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| <b>Forum:</b>           | Special Political & Decolonization Committee (GA4) |
| <b>Issue:</b>           | The Question of Kurdistan                          |
| <b>Student Officer:</b> | Maggie McBride                                     |
| <b>Position:</b>        | Chair  |

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Maggie McBride, and I am a student at Queen Elizabeth’s School in England. In this year’s session of PS-MUN I have the utmost honor of serving as the Main Chair of the Special Political & Decolonization Committee (GA4).

The GA4 has a distinct mandate that addresses topics such as decolonization, peacekeeping, outer space, territorial disputes, and colony issues, nicely linking with the conference theme of ‘Pacifism and Injustice’. The committee aims are very important when addressing each topic of the committee at the conference, making sure to resolve each issue whilst keeping in mind the goal of international collaboration and peace.

All 3 topics of the GA4 committee are of utmost importance in today’s world. This study guide touches upon the issue “The Question of Kurdistan”, including various aspects of the issue, an in-depth understanding of the historical background and the rise of significance of the separatist movement, also the various attempts to resolve the issue and the consequences of those attempts. Therefore, a significant number of aspects and factors must be considered when coming up with a solution to this issue.

Although this study guide addresses several aspects of this issue, the delegates should not only use this as their only source of research. Thus, it is strongly encouraged to conduct your own research in relation to this topic, in order to develop a wider understanding and be knowledgeable of the topic before the debate. Should you have any questions or need any help, please feel free to contact me at [maggiemcbride146@gmail.com](mailto:maggiemcbride146@gmail.com).

I am really looking forward to meeting you all!

Best regards,

Maggie McBride

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Kurdish population is an ethnic group of Indo-European descent, specifically originating from one of the indigenous peoples of the Mesopotamian plains, and currently comprises 30-40 million people worldwide. The majority of Kurds are native to mountainous regions in Turkey, as well as Iran, Iraq, and Syria. They share cultural ties and language dialects with the majority of Sunni Muslims, but some also adhere to other faiths of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many Kurdish people started making calls for the creation of a homeland which is often dubbed as Kurdistan, as, despite being a unique ethnic group, the Kurds have never had their own nation-state.

After World War I the Allied States had originally promised the Kurds territorial gains, but these promises never materialized. When the Ottoman Empire was defeated, and the modern borders of Turkey were set in 1923, there were no provisions for an independent Kurdish state. Since then, the Kurds have had an unprotected minority status in the countries they live in. There are three examples in the records that have seen a long history of modern oppression, especially the waves of insurgency from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Iraq in 1988, Saddam Hussein's government gassed thousands of Kurds to death in a city of Halajba. Later, the government slaughtered tens of thousands of more Kurds at the end of the first Gulf War when they tried to organize an independent state, eventually establishing fragile semi autonomy in Iraq's north, where they have military and administrative control. Their autonomy was only recognized after Hussein's fall, but even to this day it remains debatable.

In Turkey, Kurds have faced severe government repression for decades, partly in response to the Kurdish separatist movement. Kurds make up 15 to 20% of the population, but do not possess the same civil rights as Turkish people, are under constant threat of forced resettlement, and their identity and customs are actively denied.<sup>1</sup> Until 1991 Kurds were referred to as mountain Turks and words such as Kurdistan or Kurdish were officially banned by the government. Anyone who was caught speaking, publishing or singing in Kurdish was arrested and imprisoned. Turkey justified a tough stance against Kurdish identity as necessary due to armed uprising from Kurdish populations seeking independence. The Kurdistan workers party, or PKK, fought for Kurdish autonomy and an independent state within Turkey for several decades.

In Syria as well, the Kurdish people are the largest ethnic minority and for decades have been faced with oppression and discrimination. They have been denied basic

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<sup>1</sup> "Kurds in Turkey." *Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School*, [rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/kurds-turkey](http://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/kurds-turkey).

rights like citizenship and property rights. Their involvement in the Syrian war highlighted, again, the quest for independence.

Overall, Kurdish rights keep on carrying to be denied throughout these key regions, while their quest for independence continues. Although they clearly are a separate ethnic group and culture, the geopolitics in play are too tangible for a definitive solution to be put into play yet. The UN has a huge role to play in this situation with helping to alleviate the statelessness of the Kurds in each state and ensuring safety and equality for each Kurd.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Territorial Integrity

According to international law, territorial integrity is the concept that grants sovereign states the right to defend their borders and all occupied territory inside them.<sup>2</sup>

### Disarmament

Disarmament, which is the act of lowering, restricting, or eliminating weapons, often refers to a nation's military or a particular type of weaponry and is sometimes interpreted to entail the complete abolition of weapons of mass devastation, such as nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup>

### Federalism

Federalism is a form of governance in which two levels of authority share jurisdiction over the same region. Larger geographical regions are often governed more broadly by an overarching national government, while local concerns are handled by smaller subdivisions, states, and cities. The central government and the smaller political entities both have the authority to enact laws and enjoy some degree of independence from one another.<sup>4</sup>

### Decentralization

The delegation of control and accountability for public duties from the federal government to state, municipal, or otherwise quasi-independent government entities, as well as the private sector.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Territorial Integrity and Political Independence. (n.d.). Oxford Public International Law.

