

Forum:	Advisory Panel
Issue:	Addressing the issue of Kurdish militant groups and the ongoing Kurdish-Turkish conflicts
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Introduction

The Kurds are an ethnic group promoting an independent state of their own since World War I. Because they did not have a strong political power or significant wealth, they chose to fight for independence with force, resulting in a large militant group frequently causing insurgencies. The issue of Kurdish militant groups has intensified over the past four decades as a prominent issue mainly occurring in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), otherwise called the Kurdistan Worker's Party, is a political and militant based group that has waged an independence campaign against the Turkish government since 1984, advocating for a greater cultural and political right, simultaneously also having an initial aim of establishing an independent Kurdish state. Over 30 years, the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish government has brought numerous casualties of nearly 40,000 people including civilian women, children, and infants. The conflict had settled for a while when both sides showed considerable willingness to initiate peace talks; however, shortly after several implementations of the Turkish government rescinding restrictions on the Kurds and the Kurds slowly withdrawing their forces, the Turks and Kurds again expressed increasing discontent towards each other and went back into an increasingly intensified stage of conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Kurds

The Kurds are an Iranian ethnic group inhabiting a mountainous region among the Middle East borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Kurds' population is estimated to be from between 30 to 45 million, making up the fourth-largest group in the Middle East; however, they have never been able to obtain an independent state of their own. Despite being scattered in the mountainous region of the Middle East, the Kurds have a distinct community with their own culture, language, and social structure.

PKK

The PKK is the biggest political and militant based Kurdish group waging a violent terror campaign with the aim of receiving greater cultural and political rights, mainly to establish a new independent Kurdish state. It has been created in 1974, and Abdullah Ocalan, currently captured in the Turkish prison, leads the group.

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

The ISIL is an abbreviation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, often also referred to as the ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) or IS (Islamic State). Specifically, Levant refers to the geographical area of where the countries of Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey are located in, which are the areas that the ISIL affects and targets. The ISIL is a Sunni Jihadist group recognized as a terrorist organization, operating primarily in Iraq and Syria, claiming religious authority over all Muslims. Their main goals are to purify the Muslim community by killing infidels, expanding their laws and ideals, restore the ideal territorial presence the Sunni Muslims had before, and to incite Muslims to a Holy war with westerners. The group has established a caliphate led by the leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and expanded to control a vast amount of land in Syria and Iraq; however, recently they only hold a small portion of land due to the attacks of the international anti-ISIL coalition including Kurdish militias.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

KRG is the abbreviation of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the official executive group of the autonomous Kurdish region. Established in 1992, its main body is located in Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdistan region, simultaneously the most populated city in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 2019, Nechirvan Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region, is leading the KRG. The KRG is the only authorized group to participate in major negotiations with the state.

General Overview

Kurdish Push for Independence

From the end of WWI, the Kurdish people have put on continuous attempts for independence, but was led to failure by the disturbance of surrounding nations. Based on the borderlines created by the leaving of England and France, the Kurds were separated along the Middle East, mainly into Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia. In 1927, they were able to construct the independent Republic of Ararat in

Eastern Turkey, only to face destruction by the Turkish invasion in three years. After the creation of the Republic, foreign states had a view that the Republic's ambitions went far beyond of what they envisioned, and they did not favor an independent Kurdistan, thinking that it was unpredictable and unreliable, threatening in many ways. In 1946, the Kurds were again able to create the Republic of Mahabad with the support of the Soviet Union, which also collapsed by the raid of Iran. The Soviet Union, unlike other states disliking social distortion, had promoted an independent Kurdistan with hopes to extend their influence towards the south, which was discouraged after being pressured by the US, UK, and other Western states. Even after the end of World War II, the Kurds demanded independence whenever certain disorders occurred in the nations they were residing, and were suppressed by the armed intervention of government troops. Due to the Kurds' vulnerability of being a minority group, they were always targeted as a victim, sometimes with over millions of fatalities. From the beginning of 1984, the push for independence accelerated with the armed insurgencies of the Kurdistan Worker's party, PKK.

