

LIFTING THE VEIL

DXING THE CLANDESTINE STATIONS OF IRAN, IRAQ AND KURDISTAN

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American interest in Iraq and her neighbors reached an all-time high during the Gulf Crisis. Maps sellers quickly exhausted their supply of Middle Eastern maps and sales of shortwave radios soared. Yet in spite of all of the attention, Americans still have a difficult time understanding this area of the world. Although shortwave listeners certainly do not represent the typical American, even they have trouble and this is evident in the loggings section of any shortwave publication. A quick review will reveal generalizations and inaccuracies such as "Middle Eastern language", "presumed Arabic", and "chants". Yet according to Mathias Kropf¹, this region contains the greatest concentration of clandestine activity in the world. Would it not be great to know enough to identify the many clandestine stations operating here as well as the regulars? In addition to technical information such as time and frequencies, this article will also examine the politics, religion, and languages of this area. By applying this information DXers will be able to log clandestine stations of Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan and understand what is going on both in front of and behind the microphone. Of all the veils, the one covering languages is perhaps the most opaque.

LANGUAGE

The difficulties most shortwave listeners face in logging stations of the Middle East are most evident by the manner in which the languages of the region, some of which are not even from the same language family, are routinely lumped together in loggings as though they were as closely related as Dutch and German. Yet there are only three languages used by the clandestine stations of this region: Arabic, Farsi (Modern Persian) and Kurdish. The bottom line is that unless a shortwave listener can routinely recognize and distinguish each of the above languages he will not progress very far in the field of Middle Eastern Dxing. The below chart shows how the three languages relate to one another:

Language	Language Family	Group
Arabic	Hamito-Semitic	Semitic
Farsi	Indo-European	Indo-Iranian
Kurdish	Indo-European	Indo-Iranian

Arabic is the most widely used of these three languages with an estimated 150 million speakers. The Arabic usually heard on shortwave is Modern Standard Arabic or "Fusha" Arabic. "Fusha" Arabic is also the language heard during Koranic recitations. (Koranic recitations is a more accurate term than chanting.) Muslims believe that the Koran (Quran is another widely used transliteration) was passed from God via the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad. It was necessary at this time (7th Century A.D.) for Arabic to remain unaltered so that the various religious practices decreed in the Koran could continue to be practiced accurately. Thus "Fusha" Arabic is the language that Mohammad spoke, which was the dialect of Arabic used in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia in the 7th Century. Some of the programming such as dramas and impassioned speeches will be in the various dialects. Every Arab country has at least one dialect and often many others. The Arabs would have us believe that a Kuwaiti will have no trouble understanding Tunisian dialect. Such is not the case. An Iraqi professor related to me that when she and her Algerian friend got together they spoke in French! However for the purpose of shortwave listening the various dialects are quite close to Fusha Arabic and there is no chance of a listener confusing one of the dialects with Farsi or Kurdish.

Farsi or Modern Persian is the language of Iran and is spoken by 50 million Iranians. In addition to the dialects spoken within Iran, there are two dialects spoken outside of Iran that are often mistaken for being separate languages: Dari and Pashto, which are chiefly spoken in Afghanistan.

Kurdish is the language of 18 million Kurds living in the Middle East, Commonwealth of Independent States, and Turkey. After Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish it is the most widely used language in the Middle East. According to David McDowell, "Unlike the Arabs, the Kurds have not yet evolved a single systematized written or spoken language. To this day the Kurds are divided into dialect groups which cannot communicate freely with other Kurds in their mother tongue, although they all share a northwestern Iranian linguistic origin. . . the use of

radio and printed material, and the unifying effect of education are bound to improve the ease of communication considerably, and may even produce an eventual 'literary' style for broadcasting and writing."²

The most effective technique a DXer can use in improving his ability to deal with these languages is to make a reference tape of each. The opportunities to hear both Arabic and Farsi on the radio are numerous and the VOA recently started a Kurdish service. Listeners having trouble tuning in VOA in Kurdish can listen to this language via Iraq on 6560 khz signing on at 0230 UTC (0130 UTC in summer). Having a tape of each of the languages allows the DXer to compare the various languages and get a feel for them. The tape will also serve as a handy reference to be compared to a tape of a log in order to determine the language. In time the DXer will become as familiar with these languages as most are with Portuguese and Spanish. Appendix I is a vocabulary list of words from our three languages that are commonly heard on the clandestine stations of the Middle East.

