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On a personal note, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, George and Marianne Lortz. Thank you for your support. You have shown a lot of patience in watching me decide what I finally want to do with myself. I know it sounds cliché, but thank you and I love you both.

To my brother, my grandparents, and all my other family and friends, thank you for your support and love as well.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses an area of key interest in modern-day Iraq – the Kurdish military, or *peshmerga*. Translated as “those who face death”, the *peshmerga* have become a staple of Kurdish culture in the last 100 years. Officially organized by Mustafa Barzani in 1943, the *peshmerga* have come to represent the Kurdish nationalist movement, specifically in Iraq. Unfortunately, there have been few detailed works at length on the *peshmerga* and their link to the Kurdish struggle. Throughout this paper this link is shown in conjunction with the development and organization of Kurdish military forces. This thesis focuses on the *peshmerga* from the 19th century to 2003.

As mentioned, the *peshmerga* began as an organized force in 1943. Prior to this date, Kurdish fighters had participated in many regional uprisings against the governments of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Many of these rebellions were tribal or religiously organized and had little to do with creating an autonomous or independent Kurdish state. After his own regional rebellion in the late 1930s, Mustafa Barzani and his brother, Shaykh Ahmad Barzani, were sentenced to exile by the Iraqi government. Attempting to marginalize Barzani rebelliousness, the Iraqi regime moved the Barzanis to various Iraqi cities. During their exile, the Barzanis, especially Mustafa Barzani, were exposed to the nationalist ideas of urban Kurdish intellectuals. After his return in 1943, Mustafa Barzani realized a push against the Iraqi government would have a better chance of succeeding if coupled with a military force guided by strict rules and regulations.

After their creation, the *peshmerga* played key roles in both the Kurdish Republic of 1947 in Mahabad, Iran and the Kurdish-Iraqi War of the 1960s. Between these two eras, however, was a 12-year exile for many of the *peshmerga*, including Mustafa Barzani, in the Soviet Union. This paper uses 1958, the year of *peshmerga* return, as a way to divide the developmental years of the *peshmerga* from its role as a cohesive military force in modern-day Iraq.

Although other political bodies emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, Barzani and his *peshmerga* remained the internal and international face of Kurdish nationalism. After his death in 1979, the *peshmerga* continued to fight for Kurdish nationalism, albeit under the banner of Barzani’s Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the newer Party for a United Kurdistan (PUK),

led by former Barzani follower Jalal Talabani. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, *peshmerga* for both parties were forced to choose between alliances with each other, with regional powers, or with world powers such as the United States. Treaties, agreements, and alliances were made and broken as many of the outside governments used the Kurdish military groups as means to their own ends.

In 2003 the *peshmerga* were able to play a key role in the overthrow of the Saddam Hussayn regime. Through their cooperation with U.S. military forces, years of Kurdish struggle were rewarded and they were included in the new inclusive Iraqi government. Although this thesis ends with the conclusion of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, a brief epilogue discusses the future of the *peshmerga* and the role it and its leaders are having in the new Iraqi government.

FOREWORD

In researching Kurdish history, specifically in regards to the *peshmerga*, a researcher is likely to find numerous spellings of the same location, person, event, etc. To standardize this paper, many of these subjects are spelt as they appear in David McDowall's A Modern History of the Kurds, regardless of the spelling in the source of the information. Only within official titles appearing in the bibliography might the spellings differ (ex. Masud Barzani is the same as Massoud Barzani, author of Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement (1931-1961)). If a subject does not appear in McDowall's work, it is spelt as it appears in the text of the source.

Also, the mention of Kurdistan as a region is not to imply any political opinion, rather to define the areas of Kurdish predominance in the nations of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.