

General Assembly 4

The Question of Kurdistan



Forum:	General Assembly 4
Issue:	The Question of Kurdistan
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Introduction

Kurdistan, also known as ‘the land of the Kurds’, is a mountainous region located in Western Asia which is currently consisting of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and northern Syria (as shown in Figure 1). It is inhabited by approximately 35 million Kurds, a stateless, predominantly Muslim ethnic group who have their own culture and Language, which contains 2 main dialects (Kurmanji and Sorani). Unlike most Middle



Figure 1 *Kurdish Inhabited Area*

Eastern countries, women are prominent in their society, and they do not identify themselves as Arabs. They were originally inhabitants of ancient northern Mesopotamia, and since the Middle Eastern expansion in the 6th century, Kurds have been fighting with Arabs to maintain their territory and separate themselves from them due to their ongoing hostile relations that usually included conflicts.

After the First World War, and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds have been seeking independence and the formation of their own sovereign state. Though this was promised to them by Western Powers in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, these promises were neglected after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 as Western Powers were unable to meet the Turkish demands and live up to the promises they made to the Kurds, at the same time. Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran are not willing to give up parts of their land to the Kurds as they have no interest in a Kurdish state. This is because a Kurdish state would cause the redraw of borders for the involved countries, and more importantly, the loss of oil-containing land, which would cause a significant reduction in their oil revenues and will weaken their economy to an extent.

To this day, Kurds have been fighting with the four involved countries for independence and the international recognition of an autonomous Kurdish state. Multiple armed conflicts have happened throughout the years as Kurds continue fighting.

Definition of Key Terms

Autonomy

Autonomy allows a region within a country to control or govern itself, instead of it being controlled by another government. Autonomy can happen in a region without it forming its own state.

Independence

An autonomous region with its own state, its own government and is not ruled by any other country.

Coup D'état

When a dictator, military forces or any other organization takes power and control of a country illegally by the overthrowal of the existing government.

Referendum

A general vote on a single political question that has been referred for a direct decision.

General Overview

Kurdish-Turkish conflict

The largest percentage of Kurds live in Turkey, and they make up almost 18% of Turkey's Population. The Kurdish-Turkish Conflict is an armed conflict led by rebellious Kurdish groups who have either tried to attain autonomy for Kurds inside of Turkey or have demanded separation from Turkey. This conflict has cost Turkey over 300 billion dollars in military costs alone.



The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is the main player in the Turkish conflict. The PKK is a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group (declared a terrorist group by Turkey), founded in 1978 by a group of Kurdish Students and led by Abdullah Öcalan. During its first days, there was great oppression towards Kurds in Turkey, and they were referred to as 'Mountain Turks' by the government. The use of Kurdish culture and language was prohibited in Kurdish-inhabited areas and after the military coup d'état in 1980, the use of the Kurdish language led to the arrest of many people. The PKK's initial demand was an independent Kurdish State and the establishment of human rights for the Kurds living in Turkey. However, The Turkish government arrested Öcalan in 1999 and since then the group has shifted their position to protests for autonomy.



Figure 2 PKK Revolution

Although the PKK began in 1978, the first insurgency began in 1984, when they announced the uprising of Kurds. Over 40,000 people died in the conflict, mostly Kurds. Both sides have been accused of human rights abuses. Turkey was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for the executions, torture, and forced displacements of Kurds as well as destroying villages and the prosecution of teachers who provided Kurdish education as well as the students who demanded it. The PKK, however, were internationally condemned, mainly by Turkish allies, for using terrorist tactics such as suicide bombers and child soldiers, as well as involvement in drug trafficking. The first insurgency ended in March 1993, almost 2 years after the Gulf War, when half-Kurdish President of Turkey Turgut Özal tried to negotiate peace. The negotiations led to a cease-fire by the PKK, which then ended in June 1993, igniting a new insurgency.

Several ongoing insurgencies and cease-fires occurred from 1993 until 2013, when Öcalan read a letter to the PKK which called a cease-fire that included disarmament and withdrawal from Turkish land. There were 2 years of peace as the conflict escalated again in 2015. Till this day ongoing acts of violence occur from both sides with the death toll growing with each passing day.

Rojava conflict

Syria is home to over 2 million Kurds who make up approximately 10% of its population. The repression of Kurds has been going on for decades in Syria and the government has never acknowledged their existence. They were never given a legal status and hundreds of thousands of them were stripped of their citizenship. Their language and culture were suppressed, and they faced terrible discrimination from the government. Following the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the

Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), also known as Rojava, was then formed in 2012 by Kurdish separatists living in Syria. Rojava is a de facto autonomous region in northeast Syria which is not recognized by the government. It has a powerful militia which led the fight against ISIS. It is impressive that Rojava was able to form a democracy in the middle east, while it was surrounded and attacked by ISIS militias, Assad's authoritarian regime, and Turkey.

