

Forum: General Assembly Third Committee

Issue: The question of Kurdistan

Student Officer: Ms. Emma Valjakka

Position: Deputy Chair of General Assembly 3

Introduction

Kurds, who number 30-40 million in total, live in a compact area that reaches from western Syria to eastern Iran, southern Iraq and northern Turkey.¹ This area is called Kurdistan. The main aim of the Kurds' has throughout the years been to gain an independent nation state of Kurdistan, but the four countries named above are not willing to give them this right. The question of Kurdistan, therefore, consists of whether Kurdistan should become an autonomous state or not.



Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey have discriminated the Kurds ever since they have desired territories of their own and they have had difficulties to accept them into their countries. Only in Iraq have the Kurds managed to set up a stable government of their own in recent times, although within a federal state. With a functioning parliament, a booming oil economy and a small but well-trained army Kurdistan is one place in Iraq where hope flourishes.² Iraqi Kurdistan is different from its neighbours, and notably from the rest of Iraq. They hold democratic elections, have freedom of speech, and tolerance of religious and ethnic minorities.³

However, galloping inflation, endemic corruption and violent attacks by Iraqi Sunni extremists continue to threaten the hard won stability and progress of the Kurds. At the same time, powerful neighbouring countries like Syria, Iran and Turkey are constant reminders of the fragility of the Kurdish homeland.⁴

Kurdish Forces are successfully deploying unconventional-warfare tactics against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has caused major conflicts in the Middle-East for the past few years, especially in areas such as Syria. The Kurdish People's Protection Units, YPG (Guerrilla Wing) and the Women's Protection Units, YPJ⁵ have been actively fighting against ISIS. The Kurds are one of the only people fighting directly against ISIS, but still lack of financial and militaristic support from other nations. Therefore, the Kurds suffer great losses of their people, which slows down their process of gaining an independent nation.

Definition of Key Terms

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263>

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7169610.stm

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/2377195.stm

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7169610.stm

⁵ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/heres-how-kurdish-guerrilla-forces-are-using-dirty-tricks-against-isis-2015-8?r=US&IR=T>

Kurdistan

Kurdistan is a roughly defined geo-cultural region wherein the Kurdish people form a prominent majority population.⁶ This region is located in four different countries: Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

ISIS

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic State (IS) is a radical Sunni Muslim organization, whose aim is to restore an Islamic state in the region encompassing Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and south-eastern Turkey.⁷

PKK

The PKK is the Kurdistan Workers Party, which is rebel group that has been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department. The goal of the PKK, which has used tactics including assassination and bombings, is to carve an independent country of Kurdistan out of northern Iraq, parts of southern Turkey, and segments of Syria and Iran. Founder Abdullah Öcalan, captured by the Turks and serving a life sentence behind bars, still maintains a degree of control over the group's activities from his prison cell.⁸ The PKK was founded in 1978 and is nowadays widely listed as a terrorist group.⁹

YPG/YPJ

The YPG/YPJ is the Syrian Kurdish forces, more officially known as the People's Protection Units. The YPJ is a sector of the YPG, specifically for women wanting to participate in the forces. YPG is one of the most effective of the loose alliance of Arab and Kurdish militias fighting the Islamic State. The YPG/YPJ have been active since the 2011 and they have worked together with the PKK.¹⁰ The YPG/YPJ describes itself as "a national legitimate, multi-ethnic and multi-nationality military institution of sons and daughters of the components of the region, the Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Assyrians, Turkoman and Armenians, who adopt the right of legitimate self-defense in accordance with international laws."¹¹

Explanation of the Question

When talking about the conflict of Kurdistan you cannot refer to one specific crisis, but to several conflicts, which have happened in different areas over the years. The Kurds are the largest ethnic group, which does not have a nation of its own. They have always lived under the rule of other nations for instance Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Kurds have also spread all across Europe as they have fled the bad conditions the Kurds have experienced in the Middle East. There are about 700,000 Kurds living in Europe.¹² The main aims of the Kurds is to gain an autonomous state. For instance the Democratic

⁶ Zaken, Mordechai (2007). *Jewish Subjects and Their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan: A Study in Survival*.

