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Chapter 18 19 Response World Geography

The "line" of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia is one of the most culturally "dense" areas of the world. Simply put, the number of dramatically distinct--and sadly, often conflicting--cultures in this region is staggering. This is due to the fact that the region has been a crossroads for trade, migration, and conquest for thousands of years. The Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all originated in this region, as well as the Zoroastrianism of ancient Persia which is still practiced. More ethnic groups have their origins in this region than any other, and when you add in the liquid-gold of oil it is easy to see why it is such a pressure-cooker. This is most dramatically seen in the sad saga of the Kurds, a people who have been fighting for their own nation for over a century.

The Kurds are an ethnic group that has been living between the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and the South Caucasus for centuries. They are mostly Sunni Muslim (with some Yazidi, and a smattering of other religions), but have a distinct language and culture that is different from the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Armenians, and other groups that they live among. They hold strong regional majorities in many of the regions they inhabit, but no *national* majority. While I am personally a melting-pot supporter, the Southwest Asia has proven inhospitable to this kind of nation so far. The Kurds have been fighting for their own nation since the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was divided up by the British and French. The historical drama there is more than we can go into here, but they have proved to be unsuccessful in their quest for independence. While they have their own semi-independent part of Iraq, called Kurdistan, that is still not a state unto itself. Even worse has been the betrayal of the Kurds by the United States following the retreat from the region, with the NATO ally Turkey declaring war on the Kurds and fighting an aggressive war against them. While they are not blameless in the conflict, the Kurds were (and are) a strong ally of the United States in the fight against ISIS, and not reigning in Turkey has been a black mark on the United States' foreign policy.

In conclusion, the Kurds are a people who have been fighting for their own nation for over a century, and have been betrayed by the United States in the process. The region of Southwest Asia is a pressure-cooker of cultures, and the Kurds are a prime example of the conflicts that arise from this. There are countless other examples I could go into, but the Kurds have a longer history than many of these reoccurring conflicts.