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Policy Dilemma

The Kurdish people are an ethnic group that is often deemed the “largest ethnic group in the world without its own state.”¹ With 25 million² to 43 million³ Kurds living in “Kurdistan” – a 200,000 mile stretch of mountainous land encompassing parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria – and the rest scattered in Central Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and other parts of the Middle East, the Kurdish Diaspora is widespread. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, prior to World War I, the Kurds enjoyed self-governance. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Kurds attempted to secure their own state through the short-lived Treaty of Sevres.⁴ However, the post-WWI “new world order”⁵ left the Kurds without their own nation-state.⁶

The modern-day Kurdish nationalist movement is rooted in the desire for self-governance and the ultimate establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Kurdish nationalist thought is based on their nation’s inhabitation of the Kurdistan region for over 3,000 years as the original owners of the land and not as intruding minorities.⁷ The Kurdish nation has outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races, such as the Assyrians, Romans, Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Mongols, and Turks, and has its own



¹ Kishwork, “Kurdish People Profile,” Kishwork, <http://users.htcomp.net/kishwork/kurdprof.pdf> (Accessed March 19, 2011)

² *Ibid*

³ Nashville Kurds, “What is Kurdistan,” Nashville Kurds: <http://www.nashvillekurds.com/history/history1.html> (Accessed April 11, 2011)

⁴ *The Treaty of Peace between the Allies and Associated Powers and Turkey*, 10 August, 1920 (http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260).

⁵ “New World Order” is a term used to refer to a new period of history in which there is a shift in balance of power and in political thought. After World War I, Woodrow Wilson used the term in relation to the formation of the League of Nations.

⁶ Georgia State University, “*World War One and the Principle of National Self-Determination: A Closer Look at Kurdistan*,” Georgia State University, http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=anthro_theses (Accessed March 19, 2011)

language, culture, and history.⁸ The Kurdish people believe that their uninterrupted inhabitation of the area has been neglected through the “unjust partition” of their land.⁹ Though the Kurdish people of Iraqi Kurdistan have recently enjoyed considerable self-governance and autonomy, the same cannot be said about the Kurds in Syria, Iran, and Turkey, where Kurds are not entitled to all of the same rights as other constituents.

The Kurdish claim to self-determination is countered by the claims of territorial sovereignty by the governments of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Each of these states is a sovereign entity recognized by the United Nations. Since the creation of an independent Kurdistan would consist of territories from any or all of the aforementioned states, the creation of a Kurdish state may amount to secession, which is illegal under international law.¹⁰ Currently, one of the most prominent secessionist movements for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan is the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), or the Kurdistan Workers Party.¹¹ Based in Turkey, the PKK – a recognized terrorist group by the European Union, Turkey, and the United States – has been at war with the Turkish government since the 1980s in a conflict that has taken over 30,000 lives.¹² The PKK is just one example of Kurdish nationalism. Others include the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP), and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in Turkey, and the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK) in Iran. Such Kurdish organizations, some militant and others purely political, apply a variety of means to attain their, in some cases differing, objectives.

How can the Kurdish claim for self-determination be reconciled with the claims of territorial sovereignty by the states which the group predominantly inhabits? This question is at the core of the dilemma. However, in recent years, the PKK and other

⁷ C.J. Edmonds, “Kurdish Nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no.1 (1971): 87-107

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ General Assembly, XXV, *Declaration on the Principles of International Law, Friendly Relations, Co-Operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations* (2625), 24 October, 1970, (<http://www.hku.edu/law/conlawhk/conlaw/outline/Outline4/2625.htm>).

¹¹ Neophytos G. Loizides, “State Ideology and the Kurds in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no.4 (2010): 513-527

¹² Marc Champion, “PKK Revokes Cease-Fire in Turkey,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 2011 (Accessed March 20, 2011)

Kurdish leaders have abandoned calls for an independent state. Rather their focus, in Turkey specifically, is primarily on attaining political autonomy and the right to teach in the Kurdish language in schools.¹³ These more moderate demands present an opportunity for the international community to bring forth a solution that calls for internal reforms in these states, as opposed to the creation of a new state for the Kurdish people. Irrespective of the type of solution, the plight of the Kurdish people is one that must be understood and handled appropriately.

Chronology

1918 - 1925: Partition of the Ottoman Empire

With the Ottomans on the losing end of the First World War, the partition of the former empire, spanning from Turkey to the Middle East and Northern Africa, was heavily contested. The empire's defeat provided an opportunity for its various ethnic groups to create their own nation-states. However, both internal and external factors prevented the Kurdish state from coming to fruition.¹⁴

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, most peoples within its former borders gained independence. One notable exception was the Kurds. The United Kingdom and France occupied much of the Middle East and agreed upon the division of the land through the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.¹⁵ By 1918, Great Britain changed the terms of the agreement to include the oil-rich Kurdish *vilayet* (province) of Mosul in its sphere of influence.¹⁶ As a result, the United Kingdom – with its occupations of Syria, Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), and southern Kurdistan – had more power than the United States, France, or Turkey in determining the future of Kurdistan.¹⁷ Despite initially not receiving a state of their own, the Kurds were allotted one within the vilayet

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, D C : Taylor & Francis, Inc., 1992), 59.

¹⁵ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl, 1989), 286, 288, 391.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 391.

