

Forum:*Special Committee on the Middle East Crisis (SPCMEC)*

Issue: *The Question of Addressing Kurdistan's ongoing conflict in the Middle East region.*Student Officer: *Aoun Najdawi*

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1. **Introduction**

Today, Kurdistan’s conflict and tensions with nearby countries is considered a prominent conflict in the Middle Region, that has been ongoing now for almost a century. Kurdistan is a Middle Eastern Region, that falls within parts of Iraq, Syria, Turkey, as well as a small sector in Iran, and it comprises of an ethnic group known as the Kurds. This ethnic group has its separate, language, history, and culture. However, it does not have any land of its own, and henceforth, it is not considered a country. Establishing one on the other hand, was, and continues to be their main goal in all conflicts. One of the most notable conflicts regarding Kurdistan’s fight for independence and recognition, is the current Kurdish-Turkish conflict, which began way back. The Turkish government sent military and armed forced to Kurdish-inhabited regions to suppress them, and to attempt to wipe out their ethnicity from existence, using various inhumane techniques, which led to a worldwide condemnation of Turkey.

Kurds also face lack of recognition and oppression from Arab nations as well, mainly Syria, and Iraq. Multiple wars and armed conflicts took place between Kurds and the Iraqi government throughout the 20th century, until they were finally granted an autonomous region. The Kurdish Crisis also took involvement in the Syrian Civil war, as multiple Kurdish-Syrian parties attempted into involve themselves in the revolution as a way to gain autonomy within Syria. Today, Kurdish conflict with Middle Eastern nations does not show future hope of ending soon due to many factors, one of the most important being nationalism. However, with increased peace talks, ceasefire, and other actions, this conflict may come to an end.

1. **Definition of Key Terms:**

Insurgency: An active revolt, or an uprising, or any certain military group or political party in a country.

PKK: The PKK is the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK is an abbreviation to Kurdish name of the party which is Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê). It is a Turkish Kurdish group with communist/Marxist Leninist values.

Militias: It is an army that is formed from citizens, non-soldiers or non-professionals, to substitute an army that is not present or existing.

Autonomous: The right to Self-ruling or self-governing of any certain entity or group in a country

Ceasefire: It is considered to be a temporary period of peace or truce, where all fighting is suspended.

Disputed Territory: It is the disagreement over a certain territory or city between two or more nations/groups

Armed Conflict: It is a period of combat (that may last long) which involves armed groups of different countries or entities fighting against each for a certain cause.

Civil War: A war between citizens or groups within the same country.

Nationalistic: It is a trait belong to one who is strongly identifies with his/her nation as well as its interests; patriotic

Secularization: It is the political system in a country in which religion and the government/law are separated. It is often controversial to speak of in the Middle East.

Rojava: It is an autonomous administration present in North and East Syria, and it is majority Kurdish. It plays a crucial role in both the Kurdistan Crisis and the Syrian Civil War.

1. **General Overview – Background information**

General Information:

Kurdistan is a region that falls within the middle east in Asia, mainly within Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and small parts of Iran. What distinguishes it from the countries it falls within is its separate ethnicity (Kurds), language (Kurdish), as well as the culture and traditions present. Due to such differences, Kurds have constantly fought throughout history (and prominently throughout the 20th and 21st century) and continue to fight today, to form a nation of their own, however that only led to more suppression and conflict with other middle eastern countries. The ongoing crisis had led to the deaths countless lives and has to the destabilization of the region which only worsened the issue at hand. The “Kurdistan crisis” as a topic is usually divided to at least three subcategories (when speaking of it), as it is too broad/general on its own. Often, the aforementioned crisis would be typically discussed as either the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the Iraqi-Kurdish conflict, or the Syrian-Kurdish conflict, all which will be elaborated on below.