<https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1116>

<sup>3</sup>disarmament | meaning of disarmament in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE. (n.d.). <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/disarmament>

<sup>4</sup>federalism. (n.d.). LII / Legal Information Institute. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/federalism>

<sup>5</sup>World Bank Group - International Development, Poverty, & Sustainability. (n.d.). World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>

### Sovereign Jurisdiction

In a specified region, sovereign jurisdiction is the possession of supreme legal authority and the capacity to exert that legal authority.<sup>6</sup>

### Statelessness

A person who is not regarded as a national by any state under the operation of its law is referred to as stateless in international law. Some refugees are also stateless individuals.<sup>7</sup>

### Constitution

Usually a document, outlining the fundamental values and rules of a country, state, or social organization that establish the roles and responsibilities of the government and provide some protections for its citizens.<sup>8</sup>

### Self-determination

The capacity or authority to decide for oneself, especially that of a State to determine its own political system.<sup>9</sup>

### Separatism

The conviction that members of a specific race, religion, or other group should live separately from other citizens of their country or have their own government.<sup>10</sup>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Kurds form a separate ethnic group that is bound together by racial identity, culture, and language. The mountain tribes, who were originally from Mesopotamia, converted to Islam in the seventh century A.D. and are currently the fourth-largest ethnic minority in the Middle East, numbering between 25 and 35 million.

In the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, which was signed between the victors of WW1 and the Ottoman Empire, provisions for a Kurdish State were included. However, the Treaty

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<sup>6</sup>SAGE Reference - Encyclopedia of Law & Society: American and Global Perspectives. (2007, September 25). <https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/law/n649.xml>

<sup>7</sup>UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.). UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/statelessness.html>

<sup>8</sup>constitution. (2023, January 3). The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitution>

<sup>9</sup>Cambridge Dictionary. (2023, January 11). self-determination definition: 1. the ability or power to make decisions for yourself, especially the power of a nation to decide. . . . Learn more. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/self-determination>

<sup>10</sup>Cambridge Dictionary. (2023b, January 11). separatism definition: 1. the belief held by people of a particular race, religion, or other group within a country that. . . . Learn more. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/separatism>

of Lausanne, which established the borders of modern Turkey three years later, disregarded the clause. As a result, the Kurds were reduced to a minority inside the boundaries of the nations where they lived. The Kurds' quest to find their own independent nation has been suppressed for the past 80 years.



Figure 1: Map of Kurdistan

### Kurdish Population in Syria

Around 2.5 million Kurds live in Syria; many of them have at least partially integrated into Arab society and speak both Kurdish and Arabic. Kurd Dagh and Jarablus are where the Syrian Kurdish population first emerged. Compared to Kurds from other regions, these groups have integrated more fully into Arab culture. The majority of the Kurds from Jazira are Kurdish, and they are the ones who left the Turkish Republic during the repression in the 1920s, which is why there is so much national consciousness and conflict in the nation.

Due to their close connection with the Syrian Communist Party, the Kurdish were persecuted by the Syrian government from 1958 until 1976, when they were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. The Kurdish people of Jazira were treated as outsiders at this time, and shortly afterwards, 60,000 Kurds left for Damascus<sup>11</sup>. The Kurds were still oppressed under Hafez al-Assad albeit to a lesser extent.

The Kurdish political movements in Turkey and Iraq were sponsored by the Syrian government, and in 1990, Kurds who were politically engaged and identified as nationalists were elected to the Syrian Parliament. Although Kurds were given political rights, this had little effect on the ongoing repression of the Kurdish population. Following the events in Iraq in 2003 and the US-led invasion, Syria and Turkey's ties became closer as a result of their concern that the Kurds may stake territorial claims against them both. After an altercation between Arab and Kurdish football supporters in 2004, things got worse when Syrian security forces in Qamishli opened fire on crowds for two days. This led to Kurdish anti-government rioting across the nation,

<sup>11</sup>Minority Rights Group. (2021, February 6). Kurds. <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-5/>

which resulted in 38 fatalities and 1,000 arrests.<sup>12</sup> Even if the situation subsided during the next months, the Syrian government nonetheless made the decision to outlaw any Kurdish political activity. Kurds and the Syrian government have since engaged in a number of confrontations. Kurdish people have lost their lives as a result of several of these occurrences.