RELIGION

Compared to languages, the veil covering religion is a bit thinner. The main religion of this area is Islam and while there are various religious minorities, none are involved in any clandestine radio activity. Unfortunately, although terms such as "fundamentalists" and "Shiites" have appeared for over a decade in the western press, the press never seems to have gotten around to explaining the history behind these terms. There are two main sects in Islam: Sunni and Shi'ite. Sunni Moslems are often thought of as "orthodox" Muslims and they represent the majority. Technically, a Sunni Muslim is devoted to one of the four standard "rites" of Islamic law.³ The split of Islam into two main sects occurred over the issue of succession. After Muhammad's death, a few close relatives succeeded him as caliph, that is as head of the Islamic empire. A struggle broke out over the order of succession during the reign of the third caliph, Ali. With Ali's death, men other than direct descendants of Muhammad occupied the caliphship. Shiites (a word meaning followers of Ali) considered these subsequent caliphs to be usurpers and they believed that Ali's descendants to be the true caliphs. Having said that, it is important to note that these affiliations are as much political as they are religious. It is worth noting that although Iran is the only country with a Shiite majority, Iraq has a sizable Shiite minority living in the southern Iraq.

RECENT HISTORY

1979 was a milestone year for both of these countries. In that year, Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq and the Islamic revolution occurred in Iran resulting in the rise to power of the Ayatollah Khomeini. A year later, the two countries entered into a protracted conflict that was to engulf them until 1988. Both sides supported religious and political proxies which led to an expansion of clandestine activity as well as jamming that continued even after the two sides stopped fighting. Best described as a cold war, they remained antagonists even after Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. While Iraq and the Allies used jamming and clandestine stations before the war the air campaign destroyed much of Iraq's transmitting capability as the Allied clandestine activity continued unabated. On the heels of defeat by the Allies in Desert Storm, insurgencies broke up in both northern and southern Iraq. In the Shia' south of Iraq, the insurgents received material support as well as support on the airwaves with at least one Iranian-backed clandestine station going on the air. The Iraqis regained control of the cities in the south although insurgent activity continues in the numerous marshes of southern Iraq. At the same time the largest Kurdish insurgency ever, broke out in northern Iraq. The Kurds gained control of some of the largest cities in the north. But the subsequent Iraqi counterattack resulted in a mass civilian exodus from the cities. Faced with a civil disaster that some say the Allies caused, the Allies declared a safe haven for Kurds north of the 36 parallel. Fighting continued, albeit on a much reduced scale. Subsequent to the uprisings, Iraqi broadcasting efforts have concentrated on transmitting Kurdish and Arabic broadcasts, jamming, and provided support for clandestine stations. Iran continued to experience internal turmoil throughout this period but that did not preclude it from jamming and support for numerous clandestine broadcasts. Much of the clandestine broadcasting and jamming undertaken by Iran and Iraq relates to their support for the other's Kurdish minority. Therefore, a closer look at the Kurds, their history and their politics is in order.

THE KURDS

With a total population of 18 million in the Middle East, the Kurds easily eclipse the population of countries such as Syria and Iraq.⁴ Geography has both blessed and cursed the Kurds (see map). The mountainous terrain of Kurdistan has allowed the Kurds a certain measure of freedom yet it is this same location that has resulted in the Kurds being a sizable minority in several nations but a majority in none. Tribalism is the essential element in Kurdish society, although this is less true in urban areas. Tribalism has given great strength to past Kurdish uprisings but it has also been a weakness as some tribes at times have sided with the central government