Kurdish Conflict with Turkey:

The Turkish-Kurdish crisis is the armed conflict between the Turkish government and military against Kurds who seek independence or autonomy for their regions. These Kurds are represented mainly by the PKK (also known as Kurdistan’s Workers Party). The conflict was claimed to have officially started in 1978, where the PKK as well as other minor parties began rebelling against the Turkish government. The first insurgency began in the early 1980s and lasted until 1999 (when a ceasefire was agreed upon by both sides). During that period, a full scaled armed conflict was present, between the Turkish government and the PKK. However, the second insurgency began soon after that, and it continues today (is ongoing). Today, both sides have been found accountable of horrific dehumanizing crimes such as torture, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, terrorism, execution, and much more, making it one of the most violent and long-lasting conflicts in the middle east.

Kurdish Conflict with Iraq:

Just like Turkey, Kurdistan faced conflict on many different occasions with Iraq as well, considering how a large part of the Kurdish population exists within Iraq. In this case, outcomes were slightly different, as in 1992, after long conflict and losses, Kurdistan was able to become an autonomous (self-governing) region with its government, designating Erbil as the capital. This however did not stop conflict from occurring between both sides after an Iraqi Kurdistan was established. One of the most recent conflicts relating to this topic is the 2017 crisis, when the disputed territory (or city) of Kirkuk was fought upon between Kurdistan and Iraq (where Iraq was demanding its return). Although much less violent than current Turkish conflict, tensions and conflict continue today over many other territories claimed by both sides, as well as natural resources such as oil, petroleum, and more.

Kurdish Conflict with Syria:

The Kurdish conflict Syria is somehow different from the aforementioned conflicts, as it is not exactly state-sponsored, but rather is fought between two different militias. This crisis is also considered a part of the Syrian Civil War. This conflict was also known as the Islamist-Rojava conflict. The two militias involved were the Syrian Democratic Forces (the SDF), which were mainly Kurdish forces (although claimed to be multi-ethnic) and the Islamist forces, which were evidently opposing the Kurds. What started this ongoing conflict was the Kurdish capture of Ras Al-Ayn in Syria in 2013, which led to violent disputes. Many other forces and nations intervened in the conflict throughout the years as well, such as the intervention of ISIS. Turkey also intervened in this conflict, with a purpose against the Syrian Kurds, which significantly worsened conflict in Turkish Kurdistan. Just like all the other conflicts and crises, many war crimes were committed, such as innocent deaths, kidnappings, tortures, and more.

1. **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

*include a minimum of 3 examples, each part should have one long paragraph.*

Kurdistan’s Workers Party (KPP)

The Kurdistan Workers Party (also known as the KPP, which is an abbreviation of the Kurdish name of the party: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) is a Kurdish political and military movement existing in Turkey (specifically the southeast, where Kurds live). It was formed and established year 1978 and is known to be the main combatant against the Anti-Kurd Turkish government during the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. As of today, KPP is considered to be a terrorist organization by many countries and alliances, such as Turkey (obviously), the European Union, the United States, Australia, and Japan. In 1999, the party’s leader Ocalan was captured and immediately imprisoned (for being considered a dangerous terrorist). This organization claims to be left-wing, with goals of achieving an independent Kurdish community with a Marxist-Leninist (communist) ideology. As a result of that, the KPP had positive steady relations with the USSR prior to its dissolution. This party evidently holds Turkey as a capitalist violent nation which hunts and preys on the ethnic minority of Kurds. The KPP was found accountable to many human rights violations over the years, during the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, as was defamed for them (such violations include child soldiers, kidnappings, executions, and more.)

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The SDF is a mostly Kurdish military organization and party existing within Syria’s northern regions. This militia is related to both the Syrian Civil War as well as the Kurdistan crisis. This party holds multiple values such as multi-ethnicism (the inclusion of different ethnicities and considering them equal, although the SDF has a Kurdish majority), secularism (separation of religion from state), democracy, and more. Such values have led to the SDF facing conflict and opposition with other parties and governments, such as ISIL (also known as ISIS), Turkey, the Turkish backed Syrian free army, the Islamists, and Arab nationalists. The SDF is known as well to be a participant in the Syrian civil war. This organization has actually received international support, especially from Western nations such as the USA, the UK, and France. The USA provided the SDF with resources on multiple different occasions, which strained its relations with Turkey, which opposes the SDF. The SDF is more of a recent military group, being formed and established in 2015, unlike many other parties which were formed during the 20th century. It is unclear whether the Syrian Democratic Forces has goals towards creating independent Kurdish nation, however it is evidently pro-Kurdish and pro-minorities, and it believes in the autonomy of tribes and cities and in decentralization of the government.

