A Millennial Bond: An Analytical History of the Kurdish-Jewish Relationship to 2010

Introduction

The relationship between the Kurdish and Jewish peoples represents a unique and paradoxical phenomenon in the annals of Middle Eastern history. It is a narrative that spans millennia, evolving from a state of ancient, organic coexistence in the mountainous heartlands of Mesopotamia to a modern, politically charged strategic alliance forged in the crucible of 20th-century statecraft. This report traces the trajectory of this bond, examining its foundations in shared geography and culture, the profound rupture caused by the mass exodus of Kurdistani Jews in the mid-20th century, and the subsequent clandestine partnership that emerged between the State of Israel and the Kurdish national movement. The central argument is that the Kurdish-Jewish relationship is best understood as a story of two distinct but deeply interconnected phases. The first is an era of grassroots coexistence, defined by a remarkable degree of cultural syncretism that existed alongside firm ethno-religious boundaries. The second phase, following the near-total departure of Jews from Kurdistan, is characterized by a strategic, state-level alliance born from shared enemies and geopolitical necessity. To comprehend the covert ties that developed after 1948, one must first grasp the preceding centuries of interaction that created a reservoir of goodwill and a sense of shared identity as non-Arab minorities in a hostile environment.[1] By analyzing this relationship up to 2010, this report will illuminate how an ancient bond, having survived the trauma of separation, was successfully repurposed to navigate the treacherous landscape of the modern Middle East, culminating in a robust, albeit unofficial, partnership between Israel and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Part I: Foundations of an Ancient Coexistence

1.1. Echoes of Exile: Origins and Foundational Myths

The Jewish presence in the lands of Kurdistan is one of the most ancient in the diaspora, a fact cemented by both historical evidence and powerful foundational traditions that shaped the community's self-perception for centuries. These narratives provided a socio-theological anchor, framing their identity around a story of exile and an enduring, latent longing for return. This historical self-conception was not merely a collection of folk tales but a functional framework that would later prime the community for the political realities of the 20th century. When the modern message of Zionism arrived, it resonated not as a foreign political ideology but as the contemporary manifestation of a 2,700-year-old story the community had been telling itself.

The most potent of these traditions, held by Kurdistani Jews themselves, is that they are the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, exiled by Assyrian kings following the conquest of the northern Kingdom of Israel around 722 BCE.[3] Biblical accounts in the Book of Kings record that the Israelites were settled in "Halah, in Habor, by the Gozan River, and in the cities of the Medes," locations geographically situated in or near the region of Kurdistan.[3] This narrative established the community's identity as arguably the "most ancient diaspora," predating the Babylonian and Roman exiles and fostering a unique and deeply ingrained connection to the biblical Land of Israel.

While the "Lost Tribes" tradition is rooted in oral history, more concrete evidence attests to a significant and high-status Jewish presence in antiquity. The most striking example is the 1st-century CE Kingdom of Adiabene, centered in the region of modern-day Erbil. The royal family, including Queen Helena and her son King Monobaz II, converted to Judaism.[3] Their piety and generosity were so renowned that they are mentioned frequently and praised in the Talmud for sending substantial aid and lavish gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem.[4] The conversion of an entire ruling dynasty provides incontrovertible proof of a flourishing Jewish community with considerable influence long before the rise of Islam.

This vibrant presence continued through the medieval period. The 12th-century Jewish travelers Benjamin of Tudela and Pethahiah of Regensburg visited the region and documented a substantial and well-established Jewish population, with Benjamin of Tudela reporting over 100 Jewish settlements.[3] He described wealthy communities in Mosul, a commercial and spiritual hub adjacent to Kurdistan, and noted that in the town of Amadiya alone, there were 25,000 Jews. His chronicles also give a vivid account of David Alroy, a 12th-century messianic leader from Amadiya who led a rebellion against the Abbasid Caliph, intending to lead the Jews back to Jerusalem.[4] Alroy's movement, though ultimately unsuccessful, demonstrates a community with the capacity for political and military agency, further challenging any notion of a passive or marginal existence.

