

Is Trump another Truman? The Upcoming Challenge of Kurdish Independence

by Norman Berdichevsky (October 2017)



Untitled, [Dara Aram](#)

In my almost nine years of writing for *New English Review*, comprising almost 125 articles, I only repeated one subject nearly verbatim—with the same title (in February, 2010 and July, 2014). It dealt with the Kurds, which is also my topic for this month. The future of Kurdistan, a potentially valuable Muslim ally, friendly to both the United States and Israel, poses a major challenge for President Trump. Is he another Harry Truman, ready to defy the additional ingrained resistance and

deep objections of traditionalists in the State Department and the army chiefs of staff on this question? Their views only solidified under eight years of the Obama administration.

What the president has already said about the Kurds claims to value them as decisive and true allies in the campaign against ISIS and authentic friends of the United States. Soon, however, he will be forced to put up or shut up on what is certain to become a major foreign policy issue, and like so much else, admit that running the country as president is completely different from his stump campaign speeches.

My reason for returning to the Kurdish issue is the upcoming, irreversible referendum on complete independence to take place on September 25, 2017 less than a few weeks away which would finally end America's long term blind support for Iraq, a wholly artificial creation, as well as the present Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—both of which were cobbled together by British imperialism at the end of World War I, and represented only imperialist considerations. Nevertheless, the American foreign policy establishment in the State Department has treated both with kid gloves as allies" or at least "friendly countries," vital to our security interests.

Indeed on this, and the 1947 partition of Palestine by the U.N. vote leading to the creation of the State of Israel, the professional permanent Arabophile State Department and British Foreign Office have always stood together calling the tune to which we have danced until overridden decisively only by President Truman in 1948.

In 1947-48, they did all within their power to sway President Truman, who had the guts and balls to call them out as "The guys in the white spats." Harry Truman was a very decent man committed to fundamental principles of fairness. He tried his best to lend support to some kind of Arab-Jewish cooperation that would avoid conflict but, when absolutely certain that no compromise whatsoever could win any support in the "Arab

world,” he defied the powers representing the oil industry and big business, and the many “experts” who tried to dissuade him from his decision. This included a blanket threat of resignation by former Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, General George Marshall.

When learning that U.N. ambassador Warren Austin had reversed his promise to endorse partition, and instead called for a trusteeship, without the president’s knowledge, he was apoplectic. In the past, he had also been angry at Zionist activists in the Democratic Party and had urged them towards restraint but his anger knew no bounds when he learned he had been usurped by the State Department.

This was President Truman’s reaction in his own [memoirs](#) writing in his diary:

The State Dept. pulled the rug from under me today. I didn't expect that would happen. In Key-West or en route there from St. Croix, I approved the speech and statement of policy by Sen. Austin to the U.N. This morning, I find that the State Department has reversed my Palestine policy. The first I know about it is what I see in the papers! Isn't that Hell! Now, I am placed in a position of a liar and double-crosser. I never felt so alone in my life. There are people on the third and fourth levels of the State Dept. who have always wanted to cut my throat. They've succeeded in doing so.

Yes, these are the same people whom we call “The Deep State” today who similarly are trying to “tame” Donald Trump.

We can read in Truman’s own words his fairness, decency, independence and integrity which led him to his decision to have an American vote cast in favor of partition and later recognition of the State of Israel.

March 22, 1948: President Truman writes to his brother Vivian regarding Palestine: “I think the proper thing to do, and the thing I have been doing, is to do what I think is right and

let them all go to hell!

What can we expect of Donald Trump? In spite of lip service paid to the Kurds on many occasions in the past, there is little optimism to expect in the way of a Truman-like response. Under pressure from the military and State Department diplomats, and our "Allies," as defined by the State Department, the odds are that Trump will cave in.

In general, the American media, and most of all, academia, with its many "experts," serving their own careers, and anxious to solicit aid and research grants in the Arab world, Turkey or Iran, have all been hostile to the Kurds just as they were to the Armenian cause and Zionism.