The Republic of Turkey (Turkish Government)

The Republic of Turkey was claimed to have been oppressing and repressing the ethnic minority of Kurds ever since its establishment and modernization. Turkey as a country is a large land that is inclusive of many different cultures, ethnicities, and languages. One of those, is Kurdistan, in the southeast, which is near Iraq and Syria. As previously discussed, it is evident that the Turkish government has a vision opposing the creation of any Kurdish independent state, or even an autonomous community within Turkey itself. Not only that, but Turkey also has many differences with Kurdish nationalistic parties as well, such as the KPP, which believes in communism as a system rather than Turkey’s “oppressive” capitalism. Turkey is involved today as well in the Syrian Civil War, with intentions against Kurdish groups such as the SDF and Rojava, and it seized Syrian land (that bordering Turkey). Due to many other differences in ideology and in beliefs with other parties and militias as well, Turkey was involved in many armed conflicts against Kurdish groups. Turkey even claimed that the KPP was a terrorist organization for its human rights violations. However, many have claimed that Turkey has also committed war crimes as vicious as those of the KPP during insurgencies, proxy wars, and other armed conflicts.

Iraqi Kurdistan (Autonomous Government)

Iraqi Kurdistan is a region of Kurdish inhabitants in Iraq which has full autonomy of itself, with its own leader and its own government. Kurds in Iraqi regions have been presents for centuries, however they have never had their own nation and government until the very recent era, when they began revolting against their occupation. Wars have occurred throughout the 20th century between Kurdish nationalists and Iraq, with one side opposing Kurdish autonomy and another supporting it. This government believes in the independence of Kurdistan and in the creation of Kurdish country. Many Kurds also believe that Iraqi Kurdistan is simply a part of a “Greater Kurdistan”, which includes Kurdish regions in Turkey, Syria and Iran. The autonomy granted Kurds in Iraq in 1992 (following Iraq’s losses in the Gulf War) was a huge for the Kurdistan crisis considering how Kurds were given official political power. Iraqi Kurdistan evidently stands by Kurdish political parties and militias, which aim for the Great Kurdistan, and has made enemies with many nearby governments, such as that of Iraq. Tensions between Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq escalated dangerously during 2017, when a short-lived war began both sides, which fought for the possession of Kirkuk (which is a governate rich in oil and other resources). Today, Iraqi Kurdistan plays a large role in the Kurdistan Crisis, as it is one of the most politically powerful Kurdish groups, and as it faces continuous conflict with nearby neighbors.

1. **Timeline of Events:**

1500s through 1700s

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Description of event**  Many Kurdish rebellions occurred throughout those centuries in Iran (back then Persia). These were directed against the Persian kingdoms which repressed Kurds. |

Kurdish rebellions against the oppressive Ottoman Empire. The last rebellion was that during WWI, little before the empire collapsed.

1800s to 1917

Beginning of the Iraqi-Kurdish conflict, which was a series of wars and armed conflicts between Iraq and Iraqi Kurds.

1918

Beginning of the First Kurdish-Iraqi war, which spanned around the 60s. This conflict was a struggle by the Kurds to establish an autonomous Kurdish community in Northern Iraq.

1961

The Kurdish uprising and rebellion in Iran, where Kurds attempted to separate from the country to establish an independent community with Marxist values. It was not a success.