1.2. The Fabric of Kurdistani Jewish Life: Integration without Assimilation

The daily life of Jews in Kurdistan was defined by a complex and delicate balance: a deep integration into the local cultural milieu coexisting with the strict maintenance of a separate

ethno-religious identity. This equilibrium, sustained over centuries, was made possible by the community's unique social and political position. The relationship was characterized by a paradox of highly permeable cultural boundaries and rigid social ones. This was sustained by the Jews' apolitical and non-threatening status, which allowed for deep cultural borrowing without the perceived risk of assimilation or demographic competition from the perspective of the Kurdish majority. This dynamic allowed them to be culturally close to their neighbors while remaining socially distinct.

A critical distinction, emphasized by the community itself, is the preference for the term "Kurdistani Jews" over "Kurdish Jews". While they were integrated into the geographic and cultural landscape of Kurdistan, they did not identify as ethnic Kurds. They were Mizrahi Jews who hailed from Kurdistan, maintaining their own communal structures and pointedly not partaking in the Kurdish tribal system. This highlights the nuance between a regional identity ("Kurdistani"), which they embraced, and an ethnic one ("Kurdish"), which they did not.

Their linguistic heritage was a primary marker of this distinctiveness. The community largely spoke various dialects of Jewish Neo-Aramaic, a direct linguistic descendant of the Aramaic of the Talmud and the lingua franca of the ancient Near East.[4] The persistence of Aramaic as a vernacular, long after most other Middle Eastern Jewish communities had adopted Arabic, underscored their relative isolation and ancient roots. The main dialect families included *Lishana Deni* in the Zakho region, *Lishan Didan* near Urmia and Mahabad, *Lishanid Noshan* around Erbil, and *Hulaulá* in southern Kurdistan.[8] While they also spoke Kurdish dialects to communicate with their neighbors, Aramaic remained the language of the home and the community.[9]

Religious and communal life further solidified their separate identity. The synagogue functioned primarily as a house of prayer, with homes being the preferred venues for social gatherings. The community revered the tombs of biblical prophets believed to be buried in the region, such as Nahum in Alqosh and Jonah near Nineveh, making annual pilgrimages to these holy sites.[1] Kurdistan also produced its own notable Torah scholars, the most exceptional being Asenath Barzani. In the 17th century, she became the head of the yeshiva in Amadiyah after her husband's death and was recognized as a leading Torah instructor, earning the rare title of

tanna'it (female Talmudic scholar).[4] Her life and work testify to a rich and, at times, unique scholarly tradition.

Despite this separation, there was significant cultural syncretism. Kurdistani Jews absorbed many cultural traits from their Muslim Kurdish neighbors, including folklore, music, and styles of dress. A prime example of this blending is the Seharane festival, a spring celebration of nature that mirrored the Kurdish Newroz festival. Muslim Kurds were known to participate in Jewish folk life and religious observances. This cultural exchange, however, did not breach fundamental religious boundaries; customs surrounding death and burial, for instance, remained distinctly and fundamentally Jewish. The overall relationship is consistently described as "harmonious" and "reasonably well," existing within the traditional Islamic framework where Jews held protected but subordinate *dhimmi* status.[2] Because they did not compete for land or political power, they were not perceived as a threat, allowing for a level of

cultural intimacy rarely seen elsewhere between Jewish and Muslim populations.

Part II: The Great Dispersal and the Dawn of a New Era

The 20th century unleashed a series of political earthquakes that shattered the ancient world of Kurdistani Jewry. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the imposition of new, rigid nation-state borders across the traditional Kurdish homelands, and the rise of aggressive, centralizing Arab and Turkish nationalisms created an environment increasingly hostile to all minorities.[13] This period of upheaval coincided with the growth of the Zionist movement, which found a receptive audience among a community steeped in the traditions of exile and return. The confluence of these forces culminated in the mid-century exodus, a traumatic uprooting that ended millennia of Jewish life in Kurdistan but simultaneously laid the foundation for an unprecedented new chapter in the Kurdish-Jewish relationship.

2.1. The Shifting Sands of the 20th Century

The end of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire irrevocably altered the political geography of the Middle East. The Kurdish-inhabited territories were partitioned among the newly formed states of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, with a significant portion also falling within Iran.[13] This division not only shattered the concept of a unified Kurdistan but also subjected the Jewish communities living there to the authority of competing and often hostile nationalist projects.

In Iraq, where the vast majority of Kurdistani Jews resided, the establishment of a British-backed Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad ushered in an era of Arab nationalism. This ideology, focused on creating a unified Arab identity, left little room for the country's diverse non-Arab and non-Muslim minorities. While the mountainous north afforded the Kurds and Jews a degree of insulation from the political currents of the capital, the centralizing impulse of the modern state apparatus would increasingly erode their traditional autonomy.