Decree 49, issued by the Syrian government in October 2008, aimed to remove residents of the Syrian border regions. The Kurdish people were forbidden from purchasing, selling, and leaving the property after this edict. Between 2008 and 2011, there were more violent battles between the Syrian government and the Kurds, which were made worse by parallel crises in Turkey and Iraq. As the government made peace with the Democratic Union Party, the Syrian wing of the Kurdish Workers' Party, at the beginning of 2011, relations between the Assad regime and the Kurds improved. Even if the Presidential Decree No. 49, issued by the Assad administration in April 2011, permitted the Kurds to apply for citizenship, doing so included a meeting with the State security apparatus and maybe being drafted into the military. This military requirement has dissuaded many Kurds from applying for citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (KDUP) announced that they would start moving toward self-rule in these territories after Kurdish troops were able to seize towns and villages that were under the control of militias linked to al-Qaeda in 2003. In Jazira, Kobane, and Afrin, the Interim Transitional Administration was founded in January 2014. These actions made it possible for the Kurdish population in Syria to set up an independent government known as Rojava in Kurdish. The official languages of this autonomous government are Kurdish, Arabic, and Aramaic, and they have put in place rules that support the freedom of religion and linguistics. Rojava was declared a federal area in March 2016 and given the new name Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria.

### Kurdish Population in Iraq

When the 1926 Anglo-Iraq Treaty was ratified, Prime Minister Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa'dun said that the Kurds should be given their rights, giving the Kurds optimism that they would be allowed autonomy inside the nation. Their speech should serve as their official language, and their authority should be drawn from among them. The Iraqi administration had not produced any tangible results by 1930, and the Treaty of Sevres' unique rule and limited autonomy for the Kurds had been revoked. The Kurdish Democratic Party, founded in 1946, started to resist in Northern Iraq in 1961, and as a result, the Iraqi government disbanded them. The Kurds and the Iraqi government reached a peace deal on March 11, 1970, outlining the Kurds' autonomy in Northern

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> "Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: SYRIA." *UNCHR*, UNCHR, May 2011, [www.refworld.org/pdfid/4dcb716f2.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4dcb716f2.pdf).



Iraq. According to this agreement, Kurdish was recognized as an official language and the Iraqi people were divided into two national groups; Arabs and Kurds.<sup>14</sup>

Kurdish tribesmen in Northern Iraq rose up in rebellion against the authorities, in January 1972, and the insurgents received military support from the United States of America, Iran, and Israel. The Baath Party, headed by Saddam Hussein, was seen as a danger by the US administration, which is in part why they started funding these insurgents. The government's response was to put down the uprising and develop a fresh autonomy proposal, which the KDP rejected. The government and the Kurds resumed hostilities, and on April 1, 1974, eleven KDP members were put to death by the government. In 1975, 200,000 Kurds were transported from Northern Iraq to southern Iraq as a result of ongoing conflict<sup>15</sup>.

The invasion of Iran by Iraq in September 1980 provided some solace for the Kurdish political groups (KDP and PUK). The Iraqi government considered an Iranian triumph as an existential threat, making the conflict with Iran critical for its survival. As a result, it viewed Kurdistan as the weak link in its military defense and the increasing insurrection among the Kurds as capital treason. Iran began to tire in 1987, which prompted the Iraqi government to decide to put an end to the Kurdish rebellion. Ali Hassan al-Majid was chosen by Saddam Hussein to rule over Northern Iraq with the authority to use harsh measures against the Kurds. Three weeks later, he gave the order to use poison gas to "smoke out" the Kurdish rebels from their rural strongholds.

Al-Majid's goal included making Northern Iraq livable, and by the summer of 1987, lowland settlements had virtually all been demolished. Because his men couldn't reach the highlands, they were turned into targets for aerial attacks aimed at starving the countryside and forcing inhabitants to flee. The Anfal campaign, a massive military operation in which chemical weapons were fired and dropped, was launched by the Iraqi government in 1988. As a result of their adaptation to these circumstances, the Kurds sought out Iran's assistance in their efforts to rebel against the Iraqi government.

The Iraqi government carried out a large chemical attack against the Kurds in Halabja and Khormal on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1988, which resulted in almost 5,000 deaths, mostly consisting of civilians.<sup>16</sup> This assault weakened the Kurdish determination and gave the government more motivation to carry out its campaign. There were six further

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<sup>14</sup> "The March 11 Agreement of 1970 Was a Message That Kurds Believe in Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts: Kurdistan Region PM Barzani." *Kurdistan 24 Net*, 11 Mar. 2022, [www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/27571-The-March-11-Agreement-of-1970-was-a-message-that-Kurds-believe-in-peaceful-resolution-of-conflicts:Kurdistan-Region-PM-Barzani](http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/27571-The-March-11-Agreement-of-1970-was-a-message-that-Kurds-believe-in-peaceful-resolution-of-conflicts:Kurdistan-Region-PM-Barzani).

