

Study Guide for the Baltic Modul United Nations Security Council

On the question of: *Securing peace in the Middle East with regards to the situation of the Kurds*

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Historiography of the Kurdish People

“*The lands of Karda*” and “*The people of Su*”, as mentioned in the early Sumerian tablets from the 3rd millennium BC, are the earliest mentions of the Kurdish people and their etymological ancestors. Presumably, they settled north of Mesopotamia. Eventually, they were pushed north by the multiple Nomads who migrated into Mesopotamia and settled in the valleys of Northern Iran, Syria, Iraq, and parts of modern Turkey. In said regions, they often endured the overlordship of early Arabic, Byzantine, and Caucasian lords and overlords. Such state of matters continued well into the 12. Century, when several small Kurdish principalities and kingdoms were set up, ruling over present-day Armenia, and Azerbaijan. An interesting fact is that the legendary Arabic commander Saladin (Salah ad-Din), was the first Sultan of the Ayyubid dynasty which was of Kurdish descent. The Ayyubids would rule over much of northern Africa and the majority of the middle east. The Ayyubid dynasty fell in 1341 at the hands of the Mongols, who incorporated the middle east into their large empire. The Ilkhanate Empire, a successor state to the Mongol Empire, was dissolved in 1501 and the Safavid dynasty, which would rule the region for the next 200 years, was established. Interestingly, the paternal line (the line tracing its roots from the father) was nominally Kurdish, however, that was mere of genealogical importance, as, after the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, it were the Kurdish lands who became the frontier for the 300 years long Ottoman-Persian Wars. During these three long centuries, war-ravaged the Kurdish lands, and after a failed Kurdish rebellion in 1610, deportation to the lands of Khorasan (eastern frontier of Iran) was frequent. In 1736 the Safavid dynasty collapsed and after a grievous Civil war the Zand tribe, led by Karim Khan, came to power. Karim Khan was a notable ruler in many aspects, but it was under his prosperous rule, that the Kurdish people enjoyed the fruits of peace – as the Ottoman-Persian frontier moved further west. Karim Khan was a ruler who likely truly cared for his subjects, even earning the title *Representative of the People*, and to this day his reign is remembered as the “light period” in Kurdish history. However, like everything, this was not to last, and the death of Karim Khan marked the end of the Zand dynasty and the arrival of the Qajars. However, in the upcoming decades, the Qajars (who were positioned much more east, with larger territories in Iran) were pushed East and lost control over the many lands inhabited by the Kurds. Thus, it happened, that by 1840, many of the Kurdish lands were now under Ottoman governance.

The centralist policies of the Ottoman Empire in the 19. century was mainly targeted on newly occupied territories, and the Kurdish lands were no exception. The privileges which were held by the Kurdish tribesman since the 13. Century was now stripped away. The uprising of 1847, which directly opposed said changes were crushed – however Bedirhan Bey and his children, the leaders of the revolt, started the process which eventually developed into the Kurdish nationalism of the 20. Century. In 1880 another revolt, that now truly fought for total Kurdish independence and created the idea of a “Kurdistan” (state for all Kurds) was staged. Even though the rebellion was suppressed, it marked the start of a long-lasting conflict for Kurdish independence, which would eventually escalate during the Great War.

World War One

Before the start of the Great War, sultan Abdul Hamid II responded to Kurdish demands by increasing autonomy, offering prestigious positions in his government to Kurdish leaders, and overall promoting the integration of the Kurdish people. Such integration proved to be successful as, once the Ottoman Empire joined the Great War, thousands of Kurdish loyalists thought alongside their Turkish brethren in the so-called Hamidiye brigades. The Kurdish Cavalry regiments were to gain fame during their operational time in the Caucasus. However, thousands more flocked to the other side, and joined the British and French expeditionary forces, in hopes of achieving independence for their people. A darker part of Kurdish history is one with regards to the Armenian genocide. Once the Young Turks implemented the large-scale ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Armenian people, it was mainly their Kurdish neighbors who conducted said orders. Kurdish people were threatened with extreme punishment if they did not obey their orders, and even though many protected their Armenian neighbors, many more followed the orders and participated in the Armenian Genocide. Historian David McDowell argues that “most Kurds involved in the massacres probably felt it was a question of either them or us”. Overall, the Kurdish movement has had difficulties accepting its role during the Armenian genocide, and it remains a dark part of their national saga. In the end, about 300 000 Kurds died fighting for the Ottoman Empire, tens of thousands more died fighting for the Entente. About 700 000 were forcibly deported in 1917, as the ethnic campaign of the Young Turks continued and now targeted the Kurds themselves. About 350 000 of the deportees perished, including many soldiers returning wounded from the front.