Concurrently, the Zionist movement was gaining momentum. Some Kurdistani Jews became active in the movement from the early 20th century, and a number of families immigrated to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s.[5] Figures like Moshe Barazani, whose family moved from Iraqi Kurdistan to Jerusalem in the late 1920s and who became a prominent member of the Lehi underground, exemplify this early connection. For the broader community, Zionism offered a modern political framework for their age-old religious yearning for Zion.

2.2. Persecution and Exodus

The situation for all Jews in Iraq took a dark turn in the 1940s. The pro-Nazi coup of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in 1941 unleashed a wave of antisemitic sentiment that culminated in the *Farhud*, a

brutal pogrom in Baghdad that saw hundreds of Jews murdered and their property looted.[13] While the violence was concentrated in the cities of the Arab south and did not directly reach the Kurdish regions, the event sent a shockwave of terror through the entire Jewish community of Iraq, signaling that their long-standing presence was no longer secure.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 triggered a systematic campaign of persecution by the Iraqi state. The government enacted a series of punitive laws targeting its Jewish citizens, freezing their assets, dismissing them from public posts, imposing travel restrictions, and eventually passing legislation that allowed them to leave only if they renounced their citizenship and forfeited all property.[5] The Iraqi government also attempted to incite violence in the north, pressuring Kurdish chieftains to participate in anti-Jewish pogroms. This created a complex dynamic where the primary threat emanated from the distant state apparatus in Baghdad, even if local relations remained largely positive.

The experience of the exodus from Iraq was not monolithic; it differed significantly between the Arab-dominated center and the Kurdish periphery. For the Jews of Baghdad and Basra, the "push" factor was direct and violent hostility from both the state and segments of the populace. For Kurdistani Jews, however, the "push" was almost entirely from the remote state, while the local "pull" of Kurdish assistance and sympathy acted as a crucial facilitator and emotional buffer. This divergence is critical. The final, traumatic memory of Iraq for Kurdistani Jews was not one of betrayal by their immediate neighbors but of shared opposition to the regime in Baghdad. This preserved the foundation of goodwill that would prove essential for the future alliance with the Kurds.

Before their departure, the Jewish population was heavily concentrated in Iraqi Kurdistan, a demographic reality that would shape the focus of future Israeli-Kurdish relations.

Table 1: Estimated Jewish Population in Kurdistan by Region (c. 1947)

Region / Province	Estimated Jewish Population	Source(s)
Iraqi Kurdistan		
Mosul Province	10,345	
Kirkuk Province	4,042	
Arbil Province	3,109	
Suleymaniye Province	2,271	
Diyala Province (incl. Khanaqin)	2,851	[3]
Total (Iraqi Kurdistan)	**~22,618**	
Iranian Kurdistan	19 communities (pop. not specified)	
Turkish Kurdistan	11 communities (pop. not specified)	
Syrian Kurdistan	1 community (Kamishli)	

Note: These figures, based primarily on Iraqi statistics from 1947 , represent the settled population and may not capture all individuals. The total number of Kurdistani Jews across all regions was estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000 in the early 20th century. The table

clearly illustrates the demographic concentration in Iraqi Kurdistan, which explains why the subsequent strategic alliance was overwhelmingly focused on the Kurds of Iraq.

2.3. Operation Ezra and Nehemiah: The End of an Epoch

Faced with escalating persecution and presented with a narrow window to leave, the vast majority of Iraqi Jewry, including nearly the entire Kurdistani Jewish population, departed for Israel between 1950 and 1951.[19] This mass migration, known as Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, was a massive airlift that transported approximately 120,000 people to the nascent Jewish state. Personal testimonies describe a harrowing and humbling journey. Families were forced to leave behind homes, businesses, and centuries of accumulated heritage, permitted to take only a single suitcase and a small amount of money.[13] They were airlifted in crowded planes, often sitting on the floor, embarking on a journey into an unknown future.

The motivations for this mass exodus were a complex confluence of push and pull factors, defying simplistic narratives of either a Zionist "rescue" or an Arab "expulsion".[17] Undeniably, the acute political and physical danger posed by the Iraqi state was a powerful "push". Yet, this was coupled with the powerful "pull" of a deep-seated religious and messianic yearning for Zion, a dream that was now, for the first time in two millennia, a tangible reality. The establishment of Israel was seen by many as the beginning of the prophesied redemption, a call that was impossible to ignore.