<sup>15</sup>University of Central Arkansas | UCA. (n.d.). <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/middle-eastnorth-africapersian-gulf-region/iraqkurds-1932-present/>

<sup>16</sup>BBC ON THIS DAY | 16 | 1988: Thousands die in Halabja gas attack. (n.d.). [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/16/newsid\\_4304000/4304853.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/16/newsid_4304000/4304853.stm)

steps following the first Anfal procedure. An estimated 100,000 people perished overall.<sup>17</sup>

The Kurdish national movement found fresh life after the loss in Kuwait in 1990 when the KDP and the PUK decided to share power following elections in May 1992. Between 1994 and 1998, this resulted in a civil war between the KDP and the PUK, which eventually led to their recognition of the necessity of a unified front against the Iraqi government. The Iraqi government attacked the Kurds with commercial sanctions after they established their own regional administration, and the international world also targeted the Kurds while hitting Iraq with a trade embargo. The Kurdish area in Northern Iraq couldn't start rebuilding until 2003 when Saddam Hussein's authority in that country fell.

Approximately 6 million Kurds live in Iraq today, making up over 20% of the country's total population<sup>18</sup>. There are various reasons why the Kurds in Iraq desire to be independent, but one of them is because of Saddam Hussein's actions. Such atrocities have made them think they will always face threats from an Iraqi Arab administration; there is a growing belief among Kurds that they will never feel safe if they stay a part of Iraq. The growth of the Islamic State (IS) has also had an influence on the Kurds, who want to run their own economy. This has caused friction between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish administration.

#### Kurdish Population in Iran

In Iran, 10% of the population identifies as Kurdish, albeit they are less vociferous about trying to influence politics in Iran than other Kurdish communities in its neighbors. The Iranian Kurds have not attempted to alter their lot despite the Iranian regime's continued execution of hundreds of Kurdish dissidents. The Republic of Kurdistan was established at Mahabad in January 1946, but this only lasted for roughly a year. Armed conflicts with the Iranian government have occurred and have influenced the Kurdish independence movement. The Kurds have not been able to develop into a powerful movement in comparison to the other Kurdish factions in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. This is because there is a chasm between the political parties and the Iranian Kurds who still reside in Iran since Kurdish political groups have been exiled for decades.

#### Kurdish Population in Turkey

There may be up to 19% of Kurds living in Turkey, while the actual number is unknown. Some Kurdish groups, like the Alevi Kurds who have accepted a secular Turkish

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Meredith, S. (2017, September 16). OPEC's second-biggest producer could possibly split in two — and start an oil war. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/15/kurdistan-referendum-iraq-could-be-about-to-split-in-two-but-its-oil-riches-may-spark-a-war.html>



identity, have assimilated with the nation's populace. When the Turkish Republic was founded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurds occupied a special position in relation to Turkish nationalism because the Ottoman rulers' absence had left them with enough of their ethnic identity to prevent assimilation into the newly proud Turkish ethnicity. Despite these distinct Kurdish factions in Turkey, certain Kurdish organizations continue to exist and are isolated from Turkish culture. Due to their mobilization into the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and other violent Kurdish militant groups, this issue still exists in Turkey. The Turkish government and the PKK, who fight for an independent Kurdish state, are at odds because of this.

### Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

In order to establish an independent Kurdish State within Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was founded in the late 1970s, with roots in Marxist ideologies.

The PKK was in charge of the first Kurdish uprising in Turkey in 1984. The militants demanded that Turkey contain a Kurdistan that is totally autonomous. Many Kurdish people were uprooted as a result of the violence, and many now live in other Turkish cities. The organization changed its demands in the 1990s and pressed for stronger Kurdish rights for the Kurdish population in Turkey. The PKK commander was imprisoned in 1999 for alleged treason when the violence peaked in the 1990s. The party was heavily burdened by this, and later that year they unilaterally proclaimed a five-year cease-fire in the Turkish zone. The PKK made several attempts over the course of these five years to improve its reputation by taking steps like changing their name and lowering their demands.

In 2004, it started rebelling again after being designated a terrorist group by Turkey and other Western countries. The battle lasted for five years, until 2009, when representatives of the PKK and Turkey had in-camera peace negotiations that led to the PKK enforcing a cease-fire. Turkish authorities continued to take strong action against the Kurds throughout the period of the covert peace negotiations. They specifically prohibited the Democratic Society Party, the most significant Kurdish party, from participation in the constitutional court and detained several Kurdish activists for allegedly violating Turkish anti-terror legislation.

The PKK and the Turkish government have been at odds ever since. There is a clear ideological disagreement because the PKK emphasizes that their only goal is to live freely on their own land inside Turkey's boundaries, contrary to the Turkish government's perception that they are attempting to establish a separate state within the country. The PKK's primary objectives still seem to be the same, although it should be highlighted that they have employed more violent methods to get there. Over 40,000 individuals have perished in the fight since the PKK was founded and since the

start of this conflict.<sup>19</sup> For these reasons, the PKK has been designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the EU, the US, and the UK.

