

Forum:	Special Conference
Issue:	Measures to improve recognition of Kurdish minorities in the Middle East
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Introduction

The Kurdish minority, or ‘Kurds’, are an indigenous group who inhabit the region on the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia. Although this region is not officially an autonomous state, it is frequently referred to as ‘Kurdistan’. Despite having the majority of its population settled in Northern Kurdistan, Kurd communities are dispersed throughout the Middle East—for example, there is a sizeable Kurd population in Western Turkey resulting from internal migrations. Despite this geographical dispersion, the Kurds still share a singular and distinct communal identity, sharing common areas through race, culture, and language.

The Kurdish minority is considered the largest ethnic group that is stateless, when refers to a population that is not deemed as part of the nation by the laws of any state. Throughout history, the Kurds have been constantly battling for statehood, and partially achieving it in the early 200s when the Iraqi Kurdistan was recognized by international legislation as an autonomous state ruled under its own Kurdish Regional Government. A major part of the reason that the Kurds are still stateless is that governments of the countries they inhabit, particularly Iran and Turkey, have been oppressing the population in various ways throughout history, in fear that the Kurdish minority will take over part of their land. The Kurdish minorities have often been the victims of abuse from various national governments in the Middle East, becoming the targets of violence, discrimination, and systematic inequality. Hence, it is imperative to improve the recognition of the Kurdish minority in the Middle East.

Definition of Key Terms

Kurds

The Kurdish people are the indigenous people who dwelled in the Mesopotamian plains in places now regarded as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia.

Minority

Minority is defined as a group of people who are experiencing disadvantages in the society compared to that of the people of the majority, or the so-called dominant group.

Middle East

The Middle East is a defined area around the eastern Mediterranean and includes all the countries in Asia to the west and south-west of Iran and Iran itself.

Recognition

Recognition of the Kurdish minorities can be comprehended as the formal acknowledgement of its body and existence by certain governments or nation where they live in.

General Overview

Negative Recognition of Kurdish Minorities in the Past

Under the days of Arab nationalism from 1958 to 1976, the Kurds became increasingly repressed, due to their close links with the Syrian Communist Party: they were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured brutally. In the year of 1961, 120,000 Kurds were discounted as foreigners by a census in Jazira. Then, in the following year, a major population transfer was announced by the government, declaring that Arabs were to settle along the Turkish border. Though this plan was never entirely executed, it forced 60, 000 Kurds to leave the area for Damascus. In the March of 1986, the police fired on the Kurdish minorities when they were gathered in Damascus for a celebration for the spring festival, which ended with one Kurdish death.

At the time, Syria had been largely supportive of the Kurdish movements, which include multiple protests, parades, mass demonstrations, and their sometimes violent responses. In Turkey and Iraq, and in 1990, politically active nationalist Kurdish minorities were even elected to be a part of the Syrian Parliament. Nevertheless, their repression continued; the government began to place pressure on the land rights of the Kurds and that were exacerbated by the drought that occurred in the latter half of the year of 1990s. The power of the Kurdish minorities was building up and consolidating; while Turkey and Syrian governments feared that their lands would be claimed, the Kurds were doing the same.



Caption 1: Iraqi Kurdish demonstration

Negative Recognition of Kurdish Minorities in the 21st Century

Iran

Iran is a nation that has associations with the Kurds. In September of 2010, during a parade in Iran, a bomb explosion caused twelve deaths and a dozen injuries. Despite no group claiming responsibility for this attack, Iranian authorities blamed Kurdish separatists for this incident, and arrested members of a Kurdish armed group, claiming that they were responsible for the attack.

Turkey

The Kurdish people were also under threat from Turkey; in July 2005, a bomb was planted on a Turkish train near a Kurdish guerrilla, leading to six individual's deaths. Turkish officials blamed the incident on the PKK, the Kurdistan Worker's Party, a Kurdish militant and political organization centered in Iraq and Turkey. On December 2007, Turkey launched attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan, specifically targeting PKK outposts, using the aforementioned bombing as a justification. In France, January 10, 2013, three Kurdish women, one of them a founder of the PKK, were be shot to death. Two months later, PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan was imprisoned in Turkey. Attempting to form a Kurdish nation, the Kurds have claimed the northeastern Syrian land as their autonomous region; however, this coup and claim was unsuccessful, and shortly following, the President of Turkey had to shut down pro-Kurdish media outlets, and all citizens who had justified PKK connections were suspended. The purge included many Kurds of varying positions and roles in the nation, including ministers, teachers, etc.

In addition, the Turkey government consistently discriminates against the Kurds on a regular basis and has sought to completely eliminate their cultural identity. The Kurdish language, names, folklores, and dresses were banned, and martial law was enforced towards the areas of land inhabited by the Kurds until 1946. In fact, until 1980, the Turkish government officially categorized the Turkish Kurdish minorities as the "Mountain Turks" and banned words related to the Kurds, such as "Kurdistan" and "Kurds". Later, after an attempted coup by the Kurds in 1980, the Kurdish language was banned in both the private and public life at Turkey. The people who expressed their opinions, through singing and speaking in the Kurdish language, were arrested by the government. To this day, it remains illegal to instruct and educate students through the Kurdish language in any school.