¹⁷ David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York, London: I.B Tauris & Co, Ltd., 2004), 135.

of Mosul by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 on the condition that they prove their ability to govern independently.¹⁸

Internal conflict within the Kurds over leadership allowed this opportunity for statehood to wither away. The British government negotiated with the many Kurdish tribes scattered across the region. During this process, however, they were unable to find one sole leader of the Kurdish people. The desires of the Kurdish people were unclear as some tribal chiefs preferred protection to self-rule.¹⁹ This preference continues to be a trend in the present day, as the inability of Kurds to present a unified front has been a detriment to their claims for self-determination.

Also working against the Kurds favor was the independence movement of the Turks and unwillingness of Britain and France to enforce the Treaty of Sèvres. After the Turkish nationalist movement defeated Greece and Great Britain, its leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk moved to renegotiate the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres to establish the new government as separate from the Ottoman Sultanate.²⁰ The new government negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne, superseding the Treaty of Sèvres, which recognized the Republic of Turkey as the sovereign successor state to the Ottoman Empire; the treaty, however, made no mention of the Kurds.²¹ The Kurdish people have been deemed, by some scholars, as “victims of peace settlements,” since the original Treaty of Sèvres was not adhered to.²² Competing international interests in the aftermath of World War I are part of the reason why the Kurds remain stateless people.

1923 - 1938: Turkification and the Kurdish Revolts

After the recognition of Turkey as an independent state, President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk embarked on a campaign of “Turkification,” which entailed transforming the

¹⁸ *The Treaty of Peace between the Allies and Associated Powers and Turkey*, 10 August, 1920 (http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260).

¹⁹ David McDowell, 136.

²⁰ Joshua Teitelbaum, “*Taking Back the Caliphate*: Sharif Husayn Ibn ‘Ali, Mustafa Kemal and the Ottoman Caliphate,” *Welt Des Islams* 40, no. 3, (2000): 414.

²¹ The Convention Respecting the Regime of the Straits and Other Instruments, *Treaty of Peace Signed with Turkey*, 24 July, 1923 (http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne).

²² Gidon Gottlieb, “Nations Without States,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 3, (1994): 104.

Islamic social order that existed during the Ottoman Empire into a secular Turkish society. By extending the Law of Treason to include “all discussion of the caliphate or any appeal to religion in political life,” Atatürk cut the last ideological connection the Kurds had with the Turks, exacerbating the Kurdish community’s struggle for freedom of expression that continues to present day.²³ In December 1925, a circular was issued that banned the use of the words “Kurd” and “Kurdistan.”²⁴ Over time, the Turkification process came to also include the banning of Kurdish associations, publications, schools, and other forms of Kurdish cultural expression.²⁵

The Kurdish community met Turkification with much unrest. The Sheikh Said and the Azandi nationalist movements revolted with both religious and nationalist objectives. However, their primary goal was to establish an independent Kurdistan.²⁶ The Turkish government crushed the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 by deploying a force of 50,000 soldiers, including airpower, which vastly outnumbered the Kurdish front of 15,000.²⁷ The Kurds had two more major revolts at Mt. Ararat (1930) and Dersim (1937- 1938), but they also resulted in a harsh Turkish response that included the razing of Kurdish towns and the forced removal of Kurds from fertile lands in Kurdistan to the barren lands in Ankara.²⁸ Such events were early signs of the ongoing struggle between the Turkish government and Turkey’s Kurdish minority for the establishment of Kurdish cultural autonomy and, for some, the creation of an independent Kurdish state.

²³ David McDowell, 192

²⁴ Andrew Mango, “Ataturk and the Kurds,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no.4, (1999): 20.

²⁵ Lokman I., Meho, *The Kurds and Kurdistan: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 9.

²⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*, (Utrecht: Ryksuniversiteit, 1978), 404-5

²⁷ Robert, Olsen, “*The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-8): Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism,*” *Welt des Islams* 40 no. 1, (2000): 74

²⁸ David McDowell, 209

1946 - 1947: The Mahabad Republic

The Mahabad Republic was an attempt to establish an autonomous Kurdish territory within the limits of the Iranian state.²⁹ In late 1945, a committee of middle-class Kurdish townspeople, supported by tribal chiefs, took over the local administration and formed the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) and the Mahabad Republic.³⁰ The Republic was heavily dependent on the support of the Soviet Union, and subsequently, its success was subject to the whims of the early Cold War Era interactions between the United States and the USSR. Though Mahabad Republic President Qazi Muhammad claimed that the DPK was not communist, the Republic's ties to the Soviet Union made it fall out of favor with the western world and ultimately led to its demise.³¹ The failure of the Mahabad Republic highlights the importance of the international community in determining the future of the Kurdish people and the legitimacy of a potential autonomous region or state.

January 1978 - February 1979: The Iranian Revolution

Kurdish nationalists participated in the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in an attempt to establish cordial relations with the new Iranian government.³² The revolution put an end to the KDP exile that dated back to the days of the Mahabad Republic.³³ Many Kurdish leaders were optimistic about their chances of establishing an autonomous Kurdish province within Iran and talked openly about cooperation with the new regime.³⁴ The new Iranian government, however, was swift to reject calls for autonomy, as it was fearful that it would motivate similar splinter movements among other ethnic groups.³⁵

Within five weeks of the revolution, the Iranian government undertook a bloody military assault against the Kurdish activists, now known as the “Bloody Newroz of

²⁹ Jean, Allain, *International Law in the Middle East: Closer to Power than Justice*, (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 27–28

³⁰ C.J. Edmonds, 96

³¹ Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan In the Shadow of History*, (New York: Random House, 1997): 182.

