

MODEL UNITED NATIONS VI

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## UN Security Council

REHABILITATING STABILITY  
IN THE KURDISH REGIONS

TSINGHUA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

# UN SECURITY COUNCIL BACKGROUND GUIDE

Topic: Rehabilitating stability in the Kurdish regions

## Statement of problem

The Kurdish conflict is a long-standing issue involving the Kurdish people's pursuit of autonomy, cultural rights, and independence. According to the Global Conflict Tracker, approximately thirty million Kurds live across the Middle East, mainly in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. In Turkey alone, the Kurds make up nearly one-fifth of the population. Despite being one of the largest stateless ethnic groups in the world, with their own distinct language and cultural heritage, the Kurds have faced repression for decades.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish-inhabited regions were divided among newly formed nations. Although the Kurds were promised autonomy, such as in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, they were abandoned under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Since then, Kurdish communities have been denied cultural expression, political participation, and basic rights by their respective central governments, particularly in Turkey, Iran, and Syria. While the Kurds have been fighting over human rights and have made many improvements, such as the repeal of Law No. 2932, which banned publications in Kurdish, multiple restrictions remain, including but not limited to Article 81 of the Political Party Law, prohibiting the use of any language other than Turkish by political parties, and the Kurdish language remains limited or banned in education, broadcasting, and voting.

Furthermore, armed conflicts have increasingly intensified the situation, such as Turkey's ongoing struggle with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and under Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, the Kurds suffered from the Al-Anfal (The Kurdish Genocide) in 1988. After Hussein's overthrow in 2003, the Kurds became a semi-autonomous state; however, they still face economic difficulties, territorial control, and security threats from ISIS remnants. According to the International Crisis Group's fatality tally, more than 7,000 people have been killed in Turkey

and Northern Iraq since 2015 due to terror and armed attacks related to the conflict (Crisis Group).

The Kurds' efforts towards independence and autonomy continue to be met with military opposition and political restrictions. Regional instability and different international stances further complicate the issue. The conflict raises significant challenges to regional peace, human rights, and international law. Ultimately, resolving the Kurdish conflict requires a careful balance between upholding the rights of minority groups, recognizing the demands of cultural preservation, and the sovereignty of states.

## **History of Problem**

The Kurds are an Iranian ethnic group indigenous to the mountainous region known as Kurdistan, which spans Turkey, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, Northwestern Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The Kurds descended from ancient Iranian peoples (Medes, Carduchoi) who inhabited the Zagros-Taurus Mountain system over 2,000 years ago. Linguistically, Kurdish is a Northwestern Iranian language, closely related to Persian. Most of the populace believes in Sunni Islam, with minorities of Yazidis, Alevis, and Christians. Throughout the Medieval Era, the Kurds never formed a unified state but maintained tribal autonomy under Ottoman and Persian rule.

The first significant interactions between the Kurds and the modern Turkish state emerged in the aftermath of World War I, when the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) promised a potential Kurdish state—an offer that was later overturned by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which denied Kurdish autonomy and divided Kurdish-inhabited regions among several countries. This betrayal sparked a series of Kurdish uprisings against the Turkish Republic, beginning with the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925, which was a direct response to Atatürk's secular nationalist reforms and

the suppression of Kurdish identity. The rebellion was violently crushed, followed by further resistance such as the Dersim Rebellion (1937–1938), which was met with mass killings and forced assimilation. Throughout the early 20th century, the Turkish state pursued aggressive policies to erase Kurdish identity, banning their language and culture and labeling Kurds as “Mountain Turks.” These early conflicts marked the beginning of a century-long struggle between the Turkish state and its Kurdish population.

There are now approximately thirty million Kurds living in the Middle East, comprising nearly one-fifth of Turkey’s population of seventy-nine million. The conflict traces back to when the Turkish state intended to build a unitary national identity and suppress Kurdish ethnic identity, yet this sparked a dispute between the two parties. The Turkish government enforced cultural suppression and banned political representation. During the 1920s to 1980s, Kurdish language, culture, and even the term “Kurd” were banned and severely restricted. For decades, Kurdish media and education have been constrained. Moreover, the Kurdish uprisings in the early 20th century were violently suppressed, and Kurdish political forces were banned and accused of supporting terrorism. In this conflict, more than 40,000 people have died.