(be it Iranian or Iraqi) against their fellow Kurds. Tribalism also eclipses nationalism in Kurdish society. Leftist ideologies have made some headway, particularly in the cities.⁵ The Kurdish struggle for a nation state started after the First World War. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled Kurdistan until the war, allowed the British to expand their sphere of influence. The Treaty of Sevres (1920), was the first attempt by Britain and Turkey (the successor state to the Ottoman Empire) to achieve a peace settlement. This treaty would have granted local autonomy to the Kurds in eastern Anatolia. In addition independence would be granted to the Kurds in eastern Anatolia as well as the wilayat of Mosul (the northern area of Iraq) after one year if they so desired. This Treaty was unacceptable to Turkey however, and she continued to struggle against the British. Britain and Turkey finally signed a peace treaty in 1926. A lot had changed in those six years, however; eastern Anatolia was to remain under Kurdish control and the wilayat (province) of Mosul had been incorporated into the new state of Iraq. While failing to create a Kurdish state, the British had succeeded in waking up the force of Kurdish nationalism. The Kurds continued to struggle for freedom but it took another world war for them to achieve any success.

During the Second World War, the USSR and Britain occupied Iran ostensibly to protect the oil there as well as provide protection for supply convoys of Western aid to the USSR. Both sides were to withdraw shortly after the war, but the Soviet troops remained. Kurds living in and around the city of Mahabad, Iran, seeing an opportunity in Iran's preoccupation with the Soviet troops, formed the Republic of Mahabad on January 22, 1946. In addition to some Soviet support, the new Republic had been bolstered when the entire Barzani tribe, led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, fled Iraq and sought asylum in Mahabad. The Mahabad Republic was short-lived and Iranian troops quickly occupied the Republic after Soviet troops left northwest Iran. The leaders of the Republic were hanged while the fighters of the Barzani tribe fled to the Soviet Union. Thus ended the only republic the Kurds have ever had. With the Iraqi revolution of 1958 Mulla Barzani returned from exile; his Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) became the predominate Kurdish



party. A pattern emerged that has continued until the present day of alternating periods of fighting and autonomy negotiations with the Iraqi government. In the early 1970s and with substantial Iranian backing, the Kurds achieved a great deal of success on the battlefield. Iran and Iraq sought to solve their bilateral problems through the Algiers agreement of 1975. As a result, Iranian support of the Iraqi Kurds ended and the Kurdish insurgency collapsed. Mulla Mustafa Barzani went into exile in the United States where he died in 1979. 1976 saw the emergence of a rival to the KDP in the form of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani, who had broke away from the KDP in the 1960s. Iran did not witness the same intensity of insurgencies that occurred in Iraq until after the Islamic revolution of 1979 when the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the party that had led the Mahabad Republic, once again tried to assert itself in this area but was defeated by the Iranian army. Support for each other's Kurds by Iran and Iraq resumed with Iran-Iraq war of 1980.

The KDP, now led by one of Mustafa Barzani's sons Masoud, once again received Iranian support but in addition to fighting the Iraqi army in northern Iraq it was fighting KDPI in northern Iran. As expected, the KDPI was receiving Iraqi support. The PUK, which had received substantial Syrian support, eventually sided with the Iraqi government and fought against the KDP. The KDPI did not gain much success as Iraq seemingly channeled most of its support to other groups. Indirectly cooperating against Iraq toward the end of the war, the PUK and the KDP created an enclave under their control in northern Iraq. The end of the war in August 1988 allowed the Iraqi army to concentrate against the Kurds and substantially reduce this enclave. The latest Kurdish uprising was after the Gulf War in 1991 as previously mentioned. Having covered the Kurds, a look at some of the other groups involved in clandestine broadcasts is in order.

OTHER GROUPS

The Iranian resistance group that has received the most Iraqi support over the years is the Mujaheddin-e Khalq (People's Warriors). But with support often comes control. The group is believed by some observers to be a mere puppet of Baghdad. During the Iran-Iraq war, Mujaheddin-e Khalq fighters fought with the Iraqi army and have continued to commit acts of sabotage and carry out assassinations in Iran. Saddam has supplied the group with heavy weapons such as tanks and these constitute the core of the National Liberation Army based in eastern Iraq.⁶ The remaining Iranian and Iraqi opposition groups will only be mentioned with their particular station.

CLANDESTINE STATIONS

In general, reception of Middle Eastern clandestines is limited to our local evenings (0230+) as they sign on for their morning transmissions.