³² Lokman I. Meho, 30

³³ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, & Gareth Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran,” *Middle East Journal* 64, no.1, (2010): 17

³⁴ *Ibid*, 17

³⁵ Lokman I., Meho, 30

Sandanoj,” killing about 450 people.³⁶ What resulted was a gradual, but substantial, deterioration of relations between Kurdish leadership and the Islamic Republic. These series of events led to a guerrilla warfare campaign in which the military superiority of the Iranian government dominated the Kurdish resistance.³⁷ This hostility continues to characterize the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kurdish people.

November 1978: Founding of the PKK

In November 1978, a small group of Kurdish nationalists established the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which, over the next few decades, would become the most visible and violent voice of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Initially, the PKK only targeted feudal landlords and radical leftist groups; however, in the 1980s, it expanded its scope to Turkish nationalists, radical leftist Kurdish nationalists, and “state collaborators.”³⁸ Following the military coup in Turkey in 1980, many within the PKK fled to Syria. There, they reorganized themselves, trained, and carried out periodic attacks across the Turkish-Syrian border.³⁹

In 1984, after power was transferred back to the government from the military, the PKK launched a full-fledged guerilla war against the Turkish government.⁴⁰ The Turkish government responded by launching a massive military campaign that killed thousands of Kurds, several of whom were unaffiliated with the PKK.⁴¹ Though the PKK’s guerilla campaign was not very successful, it substantially increased PKK membership and the strength of the Kurdish nationalist movement. During the Gulf War, the PKK utilized the no-fly zone over Iraq as a base for launching their attacks. Consequently, these attacks

³⁶ Abdullah, Hassanzade, “Niw Sada Tekoshan [Half a Century of Struggle]” (Komisyoni chapamani hizbi demokrati Kurdistan: 1995), 140

³⁷ Lokman I. Meho, 30

³⁸ “The Case of the PKK: History, Ideology, Methodology, and Structure (1978-99),” *Ankara Papers* 9, no.1, (2004): 30

³⁹ *Ibid*, 28

⁴⁰ Martin Van Bruinessen, “Between Guerrilla War and Political Murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan,” *Middle East Report/MERIP Reports*, 18 (1988): 40-46, 50

⁴¹ Sheri Laizer, “Gerard Chaliand's The Kurdish Factor,” *Namah* 2 (Fall 1994): 4

resulted in the deaths of over a thousand people per year in the war's aftermath.⁴² The impact of the PKK on the Kurdish Nationalist Movement makes them one of the major actors that need to be dealt with in the resolution of the Kurdish question.

1986 – 1989: Al-Anfal Campaign

In the midst of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Saddam Hussein was concerned about the threat the Kurdish people in Iraq could pose if they were to fight on the side of Iran. However, this fear was substantially placated by the military aid given by the United States, France, and the USSR, each of which was wary of the consequences of an Iranian dominated Middle East. As a result, the ceasefire negotiations between the Iraqi government and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), an Iraqi Kurdish nationalist organization, collapsed.⁴³

The collapse of the talks led to the razing of Kurdish towns and the purging of Kurds within Iraq for the purpose of gaining a strategic advantage against Iran. As Iran encroached on Iraqi Kurdistan, employing Kurdish forces in the process, Operation Anfal was initiated by the Iraqi government. It was a series of major assaults in Kurdistan using chemical and other high-explosive air attacks even before ground forces approached the area. However, what many initially did not know was that captured Kurds were brought to detention centers. After a few days, males that were of “military age” were subject to firing squads and mass execution.⁴⁴ Many were also victims of the Halabja Poison Gas Attack on March 16, 1988 that killed over 3,200 people.⁴⁵ International recognition of the massacre was slow at the onset. The publishing of the Middle East Watch report “*Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds*” in 1993 legitimized Kurdish claims of genocide. With the deaths of approximately 182,000 Kurds, the displacement of

⁴² The Case of the PKK, 28

⁴³ David McDowell, 350

⁴⁴ Middle East Watch, “*Genocide in Iraq: the Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds*,” *Human Rights Watch*, (1993): 36

⁴⁵ BBC, “1988: Thousands die in Halabja Gas Attack,” http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/16/newsid_4304000/4304853.stm (Accessed March 29, 2011).

1.5 million, and the razing of over 4,000 villages, the Al-Anfal campaign was devastating to the Iraqi-Kurdish population.⁴⁶

2003 – Present: Post-Invasion Iraq

After the United States led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi Kurds were optimistic about their prospects for the future. The Kurds played a substantial role in the invasion as Kurdish support allowed the United States led coalition to attack on both Iraq's northern and southern borders.⁴⁷ The deposition of the rule of Saddam Hussein and the imposition of democracy has provided the Kurds an opportunity to extend their autonomy from the federal government. With a substantial representation in the Iraqi Council of Representatives after the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Kurds now wield significant power in Iraqi politics.⁴⁸ The next few years will be crucial for the situation of Kurds in Iraq. Though independence is considered by most to be unfeasible, the newfound power of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq could prove otherwise.⁴⁹

Actors and Interests

Kurdish Tribes

Tribal Kurds are becoming increasingly harder to define. Political alliances in Kurdish society have transcended tribal affiliation in terms of the amount of influence they have on decision-making. In recent years, the influence of tribes has rapidly declined. In Iraqi Kurdistan, for example, the number of Kurds that identified themselves with a tribe fell from 60% in 1960 to 20% in 1980 and continues to decline today.⁵⁰ Due to differences in place, size, structure, and organization, Kurdish tribes represent a wide range of interests.

