

**The Kurdish National Movement:  
Its Origins and Development**

*Wadie Jwaideh*

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A native of Iraq, Wadie Jwaideh founded the Islamic and Near Eastern studies program at Indiana University (Bloomington) in the early 1960s and oversaw its rise to national and international recognition until his retirement in the mid-eighties. Under his leadership, Indiana University became an internationally renowned center for the study of Islam and the Middle East. His counsel was often sought by many, including heads of state. Moreover, his encyclopedic knowledge of Arabic, Islamic history, and culture was unmatched. In 2004, his students and friends founded the Jwaideh Memorial Lecture.

This book chronologically follows the developments of the Kurdish question from the suppression of semi-autonomous Kurdish emirates (principalities) in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, through the First World War and the Kurdish rebellions of the 1930s and 1940s and the establishment and fall of the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Although his main concerns revolve around the Kurdish nationalist movement's relative strength and relations to international politics in the Middle East, he follows a comprehensive analytical approach and gives the role of economic, religious, and psychological factors considerable weight.

In his foreword, the well-known Kurdologist Martin van Bruinessen writes that "many scholars have recognized its importance not only as a study of the earlier phases of Kurdish nationalism, but also as a framework for understanding later developments." During the preparation of this study, which was originally a Ph.D. dissertation for Syracuse University in 1960, Jwaideh states of the Kurds: "Their behavior is one of the important factors in the future stability and security not only of the Kurdish-inhabited countries, but of the entire Middle East" (p. xiv). I strongly agree with Bruinessen that this statement is more relevant today than ever; current events in Iraq only serve to bear out how far-sighted Jwaideh was about the Kurds' role in the modern Middle East.

This pioneering study is still a standard work in Kurdish studies. Its strength lies in its originality, as it is based on numerous memoirs of persons living at the time in addition to published British archives and contemporary periodicals in western and several Middle Eastern languages. In addition, the author served as inspector of supplies for Kurdistan in Iraq's Ministry of Interior in the 1940s, which enabled him to observe many of the events discussed in the book's latter part.

The limitation of the study, like many others on the modern Kurdish nationalist movement, is its heavy reliance on British literature. Although the author's analysis is very thorough as well as sympathetic to the Kurds, he does not avoid all of the drawbacks of such an imbalance. This can be discerned in his analysis of the events of the 1930s and 1940s. The study would have been more thorough and balanced had the author been able to corroborate the data he received from the British sources with information contained in Ottoman documents; but unfortunately, those documents were not available to him at that time. There is also some inconsistency in the spelling of names. For example, on page 238, the name of Alo Beg, one of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's followers, has been spelled in two different ways. Knowing Jwaideh's perfectionism, this and other errors can only be attributed to

the later preparation of the thesis for publication and should be avoided in subsequent editions.

I have some reservations about the author's treatment of the nineteenth-century Kurdish revolts. Jwaideh rightly points out that the Ottoman attempts to establish direct control in Kurdistan led to numerous uprisings. The removal of the Kurdish leadership, as represented by tribal chieftains (*emirs*), created a power vacuum that the religious leaders (*tariqah* shaykhs) used to their advantage. He writes:

The rise of the shaykhs to a position of national leadership among the Kurds not only shows the great reverence in which shaykhs were held on account of their religious character, but also indicates that after the overthrow of the great Kurdish princes, there were no secular leaders among the Kurds capable of commanding sufficient power and prestige to fill the vacant seats of authority. (p. 76)

However, this is only partly true. For a thorough analysis of this phenomenon, we need to look beyond Kurdistan and even the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and view these revolts in the wider sociopolitical context of the Middle East and North Africa at that time. The Kurdish revolts, which Jwaideh treats in detail, were either led by or based on Sufi orders, the Naqshbandis in particular. Moreover, they were mostly directed against European intervention in the Ottoman Empire and European attempts to ensure Christian (*viz.*, Armenian and Assyrian) supremacy in Kurdistan. The *tariqahs'* anti-colonialist orientation was not confined to Kurdistan or even to the Ottoman Empire; it was a general phenomenon throughout the Muslim world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although the study was written more than four decades ago, it is still a must-read for both scholars and readers of Middle East affairs.

Othman Ali  
Instructor, History Department, Raymond Chang School  
Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada