

# PEOPLE WITHOUT A LAND

Attacked by enemies and betrayed by friends,  
the Kurdish people fight for survival

In the early morning hours of September 3, sailors aboard the U.S.S. *Shiloh* watched solemnly as Tomahawk missiles sliced their way through the sky on their way to Iraq. The missiles slammed into air-defense sites in southern Iraq. President Bill Clinton had ordered the missile strike as a warning to Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein.

What provoked the U.S. attack? On August 31, Hussein had sent 40,000 Iraqi troops to invade Kurdistan, an area in northern Iraq. That area—and the Kurds who live there—have been under the protection of the U.S. and its allies since the Persian Gulf war ended in 1991.

The U.S. had warned Iraq against such an invasion. But Hussein sent his troops in anyway, saying that he had been invited by the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), one of two warring groups of Kurds.

The U.S. attack focused world attention on the plight of the Kurds, one of the world's largest ethnic minorities without a country of its own. More than 20 million Kurds live in the mountains of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

## UNIQUE CULTURE

The Kurds, who are Muslims, have their own language and culture. In 1920, after World War I, an international treaty called for the creation of an independent Kurdish state. Though the Kurds have agitated for the creation of such a state ever since, they remain under foreign rule. In all the countries where they live,

the Kurds have faced problems ranging from discrimination to attempted genocide. The Kurds have often played the role of political pawns in the violent chess games of their host nations, which has reinforced an old Kurdish saying: "Except for mountains, the Kurds have no friends."

Even the U.S., despite the September missile attack, has been an unreliable friend. In the early 1970s, for example, the U.S. enlisted the Kurds in a covert scheme to help overthrow Saddam Hussein, with the help of neighboring Iran. In exchange, the U.S. promised the Kurds independence. But when Iraq and Iran later signed a peace agreement, Iraq then crushed the Kurds, and the U.S. looked the other way.

## HELP PROMISED

After Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War by the U.S. and its allies, President George Bush promised U.S. help if the Kurds in the north of Iraq would rise up in revolt. When they did, Hussein fought back—and the U.S. did not intervene. More than 1.5 million Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran, again feeling betrayed. In the midst of this crisis, the U.S. declared that those Kurds who remained in northern Iraq would be protected by the U.S. and warned Hussein to stay out of the north.