It was at the end of the *war to end all wars* that the Kurdish people achieved their most promising victory. During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, they gained the support of the Entente powers, and during the treaty of Sévres, signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente Powers. With this treaty, the state of Kurdistan was theoretically created, but before it was ratified Mustafa Kemal Atatürk staged a revolution and started the Turkish War of Independence. Atatürk was able to defeat Ottoman loyalists and established the Republic of Turkey. In 1923, he signed the Lausanne treaty, which effectively made the Sévres treaty defunct, and in which there was no mention of the Kurdish people or the promises given to them by the Entente powers. Thus, a Kurdish nationalist may argue, that the Kurdish people were robbed of their destiny to be manifested.

Right after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, numerous Kurdish republic and principalities sprung up, defiant of The Republic of Turkey and Iran. The Republic of Ararat was crushed by Turkey in 1930. The Kingdom of Kurdistan was defeated by Iraq (still a mandate of the United Kingdom) in 1924. Iran suppressed two revolutions in the 1920s. The Kurdish lands under Turkish control were put under martial law, and Iran soon followed. Kurdish nationalist was crushed and dispersed, however, they were not annihilated. It would take another 30 years, but in 1950 the Kurdish movement, spearheaded by a new generation, started gaining tracks within Turkey, Iran, and the British, French mandates.



Turkey

In 1960, Turkish coupe d'état stopped any possible moves for integration and cooperation. In the decade that followed, Marxism and nationalism combined, in a relatively un-usual mix. This eventually led to the creation of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Following the

centralization of the Kurdish forces, and their left-wing ideology, Turkey officially *denied the existence of the Kurds*. The Kurdish people were brutally suppressed, communities were destroyed and dispersed, the Kurdish language became illegal (until 1991). Following this struggle, the PKK engaged in open war in southeastern Turkey. The war lasted from 1984 to 1999 and saw nearly 3 000 Kurdish villages wiped off the map and around 400 000 displaced. Moreover, both the Turkish government forces and the PKK reportedly (Human Rights Watch) violated human rights, and mass executions were not out of the ordinary. In 1994, the first female Kurdish representative in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Parliament), was sentenced to 15 years in prison, after identifying as a Kurd and in her oath of loyalty adding “I shall struggle so that the Kurdish and Turkish peoples may live together in a democratic framework”. Notably, the cities of Van, or Diyarbakir became Kurdish strongholds and local centers for both the PKK and Kurdish communities. Such state of affairs continued well into the 21. century, with the PKK now being proclaimed as a terrorist organization by Turkey and its allies.

Iraq

In 1930, Kurdish communities in Iraq made about 20% of the population. More importantly, they had a strong presence in the region of Kirkuk, an oil-rich region. After the Kingdom of Kurdistan was defeated in 1924, Iraqi forces instituted harsh laws over the region known as *Iraqi Kurdistan*. In 1960, Iraqi Kurds joined the guerilla troops of Mustafa Barzani and started a long 15-year-old campaign for independence. Even though efforts were made from both sides to calm down the conflict, it was only in 1975, after the signing of the Algiers accords, when the Kurdish forces were truly defeated, as their supplies were cut by neighboring Iran. During the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi regime implemented extremely oppressive measures towards the Kurdish people and the civil war again broke out. Similarly, to the *Armenian Genocide*, the Iraqi Kurds were blamed for many operational failures during the war. The Iranian-Iraq war ended in 1988, with a stalemate, where no side achieved strategical victory, at the cost of 400 000 Iranian, 300 000 Iraqi, and 100 000 civilian deaths. The war devastated Iraq and there was a need for a scapegoat. Thus, the *Anfal* (tragically named “Spoils of War”) campaign of 1988, often considered a genocide, started. During the 6 months, long campaign 100 000 Kurdish civilians were massacred, including women and children. 4 000 villages were wiped off the map, around 90% of all Kurdish settlements in the region. After the end of the campaign, a new revolution was launched in 1991 by the PUK and KDP (PKK’s sister parties in Iraq) – which solidified Kurdish positions in *Iraqi*