In this dramatic final chapter, the role of the Kurds stood in stark contrast to that of the Iraqi state. Multiple accounts report that Kurdish neighbors were saddened by the departure of the Jews, with some even helping to maintain the synagogues their Jewish friends left behind.[6] Crucially, Kurds were instrumental in facilitating the escape, with many Jews being smuggled out of Iraq through the mountainous Kurdish territory into Iran or Turkey before being airlifted to Israel. This act of solidarity at the moment of departure cemented a bond of gratitude and preserved the positive grassroots relationship, creating a legacy of goodwill that would directly enable the strategic alliance that followed.

Part III: A Clandestine Alliance: Israel and the Kurds (1948-2010)

The departure of the Jewish community from Kurdistan did not end the relationship; it transformed it. The organic, grassroots coexistence of the past gave way to a calculated, clandestine alliance between a state actor, Israel, and a non-state national movement, the Kurds of Iraq. This partnership was born of mutual necessity and a shared sense of isolation in a hostile region. Driven by Israel's "periphery doctrine," this alliance evolved over decades from covert military support for an insurgency into a semi-overt partnership with a de facto state, representing one of the most enduring and unusual alliances in the modern Middle East.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq marked the single most important turning point in this strategic relationship, transforming it from a proxy war against a common enemy into a partnership with an autonomous entity, shifting the core logic from purely tactical to broadly geopolitical.

3.1. The Periphery Doctrine: A Strategy Forged in Isolation

In the years following its founding in 1948, the State of Israel found itself encircled by hostile Arab nations committed to its destruction. In response to this profound strategic isolation, Israeli leaders, most notably Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, formulated the "periphery doctrine".[12] The strategy was to bypass the immediate wall of Arab hostility and forge alliances with non-Arab states and minority groups on the "periphery" of the Arab world. The primary targets were non-Arab states like Turkey, pre-revolutionary Iran, and Ethiopia, as well as ethnic and religious minorities within the Arab states themselves, such as the Maronite Christians in Lebanon and the Druze.[12]

Within this framework, the Kurds were of paramount strategic importance. As a large, stateless, non-Arab nation with a history of rebellion against the central government in Baghdad, they were a perfect candidate for the periphery doctrine. An alliance with the Kurds of Iraq offered Israel a unique opportunity to weaken and distract a powerful and implacably hostile Arab adversary, preventing the Iraqi army from bringing its full weight to bear on Israel's eastern front.[12]

3.2. The Barzani Connection (1960s-1975): The Covert Alliance

Building on tentative contacts established as early as the 1930s by figures like the future Mossad director Reuven Shiloah, the relationship between Israel and the Iraqi Kurds formalized in the 1960s.[15] The alliance centered on Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the charismatic leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), who led the Kurdish national movement in a long-running war for autonomy against Baghdad.

Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, became the primary instrument of this covert relationship. Through a logistical channel provided by the Shah's Iran, a fellow partner in the periphery doctrine, Israel began to supply the Kurdish Peshmerga with critical support.[24] This aid was multifaceted. It included significant financial support and military hardware, such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, which dramatically increased the Peshmerga's fighting capacity.[23] Israeli military advisors were stationed at Barzani's headquarters in the mountains of northern Iraq, providing training in modern warfare techniques and tactical planning.[12]

Israel even established field hospitals to treat wounded Kurdish fighters. Furthermore, Mossad collaborated with its Iranian counterpart, SAVAK, to help establish the KDP's own intelligence service,

Parastin, in 1966, professionalizing the Kurds' intelligence-gathering capabilities against the Iraqi army.[22]

The benefits were mutual and clear. For Israel, the alliance was a stunning strategic success. The Kurdish insurgency tied down as much as 80% of the Iraqi army, effectively neutralizing Iraq as a significant threat during the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War.[12] The Kurds also provided valuable intelligence on the Iraqi military and assisted in the escape of the few remaining Jews in Iraq. For Barzani and the KDP, Israeli support was a lifeline. It provided the military means to sustain their rebellion and offered a crucial link to a powerful, Western-aligned state, which they hoped would eventually bring the United States into their corner.[22]