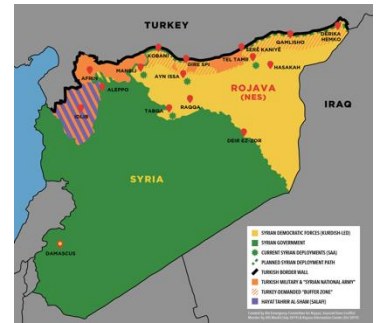


Figure 3 Region of Rojava

At the wake of the Syrian Civil War, multiple uprisings were occurring in major cities in the west, therefore, Assad was forced to pull back his troops from the Kurdish populated region to defend the major cities. The Kurds took advantage of the situation and decided to govern Rojava but as it started taking shape, ISIS attacked the region. With Assad being occupied by the Civil War, Rojava had to lead the operations against ISIS. With the support of the US, the conflict went on for 4 years, until the US declared victory in 2019.

Although the Kurds have promoted Rojava as a post-war solution, they have been criticized in the form of human right violation claims against non-Kurds and for their ties with the PKK, who have been accused of terrorism.

Kurdish separatism in Iran

6 million Kurds comprise approximately 10 percent of Iran's population and they have settled there since before the Islamic conquests in the 7th century. Kurdish dialect was derived from Persian dialects in the early centuries, and Irani Kurds represent a diverse range of tribal and ethnic groups from the region. Since the end of the First World War, there has been a long separatist dispute between the Kurds and the government. They have not managed to establish any sort of autonomy in Iran.

Although Kurds do not have autonomy, they have managed to form and establish a local military group, known as the Kurdistan Free Life Party, which protests and strives for Kurdish self-determination. Due to human rights abuses during their protests, and affiliations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, they are considered a terrorist group.



Kurdish separatism in Iraq

Iraq is home to the only Kurdish minority which was able to gain some sort of autonomy. However, during the process, these Kurds suffered scandalous human rights violations, especially during Saddam Hussein's rule. After the Kurds sided with Iran after the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam decided to destroy multiple Kurdish villages and use chemical weapons against them during an anti-Kurd movement he started known as the Anfal Campaign. This campaign took place between 1986 and 1989 in which over 180,000 Kurds were killed.

Following the Gulf War, US intervention started to occur and an autonomous region with its own government and army was given to the Iraqi Kurds. In 1992, the Peshmerga Armed Forces and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) were created, making the region the strongest area in the country. The KRG governs approximately 6 million people and is the only official Kurdish authority in the world. This Kurdish area contains parts of the country which are filled with oil and gas and with the Kurds selling these resources independent of Iraq, they are boosting their economy. On the other hand, the Peshmerga Armed Forces, is a military group which have become a stronger and more efficient fighter unit than the Iraqi army as they have managed to sustain attacks from ISIS more efficiently. They have assisted Rojava and the US in the fight against ISIS and they helped capture both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden's messenger.

However, despite all this, the Kurds still do not have independence and they have fought for it during the past years. In 2005, an unofficial referendum was held in which 98% of the electorates supported independence, though no changes took place. After having raised global awareness regarding this issue, the KRG decided to conduct another referendum with 93%

being in favor of independence. Expectedly, the Iraqi government decided not to recognize the referendum once again, as they claimed it was unconstitutional, resurrecting the issue again, after a long time. The reason the Iraqi Kurds are in the best position relative to other Kurdish minorities, is because they have been very active in their protests regarding their independence.



Figure 4 Kurdish Protests in Iraq

Major Parties Involved

Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq

Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq are the four countries involved in this issue. Kurds are populated in regions in these countries and ongoing conflict has been occurring in each country. Kurds are fighting for independence in these countries though these countries have no interest in giving them pieces of their land to establish a Kurdish state.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a far-left political and militant group which was formed by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 in Turkey as a form of opposition against the suppression that Turkish Kurds faced. More than 40,000 Kurds have died due to ongoing and frequent conflict between them and Turkey. Many international organizations alongside



Figure 5 PKK

multiple countries have classified them as a terrorist group due to their human rights violations in the conflicts with Turkey. Though, there are still some countries who do not wish to recognize them as such a group. Although ceasefire has been reached in multiple occasions, they did not last long as either party would usually not hold their promises intact. Currently, the group is willing to make peace with Turkey only under US guarantees.