Kurdistan. After a counter-offensive, by the Iraqi government, which successfully re-captured many of the lost territories the, UN Security Council established a “ safe haven” to house Kurdish refugees and to prevent further conflict. This region became the base of operation for the KDP and PUK and was expanded upon in 2006 and 2007 – merging the PUK and KDP controlled territories and also gaining control over all of Kirkuk and Mosul. Hostilities between the government and Kurds were renewed in 2010, however, the Islamic Insurgency which swept the region a few years later forced both sides to cooperate. With the help of the Kurdish forces and American expeditionary troops, the Iraqi government successfully recaptured territory lost to Daesh and effectively restored the pre-ISIS borders.

Iran

During the Pahlavi Dynasty, Kurdish nationalism was suppressed, however, unlike in Iraq and Turkey, Kurdish communities were encouraged to participate in the so-called *Pan-Iranism*, in a response to *Pan-Turkism*. Many government officials of the Pahlavi Dynasty argued for Kurdish integration, as a means to gain potential Kurdish support against the Republic of Turkey. It is said that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Shah of Iran) himself stated that Kurds are an integral part of the Iranian nation and that they are “pure Iranians” and “one of the most notable Iranian peoples”. During the 1940s, this cooperation however found its first problems. Similarly, to Kurds in Turkey, Kurdish communities in Iran found Marxism extremely attractive and in the Iranian crisis of 1946 attempted an audacious move of establishing a Soviet puppet state, the Republic of Mahabad. This republic was short-lived, however, as only 6 months later, once Soviet forces left Iran, the Iranian army re-occupied Mahabad and ended the republic. This marked the end of Kurdish-Iranian integration and the beginning of many Marxist-Kurdish insurgencies. However, after the Iranian revolution (1979) and the Iranian-Iraq war (1988), Kurdish communities were given more autonomy as a means to quell the numerous Marxist uprisings. Interestingly enough, in Iran integration eventually moved into assimilation and in the next 30 years, Kurds became an integral part of Iran. Kurdish nationalism in Iraq has slowly faded into obscurity, as the majority of Kurds (mainly Shia) show no interest in the idea of a Kurdistan.

Syria

Notable Kurdish communities reside in Syria. Kurdish minorities in Syria were subject to harsh policies since the Syrian independence in the 1960s. The Kurdish language was prosecuted throughout the 1970s and 80s, and till 2021 still, about 200 000 Kurds were not given Syrian nationality. In 2011, Kurdish leader Mashaal Tammo was assassinated, widely believed that at the orders of Bashar al-Assad. During his funeral, five more people were killed, when the military fired into the crowd. This sparked the Kurdish Rebellion and the Rojava Revolution. In response to the actions of the Syrian Government, the Kurdish Supreme Committee created the People Protection Units and captured the cities of Kobane, Ras al-Ayn, and Al-Muabbada. By this, a de-facto Kurdish state was created in Northern Syria and has continued since.

Germany

The first group of Kurds to arrive in Germany was during the 1960'. They fled from Turkey as guest workers and from that point on, Germany saw waves of the Kurdish people immigrating there for better living standards and jobs since they faced discrimination and oppression in their country of origin. The civil war in Syria in 2011 triggered huge immigration operations from Syria to Germany and the majority of Syrian refugees were Kurds.

USA

The US has played a major role in restraining the conflict in Syria that has been going on continuously from the year 2011. The USA has worked alongside Kurdish soldiers in Northern Syria and were their strong allies. In 2019, the USA government ordered the withdrawal of all troops from Northern Syria. This ignited huge concerns even by the Secretary-General of the UN who strongly advised to find a solution since the Kurdish fighter faced immense danger.

