who appear to support the Kurds are the Soviet Union and its outliers. They do not support them rhetorically or with draft resolutions at the United Nations; and that is only prudent, for the Kurds are likely to lose once again. Moreover the idea that ethnic minorities have special rights is not one which the Soviet Union wishes to encourage, lest it be put to the test at home. But the Kurdish weaponry, unless captured in the field is of Soviet and Czech manufacture. In so far as the Kurds keep a sector of the Middle East unstable they are to be encouraged. Moscow's reasoning is as simple as that. Conversely Iran finds it easier to represent the Kurds as a Marxist insurgent force rather than a disaffected national minority like the Iranian Arabs.

The studied ambiguity of the rest of the world is almost as cynically explained as the Soviet interest. One difference between the Palestinians and the Kurds is that the former are fighting an OK enemy—Israel—whereas the latter are fighting Moslem governments which collectively speak for the Third World. Another difference is that Palestinians have a vicarious hold over the West's oil supplies, through their sponsors in the producing states; whereas the Kurds are opposing the oil producers of Iran and Iraq. Justice (however defined) for the Palestinians is therefore at the top of the agenda. A meeting to advance the cause will end with prolonged cheers. Justice for the Kurds is not even on the agenda and no meetings take place.

There are said to be 12 million Kurds, though it is unusual knowingly to meet one. Since the land they claim, Kurdistan, overlaps Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, they face a powerful establishment. The many fewer Palestinians, whose envoys are everywhere, face an establishment of one. On the face of it there is little in equity to distinguish the one liberation movement from the other. In politics there is a great deal. A thought for the day is that all who support "the legitimate rights" of the Palestinians without a fleeting reference to Kurdistan should at least examine their motives. For either the Palestinians attract too much international attention or the Kurds do not attract enough.