⁴⁶ William Ochsenwald & Sydney N. Fisher, *The Middle East: A History*, (McGraw Hill, 2004), 768

⁴⁷ Ofra Bengio, "Iraqi Kurds: Hour of Power?," *Middle East Quarterly* 10, no. 3, (2003): 46

⁴⁸ National Public Radio, "Iraq Votes: The 2010 Iraq Parliamentary Elections," National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124316156> (Accessed March 28, 2011)

⁴⁹ The Economist, "Iraqi Kurdistan: Does Independence Beckon?," The Economist, <http://www.economist.com/node/9769132> (Accessed March 28, 2011).

⁵⁰ Michael M. Gunter, "The A to Z of the Kurds," (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009), 52

Tribal Kurds have been victims of persecution, as there have been attempts by governments to forcibly remove tribal chieftains to achieve their goals of centralization.⁵¹ Despite such efforts, Kurdish tribalism continues to exist and transcends geopolitical boundaries. Kurdish tribes tend to be ideologically consistent in recognition of common descent and practices of endogamy (parallel cousin marriage); however, their influence is marred by irreconcilable differences in political alliance.⁵²

A prominent example is the Bucak tribe within Turkey. Members of the Bucak tribe have died on both sides of the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK.⁵³ In 1979, the PKK targeted the leader of one branch of the Bucaks, Mehmet Celal Bucak, as a symbolic attack against a Kurd considered to be a “collaborator” with the Turkish government. A leader of another branch of the family, Serhat Bucak, is closely aligned with the PKK.⁵⁴ These individuals have a common ancestry, but they are separated by alliance. Such internal divide makes it difficult to delineate the desires of the Kurds as a collective group.

Kurdish Political Parties

Similar to tribal Kurds, Kurdish political parties represent a wide range of interests. Sometimes referred to as “neo-tribalism,” Kurdish political parties can be described as confederations of tribes. Iraqi Kurdistan is a prime example, as the KDP and PUK are two major confederations that are competing for political hegemony in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)⁵⁵ and economic hegemony in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁵⁶

The KDP and PUK represent two parallel structures of governance in the KRG that dispute over revenue control, leadership, and the “degree to which they should

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ Martin Van Bruinessen “Kurds, States, and Tribes,” Utrecht University, <http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds,%20states,%20tribes.htm> (Accessed April 4, 2011)

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ David McDowall, 403

⁵⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen “The Nature and Uses of Violence in the Kurdish Conflict,” Utrecht University, <http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Violence.htm> (Accessed April 4, 2011)

acquiesce to Baghdad.”⁵⁷ Historically, the KDP was more tribal and was interested in maintaining a more autonomous relationship with Baghdad as opposed to the PUK, which was more progressive and had a more conciliatory stance towards Baghdad.⁵⁸ The tensions between the two parties led to the Kurdish Civil War from 1994 to 1998.⁵⁹ The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government showcased solidarity between the two parties as they fought for greater Kurdish regional autonomy. Despite this move, the spheres of influence of the two parties within Iraqi Kurdistan are still evident as they continue to control the KRG.⁶⁰ The KDP and PUK have shown signs of cooperation, but there is still a distinct divide between members of both parties. There has even been talk of the two parties running separately in Iraq’s general elections, which would further emphasize the divide in their so called “strategic alliance.”⁶¹

In Turkey, the primary issue has been the Turkish government’s outlawing of Kurdish political parties. In 2003, Turkey banned the Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) for its alleged connections with the PKK.⁶² This decision was followed by the ban of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2009 for the same reasons.⁶³ The bans caught the attention of the European Union Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the ban of HADEP was “not justified” as it violated the members right to assembly and association.⁶⁴ The newest Kurdish political party in Turkey, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), advocates sweeping changes within the Turkish political system

⁵⁷ Darren L. Logan, “Thoughts on Iraqi Kurdistan: Present Realities, Future Hope,” *Iran & The Caucasus* 13, no.1 (2009): 161-186

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ Middle East Explorer, “Iraqi Kurdish Civil War,” Middle East Explorer, <http://www.middleeastexplorer.com/Turkey/Iraqi-Kurdish-Civil-War> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶⁰ Darren L. Logan, 174

⁶¹ *Rudaw*, “Kurdistan’s Two Ruling Parties May Separate for Elections,” 13 March, 2011: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/3500.html> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶² *BBC*, “Turkey Bans Kurdish Party,” 13 March, 2003: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2846513.stm> (Accessed April 5, 2011).

⁶³ *Al-Jazeera*, “Violence follows DTP Ban in Turkey,” 13 December, 2009: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/12/200912136152398809.html> (Accessed April 5, 2011).

⁶⁴ *Hürriyet*, “Euro court says Turkey’s closure of pro-Kurdish HADEP ‘not justified’,” 14 December 2010: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=euro-court-says-turkeys-closure-of-pro-kurdish-hadep-not-justified-2010-12-14> (Accessed April 5, 2011).

in order to gain democratic autonomy for the Kurdish people.⁶⁵ When comparing Turkey to Iraqi Kurdistan, it is evident that the struggle for political representation is both internal and external for the Kurds. Nonetheless, a representative organization for the Kurds will allow them to conduct negotiations with the international community.