ISIS

The Kurdish people have been a major force against the ISIS takeover of Syria that had begun in 2011. In August of 2014, ISIS took over Kurdish towns in Sinjar which resulted in thousands of people losing their homes and fleeing to the North to seek shelter. However, this took a turn after the help of the US military in 2015 where Kurds forced ISIS out of the Syrian

border. From that point on, Kurds defeated their part of Syria and forced ISIS back to the south after defending the Iraq and Syrian borders. In 2018 campaign against ISIS was conducted with backup by the USA where Syrian Kurds and Arabs (together with the SDF; Syrian Democratic Forces) focused on capturing ISIS' key position. This was briefly suspended due to abrupt Turkish attacks in November of 2018 against the Kurds. However, in December the SDF successfully captured the town of Hajin which helped reduced the ISIS territory near Iraq.

Key Terms

Ethnic group: A group of people who share the same culture and beliefs and differentiate from other groups. They usually same traditions and communicate in the same language.

Referendum: A referendum defines a unified vote conducted by electorates (voters) to achieve a formal decision. The term referendum is relevant to this topic because a referendum was brought into the United Nations by the Kurds to uprise the question of declaring Kurdistan as a country.

Autonomy: Defined as the right a country obtains through governance. In one word, autonomy is the independence of how the government rules the country. Therefore autonomy is the status Kurdistan desires to obtain to allow citizens to live in the country they belong to"

Coup d'etat (also known as a putsch): means the overthrow of an existing government, typically an unconstitutional seizure of power by a dictator, fraction, political party, or military

PKK: The Kurdistan Workers party was a political movement that originated in the State of Kurdistan but now remains in the Southern part of Turkey. It is focused on increasing Human Rights for Kurds in Turkey and tries to achieve autonomy for its people.

PUK and KDP: The Patriotic Union of Turkistan and Kurdistan Democratic Party have the same beliefs as the PKK but are based in Iraq.

Anfal: The Anfal genocide was a tragic event in which over 180 000 Kurds were killed. It was conducted by systematic attacks led by Iraq against Kurds residing in Northern Iraq between the years 1986-89.

Northern Syria: A part of Northern Syria known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria or Western Kurdistan is inhabited mainly by the Kurdish people. The region is constantly defended by Kurds and other ethnic groups against ISIS and has served as a semi-autonomous state for Kurds.

Timeline of Key Events

The Ottoman Empire defeats the Qajar dynasty, the 1840s – The Ottomans gain control over Kurdish lands and enact strict policies of centralization and integration.

Ottoman Empire joins the Great War, 1914 – Kurdish regiments fight for both sides, approx.. 350 000 dies altogether.

The Young Turks start the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918 – Kurdish communities are ordered to carry out parts of the ethnic cleansing, actively participating in the Genocide.

Treaty of Sevres and Lausanne, 1920 and 1923 – The Kurdish people are “robbed” of the land promised to them in the treaty of Sevres, and instead are divided between Turkey, Iran, and British, French mandates (eventually becoming Iraq and Syria).

Turkish-Kurdish war, the 1980s – The PKK starts an all-out conflict that lasts 15 years, and kills thousands of Kurds. Both sides commit atrocities and human rights violations

Anfal Campaign, 1988 – As a means to create a scapegoat for the disastrous Iranian-Iraq war, the Iraqi government starts the ethnic cleansing of Kurdish communities in Iraq. 100 000 Kurdish civilians are massacred.

Iranian Revolution, 1979 – Iran overthrows its Sash, and creates a Shia Muslim theocracy. Kurdish communities in Iran are slowly invited to participate in the new government.

Proposed topics for open debates and suggested contents of the resolution

An autonomous state for the Kurdish people?

How to prevent discrimination against this ethnic group?

Possible UN membership and representative of the Kurds in the UNSC?

Establishment of a new office at the UN that specifically focuses on the situation of the Kurds?

Compromise between existing governments to prevent further conflict on the topic?

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