

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Issue: The question of the Kurdish Separatist movement

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INTRODUCTION

From an indigenous community in the Mesopotamian plains, to a nation consisting of approximately 25-35 million people, the Kurds have fought for autonomy for centuries.

The Kurdish people inhabit the general area around the Zagros Mountains, named Kurdistan. Their population is mostly spread within four states and divided amongst them in a number of regions -

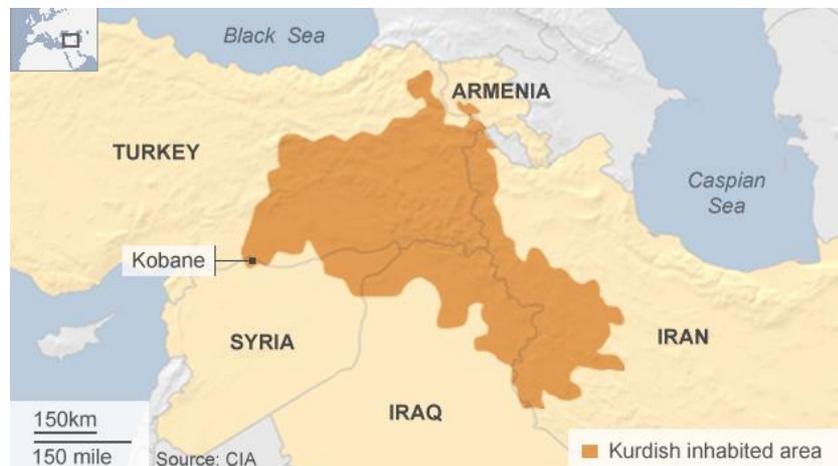


Figure 1: Kurdish Inhabited Area

namely Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, with Armenia and Georgia also having a smaller share of Kurds.-. Specifically, Northern Kurdistan is located in the Turkish southeast region as well as in the northern Armenia area, Rojava in northern Syria, Southern Kurdistan in northern Iraq and Eastern Kurdistan in the Iranian southwest.

Additionally, Kurdish people are tied within their culture. They have developed a Kurdish language which has many scripts. Their language is recognized as an official language in Iraq as well as a regional language in Iran. That being said, they have no standard dialect and many of them are bilingual. As regards their religion, the majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, although there is a minority of Kurdish people who are Shia Muslims. Although Kurds share the same cultural identity, there are many political movements within Kurds who do not share the same ideas and principles. In this way,

Kurdish separatism has been created and has resulted in a number of conflicts and efforts towards autonomy.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Separatism

The will and support of separation of a number of people from a wider mass of people, community or society by reason of “ethnicity, religion or gender”¹.

Autonomy

The right of the people to self-governance which is granted through independence from external powers and influence.

Governorate

A governorate is an “administrative division”² of a nation. Characteristically, a governorate is run by a governor.

Secession

Secession refers to when a group, individual, ethnicity or nation formally departs from “alliance, federation, or association”³

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kurdish Separatism in Iraq

Kurdish separatism in Iraq dates back to the 20th century and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, in 1918, after the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Iraqi Kurds were burdened by British colonial rule. The Kurds, in their timely struggle towards independence organized a number of revolutions in opposition to British as well as Iraqi power.

With this as a backdrop, after a broken promise of autonomy through the Treaty of Sevres⁴ in 1920 and an inability to discuss the option of Kurdish autonomy in the late 1950s ,

¹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/separatism>

² <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/governorate>

³ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/secede1>

the first Kurdish-Iraqi war erupts in 1961. Kurdish rebels were fighting for an independent Kurdish region in northern Iraq. With 80% of the Iraqi ground forces involved in the conflict and an approximate number of 105,000 casualties the conflict ended in a stalemate in 1970. After the end of the first Kurdish-Iraqi war, the two opposing sides reached a peacekeeping agreement in 1970. Specifically, the agreement was one of the first and most important attempts to resolve the Kurdish-Iraqi conflict promising Kurds a number of autonomous results. It promised the establishment of three Kurdish governorates as well as other measures such as a place in local government bodies and institutions which would be put into effect four years after the signing of the agreement. However, due to the ratification of a plan of Arabization Iraq engaged into, the peace agreement failed and thus, more conflict emerged, leading to the second Kurdish-Iraqi war between 1974 and 1975.

That being said, the worst of all conflicts occurred when Saddam Hussein was in power during the Iran-Iraq war. More specifically, in 1983 the Kurdish militias in northern Iraq rebelled against Saddam Hussein in a quest for autonomy. As a response Saddam Hussein launched a massive attack in Kurdish inhabited regions through the use of armed forces. Additionally, he launched several chemical attacks against civilians with the use of chemical weapons. All in all, conflict was ongoing up until the ratification of the international anti-Saddam alliance which put into effect a semi no-fly zone in regions where conflict was most prominent, namely northern Iraq, in 1991 at the end of the First Gulf War. This left space for Kurdish forces to establish their power in northern Iraq and thus, initiate reconstruction of the region. Infrastructures were rebuilt and a Kurdish administration was created which both helped in the recovery of the Kurdish displaced community. The reconstruction lasted up until the beginning of the 2nd millennium when a parliamentary democracy was put into place in 2003 and the economy started growing. Lastly, in 2005 the Iraqi constitution acknowledged an independent Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Today, this region is run by the local Kurdish government and is the only current fully autonomous Kurdish region.