Militant Kurdish Organizations

Militant Kurds are those that have taken up arms in order to achieve stated aims of greater autonomy for Kurdistan. The most prominent organizations are the PKK, Ansar Al-Islam, and the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK). All three groups are recognized by the United States⁶⁶, United Kingdom⁶⁷, and/or European Union⁶⁸ as terrorist organizations. The relationship between these militant organizations and the Kurdish people needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis. For instance, in Turkey, a group of prominent Turkish intellectuals have openly condemned the PKK for their use of violence.⁶⁹

Ansar Al-Islam is a case of Kurdish militants fighting against other Kurdish groups. Based in Iraqi Kurdistan, Ansar al-Islam has intermittently engaged in clashes against the PUK.⁷⁰ The organization advocates a more orthodox interpretation of Islam, which includes a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, and wants a return to the "purity" of the early Islamic community.⁷¹ The United Nations has Ansar Al-Islam on its list of

⁶⁵ Peace and Democracy Party, "Democratic Solution to the Kurdish Question," Peace and Democracy Party: <http://www.bdp.org.tr/english/documents/democratic-autonomy.html> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶⁶ U.S Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," U.S Department of State: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶⁷ U.K Home Office, "Proscribed Terrorist Groups," U.K Home Office, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/proscribed-terror-groups/proscribed-groups?view=Binary> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶⁸ E.U Parliament, "Council Common Position on the Application of Specific Measures to Combat Terrorism," <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:023:0037:01:EN:HTML> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁶⁹ *Today's Zaman*, "Kurdish Intellectuals Condemn PKK threats, Intimidation," 11 March, 2011: http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action;jsessionid=837EF01F762F09C3168152C2901A71B6?newsId=237840 (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan," Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounders/mena/ansarbk020503.htm> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁷¹ *Ibid*

organizations that are affiliated with Al-Qaeda.⁷² Likewise, it is apparent that the international community does not look favorably upon Ansar Al-Islam. The organization is against the involvement of the United States and coalition forces in Iraq, and uses the “illegality” of the 2003 invasion as justification for its attacks.⁷³ Its use of indiscriminate violence in suicide attacks against Shiite mosques, Christian churches, and Kurdish political parties have made it a very polarizing political organization.⁷⁴

Regardless of whether a militant organization has considerable support among the Kurdish people, it is still a relevant actor. Though the stated goal for the majority of these militant organizations is some form of greater autonomy or independence for the Kurdistan region, some, such as the PKK, have been willing to compromise. Though the PKK’s stated aim is for an independent Kurdistan, it has narrowed these aims in favor of Kurdish cultural autonomy.⁷⁵ Recently, the PKK decided to extend its ceasefire with the Turkish government in order to further the election chances of the BDP⁷⁶, who won 36 seats in parliament in the June 2011 elections.⁷⁷ This gesture may be an indication of the PKK’s exploration of political avenues to enact change in the future.⁷⁸ It is possible to convince these organizations to reach a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish question but unclear what price the affected states will have to pay.

Sovereign States

Sovereign states are a significant actor in the Kurdish question, as a resolution may threaten their territorial integrity. In states with large Kurdish populations, it is

⁷² United Nations, “The Consolidated List established and maintained by the 1267 Committee with respect to Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them,” 24 March, 2011: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/pdf/consolidatedlist.pdf> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁷³ Council on Foreign Relations, “Ansar al-Islam (Iraq, Islamists/Kurdish Separatists), Ansar al-Sunnah,” Council on Foreign Relations: <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/ansar-al-islam-iraq-islamistskurdish-separatists-ansar-al-sunnah/p9237#p5> (November 5, 2008)

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ Tahiri Hussein, *The Structure of Kurdish Society and the Struggle for a Kurdish State* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publications, 2007): 232

⁷⁶ *Today's Zaman*, “PKK cease-fire end seen as move to help BDP before elections,” 2 March, 2011 http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=237075 (Accessed April 5, 2011)

⁷⁷ Ross Wilson, “Turkish Election: An AKP Victory with Limits,” *The Atlantic Council*, June 13 2011, http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/turkish-election-akp-victory-limits (Accessed June 16, 2011)

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

difficult for the state government to ignore the political activism of the Kurdish minority. Though the Kurdish question has yet to be resolved, the presence of large minorities puts in doubt the continuity of policies that discriminate against the Kurdish population.

Outside of the Middle East, one prominent state in the Kurdish question is Germany. Germany is home to over 500,000 Kurds.⁷⁹ Within its own borders, Germany is fighting against a Kurdish separatist movement.⁸⁰ Though Germany has banned the PKK, which has committed terrorist attacks within German borders, the Kurds have gained significant political influence within the state.⁸¹ The activities of the PKK in Germany play a substantial role in Germany's lack of approval for Turkey's ascension in the EU.

While Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are generally recognized as states with large Kurdish minorities, one cannot neglect diasporas in Germany, Brazil, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and other states, where the Kurds may have an impact on political decisions. Though this influence has not amounted to drastic shifts in government policy, it has played a role nonetheless.