Referendum on independence

On September 25, 2017, the Iraqi Kurds voted on a referendum regarding their independence in a region already declared autonomous; the result was overwhelmingly in favor of independence. The UN warned that the referendum was potentially destabilizing, and showed opposition to the vote along with the US and several other nations surrounding Iraq. The other states containing Kurdish populations showed fear that the result of the referendum could fuel separatism among their Kurdish populations.



Iraqi Kurdish soldiers in front of a Kurdistan Flag

Intensified Conflict

Starting with the urge of the Turkish government, the PKK, first recognized as a group advocating for independence, was designated as a terrorist organization by the EU and USA. The leader of PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, called for the help of Kurdish groups after declaring to form an independent nation around the region between Iraq and Turkey. Under his leadership, urban regions were targeted by terror and arson attacks, while guerrilla tactics were predominantly carried out in mountain regions. In response to PKK attacks, the Turkish arranged fifteen million military forces around the southeast region and sent two million stepping into the Iraq borders to launch hostile attacks concentrated to the PKK's military base. Facing unfavorable conditions, Ocalan declared a unilateral ceasefire and proposed peace talks with the Turkish government, which collapsed following a suicide bombing initiated by PKK hardliners opposing talks with the Turkish state. The conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish government subsequently intensified reaching 1984, with military operations victimizing nearly four million Kurds. Innocent civilians were also killed; the executions, torturing, and forced displacements of Kurdish citizens encouraged thousands to flee away from the conflict. The PKK also reacted with expanded insurgencies, now perpetrating attacks to diplomatic offices in France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark. With continuous repetitions of attacks and retaliations, the vicious cycle between the two does not seem to end, but rather shows a tendency to be more intensified with large scale operations. Turkey threatens to head into Syria where a large population of Kurds are concentrated in, and the Kurds continue their terrorist attacks targeting military personals and civilians.

Efforts for peace

Although the conflict between the Turks and the Kurds is mostly a repeat of massive insurgencies, there have been several efforts to retain peace without an armed clash. After the death of thousands of Kurds and hundreds of Turks in 1984, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan established a conference with the Iraq government regarding the solutions to the ongoing conflict, but neither could reach an agreement, resulting in an end in the conference without progress. During the election season in 2009, the Turkish government attempted an appeasement policy and undertook the work of resolving the Kurds' problems in a democratic method, accepting Ocalan's suggestions and granting several rights to the Kurdish population, such as lifting the ban of the Kurdistan language. Their policy started in 2013 February; following Ocalan's call for the immediate ceasefire and start of the withdrawal of thousands of fighters from the Turkish territory, the Turkish government accepted Ocalan's peace initiative and agreed to promote expanded Kurdish rights. However, the Turkish government changed direction and decided not to implement Ocalan's peace initiative. There were numerous objections in regulations such as the abolishment of surveillance policies and the acceptance of Kurdistan language usage, and the Iraq government expressed great discontent in the influx of PKK as an interference in their sovereignty, ending the policy as a failure.

Conflict with ISIL

As the Kurds expanded throughout the Syrian region, they soon faced conflicts with the ISIL. Since 2014, the Kurds living in Syria united with the US forces and fought in cooperation against the Islamic States. The US supported the Kurds with weapons, military advising, and air support to help them fight against the ISIL. The US choice to work with the Kurds instead of the Syrian military was mainly affected by the close relationship between the Syrian government with Iran and Russia. With the ISIL at its peak, the Syrian and Kurdish troops refrained from attacking others as primary enemies. After the defeat of the ISIL, the Kurds were able to control a large fraction of northern Syria, virtually having a self-governing region. However, in October 2019, Donald Trump, the president of the US, started to withdraw US military forces from northern Syria, and Turkey was again able to launch military operations in that region. The operations launched brought more than 50 casualties of civilians in Syria and about 60 deaths of Kurdish fighters; it further caused the displacement of over 300,000 people. While Kurds criticize the US for “betraying” them, Turkey started sending troops to advance 30 kilometers into Syria’s territory. In response to the critics of other nations pointing out that the Turks were attempting “invasion”, Turkey once again threatened to send refugees hosted by Turkey to Europe. Though Turkey’s threat brought Europe into a halt, thousands of people within has continued to denounce the Turkish military operation in Syria, warning about the possibility of ISIL revival. The EU also agreed on prohibiting weapon exports to Turkey and on creating a list of possible sanctions to be made on Turkish individuals and entities under certain circumstances. Additionally, the US, though doing little to stop the operation, has threatened to destroy Turkey’s economy if going too far. The Middle East rivals have all united against the Turks in worries about the revival of ISIL and with attention on upholding their territorial sovereignty.