1967

The end of the First Kurdish-Iraqi war. At that time, it was not a success for the Kurds as they could not establish an autonomous community

1970

The second Kurdish-Iraqi war, which was fought between Iraq and the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Forces), where autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan was once more brought up and fought upon

April 1974-1975

1978 - Present

The establishment of the KPP, the Kurdistan Workers Party, in Turkey, which aimed for an independent Kurdistan, with communist values, and which opposed Turkey heavily. The Turkish-Kurdish conflict is claimed to have started that year as well

The 1979 Kurdish revolution in Iran was one of the biggest revolts/rebellions occurring in Iran. It occurred very shortly the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran, and it brought up the consideration of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iran

1979

The first Kurdish insurgency in Turkey (mainly involving the Kurdistan Workers Party), where there was armed conflict. The conflict carried on for 15 years until a ceasefire was called upon in 1999.

1984 - 1999

The establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan in Northern Iraq, with its own government. This was done after Iraq’s great losses during the Gulf War. Erbil was designated as the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

1992

2003

The Iraqi-Kurdish is claimed to have finally ended (started in 1918) after almost a century of conflict and bloodshed

2004 - Present

The second insurgency in Turkey begins and the 1999 ceasefire breaks down, and armed conflict begins once again between the Kurds and Turkey

2004

The al-Qamishli riots take place in Syria due to a chaotic football match, where Kurds in Syria (northeastern region) revolt against the nation demanding autonomy

2012 - Present

The Syrian Kurd campaign begins, where Kurdish militas and parties participate in the Syrian Civil war in an effort to establish Kurdish autonomy in Northeastern Syria.

Turkey intervenes in the Syrian civil war as it launches troops there. Turkey has a clear vision against Syrian Kurdish groups such as the SDF (est. 2015). Turkey also takes control of some Syrian territory

2015-2016

The 2017 Iraqi-Kurdish war takes place, between the Iraqi government and Iraqi Kurdistan, as Iraq demands for the return of Kirkuk, which is ultimately returned to be under Iraqi control

2017

1. UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events:

The Algiers Agreement (1975)

The Algiers agreement (also known as the Algiers Accord) was a series of negotiations and agreements set throughout 1975. Although the primary and public reason the negotiations were set was to end Iraqi-Iranian conflict over disputed territory, the Algiers agreement was also set up in an effort to end the second Iraqi-Kurdish war which began in 1974. Unfortunately, despite international support for peaceful negotiations with the Kurds (the rebels in the war), Saddam Hussein, who was the Vice-Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council decided to set on an aggressive campaign against the Kurds, aiming to banish them from the nation. Fortunately, the second Kurdish-Iraqi war ended soon after that, however it was definitely not the last one, as Iraqi and Kurdish tensions continue to live today.

The Turkish-Kurdish Peace Process (2010s – Present)

The Turkish-Kurdish Peace Process is an attempt at peace between Turkey and Turkish Kurdistan (to resolve the Turkish-Kurdish conflict which has been ongoing since 1984), which mainly began in 2016 after the 2013 truce broke down. Many developments were made towards peace between sides, and such developments include Kurdish militias withdrawing their forces from Turkish soil to other territories. There was less overall violence and casualties (in Turkey) and it was obvious that both sides were working towards a solution. Today, this peace process remains active as efforts are being put to end the decades-long conflict.

1. Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement (1970)

The Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement was an agreement set in 1970, where the Iraqi government offered the Kurds an autonomous region in Northern Iraq, with three governates. Kurds were also promised Kurdish representation in the government. This was seen as a great step towards resolving the Kurdish crisis of the Middle East, as Iraq played a crucial role in that. This agreement promised Kurdish culture and language representation as well. 15 articles were instated in this agreement, all which promised better and more peaceful conditions for Kurds in Iraq. For example, the first article read: “The Kurdish language shall be, alongside the Arabic language, the official language in areas with a Kurdish majority; and will be the language of instruction in those areas and taught throughout Iraq as a second language.” Although the plan sounded promising, it began to crumble down when natural resources and topic of possessions came into discussion. The Iraqi government aimed at the Arabization of resources in Kurdish areas. This started constant disagreement between both sides, which destined the autonomy agreement to miserably fail. Not only did this agreement fail, but as a result of the disputes, the Second Iraqi-Kurdish ultimately erupted in 1974.