Jamming has a large role in the clandestine broadcasts of this region. The jamming is described as bubble jamming and the term is used generically, but the Iraqi and Iranian types of jamming each have a distinctive sound. Once again, a reference tape will be quite handy. Start by making a tape of the jammer on 4750 khz that is jamming Iraq's Arabic service and presto, you have a copy of an Iranian bubble jammer. Now contrast this with the jamming used against the Voice of the Iraqi People. When you hear an unidentified station you can often rapidly narrow down the possibilities if you recognize the type of jamming being used against it. Finally, in trying to listen to a broadcast through jamming try both sidebands as the jammers will at times be operating in only one of them. The below is not comprehensive, but rather lists stations that can be logged in North America:⁷

CLANDESTINE STATIONS BROADCASTING TO IRAQ

Iraqi Republic Broadcasting from Baghdad, Voice of the Iraqi People (Arabic-Itha'at Al-Jumhuriya Al-Iraqia min Baghdad, Sowt Ash-Shab Al-Iraqi). This Western and Arab backed station started broadcasting to Iraq shortly before the Gulf War under the name Voice of Free Iraq. After the failed insurgencies against Saddam Hussein in early 1991, the station changed its name to the Voice of the Iraqi Opposition. In yet another name change last fall the station changed its name to the above. A full Id is a must in logging this station as the first part of its Id is essentially Iraq's Arabic service Id. The station also plays the Iraqi national anthem at sign on and off and also uses Iraq's Arabic service news theme. Monitoring has confirmed that Egypt is one of the transmitter sites and QSLs have confirmed Saudi Arabia as another. Programming is in standard Arabic with some Iraqi dialect. Some Kurdish programs were noted in the past, but not in the last year. The station's message has been consistent in spite of the name changes: "Attention Iraqi army-conditions in Iraq are deplorable, overthrow Saddam Hussein." Try around 17957, 15650 and 9985 khz shortly before 2315 (2215 summer) sign off. This station is almost always jammed. Write Saudi broadcasting for a QSL.

Voice of Rebellious Iraq (Sowt Al-Iraq Ath-tha'air). This station has ties to a Shiite umbrella organization, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCARI with council sometimes translated as assembly). The group operates from Damascus and seeks to establish an Islamic state in Iraq. The transmitter is most likely in Iran. Only logged once tentatively in North America. 6330 khz at 0430 sign on, but formerly used 7085 khz.

Voice of Iraq (Sowt Al-Iraq). Operating from a Syrian site, this station apparently does not have any ties to a particular group but is simply a Syrian way of irritating Iraq and is consequently almost always jammed. Programming in standard Arabic and Iraqi dialect. 9950 khz at 0400.

KURDISH CLANDESTINES FROM GROUPS OPERATING IN IRAQ

Iraqi Kurdistan Radio (Radyo Kurdestana Iraqia-Kurdish) (Itha't Al-Kurdistan Al-Iraqi-Arabic). Formerly known as Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan, this is the station of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani. The KDP is the largest Kurdish group within the Kurdistan Front, a coalition of Kurdish groups. Programming is mostly in Kurdish with some Arabic and supports the KDP's call for Kurdish autonomy within Iraq. 4175 khz with 10kw signs on at 0430 with a second 400 watt transmitter operating on 6295khz with both transmitters broadcasting from Sala'deen in northern Iraq.⁸ No jamming has been noted against this station.

Voice of the People of Kurdistan (Aira Dangi Gelli Kurdistan-Kurdish) (Sowt Sha'b Kurdistan-Arabic) belongs to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani. The PUK is the second largest group in the Kurdistan Front. 7085v and 4930v khz at 0400 sign on with no jamming noted.

Voice of the Kurdistan Revolution Radio (Ith'at Sowt Kurdistan Ath-thawra). The Kurdish People's Democratic Party (KPDP), a small Marxist party, is behind this station. The party used to operate from London. Noted by BBC-MS on 6716 khz at 0550 with Arabic programming.

Voice of Unity (Sowt al-Tawhid-Arabic) is the voice of the minor Kurdish Socialist Party (KSP), which broadcast at 0300 on 4130 khz according to BBC-MS.