### Kurdish War with ISIS

Several Kurdish enclaves in northern Syria that were on the verge of becoming under its control were targeted by the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS) in the middle of 2013. They continued to attack the area for the remainder of the year until the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed branch of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party, repulsed them in the middle of 2014. The Islamic State, then, expanded throughout Northern Iraq, drawing the Kurds into the battle. The independent northern Kurdish Region dispatched its Peshmerga soldiers into territory that the Iraqi army had left undefended. The IS invaded a number of cities in August 2014 that were home to religious minorities and where they slaughtered or abducted thousands of Yazidis, including Sinjar. The Peshmerga, then, joined the US multilateral coalition in its conflict with the Islamic militants. This applied to the YPG and the PKK, both of which maintained bases in Iraq.

Another issue raised was Iraqi sovereignty, which has been in jeopardy as a result of the Islamic State's three-year national growth. ISIS totally overran the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Fallujah, among others, and only recently were they reclaimed. Although the army maintains offensives to drive out ISIS extremists, the Iraqi government announced a triumph against ISIS in July 2022.

As a result of an IS onslaught on an enclave close to the Kurdish-populated Kobane in northern Syria in September 2014, tens of thousands of people were forced to evacuate across the neighboring Turkish border.<sup>20</sup> The Turkish government forbade the Turkish Kurds from entering Syria to protect it despite the country's proximity. Kobane was just liberated from the IS by Kurdish forces in Syria in January 2015. Kurdish troops have been a part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) since 2015, helping the coalition led by the United States with its air power to retake control of large stretches of the state territory with Turkey. With the SDF's liberation of Raqqa in October 2017, the Islamic State's hold on territory in Syria was completely destroyed. As a result, the Syrian government forces supported by Russia and the rebels backed by Turkey came into direct confrontation with Kurdish forces, escalating tensions between the major countries.

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<sup>19</sup>Abadi, C. (2019, October 24). Turkey Claims That Syria's Kurds Are Terrorists. Should Anyone Believe Them? Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/17/turkey-claim-syrian-kurds-terrorists-not-isis-ypg-pkk-sdf/>

<sup>20</sup> "UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency." *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2014/10/5437ad67f95/growing-number-syrian-refugees-kobane-seek-safety-northern-iraq-eastern.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2014/10/5437ad67f95/growing-number-syrian-refugees-kobane-seek-safety-northern-iraq-eastern.html).

The fight against the IS gave the Kurds reason for optimism because they were strengthened by Western allies, which may have given them a reason to assume that their demand for an independent state would be granted. Instead, the Western powers stopped supporting the proxies they had employed to combat the terrorist group (IS). In truth, the Kurds are in a precarious situation as a result of the post-war campaign against the IS, and they have abandoned their cautious approach to achieving autonomy in the hopes that American support will help them get over their obstacles.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### Germany

More than 600,000 individuals in Germany, or about 1% of the country's total population, are of Kurdish ancestry.<sup>21</sup> Kurds were historically one of the major immigrant ethnic groups and the biggest number of refugees coming to Germany until the recent Middle Eastern refugee influx. Yet, a sizable portion of the Kurdish people in Germany did not enter as refugees. Turkey sent a large number of guest employees to work in Western Europe in the 1960s and the 1980s. About one in five of these were Kurdish, however, Turkey's government would not acknowledge that it was hiring from Kurdish regions, particularly when ethnic tensions increased in those areas.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, temporary employees were expected to return to Turkey; however, they frequently faced too much risk. Each successive incident of political turmoil or violence forced thousands of Kurdish refugees in Turkey or Iraq to join their extended family already in Germany since this original group of Kurdish workers had already established itself in European nations like Germany. By 2005, Germany was home to more than 60% of the 100,000 Kurds living in Europe.<sup>23</sup> Following the loss of Mosul in 2014 to the so-called Islamic caliphate, Germany provided the majority of the modern weapons to Iraq's Kurdish militia groups. Turkish Kurdish politicians have called on Germany to play a more active role in settling a new dispute with Turkey's government and backing Kurdish resistance to ISIS.

### Iran

The Kurds have long been seen as a threat by Iran and its neighbors due to their size, geographic distribution, and resistance to centralized authority. The Kurds have never had a modern state, but Iran's Kurds may have come the closest in January 1946 when separatists voted to secede from Iran and established the brief Republic of Mahabad in the northwest, suggesting some significance in Iran's less hardline role to play.