Iraq

On February 1, 2004, in Iraq, more than 50 people were killed in Erbil by two suicide bombs detonated at the headquarters of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Kurdish officials from both of the parties were killed as a result of the bombing.

In Iraq, the Kurds are hindered in their life by the Iraq government. As a matter of fact, when the Kurdish minorities are in need to renew their driver's license and to send their children to school, they would have to be forced to change their identity from Kurdish to Arabic. Some Kurdish families were even forced to change the name of their Kurdish child to an Arabic one.

Syria

In March of 2004, in Syria, nine Kurds were killed at a soccer game in Qamishli after clashes against the police. Kurdish minorities started to demonstrate at their funerals; after the police violently suppressed the demonstration by firing on the crowd, the demonstrations soon became prevalent in the surrounding areas as well. On October 2011, a Syrian Kurdish activist named Meshall Tammo was assassinated, and the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime was blamed for this assassination.

Moreover, in Syria, there are also many examples of the Kurdish minorities being oppressed intellectually and in daily life. The Syrian government concluded in 1962 that many Kurds in Syria have come illegally from Turkey to Syria, and thus, about 120,000 Kurds were stripped of their civil rights (such as access to employment and education), making their daily life extremely difficult. Furthermore, the Kurdish minorities were deprived of their right to own land.

Improvements in Recognition of the Kurdish Minorities with the Passage of Time

The recognition of Kurdish minorities has, undeniably, improved with passage of time. Focusing on improvements in the 21st century, as of June of 2004, Turkish state TV has started broadcasting the Kurdish-language programs for the first time. In April 6, 2005, an Iraqi- Kurdish politician, Jalal Talabani, was elected as the president of Iraq by the transitional national assembly and was sworn on April 7. He served as president from 2005-2014. The recognition of the Kurds has had significant improved since then. Further on that year, the Iraqi constitution enforced Kurdish autonomy, or independence, which gave right to the Kurdistan as an autonomous federal region. Then in 2009, in Turkey, a newly enforced policy named the Kurdish Initiative served as a platform to increasing the Kurdish language rights and to reducing the military presence in the southeast of Kurdistan. Furthermore, in the April of 2011, Syria granted citizenship to thousands of Kurds, as according to the Human Rights Watch, in the year 1962, approximately 20% of the Kurdish Syrians were striped of their citizenships. In recent years, the recognition of the Kurdish minorities has started to improve; however, this is still not enough to fully resolve the issue, and hence, more involvement, solutions, and efforts need to be implemented.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

On the topic of the Kurdish minorities, the UN Security Council issued the following statement on September 21, 2017: “council members expressed their continuing respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of Iraq.” The Security Council urged “all outstanding issues between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to be resolved, in accordance with the provisions of the Iraqi constitution, through structured dialogue and compromise supported by the international community”. Security Council members have pledged their full support of the endeavors of the United Nations to facilitate dialogue. The foreign ministers of neighboring nations, including Turkey and Iran, which have sizeable Kurdish populations, have agreed that Iraq should divide part of its land to the Iraqi Kurds and that further regional conflict could be piqued by the scheduled referendum voting on the topic of the independence for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, the leaders of Iraqi Kurds have claimed to be determined to press ahead with the referendum. As a result of the pressure, UN Special Representative for Iraq, Jan Kubris, has made an offer to make negotiations that would placate the future relations between the Kurds and other nations of Middle East. However, the referendum will be postponed until the end of the negotiations, as a return to the negotiations.



Caption 2: Kurdish independence vote

Possible Solutions

On a national level, adjacent nations to Kurdistan could pass laws to protect the interests of the Kurdish minorities and also guarantee inalienable, basic human rights to every individual. For example, this may include forbidding blaming and recognizing the Kurdish minorities negatively without factual and irrelevant support and statistics, and also violent combats with the Kurds, which can include shooting, bombing, and more. It is important to enforce laws for the elimination for such unwanted negative recognition of the Kurdish minorities in the future. Appropriate legislature would be the first step to

achieving this goal. Again, think about preventing everyday instances of discrimination/violent persecution, promoting cultural identity, eliminating systematic inequality etc.

Advocating for the rights of the Kurdish minorities in the Middle East through social networking would be a great way to improve and spread the recognition of the Kurdish minorities, because in the current 21st century, knowledge can be spread easily using the platform of the internet and social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and many more, reaching millions of people all around the globe. For instance, individuals can post stories about Kurds on their social media, which can serve as a tool to potentially reach out to people who can pass on the message to an even larger audience. Many atrocious incidents with the violation of human rights with the Kurdish minorities happen in the Middle East, but specifically in nations, such as Turkey, Iran, or Syria, and therefore staying informed on such current events is extremely important.

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