United States Military Vehicles in Iraq leaving northern Syria

Oil Revenues

The Kurds have control over nearly one-third of Iraq's oil reserves, mostly with the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline. The Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline is Iraq's largest oil export line constructed in the 1970s, extending from Kirkuk to Ceyhan in Turkey. The Kirkuk oilfields show importance in their massive volume and revenue, estimated to contain about nine billion barrels of recoverable oil. The Kirkuk fields used to be split between Iraq's oil company and the KRG, but the ISIL drove Iraq out in 2014, and Kurdish forces gained control of the Kirkuk fields after defeating the ISIL in that region. In 2013, the KRG constructed another export pipeline from Kirkuk to Ceyhan in order to transport crude oil, and in 2015, they began independent sales of crude oil. While the Kurds urgently need Kirkuk sources to maintain their independent exports and cover their budget needs in support of refugees and militants, the Iraqi government insists that SOMO (State Oil Marketing Organization) should have complete control over Iraqi crude oil exports, partially in fear that independent oil exports would fuel the Kurdish push for independence. Because export of crude oil plays a crucial role in both the state and the Kurdistan's economic issues, both sides cannot easily give up their lucrative oil revenues. The Kurds have a limited area they control, and is not an independent state, so they can only rely on oil revenues under their control for a solution to financial issues. But even this contains many hardships; the oil pipelines in the Kurd's area are under the state's possession in paper, and exports can easily be blocked with the economic blockade of surrounding nations. On the other hand, the government also faces several risks that taking over the oil exports could provoke the powerful players in the international markets, such as the Rosneft Oil Company of Russia. The two sides have also tried making a deal to regulate such issues, but were unable to fully satisfy their desires. In 2014, the KRG and the Iraqi government signed a deal assuring financial assistance of 17 percent of Iraqi budget under which the Kurds would transfer an average 550,000 bpd (barrel per day) to SOMO. However, the deal broke down in a little more than two months when both sides started to transfer an amount less than the agreed volumes. In 2017, exports have been blocked since the Iraqi government regained the oil fields of Kirkuk, in retaliation to a referendum advocating for Kurdish independence. With the intervention of the US mounting pressure on Iraq to restart crude export, Iraq and the KRG resumed oil exports from Kirkuk in the end of 2017. Though oil export has resumed, there is a need for the KRG and the Iraqi government to renegotiate their oil policy.



Map showing different parts of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Pipeline under Iraqi, KRG, and Turkish control

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The Middle East nations of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, the states in which the Kurds live, have favored keeping the Kurdish question out of the United Nations' interest; therefore, until 1991, the United Nations did not have a direct relationship with the Kurdish question. In the beginning, there were few early attempts to make the United Nations acknowledge the Kurdish question, which often faced an unsuccessful ending. One of the attempts occurred in January 1946, when Rizgari Kurd, a Kurdish liberation party made a formal appeal to the United Nations for Kurdish sovereignty and self-determination, which was superseded by the formation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP).

On March 1988, the UN finally brought up the issue of Iraq's use of chemical warfare against the Iraqi Kurds and condemned Iraq's use of such weapons in UN Security Council Resolution 620 (August 26, 1988). Not seeing a complete solution to the problem, the destruction of Iraq's stockpile of WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) was ordered by Resolution 687. In it, the U.S. Special Commission (UNSCOM) was established to oversee the destruction and monitoring of chemical weapons. After three days, Iraq accepted the resolution and destroyed WMD equipment; the UNSCOM's destruction program followed, putting an end to Iraqi chemical usage. On April 5, 1991, the UN proposed another Security Council Resolution 688, condemning the repression of the Iraqi civilian population in Kurdish populated areas and demanding Iraq to end the repression to ensure that all human and political rights of Iraqi citizens are respected. The United States later used this resolution to justify its creation of a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq. Subsequently, the United Nations also enforced several humanitarian