Intergovernmental Organizations

The Kurdish Diaspora is widespread, as there are nine states with a large – at least 100,000 – Kurdish population. The states that fall into this category are Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Germany, France, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Brazil.⁸² The Kurds in each of these states represent a broad range of interests, some of which do not even desire an independent or autonomous state. Such divergences further emphasize the supranational

⁷⁹ Bruce, Van Voorst "Europe: Embittered Guests", *Time International* (1996): 27

⁸⁰ Alynna J. Lyon;=, Emek M. Uarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no.6 (2001): 925

⁸¹ *Spiegel*. "PKK Circumvents Ban in Germany," 30 October 2007:

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,514379,00.html> (Accessed April 6, 2011)

⁸² The Kurdish Institute of Paris, "The Kurdish Diaspora," The Kurdish Institute of Paris;,
<http://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/> (Accessed April 5, 2011)

nature of the Kurdish question, as the desires of Kurdish populations transcend state boundaries.⁸³

The activism of Kurds within the European Union (EU) is an example in which the Kurds attempt to use diplomatic power in order to achieve the resolution of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Turkey has been vying for EU membership since 1987.⁸⁴ However, Turkey's poor relations with Greece and Cyprus, as well as its internal conflicts with minority groups like the Kurds, have prevented its ascension to the EU.⁸⁵ EU institutions and the European Court of Human Rights have significantly aided the European Kurdish population in simultaneously pursuing political, cultural, and human rights.⁸⁶ Turkey's fear of being excluded from EU institutions has provided Kurds residing within the European Union substantial leverage.⁸⁷

Kerim Yildiz, executive director of the Kurdish Human Rights Project in London and a member of the Board of Directors of the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC), states that "for the Kurds, the stipulations in the field of minority and human rights attendant to the accession process offer unparalleled scope to achieve long-term justice and security."⁸⁸ However, Yildiz questions whether Turkey is committed to change or if the EU is objectively approving Turkey's progress on democratization and human rights by opening ascension talks.⁸⁹ The presence of the European Union and its relationship with Turkey offers an opportunity for the Kurds to gain international recognition.

⁸³ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Political Movements and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1: 91

⁸⁴ Euractiv.com, "EU-Turkey Relations," Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations/article-129678> (Accessed April 6, 2011)

⁸⁵ Burak Akç Apar, and Denis Chaibi, "Turkey's EU Ascension: The Long Road from Ankara to Brussels," *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 1, no.2 (2006)

⁸⁶ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, 92

⁸⁷ Meltem Muftuler-Bac, *Europe in Change: Turkey's Relations with a Changing Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997): 51-73.

⁸⁸ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights*, (Pluto Press, 2005): 20

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

Possible Causes

Competing Nationalisms

The competing nationalisms of the Kurds and the states they inhabit propagate the divisions between them. Secular Turkish nationalism in Turkey and Persian Shiite Muslim nationalism of Iran are two examples of government ideologies that directly conflict with the primarily Sunni Muslim Kurdish nationalist base.⁹⁰ The Arab nationalism of Syria influences the Syrian government in not granting citizenship to over 80,000 Kurds today.⁹¹ These competing nationalisms are a substantial force in the Kurdish question and are essential components in state policies concerning the Kurds.

The Syrian case juxtaposes Arab nationalism and Kurdish nationalism. The Syrian independence movement was fought on the basis of Arab nationalism, as opposed to Syrian nationalism, as a means of uniting its religiously and ethnically diverse people under a single identity.⁹² With a population of about 1.7 million, the Kurds are Syria's largest minority.⁹³ Though the Syrian government recently made overtures to its Kurdish population by granting citizenship to 220,000 Kurds,⁹⁴ Syria's Kurdish minority continues to express its displeasure with the current Syrian administration through anti-government protests.⁹⁵ The Syrian government still has restrictions on Kurdish language, culture, holidays, marriages, and right to organization.⁹⁶ These policies are a part of the "Arabization" strategy of the Syrian Arab Republic. Initiated in 1962, this strategy intended to restrict the Kurdish people within Syrian borders by simultaneously limiting

⁹⁰ Global Security, "Sunni Islam in Iraq," Global Security, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/religion-sunni.htm> (Accessed April 11, 2011).

⁹¹ *CNN World*, "Stateless Kurds in Syria Granted Citizenship," April 7, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-04-07/world/syria.kurdish.citizenship_1_kurdish-region-kurdish-identity-stateless-kurds?_s=PM:WORLD (Accessed April 11, 2011).

⁹² Robert Lowe, "The Syrian Kurds: A People Rediscovered," *Chatham House: Middle East Program* (2006): 2.

⁹³ University of Maryland, "Assessment for Kurds in Syria," University of Maryland, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=65202> (Accessed April 11, 2011).

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, CNN World

⁹⁵ Frederick Kunkle, "Syrian forces move into seaport; protests reportedly spread to Damascus University," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/violent_protest_continues_in_syria_spreads_to_university_in_capital/2011/04/11/AFV99MLD_story.html?wprss=rss_homepage (Accessed April 11, 2011)

⁹⁶ UNHCR Refworld, "Assessment for Kurds in Syria," UNHCR Refworld, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,MARP,,469f3ad71e,0.html> (Accessed April 12, 2011)

Kurdish cultural practices and expanding Syrian settlements into predominantly Kurdish inhabited lands.⁹⁷ The dynamic between the Kurdish population and Syrian government is characterized by a conflict of interest over the desire for cultural autonomy by the Kurds and the desire for a uniform Arab identity by Syria. However, the nature of the relationship between the two is currently changing as the Arab Spring has inspired further Kurdish nationalism in Syria.⁹⁸

Competing nationalisms in a broader context encapsulates the nature of the Kurdish question, as it is difficult for the Kurds to make an appeal for self-determination without seeming to pose a threat to the other nationalist causes. Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria aim to maintain their borders, just as the Kurds aim to establish new ones. Competing nationalisms has contributed to the stalemate between the Kurdish people and the states which they inhabit.