⁷ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/isis>

⁸ <http://worldnews.about.com/od/mp/g/PKK.htm>

⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html? r=0>

¹⁰ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/06/ypg-america-friend-isil-kurds-syria-150627073034776.html>

¹¹ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/heres-how-kurdish-guerilla-forces-are-using-dirty-tricks-against-isis-2015-8?r=US&IR=T>

¹² http://wanda.uef.fi/tkk/liferay/projektit/monikko/Kurdiartikkeli_Saarinen.pdf

Union Party (PYD), which largely represents the Syrian Kurds, has stated that its priority is now focused on uniting historical Kurdish areas of Syria (known as Rojava), stretching from Afrin to the Tigris river into one contiguous land mass.¹³

The countries where the Kurds mostly live are the ones where Kurdistan would be if it was to be established. These countries have been prejudice of the Kurds and therefore mistreated them. The Kurds' dreams of independence have been the cause of many conflicts. The area of Kurdistan consists of prosperous natural resources such as oil, chrome, copper, iron and coal. This is one of the reasons why the four countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) don't want to give away their land.¹⁴

Background

The nationalism of the Kurds and their battle for an independent nation have been strong already from the 1800's. The Kurds lived in the Ottoman Empire (nowadays known as Turkey), which covered parts of the Balkans, Egypt and some countries from the Middle East. After the First World War the Ottoman Empire was divided between the winning countries and in the Treaty of Sévres (1920) the Kurds were promised their own land. However, after the Turkish War of Independence, fought between 1919 and 1923, the Treaty of Sévres was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which gave Turkey the right to keep the land that was promised to the Kurds in the previous treaty. It could be said that the Treaty of Lausanne is the cause of the conflict and protest that are still going on today.¹⁵

As mentioned briefly before, the establishment of an official state of Kurdistan has caused many protests. The Kurds have therefore unfortunately been the victim of broad political persecution. The citizens have been forced to flee and have been victims of massacres. Also, the Kurdish language and pursuing the Kurdish culture has been forbidden. Additionally, the conflict between different Kurdish tribes has continued throughout this time.

Key Member States and NGOs Involved

United States of America

The United States of America have involved themselves in the Syrian War for instance by helping the Kurdish fighters (YPG, YPJ) fight against ISIS. The Kurds have been coordinating with the American military since last October and the Y.P.G. is perhaps America's most effective ally in Syria against the Islamic State.¹⁶ However, at the slightest mention of Kurdish independence, America is the first to speak of Iraq's territorial integrity.¹⁷ This is conflicting as the Kurds cannot completely rely in America's support for them and America needs to support other countries such as Turkey, which does not want Kurdistan

¹³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/06/ypg-america-friend-isil-kurds-syria-150627073034776.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.globalis.fi/Konfliktit/Aasia/Kurdistan>

¹⁵ <http://www.globalis.fi/Konfliktit/Aasia/Kurdistan>

¹⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html? r=0>

¹⁷ <http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/05022014>

to be established. American officials have been careful not to offend Turkey and have publicly supported its campaign against the P.K.K..¹⁸

Turkey

15-20% of the Turkish population are Kurds. The Turkish government strongly opposes the Kurds having an independent state.¹⁹ After the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) the Kurds and other ethnic minorities were harshly persecuted in Turkey. In 1984 the PKK started a guerrilla war against Turkey. Even though the situation had calmed down a lot in 20 years after this, in 2004 the PKK and Turkey started to fight again. An official ceasefire was announced in March 2013.²⁰ However, tension between the Kurds and Turkey has existed ever since. Mr. Erdogan (the President of Turkey) has said that Turkey “will never allow the establishment of a new state on our southern frontier in the north of Syria.” For now, Turkey is more actively targeting Kurdish insurgents with the P.K.K. than it is fighters with the Islamic State. In Turkey’s recent roundup of 1,300 people it identified as terrorism suspects, 137 of those arrested were linked to the Islamic State and 847 were linked to the P.K.K. At the same time, Turkey bombed P.K.K. positions in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq, claiming that the militants could attack Turkish areas from across the border. This has brought up a lot of media attention as Turkey’s views are conflicting. They are against the people who fight against ISIS, which Turkey is fighting against as well.

Iran

In Iran the Kurds are 10% of the population. The Iranians have never been found on the idea of Kurds having an own area in Iran. After the Second World War the USSR helped the Kurds to get an area from Iran but the Iranians quickly invaded it back to themselves. From this onwards the Kurds and other minorities have been openly discriminated. Especially the Sunni Kurds have been discriminated as the Iranians are mostly Shias.

Iraq

The Kurds cover 17 to 20% of the population in Iraq.²¹ The Kurds have been the victims of harsh violence and punished for example for supporting Iran when Iraq was in war with Iran between years 1980 and 1988. From 1986 to 1989, the Kurds of Iraq suffered through one of the grizzliest genocides in human history.²² Nowadays, however, the Kurds have managed to set up a stable government of their own in Iraq.²³ The capital of the area of Kurdistan in Iraq is Erbil, which is said to be more developed than Iraq’s own capital, Baghdad. The Iraqi Kurds were left to govern themselves for 22 years, from 1991 to present. During this period, the Kurds have literally lifted their corner of Iraq from the ashes, establishing not only one of the most prosperous polities in the region, but also by far the best approximation of secular democracy that the Middle East can currently offer.²⁴