programs in this region. In August 14, 2003, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) was established by the Security Council Resolution 1500, with a mandate (renewed in Security Council resolution 2421 as) assisting the Iraqi government in its political processes, including elections, constitutional review, and efforts to reform in the security sector. UNAMI maintains a neutral position in the disputes between Iraq and the Kurds; it is currently proposing discussions for the Kirkuk region oil management and puts in efforts to refrain from using military troops. In 2008 to 2009, UNAMI has organized a study called Iraq's "Disputed International Boundaries" (DIBs) and proposed specified methods to settle the question of the Kurdish region's sale of oil and gas; however, the hopes of the Kurds to see a concrete political process has leaked into carrying out a referendum, and no further significant progress has been seen.

In response to Trump's announcement of the US' sudden withdrawal from northern Syria, the UN is operating across the northeast to implement plans to provide food to the people along the border for a month or two. However, the UN is only able to rely on Turkey's words promising to prioritize the protection of civilians and humanitarian concerns during the operations in the northern zone along the borders of Syria.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
July, 1922	Kurds' first revolt for independence
April, 1984	Formation of the PKK (Kurdistan's Worker's Party)
1990	Conference between Kurds and Turkish government
March 20, 1995	Three million Turks launch assaults across the border of Iraq
August 26, 1988	UN Security Council Resolution 620
April 3, 1991	UN Security Council Resolution 687
April 5, 1991	UN Security Council Resolution 688
February 15, 1999	PKK leader Abdulla Ocalan captured and sent to Turkey
February 26, 1999	Kurds target Turkish diplomatic offices in protest to Ocalan's arrest
July 29, 1999	Turkey declares Ocalan's execution
September 26, 2001	Turkish government passes a revision of accepting Kurdish cultural characteristic and linguistic usage
April 16, 2002	PKK changed its name to KADEK: Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan; USA and EU recognize PKK as a terrorist organization
October 12, 2002	Turkey changes Ocalan's execution plans to life imprisonment
August 14, 2003	UN Security Council Resolution 1500 created UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq)
October, 2006	Creation of the ISIL with Baghdadi as its leader
January 4, 2007	Turkey threatens to end cooperation with US if not participating in a military offensive

	to root out Kurds
October 12, 2007	EU requests a stop in Turkish military attacks on Kurds
January 9, 2013	Turkish government accepts Ocalan's peace initiative
November 11, 2013	Kurds in Syria drives out ISIL
December 2, 2014	Government of Iraq and the government of Iraqi Kurdistan oil agreement sign
October 17, 2014	US international union unites with the Kurdish military
September 23, 2014	United States carries out airstrikes against ISIS
January 26, 2015	Kurdish People's Protection Units take control of Kobani from ISIS
March 17, 2016	Kurds declare northeastern Syria as a separate autonomous region
September 25, 2017	Iraqi Kurdistan referendum on independence
March 23, 2019	Kurds capture eastern Syrian Baghouz from ISIS
October 9, 2019	Turkey launches military offensive into Syria shortly after US withdrawal
October 17, 2019	Turkey agrees on a conditional ceasefire

Possible Solutions

The borders of the countries the Kurds reside on, which are the places the Kurds hope to establish an independent nation in, are the oil provinces of each country, which accounts for a great reason to prohibit the Kurds from making an independent nation. For the Kurds and the nation to both establish a win-win, there is a need for the two to renegotiate and work on setting up specific and clear regulations on oil mining and profit distribution. The UN should organize an annual conference for the Kurds and the nations sharing the oil provinces to negotiate with each other and reach an agreement.

To stop the ongoing armed conflict, a ceasefire is necessary to make the first steps of a new peace talk. It is important to satisfy the demands of both sides – the Kurds wanting an autonomous region and the government wanting to prevent secessionist movements – in order to prevent the same mistake made in 2013. The government should make progress in providing an autonomous state in each nation the Kurds reside in or strengthening already existing ones, and accept the cultures and language of the Kurdistan groups. An understanding and concession are necessary for any progress to be made.

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