Currently, in 2025, the Kurdish conflict has reached a critical turning point. On May 12, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) announced its decision on Monday to dissolve the group. This is a historic move after decades of conflict with Turkey that have claimed tens of thousands of lives. The disbandment of the PKK is part of a broader peace-building initiative. However, despite this development, the conflict persists into the modern era as a concerning dilemma.

## Past Actions

The past actions concerning the Kurdish community and conflict are characterized by intense violence, forced separation, and death. Following major social changes associated with the commercialization of agriculture since the 1950s, outbreaks of violence started in the regions of

Kurdish settlements during the 1970s, while direct links to Kurdish support were revealed. Two Kurdish nations were founded in 1946, one falling in Iran in December of the same year, while the other, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) remains in Iraq until now. The latter launched a rebellion in 1961 following ignored promises of autonomy, raging for a decade.

During this transitional period in the 1970s, the Kurds faced massive displacements in the lands of Syria (120000 losing citizenship) and a so-called Arab Belt along the Turkish border, aiming to disrupt Kurdish power.

In 1984, the Kurdistan Workers' Party waged an armed insurgency in southern Turkey. 10 years prior, it was created by Abdullah Öcalan, yet ignored. Upon its beginning, it was aimed at creating a Kurdish state within the area. However, it has since evolved to become a campaign for rights and autonomy for the Kurds in Turkey and other surrounding countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It is known as a terrorist organization by many countries, such as the United States and Turkey. An offshoot of the Kurdish Democratic Party, believing the leader to be too reactionary, formed as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

1988 marks the year in which the most violent crime against the Kurdish people began. From February to December, Saddam Hussein of Iraq carried out the al-Anfal campaign, posthumously named the Kurdish Genocide. Estimates of deaths range from 50 thousand to 180 thousand, with tens of thousands more displaced.

While in March of 1991, in the Iraq invasion of Kuwait (which was later, defeated by the US coalition that was in defense of Kuwait), Saddam continued the suppression of Iraqi Kurds, resulting in more than one million Kurds fleeing to neighboring nations. In response, the US coalition initiated Operation Provide Comfort and the subsequent Operation Northern Watch, providing protection and continuing humanitarian aid, allowing the resettlement of the displaced.

Among the chaos, the Iraqi Kurds gained de facto autonomy, which later led to the creation of the first Kurdistan Regional Government and National Assembly in 1992.

In 1980, Ocalan runs to Syria. 19 years later, he is captured by the Turkish government. This arrest sparked huge protests across the Kurdish community, accomplishing the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire, lasting until 2004.

After much disagreement and conflict, the Kurds and the Turkish reach an agreement in 2011. In Decree 49, Bashar al-Assad grants citizenship to all Kurds who were registered as foreigners in 1962. In April of the same year, Prime Minister Erdogan became the first Turkish leader to visit Iraqi Kurdistan, leading to an agreement to build 3 pipelines.

2014 marks the creation of the Islamic State, bringing not only largely disputed rule, but also the hatred of the Kurdish parties. After heavily attacking the city of Kobani, the United States came to its aid as an affiliate supporter of the PKK. This strains US-Turkey relations. In 2015, Turkey joined the fray, attacking both Islamic State and PKK members. In 2019, Syrian Kurds declared victory over the Islamic State, ending their rule.

Finally, in 2025, the PKK moved to disband after 40 long years of conflict, having achieved its goal. They will disarm their members and stop their decades-long insurgency. The past actions to solve the Kurdish Conflict have mainly been around varying degrees of autonomy and freedom that the Kurdish people should acquire. Successful efforts to form independence have not gone unnoticed, while in recent years the degree of attention towards the problems of inequality and separation greatly increased.

## Potential Solutions:

The central aim of most countries should be a peaceful, quick end to the conflict. The Kurdistan People's Party (PKK) has been designated as a terrorist organization within the EU since 2004, placing it under several legislative restrictions. Consideration should be given to adjusting the PKK's current status as a terrorist organization within the EU, provided that the according disarmament and peace efforts are taken and verified by external parties, to ensure that future efforts towards achieving peace in the region can be effectively executed. In exchange, other governments should ensure that the necessary legislative reforms are taken to guarantee Kurdish rights regarding cultural, identity, and rights issue.