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<sup>21</sup>Globalist, T. (2022, August 16). Germany's Kurds. The Globalist. <https://www.theglobalist.com/germany-kurds-turkey-politics-isis/>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

Despite the Iranian regime's continual killing of dozens to hundreds of Kurdish dissidents, the Iranian Kurds have not tried to improve their condition. The Kurdish independence movement has been inspired by armed battles with the Iranian regime. Unlike the Kurdish groups in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, the Kurds have not been able to grow into a strong movement. Furthermore, in the recent 2017 referendum Iranian leaders were criticized for supporting it after being warned of the potential instability that might come from it and the war-torn region, showing more lenience than the other regions.

### Iraq

The Kurdistan community in Iraq has faced several political challenges throughout its existence. The Iraqi Kurds were once believed to enjoy full independence under the conditions of the Treaty of Sevres, but their recent, turbulent history is one of deceit, despotism, and genocide. Iraqi Kurds are at a critical juncture in the political history of their nation; they are now governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government as a result of Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003. The Kurds can now create an autonomous territory inside the Iraqi federation thanks to a new legislation that respects their rights. Kurds in Iraq are arguably in the greatest conceivable situation since they have total authority over every aspect of their everyday life, including education, justice, municipal planning, and so forth.

### Syria

The Kurds, who account for 10% of all Syrians and around 5% of the country's total population, are thought to be the dominant immigrant minority in the country.<sup>24</sup> Turkish Kurds who crossed the border on different occasions over the 20<sup>th</sup> century make up the majority of the Kurds in Syria. The three principal centers for the Kurdish population in Syria are the northern area of Jazira, the middle Euphrates Region around Kobani, and the western region surrounding Afrin. The majority of them are situated close to the Syrian-Turkish border, while farther south, large Kurdish communities may be found in Aleppo and Damascus. Human rights organizations have accused the Syrian government of routinely abusing and oppressing Syrian Kurds. Like the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, many Kurds desire political independence for what they see as Western Kurdistan, or they wish to be a part of an independent Kurdistan. During the Syrian Civil War, Kurds established the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

### Turkey

As a result of the government's purposeful attempts to persecute the Kurds, with the PKK acting as the principal catalyst for this persecution, tension has increased between

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<sup>24</sup> Minority Rights Group. "Kurds." *Minority Rights Group*, 6 Feb. 2021, [minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-5](http://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-5).

the Turkish government and other Kurdish groups. To remove the government, the PKK and the People's Protection Unit (YPG) have undertaken many actions against Turkish authorities in the Southeast. A two-year cease-fire between the Turkish government and the PKK was broken after a suicide attack by self-declared Islamic State insurgents that killed about thirty Kurds close to the Syrian border in July 2015. Now, Kurdish connections have further deteriorated because Kurds are not permitted to speak, write, or teach their native language to their children. Furthermore, relations between the United States and Turkey have deteriorated since Erdogan re-called for Fethullah Güle's extradition, with the USA's ties with aiding the Kurds pushing this deterioration.

### United States of America (USA)

Throughout the 20th century, USA has backed and disregarded the Kurds in equal measure. USA supported Kurdish insurgent forces fighting the Ba'ath party in Iraq in the 1970s, but abruptly terminated connections with them in the early 1980s, allowing Saddam Hussein to ruthlessly repress the Kurds during the An-Anfal war.<sup>25</sup> In order to stop Saddam from continuing to persecute Kurds, USA took benefit of the chance to impose a no-fly zone over Iraqi Kurdistan when it began Operation Desert Storm and the First Gulf War in 1990. The opposition Iraqi National Congress, which has Kurdish roots, was founded with assistance from USA. In 2014, the Kurds used American-led airstrikes to assist counter the menace of ISIS. Even though the Kurds do not yet have complete independence, USA has promised to help Kurdistan by providing weaponry and ammunition as well as USAID to the Kurdish Regional Government. Overall, Kurdistan and USA have a parasitic relationship, where Kurdistan relies on the USA heavily, through USAID.

### Kurdish Human Rights Watch (KHRW)

Kurdish Human Rights Watch's goal is to empower those who are forcibly displaced, refugees, asylum seekers, and homeless people to become self-sufficient and independent in their financial lives. Its objectives are to promote the financial, political, and human rights of all racial and religious minorities in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Turkey and provide the platform for humanitarian assistance to be given to refugees while promoting human rights. Empowering women who speak Kurdish to participate equally in the country's new political structures, which will help refugees and their families become economically independent, expanding aid to the most in need, especially refugee families and forcibly displaced, and offering chances for local and micro business income progress are more of its aims to help and alleviate the situation in the region.