3.3. Rupture and Realignment (1975-2003)

The covert alliance came to an abrupt and disastrous end in 1975. At a summit in Algiers, the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein of Iraq signed the Algiers Agreement, a deal in which Iran, in exchange for territorial concessions in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, agreed to cease all support for the Kurdish rebellion.[12] Without the Iranian logistical channel and safe haven, the Kurdish revolt collapsed overnight. The event was a catastrophic betrayal for the Kurds and a major strategic setback for Israel, which had lost its most effective proxy against Iraq.[12]
During the long and difficult years that followed, which included the brutal Anfal genocide perpetrated by Saddam Hussein's regime, the formal strategic relationship lay dormant. However, the "soft power" connection was kept alive by the large and vibrant Kurdistani Jewish community in Israel. This community, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, served as a living bridge between the two peoples.[1] They acted as cultural ambassadors and a consistent political lobby within Israel, organizing support for Kurdish refugees, publicizing their cause, and ensuring that the memory of the alliance and the plight of the Kurds were not forgotten.[1]

3.4. A New Reality in Northern Iraq (2003-2010)

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which overthrew the Ba'athist regime, was the single most important turning point for the Kurds and for their relationship with Israel. The fall of Saddam Hussein paved the way for the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a constitutionally recognized, autonomous federal entity with its own government, parliament, and security forces (the Peshmerga). This new reality transformed the relationship from a clandestine proxy war into a semi-overt partnership with a de facto state.
This new status allowed for a more open, though still unofficial, relationship. High-level Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his successor Benjamin Netanyahu, began to publicly voice support for the Kurds and their right to self-determination, with Netanyahu calling them a "fighting people... worthy of their own political independence".[12]
Cooperation expanded beyond the military sphere. Economic ties flourished, most notably with Israel becoming a primary and reliable customer for Kurdish oil exported independently

of Baghdad, providing the KRG with a vital stream of revenue.[22] Security cooperation also continued, with numerous reports indicating that Israeli security firms and former military personnel were involved in training Peshmerga forces and providing advanced technology.[22] By 2010, the KRG had solidified its position as Israel's most stable and dependable partner in a volatile region, a relationship built on a unique fusion of historical affinity, diaspora politics, and hard-nosed strategic interests. The alliance had matured from a tactical tool to weaken an enemy into a geopolitical partnership to cultivate a stable, non-Arab, pro-Western ally in a strategically vital location.

Part IV: Myths, Perceptions, and Realities

The modern Kurdish-Jewish relationship exists within a complex web of regional propaganda, competing internal perspectives, and the powerful influence of historical memory. While the strategic alliance between Israel and the Iraqi Kurds is a matter of historical record, its interpretation and meaning are fiercely contested. For regional adversaries, it is a convenient tool for delegitimization. For Kurds themselves, it is a source of both hope and apprehension. And for the Kurdistani Jewish diaspora, it is the modern expression of a millennial-old bond, a bridge of memory connecting a lost homeland to a new reality.

4.1. The "Second Israel": Propaganda and Delegitimization

One of the most persistent narratives used against the Kurds by their adversaries in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria is the accusation that their struggle for self-determination is a Zionist plot to create a "Second Israel" in the heart of the Muslim world.[1] This propaganda trope serves a dual purpose. First, it attempts to strip the Kurdish national movement of its indigenous legitimacy, reframing a genuine, long-standing struggle for rights and autonomy as a foreign, imperialist conspiracy.[2] Second, it mobilizes anti-Israeli and antisemitic sentiment within the wider region to justify brutal crackdowns against the Kurds.

This narrative reached a fever pitch during the 2017 KRG independence referendum. When Israel was the only country in the world to openly support the Kurdish vote for independence, leaders in Turkey and Iran seized upon it as proof of the "Zionist plot".[2] The sight of Kurdish youths waving Israeli flags at pro-independence rallies—an act intended as a gesture of gratitude to their only state supporter—was powerfully co-opted by this propaganda machine and broadcast across the region as evidence of treachery. This accusation effectively isolates the Kurds, linking their aspirations to the region's most polarizing conflict and alienating potential supporters in the Arab and Muslim world.

4.2. A Spectrum of Kurdish Views

Contrary to the monolithic image presented by their enemies, Kurdish opinion on Israel and the alliance is varied and nuanced. There is no single "Kurdish view," but rather a spectrum of perspectives shaped by political affiliation, religious belief, and personal experience.