Kurdish Disunity

The disunity among Kurdish populations throughout Kurdistan has prevented the Kurds from presenting a legitimate front to the international community. Disunity between the KDP and PUK has severely undermined the legitimacy of the KRG in Iraqi Kurdistan and has made it increasingly difficult to discern the interests of the Kurdish people. Divisions between the PKK and Kurdish populations in Turkey have led to murders of Kurdish civilians that were deemed to be in “collaboration” with the Kurdish government. The diversity of the Kurdish population as a whole, whether tribal, militant, or political, compromises the ability of the Kurds to present a unified front to the international community.

The emerging rivalry between the Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK), or Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, and the PKK in Turkey is a prominent example.⁹⁹ The

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: The Silenced Kurds,” Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1996/Syria.htm> (Accessed April 12, 2011).

⁹⁸ Chris Zambelis, “Unrest in Syria Inspires Kurdish Nationalism,” *Asia Times*, June 4, 2011, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MF04Ak02.html (Accessed June 16, 2011)

⁹⁹ James Brandon, “The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons Emerges as a Rival to the PKK,” *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 40 (2006).

Kurdistan Freedom Falcons are believed to be a splinter group from the PKK that is comprised of former members that were dissatisfied with the PKK's "softening" tactics and more conciliatory approach toward the Turkish government.¹⁰⁰ The presence of the TAK and the increase of anti-government violence are dividing the opinions of Kurds in Turkey.¹⁰¹ Some Kurdish intellectuals have condemned the actions of the TAK as they believe it hurts the legitimacy of the Kurds in Turkey.¹⁰² These competing views have prevented the Kurds from presenting a united front against, in this case, the Turkish government.

Disunity has been a fundamental cause of the Kurdish question since the Treaty of Sèvres. The inability of the Kurdish people to unite is a significant obstacle to achieving the ends of any objective. Kurdish activist Dr. Kirmanj Gundi stated, "[Kurdish disunity] has made our people in each part of Kurdistan to struggle independent from each other. This has weakened our people in their struggle to achieve their national dream and confined them in the minority mentality."¹⁰³ Whether it is cultural autonomy or statehood, disunity amongst the Kurdish people has prevented the Kurds from making any substantial gains as a whole.

International Neglect

The international community plays a vital role in the Kurdish question. However, it is the international community's neglect of the Kurdish question that has the most profound impact on the issue as a whole. The discarding of the Treaty of Sèvres in favor of the Treaty of Lausanne was the first of a series of international actions in the Kurdistan region that disregarded the plight of the Kurds. During the Gulf War in 1991, the United States and its coalition forces did not take any further action aside from removing the

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Harvey And Louis Meixler, "Militant Kurds Warn of Wrecking Havok", *USA Today*, August 29, 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-08-29-kurds-warning_x.htm (Accessed April 12, 2011)

¹⁰¹ Rozh Ahmad, "Turkey's Kurds Divided After Death Threats from Separatist Kurdish Group", *Rudaw*, March 27, 2011, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/3522.html> (Accessed April 12, 2011)

¹⁰² *Ibid*

¹⁰³ Kirmanj Gundi, "Division of Kurdistan: Its Impact on the Unity of Kurdish National Psyche," *Kurdish Aspect*, <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc061310KG.html>

Iraqi army from Kuwait; this included not taking any action against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein specifically for his persecution of the Iraqi Kurdish population.¹⁰⁴

The current state of post-invasion Iraq has also demonstrated international neglect towards the Kurdish question. United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative in Iraq Al Merkert stated, "As long as these issues are lurking and are unresolved, they at any moment in time can just be the trigger for conflict and polarization... what we see today on the streets just shows that this [protests] can happen overnight, and you should try to prevent that."¹⁰⁵ International neglect is also rooted in the potential geopolitical consequences of establishing any form of Kurdish presence in the Middle East. For instance, many states believe that a Kurdish entity would destabilize the Middle East as a whole, as it would require infringing upon the territorial sovereignty of one or more Middle Eastern states.¹⁰⁶ The Kurdish question has only been exacerbated by the reluctance of the international community to provide a practical answer.

Comparison of Causes

Competing nationalisms thoroughly explains the reluctance of the governments of Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey to provide an independent state to the Kurdish people. The internal disunity of the Kurdish population prevents the Kurds from acting as a collective group and makes it difficult to recognize a representative of the Kurdish people on the international stage. International neglect serves to negatively impact the desires of the Kurdish people for self-determination, as states do not wish to cause a disruption in the geopolitics of the Middle East through the resolution of the Kurdish question. These factors act simultaneously in preventing the resolution of the Kurdish conflict.

Each cause operates within the context of specific states. In Turkey, for example, the secular nationalist government policy competes with the Kurdish nationalist desire for

¹⁰⁴ Kendal Nezan, "When Our "Friend" Saddam was Gassing the Kurds," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 4, 1998, <http://mondediplo.com/1998/03/04iraqkn> (Accessed April 12, 2011)

¹⁰⁵ *Reuters*. "Protests show Arab-Kurd Issues Need Solving: UN," February 22, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/22/us-iraq-un-melkert-idUSTRE71L7OD20110222> (Accessed April 12, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Michael M. Gunter, "The Kurdish Question in Perspective," *World Affairs* 166, no.4 (2004): 204

cultural autonomy. The violent tactics of the PKK and the TAK have polarized the population, causing disunity amongst those who support militant nationalism and those who prefer a peaceful solution. Lastly, the recognition of the PKK as a terrorist organization by members of the international community shows the reluctance of states to recognize the desires of the Kurdish population as legitimate.¹⁰⁷ In Iran, Iraq, and Syria, similar comparisons can be made that illustrate the relationship between competing nationalisms, Kurdish disunity, and international neglect that substantively explain why the Kurdish question continues to this day.