Kurdish separatism in Turkey

Unlike Iraqi-Kurdish conflict which resulted in the creation of an independent Kurdish region in northern Iraq, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict is still an ongoing one. The

⁴ Treaty of Sèvres: The Treaty was signed in 1920 after the finish of WWI between the Ottoman empire and a number of Western nations, namely Great Britain, Italy and France. The Treaty triggered the start of the division of the Ottoman Empire. The 64th article of the Treaty promised Kurds in Mosul their participation in a future autonomous Kurdistan.

Turkish-Kurdish conflict roots back to the end of the 20th century when Kurdish insurgencies inside Turkey asked for Kurdish rights to be recognized as well as for greater autonomy for the Kurdish population. Additionally, the leading insurgency group is the Kurdistan Worker's Party which is also known as the PKK.

The PPK was established in the late 1970s, with roots in Marxist ideologies. In addition, the PKK was the leader of the first Kurdish rebellion in Turkey in 1984. The insurgents asked for a fully autonomous Kurdistan within Turkey. The conflict led to the displacement of many Kurdish people who turned to other Turkish cities for residence. In the 1990's the group altered its appeals and asked for more Kurdish rights for the Kurdish inhabitants in Turkey. After the conflict reached its peak in the 1990's, the leader of the PKK was put into jail for "treason" in 1999. This burdened the PKK greatly which later on in the same year announced a unilateral ceasefire agreement which would last for five years in the Turkish region.

Within this five-year period the PKK made various attempts to change its reputation through measures such as alterations of their name and minimization of demands. However, after being declared a terrorist organization by Turkey as well as other Western nations it resumed its rebellion in 2004. The conflict lasted for five years, specifically, until 2009 when secret peace talks between the PKK and Turkish representatives took place, resulting into the implementation of a ceasefire by the PKK. Throughout the duration of the secret peace talks, Turkish officials imposed harsh measures against the Kurds. In detail, they restricted the most important Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Part, from participating in the constitutional court as well as arrested a great number of Kurdish activists for their supposed violation of Turkish anti-terror laws.

It is important to mention that the Turkish anti-terror law has been vastly denounced by a number of organizations such as Amnesty international as well as the European Council due to the vague nature of its definition of terrorism. Moreover, the arrests were also condemned due to timely pre-trial custody periods which varied from half a year to various years as well as inadequate amount of evidence the arrests were based on. Unfortunately, the secret talks were broken when violent encounters took place between Turkish authorities and PKK soldiers in 2011, leaving 14 Turkish men dead. The break of the peace talks led to the restart of the conflict which has been characterized as "the heaviest

fighting seen in three decades”⁵ by experts. In this conflict, civilians were also targeted by Kurdish forces through violence in urban regions of Turkey. Moreover, in 2012 peace talks between Turkish officials and the still-imprisoned leader of the PKK were initiated, however, they reached no peaceful agreement. That being said, violent still continues to take place today between Kurds in the Turkish region and Turkish authorities whilst the Kurds still demand extended human rights for their population.

OTHER MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/ Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Since 2013, the Kurds have been in conflict with ISIL. The conflict occurs currently both in Iraqi as well as Syrian Kurdistan. Both of the regions are in conflict with ISIL in order to protect the regions they inhabit since ISIL has tried to gain command of these territories. As regards the conflict in Syrian Kurdistan, it plays a major role in the Syrian Civil War. Specifically, war erupted between ISIL and Kurdish separatists in Syria when Kurdish separatists tried to gain control of areas controlled by ISIL in the governorate of al-Hasakah as well as other parts of Syrian Kurdistan such as Aleppo and Rojava. The Kurds aimed at pushing back ISIL forces from the area in order to establish greater autonomy and freedom. Similarly, the conflict between Iraqi Kurds and ISIL began when ISIL gained grounds in the Iraqi Kurd city of Sinjar and Makhmour.

That being said, the conflict quickly escalated, since generals asked for Kurdish forces to “push back”⁶ ISIL forces as far as possible, and now takes up 650 miles in one side of the Iraqi Kurdistan border. Since 2013, both conflicts are on-going. What is important to understand is that as experts have expressed, the fight against ISIL, is both a risk and an opportunity for the Kurds. It is a risk, since Kurdish territories are at risk to be under Islamic control but it is also an opportunity since it has brought new territories to Kurds. For example, in the Iraqi city of Mosul, when ISIL forces gained power, Iraqi forces left the city. The Kurds then seized control of the city from ISIL forces, since the Iraqi Army had left, and then was left on its own to build a nature which emitted political autonomy as well as gave space for economic development due to oil mines in the area.