¹⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html?_r=0

¹⁹ http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html?_r=0

²⁰ <http://www.ataa.org/reference/pkk/pkk.html>

²¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263>

²² <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/plight-syrian-kurds>

²³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263>

²⁴ <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/plight-syrian-kurds>

Syria

In Syria 7-10% of the population are Kurds. Syria is the country where the YPG and the women fighters group YPJ are fighting against ISIS. The Syrian Kurds have succeeded to take control of some areas in northwest Syria in which most of the fighting is happening at the moment. The Kurds of Syria face a severe shortage of food and other basic supplies, as well as a general health and security situation in Syria as no one wants to support them and the threat from several enemies is continuous.²⁵

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
August 10, 1920	Treaty of Sévres
July 24, 1923	Treaty of Lausanne
1945	The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was founded ²⁶
1946	KDP holds its first congress in Manabad ²⁷
1970	A peace agreement signed between the Iraqi government and the Kurds of Northern Iraq, granting the Kurds some self-rule
1974	The KDP attacks Iraqi troops after the Iraqi government refuses to give them control of the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, which was traditionally Kurdish territory
November 27, 1978	The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) established
September 22, 1980	War between Iran and Iraq begins
1986-1989	The genocide of the Kurds
March 16, 1988	Iraqi jets dropped a variety of chemical weapons on the Kurdish town of Halabja
August 20, 1988	The war between Iran and Iraq officially ends
1991	The UN established a no-fly zone above the Kurdish area
1993	The Turkish government grants limited autonomy to the Kurds
October 21, 1998	Turkey and Syria signed an accord whereby Syria agreed to brand the PKK as a terrorist group ²⁸
2003	The Kurds join U.S. and British forces in defeating Saddam Hussein's regime
2007	Iran and Turkey initiate offensives against PKK
2011	Turkey again launches air and ground attacks against the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan
2012	Turkish attacks continue against the PKK

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

There has not been that many resolutions concerning Kurdistan as Kurdistan is not officially a country and therefore is not represented in the UN.

²⁵ <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/plight-syrian-kurds>

²⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/2893067.stm

²⁷ <http://www.timelines.ws/countries/KURDISTAN.HTML>

²⁸ <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/kurds3.html>

- Resolution of the Security Council establishing the Iraqi no-fly zone, 5 April 1991 (**S/RES/0688**²⁹)
- Situation of human rights in Iraq, 17 December 1991 (**A/RES/46/134**³⁰)

Possible Solutions

The best solution for the Question of Kurdistan would be that all the four countries in which the area of Kurdistan is located in (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) would recognize the Kurds as a people and would grant them autonomy. The issue that the Kurdish area consists of oil could be agreed on. For example, the Kurds could give a part of the profit from the oil production to the land that gave them a possibility to have an own country.

If these countries will not agree on giving the land that the Kurds wish to have, they could offer an alternative option from their country. This area, however, should be optimal for living meaning it has fertile land and urban areas/ possibilities to create urban areas.

The other nations in the world should take part in this debate to make it as objective as possible. The UN and the nations that are members should try their best to help the Kurds achieve an autonomous state. This can only be achieved by cooperation of countries.

Bibliography

Iraqi Kurdistan profile: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263>

Article about Kurdistan: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7169610.stm

Article "Kurdistan's dilemma": http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/2377195.stm

Article about Kurdish guerrilla forces:

<http://uk.businessinsider.com/heres-how-kurdish-guerilla-forces-are-using-dirty-tricks-against-isis-2015-8?r=US&IR=T>

Zaken, Mordechai (2007). *Jewish Subjects and Their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan: A Study in Survival*.

Definition of ISIS: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/isis>

Definition of PKK: <http://worldnews.about.com/od/mp/g/PKK.htm>

Relations between Turkey and the Kurds:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html?_r=0

The YPJ:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/06/ypg-america-friend-isis-kurds-syria-150627073034776.html>

About Kurdish culture: http://wanda.uef.fi/tkk/liferay/projektit/monikko/Kurdiartikkeli_Saarinen.pdf

About Kurdistan in general: <http://www.globalis.fi/Konfliktit/Aasia/Kurdistan>

Relations between the USA and the Kurds: <http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/05022014>

About the PKK: <http://www.ataa.org/reference/pkk/pkk.html>

Article about Syrian Kurds: <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/plight-syrian-kurds>

Timeline of Iraqi Kurds: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/2893067.stm

²⁹ <http://fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sres0688.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r134.htm>

Timeline Kurdistan: <http://www.timelines.ws/countries/KURDISTAN.HTML>

Kurdish History timeline: <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/kurds3.html>

First resolution: <http://fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sres0688.htm>

Second resolution: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r134.htm>