An alternative solution is the establishment of an independent, self-governing Kurdish state encompassing largely-Kurdish regions of Turkey. This state must meet the necessary requirements for statehood under the 1933 Montevideo Convention, including a permanent population, defined territory, effective government, and capacity to engage in diplomatic relations. These factors should be determined by joint UN-Turkey-Kurds negotiations that ensure any actions taken satisfy all involved parties. Once established, the new Kurdish state should receive UN membership according to relevant regulations. Further support should be executed under UN support, including funding, material aid, and infrastructure establishment. Regardless of the chosen method, care should be taken to ensure that both Turkish and Kurd parties are satisfied with the result.

## Possible Stances

### *Countries that strongly oppose Jurdish independence (Turkey, Iran, Iraq)*

These countries strongly oppose Kurdish independence, viewing it as a threat to their national sovereignty. Turkey views the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization and has at various times undertaken cross-border military operations in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, when it comes to the discussion of the Kurdish Conflict, these countries will discuss preserving national borders, opposing any formal recognition of Kurdish independence, and discouraging international support for separatist Kurdish groups.

***Countries who strongly supports Kurdish Independence (United States, United Kingdom, France)***

These countries are prominent supporters in promoting the concept of Kurdish independence in terms of ISIS. The United States has given substantial military support to Kurdish forces, such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The United Kingdom had also cooperated with military troops in Iraq and Syria and has noted the need to protect Kurdish rights. Therefore, when it comes to the discussion of the Kurdish Conflict, these countries will likely advocate for the protection of Kurdish populations.

**Key Terms:**

**Kurdistan:** Kurdistan is a geo-cultural region located within the countries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Mainly inhabited by the Kurds, this region has unique cultural characteristics that lead them to seek political autonomy from their respective controlling countries.

**Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK):** The PKK is a Kurdish militant political group seeking autonomy and increased rights for Kurds in Turkey. It is designated as a terrorist organization by several countries, including Turkey, the United States, and the EU. Plans for the dissolution of the organization were announced on May 12, 2025, following a ceasefire agreement with Turkey on March 1, 2025.

**KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government):** The KRG is the regional government of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region in Iraq. In 2017, a referendum held to determine public opinion on seceding from Iraq was struck down using military action by the Iraqi federal government after receiving a 92% approval rating.

**People's Defense Units (YPG):** The YPG is a Kurdish US-backed militant group in Syria that aims to protect the Kurdish regions of Syria. While not explicitly seeking for independence from Syria, the group does aim for autonomy and self-governance over the Kurdish region. While the

YPG is backed by some Western countries, most predominantly the United States of America, it is also opposed by key countries such as Turkey which view it as a terrorist organization due to its association with the PKK.

**Self-Determination:** This term is defined under Article 1 of the UN Charter and common Article 1 of the ICCPR & ICESCR as the idea that all peoples have the right to freely determine their political status.

**Regional Autonomy:** These are formal legal structures that grant a region the power of self-government over local matters such as legislation, taxation, or security.

**Territorial Integrity:** Territorial integrity refers to the preservation of existing borders over the formation of new ones. It is generally preferred by international agencies and aligns with the goals of most countries involved in the Kurdish conflict.

**Secession:** Secession refers to the formal withdrawal of a region or territory from a larger political entity, such as the withdrawal of Kurdish territories from their respective countries.

**Counterinsurgency:** These are state campaigns that aim to combat insurgent groups through a variety of operations, including military action, intelligence operations, and appeals to public interests.

**De Facto vs De Jure Authority:** De facto control refers to the parties with real, practical control over a location (such as the KRG), whereas de jure authority refers to the parties that are formally recognized by the international community to have control over a region.

**Power-Sharing:** Power-sharing agreements are policies designed to peacefully integrate minority groups into the national politics of larger countries as opposed to a splitting of power or sovereignty.

**Federalism & Decentralization:** These are terms used to describe policies that distribute power to regional governments, enabling the accommodation of cultural diversity in ways that centralized governments may not be able to provide to local peoples.

**Referenda & Popular Consultation:** These are forms of democratic policies where decision-making powers are given directly to the people (i.e. the people directly vote on whether certain decisions should be made) rather than a certain group of people or certain person.

**Rehabilitation:** Rehabilitation is the process by which a previously disgraced political individual or party can be restored to a recognized or honored political position, essentially giving them back their former power or rights.

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