1. Possible Solutions

Solution to Kurdish-Turkish conflict

1. One way to partially resolute the ongoing Kurdish-Turkish armed conflict and crisis which has been active since 2004 it to grant incentives to both sides of the issue in order to push both sides (Kurdish political and military parties and the Turkish government) to agree to peace with each other. Granting Turkish Kurdistan partition from Turkey (thus creating a new nation) would far too unrealistic unfortunately, as it grants no real benefits to Turkey, making such suggestion instantly off the table. On the other hand, as an alternative to that, Turkish Kurdistan (which is Southeastern Turkey) may be granted autonomy, meaning that it would rule itself, similar to how the situation works out in Iraqi Kurdistan. In order to ensure Turkish agreement to such proposal, a “Turkish Kurdistan” should not undergo a change in economic and political systems (from capitalism to communism, as desired by the KPP), in order to avoid shifting Turkish Kurdistan too far away from the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, despite Turkish Kurdistan having autonomy, Turkey itself should still have access to Kurdish land, considering how vital it is to nation, as that is where Turkey shares border with Iraq and Syria, two countries that are of great interest to the nation. If both sides agree to the Kurdish autonomy, then it is mostly expected that they would sign peace treaties considering how both are satisfied and got the most out of the situation, which would end the 16 years long (and counting) insurgency.

Solution to Kurdish-Iraqi conflict

1. A large part of the Kurdistan crisis remains in Iraq, mainly over the territory and resource disputes between the Iraqis and the Kurds. This unfortunately caused many uprisings, bloodshed, and conflict recently, and tensions remain. One way to resolute this threatening crisis, is to restart peace negotiations between Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdistan, which abandoned years ago. Such negotiations have been proved to be effective in the past with other disputes. In those negotiations, suitable agreements and plans may to split the resource abundancy. It is obvious that no side would succumb to giving up all the resources to the other side for the sake of peace, meaning that splitting might be very suitable. Furthermore, other issues include the dispute over Kirkuk (although the conflict over it is over, tensions remain high). This governate/city was found to be historically neither Iraqi nor Kurdish, and thus once more it would controversial to fully give this city to one side. A solution to this dispute would be either to share control over the city, or to hand it over to the UN (so it would UN-administered) until other tensions subside. Finally, in regard to the independence referendum (Kurdistan aiming towards possible independence from Iraq), a solution to that would be external intervention to peacefully persuade the Kurdish from doing so, as that would create even higher tensions and very possibly a war between the two sides.
2. Guiding Questions
3. What is your countries stance on Kurdistan’s desire of full autonomy/independence in the Middle East?
4. What crucial resources present in the Middle East caused dispute between Kurds and Arabs?
5. Are there any other countries where Kurdish crisis is present (apart from Iraq, Turkey, and Syria)?
6. Who are your country’s allies in the Middle East?
7. What are some of the successful agreements implemented that helped establish peace for both sides?
8. What might be the future repercussions that could occur as a result of the current ongoing conflict?
9. What are some political parties which oppose Kurdistan’s future vision?
10. Is external intervention in Kurdistan crisis truly necessary in this case?
11. What the people’s stances (of your country) on the Kurdistan crisis?
12. How involved was the UN in the Kurdistan crisis, and was it able to establish more peace and stability?
13. Appendices and useful links
14. <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article43092>
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rojava%E2%80%93Islamist_conflict#Kurdish_capture_of_Ras_al-Ayn_and_spread_of_fighting>
16. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish%E2%80%93Turkish_conflict_(1978%E2%80%93present)>
17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Democratic_Forces#Support_by_the_United_States,_France_and_other_Western_nations>
18. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey>
19. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Kurdistan>
20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Kurdish_uprisings>
21. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish%E2%80%93Turkish_peace_process>
22. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/55-settling-iraqi-kurdistans-boundaries-will-help-defuse-post-referendum-tensions>
23. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi%E2%80%93Kurdish_Autonomy_Agreement_of_1970>
24. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Algiers_Agreement>
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