CLANDESTINE STATIONS BROADCASTING TO IRAN

Voice of the Mojahed (Seda-ye Mojahed-Farsi) is operated by the Iraqi-backed Mojahideen Khalq organization that was formed in 1965. This leftist group has resisted the Islamic republic as much as it did the Shah. Programming is in Farsi and frequencies constantly change in order to avoid heavy jamming. Check 48 and 59 meters at 0230 (0130 summer) sign on. QSLs have been received from A. Hossein, Secretary, MISS, P.O. Bx 9720 London WC1N, 3XX, Great Britain.⁹

Radio Freedom Radio Azadi operating from an Egyptian transmitter site this is the station of exiled group National Movement of Iranian Resistance that was led by former Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar until his assassination in Paris in 1991. The Farsi language programs are jammed. 9400 khz at 0230 (0130 summer).

Iran's Flag of Freedom Radio. This station broadcasts IDs in a number of languages including English at the start of its transmissions. Subsequent programming is only in Farsi; however, and the station is often jammed. A little known organization called the Front for the Liberation of Iran led by a former Prime Minister is behind the station which transmits from Egypt at 0330 (0230 summer) on 15556, 11470, 9250 and 9045 khz. QSL hunters can write to: Flag of Freedom, Reza Farhadi, P.O. 19740 Irving, CA 92714.¹⁰

KURDISH ORGANIZATIONS BROADCASTING to IRAN

Voice of Iranian Kurdistan (Aira Dangi Kurdistanani Irana-Kurdish) (Seda-ye Kurdistanani Iran-Farsi) is the station of the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party (IKDP), the largest Kurdish party in Iran. Programs are in both Kurdish and Farsi and the station opens with about 15 minutes of Kurdish music. 0330 (0230 summer) on 4065 khz. This station is unjammed.

CONCLUSION

Accurately logging the above stations can be a daunting task. I feel that some Dxers believe that most of my success in logging these stations is due to the fact that I speak some Arabic. Keep in mind that Farsi and Kurdish are not even closely related to Arabic and I am able to id these stations on a regular basis. While I have pointed out some techniques that are perhaps particular to Dxing these stations, such as taping jammers, most of the techniques I use are also used by Dxers every day in logging stations from regions such as Indonesia and South America. Factors such as language recognition skills, station knowledge, and propagation all play a role in successful Dxing. Any DXer is capable of Dxing these stations and although it requires some practice and study, the rewards are great.

ENDNOTES:

The following was used for background information: *Political Handbook of the World*, Arthur S. Banks. CSA Publications, Binghamton, NY 1991; *Kurdish Dictionary*, Joyce Blau, Brussels 1965; *The Combined New Persian-English English-Persian dictionary*, Abbas and Manoochehr Aryanpur Kashani, Mazda Publishing 1986.

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³Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *A Consise History of the Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder CO 1983, p. 79

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⁵Anthony Hyman, "Elusive Kurdistan The Struggle for Recognition". Center for Conflict Studies, London, 1988.

⁶*International Defense Review*, September, London, 1991, p. 16

⁷Finn Krone, *Clandestine List*, Danish Shortwave Club International, Greve Danmark 1991; numerous issues of *World Broadcasting Information* from 1991 and 1992.

⁸*Media Network*, Radio Netherlands, May 21, 1992

⁹"Onda Corta" via *DX South Florida*, #273

¹⁰Pete in Michigan on the ANARC SWL Net, October 1991

APPENDIX I

A short vocabulary list for Arabic, Kurdish and Farsi:

ENGLISH	ARABIC	KURDISH	FARSI
communist	shua ' wi	kommunist	kommunist
fighter	fedaeen	pesh merga	mujahed
freedom	tahrir	azadi	azadi
opposition	mua ' rada	dijati	maqawamet
party	hizb	---	hizb
people	sha ' b	gelli	khalq
radio	itha ' t	radyo	radio
republic	jumhuriya	---	jumhuri
resistance	mua ' rada	dijbir	baidari
revolution	thawra	---	inkelab
struggle	nidal	khabati	satiz
voice	sowt	aira dangi	seda-ye