The dominant view, particularly within the secular nationalist movements like the KDP, is overwhelmingly positive and pragmatic. Many Kurds look to Israel as an inspirational model: a small, historically persecuted nation that successfully achieved statehood and has been able to defend itself against overwhelming odds.[1] They see a shared fate as non-Arab minorities and view Israel as a vital and reliable strategic ally, often the only one willing to support their cause when they have been abandoned by the rest of the world.[22]

A second camp holds a more neutral or critical position. While not hostile to Israel, these Kurds are wary of being used as pawns in a larger geopolitical game between Israel, Iran, and the United States. Some are also critical of specific Israeli policies, particularly towards the Palestinians. Seeing parallels between the Palestinian experience of occupation and displacement and their own history of oppression, they find it difficult to offer unconditional support.[30]

Finally, a minority of Islamist Kurds oppose Israel on purely religious grounds. Their worldview prioritizes religious solidarity with the Palestinians and Hamas over Kurdish national interests. These groups often echo the anti-Israel rhetoric of the very states that oppress the Kurds, highlighting a deep tension within Kurdish society between nationalist and pan-Islamist identities.

4.3. The Kurdistani Jewish Bridge: Memory and Influence

The strategic alliance and the Kurdistani Jewish diaspora in Israel exist in a symbiotic, mutually reinforcing loop. The diaspora's positive historical memory provided the "soft power" foundation that made the "hard power" strategic alliance politically and socially palatable within Israel. In turn, the strategic alliance's existence elevated the status and visibility of Kurdistani Jewish culture within Israel, validating their heritage as strategically important.

Today, the Kurdistani Jewish community in Israel numbers up to 200,000 people and serves as a living link to the shared past.[6] They have been instrumental in preserving cultural traditions, such as cuisine, music, and the vibrant Seharane festival, which is now a major cultural event in Israel celebrating Kurdish heritage.

More than just preserving culture, this community has acted as a crucial political, economic, and social bridge. They have served as powerful advocates for the Kurdish cause within Israeli society and government, influencing policy and public opinion in favor of the Kurds.[1] Their collective memory, which is overwhelmingly positive regarding their historical coexistence with Kurds, stands in stark contrast to the often-traumatic memories of Jews who fled persecution in many Arab lands. This positive narrative has provided a powerful and authentic emotional foundation for the modern strategic relationship. The alliance gave their unique Mizrahi identity a new relevance in modern Israel, and their identity, in turn, gave the alliance a historical depth and warmth that pure realpolitik could never achieve.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Kurdish and Jewish peoples, as it stood in 2010, is a testament to the enduring power of historical affinity and the pragmatic demands of geopolitical survival. It is a story that evolved through two distinct and transformative phases. The first was an era of organic, grassroots coexistence spanning millennia, where Jewish communities thrived in the mountainous lands of Kurdistan. This period was defined by a remarkable equilibrium of deep cultural exchange and steadfastly separate ethno-religious identities, a harmony made possible by the Jews' apolitical and non-threatening status within the broader Kurdish society. The foundational myths of this ancient community, particularly the tradition of descent from the Lost Tribes of Israel, created a unique self-perception that primed them for the call of Zionism.

The second phase was precipitated by the cataclysmic events of the mid-20th century. The rise of hostile nation-states and the establishment of Israel led to the mass exodus of virtually the entire Kurdistani Jewish population. This traumatic separation, however, did not sever the bond. Instead, it repurposed it. The final memory of their homeland was not one of betrayal by their Kurdish neighbors—who often aided their escape—but of a shared opposition to the hostile state in Baghdad. This preserved a vital reservoir of goodwill.

From the ashes of this dispersal rose a clandestine, strategic alliance between the new State of Israel and the Iraqi Kurdish national movement. Driven by Israel's periphery doctrine and the Kurds' desperate need for support, this partnership became one of the most durable covert relationships in the region. It enabled the Kurds to sustain their struggle and significantly benefited Israel's national security by distracting a major Arab adversary.

The 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein marked the final evolution of this bond within the timeframe of this report, transforming the relationship from a covert proxy war into a semi-overt partnership with the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government. By 2010, this alliance was a multifaceted reality, encompassing security cooperation, vital economic ties, and open political support. It stood as a unique geopolitical feature, a robust partnership grounded in a rare fusion of ancient memory, diaspora politics, and calculated strategic interest. The millennial bond had not only survived the rupture of separation but had been successfully reforged to navigate the perilous realities of the modern Middle East.

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