Projections and Implications

The Geopolitical Implications of a Kurdish State

The creation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East will have widespread geopolitical implications for the current dynamic of the region. One argument that is usually presented against the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraqi Kurdistan specifically is that it would be surrounded by hostile states.¹⁰⁸ Some believe that an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would foster wider Kurdish nationalist sentiment in neighboring Iran, Syria, and Turkey.¹⁰⁹ Turkey has even stated that it would view secession by the Iraqi Kurds as a *casus belli*, or justification for war.¹¹⁰ The United States has also expressed its interest in keeping the territorial integrity of Iraq in tact.¹¹¹ These geopolitical implications have mounted as a significant deterrent to the creation of a Kurdish State.

¹⁰⁷ Marlies Casier, "Designated Terrorists: The Kurdistan Workers' Party and its Struggle to (Re)Gain Political Legitimacy," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010)

¹⁰⁸ Aram Rafaat, "An Independent Kurdish State: Achievable or Merely a Kurdish Dream?," *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* 32, no. 3, (2007): 285

¹⁰⁹ Michael M. Gunter, "Why Kurdish Statehood is Unlikely," *Middle East Policy* 11, no. 1, (2003):

¹¹⁰ K Gajendra Singh, "Long Time Allies: USA and Turkey- almost fallout over Kurdish Iraq," South Asia Analysis Group, 23 July 2003, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers8%5Cpaper742.html> (Accessed April 19, 2011)

¹¹¹ Leslie H. Gelb, "The Three State Solution," New York Times, 25 November 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/25/opinion/the-three-state-solution.html> (Accessed April 19, 2011)

The Socioeconomic Implications of a Kurdish State

The Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are geographically isolated from major cities and centers of political activity and are generally underdeveloped.¹¹² In Iran and Turkey specifically, these regions have been neglected and deprived of developmental funding relative to other regions in those states.¹¹³ The Kurdistan region as a whole is primarily an agrarian region¹¹⁴; with the exception of oil refineries, Kurdistan has little to no industry.¹¹⁵ The agrarian lifestyle in Kurdistan has disintegrated as a result of an enhanced rural-urban migration in the Kurdistan region; however, an alternative industrial lifestyle has yet to be developed.¹¹⁶ In Turkish Kurdistan, only 1 in 280 Kurds can find employment in industry as opposed to 1 in 47 throughout the rest of Turkey.¹¹⁷ Likewise, one cannot easily switch from an agrarian to an industrial means of living. If a Kurdish state comes into existence, it would need to attract a significant amount of investment, as the lack of infrastructure in the Kurdistan region will make it difficult for a state to sustain itself.

¹¹² Graham E. Fuller, "The Fate of the Kurds," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 2, (1993): 111

¹¹³ *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ Carl Dahlman, "The Political Geography of Kurdistan," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 43, no. 4, (2002): 271

¹¹⁵ Maria T. O'Shea, "Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan," (New York: Routledge, 2004): 51

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*

Conclusion

The Kurdish question has been unanswered since the immediate aftermath of World War I. Despite multiple attempts such as the Mahabad Republic in Iran, the Kurdish people have been unable to achieve statehood. As a result, the Kurds have faced discrimination and persecution in the states which they inhabit, most prominently during the Anfal Campaign in Iraq. The major actors in this dilemma include the different Kurdish tribal, political, and militant entities, as well as states with large Kurdish populations and intergovernmental organizations. The conflict of interest between these actors juxtaposes the Kurdish demand for self-determination and the territorial integrity of the states they inhabit. Turkey's aspiration to ascend into the European Union also introduces regional interests as a factor. The disunity amongst the Kurds coupled with international neglect has only exacerbated the Kurdish question. Irrespective of the solution, the international community must address the Kurdish question in a timely manner.

Discussion Questions

- Given the geopolitical and socioeconomic implications, is the creation of a Kurdish state even feasible?
- Should the international community settle for a solution to the Kurdish question that is based solely on cultural autonomy?
- Is there a legitimate representative of the Kurdish people?
- What role does the United States and its coalition play in the Kurdish question?
- What role will the European Union play in the resolution of the Kurdish question, particularly in Turkey?
- Does the Kurdistan Regional Government have enough power and influence to govern an independent Kurdish state?
- If an independent Kurdistan is created, how will it affect the oil interests of Iraq? Would it require brokering an oil sharing agreement?
- What jurisdiction does the United Nations have over modifying policies that discriminate the Kurds?
- Does demanding reform violate a state's national sovereignty?
- On what basis do the Kurds have or have not the right to self-determination?
- Should the international community play a role in creating a recognized Kurdish entity for the purposes of negotiation?
- What implications would granting self-determination to the Kurds have on other such movements in the world?
- Given the presence of disunity amongst the Kurds, would an independent Kurdistan be politically stable?
- What can be done to further develop and industrialize the Kurdistan region?
- Is Kurdish tribalism a defunct concept?
- Considering the differences in language and culture between some Kurdish tribes are the Kurds a unified people deserving of self-determination?

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McDowell provides a superb analysis of the origins, identity, culture, and plights of the Kurdish people. His book provides a comprehensive analysis of the Kurdish question in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. It is a great starting point for a study on the Kurds.

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Similar to McDowell, Gunter provides a through overview about the history of the Kurds. This “guide” has an extensive chronology of the major events in Kurdish history. It also has a “dictionary” section that outlines the key terms and concepts in the Kurdish question.

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