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<sup>25</sup>Anfal Campaign and Kurdish Genocide - Department of Information Technology, KRG. (n.d.). <https://us.gov.krd/en/issues/anfal-campaign-and-kurdish-genocide/>

### Kurdistan Aid (KAID)

KAID offers education and builds infrastructure facilities to enhance the living situations for refugees and internally displaced people in Kurdish areas. Working in tandem with regional non-governmental groups and recently formed civil authorities to address issues and spur lengthy, effective results. They consist of Kurdish regions in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Turkey. KAID fundraises to construct a college in Kobani following incursions by Al Qaeda, ISIS, and ISL; promotes violations of human rights by lobbying the Kurdish Local Authority; fundraises for disaster relief operations in eastern and southern Kurdistan; and offers legal affairs, strategy planning, and office admin courses as parts of the KRG's capacity-building initiatives; posts articles on topics such as post system in Kurdistan, press liberties, and Kobani reconstruction.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| DATE                    | DESCRIPTION OF EVENT   |
|-------------------------|--|
| 7 <sup>th</sup> century | The Arabs conquer the Kurds, commencing hundreds of years of Kurdish subjugation.  |
| 1920                    | The Treaty of Sevres is signed, including a clause for a Kurdish state, offering more autonomy for the Kurdish people.   |
| 1923                    | The Treaty of Lausanne is signed and Turkey is no longer required by its obligations to offer autonomy to the Kurds. The Kurdish territory is split between Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. |
| October 1927            | The republic of Arat is established in eastern Turkey as a self-proclaimed Kurdish state.  |
| January 1946            | Kurdistan formally appealed to the UN for sovereignty and self-determination.  |
| August 1946             | With Soviet assistance, Iranian Kurds founded the short-lived Mahabad Republic. Mustafa Barzani, an Iraqi Kurd, created the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).                        |
| 1957                    | The Syrian Democratic Kurdish Party is established.  |
| 1961                    | The initial war between Iraq and the Kurds begins when the Kurds of northern Iraq rise against Abdul Karim Kassem's administration.  |



|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1974              | After the government declines to hand over autonomy of Kirkuk, an oil-rich area that was historically Kurdish, the KDP attacks Iraqi forces.   |
| 1975              | The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) leader Jalal Talabani quits to create the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).   |
| 25 November, 1978 | The PKK, the militant political organization and armed guerrilla movement, is founded in South Turkey.   |
| 1988              | Through the "al-Anfal" campaign, Iraq takes revenge on the Kurds for their backing of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war by killing thousands of civilians, displacing 1.5 million people from their homes, and forcing others to flee to Turkey. |
| 1991              | Following the Persian Gulf War, the US-backed Iraqi Kurds revolt against Saddam Hussein.   |
| 1998              | A peace treaty is signed by the leaders of the PUK and KDP, putting an end to their four-year conflict.  |
| 2002              | The first meeting of the Iraqi Kurdish regional parliament in six years takes place.   |
| January 2005      | An independence referendum for Kurdistan is held, with results showing a majority in favor of independence.  |
| 2007              | Both Iran and Turkey undertake offensives against Iraqi Kurdistan.   |
| March 2013        | The PKK released eight Turkish troops and government employees in March.   |
| 2017              | A Referendum on Independence is held for the Kurds in Iraq.  |

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### Referendums on Independence 2005 and 2017

The Kurdistan Region held an illegal referendum on independence on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The results show that 99% of votes were cast in favor of independence.<sup>26</sup> During the 2005 Iraqi parliamentary elections and the elections for the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdish Constitutional Campaign polled the populace to determine whether they wished to stay a part of Iraq or were in favor of an independent Kurdistan. The election did not result in Kurdistan's independence because of threats from neighboring countries. Instead, the Kurdistan Region was granted freedom under the Iraqi Constitution.

The Kurdish Region of Iraq held another referendum regarding its independence in September 2017, and preliminary results indicated that 93% of votes were cast in favor of it.<sup>27</sup> Despite rumors to the contrary, the self-governing Kurdistan Regional Council maintained that the independence referendum was legally binding. They added that a favorable outcome would instead result in the start of democratic institutions and negotiations with Iraq opposed to an immediate autonomy declaration for Kurdistan.

This was also rejected by the Iraqi parliament, but the Kurdistan Region Legislature approved a proposal to conduct it, nevertheless. The poll was subsequently put on hold as the Iraqi Supreme Court looked into whether it was lawful. Despite this, the referendum was sworn to go through despite the legal issues, and the validity of the poll was ultimately denied by the Iraqi federal government.

### United Nations (UN) involvement

In 1946, a formal application for Kurdish autonomy and sovereignty was made to the UN, but it was denied. Iraq used chemical agents against Iraqi Kurds in Halabja in March 1988 and during the Iran-Iraq War, and the UN Security Council officially condemned this use of weapons in Resolution 620 on August 26, 1988.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Barzani requested the UN to stop Iraq from using chemical weapons, However, the United Nations, in general, remained silent at the time due to a desire to avoid upsetting Saddam Hussein or Iraq.

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<sup>26</sup>98 percent of the people of South Kurdistan vote for independence : (2005, February 9). Indybay. <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2005/02/09/17205061.php>

<sup>27</sup> BBC News. "Iraqi Kurds Decisively Back Independence in Referendum." *BBC News*, 27 Sept. 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41419633](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41419633).