Time Magazine ([July 14, 1967](#)) typically called the Kurds, "A Troublesome Minority" without presenting any background information on their majority status and heritage in the areas they occupy. Similar views frequently continue to appear in most of the media that frequently and even today ignore both Jewish and Kurdish roots in the region. The absence of any historical or cultural analysis of the presence in the Middle East and Central Asia for millennia of the Kurds, a people, like the Persians and Armenians, who speak Indo-European languages, contributes to the distorted image of the region as the "historical heartland" of the Arabs or "Islam" (as if this was one monolithic entity).

Lost amidst the acrimonious debate over the American intervention in Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein was the emergence of a free Kurdish society, the only long lasting, significant and praiseworthy achievement of that conflict, mistakenly named "Operation Iraqi Freedom." If it were renamed, Operation Kurdish Freedom, perhaps it would have been worth the price.

In so doing, an independent Kurdistan, like Israel, and a free, independent non-communist Armenia would finally have

emerged from the betrayal of the solemn promises made at the end of World War I to all three of them.

To my dismay, but hardly surprising, President Trump has already reneged on some of his signal promises to Israel and indefinitely postponed recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Indeed, the new administration refuses to categorically state that the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem is Israeli territory. Moreover, he has reversed himself on further withdrawal from Afghanistan. Does anyone believe that Afghanistan, after 17 years of fruitless American intervention to prevent a Taliban takeover, is even as trustworthy an ally as South Vietnam was? As Michael J. Totten wrote in "[The Kurds are About to Blow Up Iraq](#)" in the August, 2017 issue of World Affairs Journal, "*The Kurds are as pro-American as Texans . . . An independent Iraqi Kurdistan is far more likely to be stable with American backing than without it, but the Kurds are going forward regardless.*"

Diplomat Dennis Ross in his magnificent book "[Doomed to Succeed](#)" dealing with the machinations of the State Department to forsake and abandon Israel, has definitively outlined the repeated mistaken policies toward demanding additional one-way Israeli compromises on the ground and the erroneous estimates of the importance of pacifying the Arabs and Muslim world. The hundred-year-old record of broken American promises to the Kurds and Armenians is taken from the same mind set.

A Kurdish region was scheduled to have a referendum following the end of World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to decide its fate, which, according to Section III, Articles 62–64 of The [Treaty of Sèvres](#) was to include the Province of Mosul. There was however no general agreement among Kurds on what its borders should be and disputes existed among Armenian and Kurdish representatives. This is a sad fact of two peoples who stood everything to gain by cooperation but were condemned to failure by their own jealous, excessive and mutually exclusive demands, but is certainly solvable today.

Neither of the maximum proposals of both Kurds and Armenians was endorsed by the Treaty of Sèvres, which outlined a truncated Kurdistan located on what is now primarily Turkish territory. Thus, the Kurdish populations of Iran, British-controlled Iraq and French-controlled Syria were all ignored. President Wilson undertook to delineate the borders of the Turkish, Armenian and Kurdish states and did an eminently fair job by all accounts. It too is gathering dust on the shelves.

The division of Kurdistan following World War I was concocted primarily by the European "Great Powers," in callous disregard for the basic human and language rights called for in the original Treaty of Sevres. The Kurds, like the Jews and Armenians were all promised national rights in their historic homelands by the League of Nations but foundered on the rock of Arab opposition. Thus, three of the world's most ancient peoples and belonging to three diverse religions were briefly proclaimed only to be sacrificed to Turkish resistance and British and French great power designs.

Only the modern State of Israel eventually emerged from the cauldron of Arab power ambitions in the Middle East to establish an independent state, thirty years after the conclusion of World War I and the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Armenia had to wait until the fall of the Soviet Empire to regain its ancient independence and the Kurds continue to wait, divided, forgotten and ignored living under the control of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Both Russian and American attempts to increase their influence among the governments of Turkey, Iran and Iraq have almost always resulted in opposition to the Kurdish struggle for increased autonomy.