United States of America (USA)

The USA has been a major supporter of Kurdistan, providing vital aid since the First World War. The USA first supported the formation of an independent Kurdish state in the Treaty of Sevres, and although that did not occur, the USA still managed to help the Kurds in multiple ways. After the Gulf War, the US foisted a no-fly zone over the Kurdish region in Iraq, helping in the establishment of the Kurdish government in the region and preventing Kurdish repression by Iraq. The Kurds have also helped the US by taking the opportunity to help them overthrow Saddam Hussein and win their fight against ISIS. However, the USA did not support the Independence Referendum in 2017 as they thought it would distract the Kurds from fighting ISIS.

Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)

The Kurdish Regional Government is the first and only official Kurdish authority in the world. It was established in 1992, following the Gulf War, due to US interference and support in establishing a Kurdish autonomous region. It governs 6 million people, which is almost a fifth of the Iraqi population and is the strongest, most efficient, and most stable area in the country.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
August 10 th , 1920	Treaty of Sevres is signed
July 24 th , 1923	Treaty of Lausanne is signed
November 25 th , 1978	PKK is founded by Abdullah Ocalan
February 28 th , 1991	Gulf War ends
April 5 th , 1991	Security Council passes Resolution 688
July 15 th , 1992	Kurdish Regional Government is created
February 15 th , 1999	Abdullah Ocalan is arrested
March 20 th , 2003	Iraq is invaded by the US
January 30 th , 2005	First unofficial Iraqi Kurdistan Independence Referendum
July 2012	Rojava is established and formed
September 25 th , 2017	Iraqi Kurdistan Independence Referendum
March 23 rd , 2019	Syrian Kurds Declare Victory Over Islamic State
September 2022	Iran Attacks Exiled Kurds in Iraq

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Treaty of Sevres, 10 August 1920
- Treaty of Lausanne, 1923
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, 5 April 1991
- Iraqi Kurdistan Independence Referendum, 25 September 2017



Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Unfortunately, there has not been much involvement regarding this issue. There have only been three relevant involvements which include two treaties and resolution 688 of the Security Council. It is also worth noting that said involvement has failed as the issue at hand is still ongoing.

The first involvement was the Treaty of Sevres, which occurred in August of 1920, after World War I. This was a pact between the allied powers and the Ottoman government. This treaty abolished the Ottoman empire and required the new Turkish state to renounce all rights over the middle east. It also provided for an independent Armenia and an autonomous Kurdistan. It was then replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne a few years later.

On July 24, 1923, the final treaty regarding the First World War was signed in Lausanne, Switzerland after a seven-month conference. This treaty recognized the boundaries of the new Turkish State which led the allied powers to drop their demands for an autonomous Turkish-Kurdish region. This meant that what the Treaty of Sevres had promised the Kurds was never applied and was reversed. Since there was a refusal of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey to recognize an independent Kurdistan, no more issues were made concerning it.

The first official UN involvement occurred after the end of the Gulf War in 1991, and the first resolution was submitted in the Security Council. This resolution condemned Iraq's actions and suppression towards the Kurdish population. It also defended the Kurds' human rights and it touched upon their ongoing issues. Many reports regarding Iraqi human rights violations were submitted after this resolution and international awareness was raised towards Kurds and the disasters they were suffering.

Possible Solutions

It is evident that this issue is extremely complex and has been ongoing for over a century. Therefore, it must be understood that autonomy or independence cannot be achieved overnight but it is a process which would be approached in multiple stages. Just like any ethnic group, the Kurds do not want to lose their cultural background and heritage and they do not want to be merged into a different culture, furthermore, measures must happen to prevent this from happening. The creation



of a Kurdish state would be ideal, however, that is not possible as such a measure would cause terrible instability in the middle east.

To start with, it should be the responsibility of the United Nations and global leaders to force and apply pressure on the governments of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran to give the Kurdish population human rights. The United Nations should also monitor these areas to make sure no human rights violations occur through humanitarian agencies.

A ceasefire between Turkey and the PKK should occur as this conflict has caused deaths daily for decades and a solution must be found. Both parties must communicate through peace negotiations, formally express demands, and reach a settlement. Since this has failed multiple times in the past, UN peacekeepers should be deployed in the region to make sure the parties do not break their promises or settlements again.

Lastly, UN overviewed talks must occur between the Kurdish minorities and the involved governments to discuss matters of autonomy and independence. Though, all parties must be open-minded and willing to cooperate for this to happen and for both sides to benefit from the negotiation. Through these discussions, Kurds can request and gain the increased autonomy they have been advocating for while also generating unity and peace in the region. Human rights violations must also be discussed and solved, which could put a stop to the prosecution of Kurdish activists and could lead to the recognition of a Kurdish language and the introduction of a Kurdish education.

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