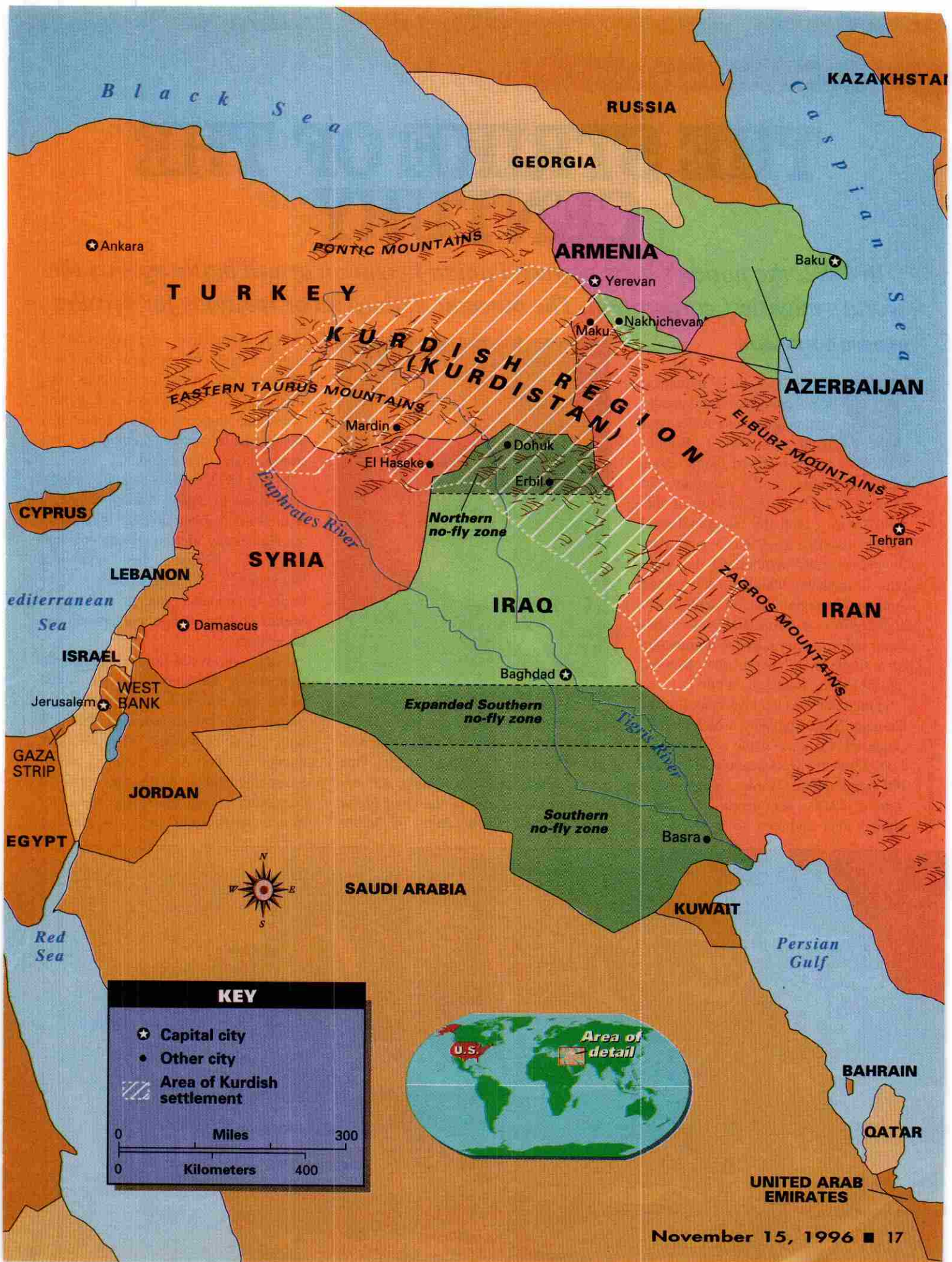
But with Kurdish dreams of independence crushed, once-unified Kurdish political groups began fighting each other, until the U.S. brokered a cease fire in 1994. The division caused the rival groups to seek outside aid. One group—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

(PUK)—turned to neighboring Iran. In response, the other group, the KDP, asked its former arch enemy, Iraq, to join forces to oust its Kurdish rivals from northern Iraq.

Although the U.S. missile attacks prompted Saddam Hussein to remove his troops from northern Kurdistan, the pro-Iraqi KDP remains firmly in control. And the U.S. has made it clear that it will not fight a war to save the Kurds. As one anti-Iraqi Kurdish political official recently told a U.S. reporter: "The Americans are just interested in there being no fighting. They want 'no war, no peace'—they want us to hang in limbo, as we always have."—Steven Manning

## GEO-QUIZ

- ▶ The map shows Iraq, the area called Kurdistan, and surrounding countries. Note the "no-fly zones" in southern and northern Iraq. After the Persian Gulf War ended in 1991, the UN set up these zones where Iraq is not allowed to fly warplanes. Use this information to help answer the following questions:
- ▶ Most of Kurdistan is located in what four countries?
- ▶ U.S. Navy ships would sail into what body of water to fire missiles at Iraq?
- ▶ The city of Baghdad is located at about what latitude and longitude?
- ▶ Using an almanac or other resource material find out: Which country has the highest percentage of Kurds among its population.



**KEY**

- ★ Capital city
- Other city
- ▨ Area of Kurdish settlement

0 Miles 300  
0 Kilometers 400



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