United States of America (USA)

⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20971100>

⁶ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/29/fight-lives>

The relationship between the Kurds and the United States of America is a controversial one. According to journalists, in 2003, when the USA invaded Iraq in a fight to bring down then President Saddam Hussein, one of their closest allies was Kurdish forces. As a matter of fact, Kurdish forces never did harm American soldiers in their fight against Saddam Hussein. Specifically, in 2011 when US forces left Iraq not one American soldier was killed in Iraqi Kurdish regions. Furthermore, Barack Obama, president of the USA has made positive statements about the Kurdish government mentioning that it is “functional the way we would like to see”. The USA has also helped the Kurds in their fight against ISIL. Specifically, the USA has sent jets and drones to the areas where the Peshmerga Kurdish forces have been fighting with ISIL. All that aside, critics are still unsure whether the USA want Iraqi Kurds to secede from Iraq. Some believe that USA officials have discouraged companies from investing in Kurdish oil since they might suffer “dire legal consequences”⁷. This has affected the Kurdish government negatively as regards economic growth, a factor that is essential for the Kurds.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1920	The Treaty of Serves is signed, promising greater autonomies for Kurdish people.
1957	The Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria is founded.
1961	The first Iraqi-Kurdish war erupts.
1962	120,000 Kurdish people lose their Syrian citizenship after Syrian authorities launch a population census.
1986	Syrian police forces open fire at Kurdish crowd celebrating the “Newroz” spring festival and asking for Kurdish traditional wear to be allowed.

⁷ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/29/fight-lives>

1991	The UN adopts Security Council resolution number 688 urging Iraqi authorities to respect the human rights of Kurdish civilians in their respective region.
1999	PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, is put into jail by the Turkish authorities.
2005	A Kurdish region in northern Iraq is recognized as an autonomous region by the Iraqi constitution.
October 2012	Political prisoners of Kurdish nationality launch a hunger strike for the purpose of asking for better conditions for the leader of the PKK as well as desiring the allowance of the use of their language in justice as well as education.
March 2013	Leader of the PKK announces unilateral ceasefire between the PKK and Kurdish forces.
July 2015	ISIL attack kills 32 people in the Kurdish inhabited town of Suruc.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Security Council resolution 688

The UNSC resolution #688 was voted on the 5th of April of 1991 and it represents one of the most important weapons against the human rights violations occurring in the area at the time. It was adopted after three representatives, namely the representatives of Iran, Turkey and France, wrote letters to the Security Council voicing their concern over the political suppression of the people of Iraq as well as the Kurdish minority in Iraq. As a result, the resolution was adopted and Iraq was obliged to end the suppression as well as accept a number of humanitarian methods. Specifically, it had to accept the involvement of international human rights organizations in its nation in order for the organizations to protect civilians and allow the Secretary General of the United Nations to create reports on the state of populations affected by the human rights violations. It is important to understand that the resolution was widely used by nations such as the United States to implement no-fly zones over Iraq as well as other humanitarian measures in order to end

the violations of human rights which occurred in Iraq against Kurdish people as aforementioned.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Solution Process

The term “Solution Process” is used by experts to refer to previous attempts in the resolution of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Specifically, it refers to peace processes which occurred between Turkish authorities and the leader of the PKK. Although many events occurred throughout the peace process which brought distress, such as bomb attacks in the Turkish Justice Ministry, both parties were determined to resolve the issue. In this way, in 2013, a letter written by the PKK leader was read out in a traditional holiday celebration, announcing a unilateral ceasefire between the opposing forces. A month later, the PKK withdrew its men from the area stretching from Turkey to Northern Iraq, marking the finish of the conflict. However, the ceasefire was short lived. In July 2015, after a number of attacks, Turkish forces announced that they will be starting a violent campaign against PKK forces in the area which in turn, made the PKK resume its hostility.

Iraqi Kurdistan 2005 Referendum on Independence

In 2004, a non-partisan delegation delivered 1.7 million signatures, signed by Kurdish people, to the United Nations in order to ask for an Independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan. At first, the demand was dismissed. However, in January 2005 the referendum occurred. Its question was whether the Kurdish people of Iraq wished to secede from Iraq and create an independent state or remain a part of the Iraqi nation. The result of the referendum was in favor of independence by 98.8% while only 20.000 Kurds voted to stay in Iraq. As a result, in 2005 the Iraqi constitution recognized southern Kurdistan as an independent state.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Due to the nature of the issue, a multifaceted approach is required. Although the creation of an independent Kurdish state consisting of all Kurdish inhabited areas would be ideal in the minds of the Kurdish population, such a drastic measure would bring further instability in the region. The Kurdish independence needs to happen in stages.

Primarily, global leaders will need to apply pressure to Turkish and Syrian leaders to grant fundamental human rights to Kurdish people. United Nations member states will need to evaluate whether the Kurdish language will be accepted as an official language whether it should be included in institutions such as public education in Turkey and Syria. Moreover, countries should evaluate the number of Kurdish representatives in the respective governments of Turkey and Syria. Furthermore, the issue of Kurdish activists who have been put in prison with inadequate evidence, as aforementioned, should be addressed.

In addition, the problem of militarism should be resolved. Specifically, UN overviewed peace talks between the PKK and Turkey should begin again and a ceasefire agreement should be re-implemented. Other measures will also be needed in order to ensure that the ceasefire agreement is to be respected.

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