<sup>28</sup>UN. Security Council (43rd year : 1988). (1988, August 26). Resolution 620 (1988) /. United Nations Digital Library System. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/44865?ln=en>

A change during events occurred in 1991 as a result of UN Security Council Resolution 688, which condemned the persecution of the Iraqi innocent civilians.<sup>29</sup> The demand was for Iraq to quickly halt this repression in Kurdish-populated areas. This was by far the most important specific acknowledgement of the Kurdish conflict that the UN has ever released. In the years that followed, USA made use of this Security Council Resolution to assist the short-lived creation of a haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq and the subsequent implementation of a no-fly zone over the area. The KRG expanded inside this refuge after 1992, and the new Iraqi constitution, which was passed in October 2005, acknowledged it as a federalism within Iraq. The KRG also continued to run a variety of relief initiatives in the area.

The Iraqi Kurds were urged by the UN to forgo holding a vote on whether Kirkuk should be annexed by the KRG. This plan was opposed by Masoud Barzani, the president of the KRG, to the Kurdish desire to implement Article 140 of the provisional government of Iraq, which called for a similar referendum and was fiercely criticized. But in 2014, when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria had routed the Iraqi army, the KRG ultimately seized over the bulk of the contentious Kirkuk province. Most crucially, despite the fact that the UN's own guiding principle was to safeguard the territorial sovereignty of all States, the UN Security Council President said in 2016 that the KRG's aspirations for an independence vote were merely a domestic Iraqi concern. Overall, the UN's attempts to reform it have been ineffective as seen by the lack of action on its side.

### Peace process

The peace process was used to examine the government's efforts to settle a protracted conflict with Kurdish separatists, which illustrated how a successful resolution may increase the government's budget. Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned PKK leader and leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, pushed for the disarmament of his group, advancing the peace talks. A great deal of hope was also voiced for Turkey's economic growth if the peace process was successful. It would have expedited the Kurdish regions' economic growth and allowed the government to redirect expenditures from internal security to more important projects. As part of the peace process, a truce was necessary, but it was incredibly brief. Following multiple attacks, Turkish forces said in July 2015 that they would begin a severe offensive against PKK fighters in the area, which sparked a resumption of hostilities on their part. Since 1984, the PKK has fought for an independent Kurdistan, claiming 36,000 lives in Turkey.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Security Council Resolution 688 - UNSCR. (n.d.). <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/688>

<sup>30</sup>Project, T. K. (2015, March 13). PKK Disarmament Likely After Öcalan's Call. The Kurdish Project. <https://thekurdishproject.org/pkk-disarmament-likely-after-ocalans-call/>

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The independence of Kurdistan can be achieved in stages, as a full-blown approach of the creation of an independent Kurdish state, although the simple and direct approach to this issue, will cause further problems and instability within the regions. Largely, world powers will have to put pressure on Turkish and Syrian leaders to acknowledge Kurdish people's language and culture, to grant them basic human rights, and to most pertinently inform the governments that ethnic minorities still need to uphold their human rights.

### Government Representation

Any new government should contain respect for the rule of law and democratic principles, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, advocacy of gender, racial, and religious diversity at all levels, and decentralization. A provision allowing Kurds and other marginalized groups to participate in real democratic governance should be included in the new constitution. Therefore, it is important to eliminate any present legislative thresholds. The demands of the Kurdish population may be better served if there were more Kurdish MPs in the administration since they would have a stronger voice in determining policies.

### Decentralization of Government

Because the unified and collectivist structure has been a substantial catalyst to the struggle, federalism can help resolve the Kurdish conflict. Instead of having centrally selected governors, the government could decentralize authority down to locally elected co-mayors in towns and cities. Kurds have previously established and effectively used a co-mayor and co-chair system. A new, peaceful, and multicultural one-state alternative for Kurds would be made possible with the development of local police departments and political, organizational, and budgetary decentralization. Decentralization should be implemented in the areas of education, medicine, economic growth, and sports. In regions where Kurds are dominant, the constitution should also legalize the application of Kurdish as a main language.

### Kurdish and State Culture

Considering the idea of blending Kurdish and state cultures, Member States will need to assess if the Kurdish dialect will be acknowledged as a primary language and if it needs to be incorporated in organizations like state schooling in Turkey and Syria. Additionally, constitutional rights should acknowledge and safeguard the presence and unique identities of many ethnic and religious communities, including the Kurdish. Locations where minority groups predominate must permit the usage of local flags and emblems. Long-term, it could be essential to design a new, all-inclusive State flag. If there is no acceptance for diversity, the ideals of one country cannot hold the Turks

and Kurds together. The long-standing Kurdish issues cannot be solved without tolerance and respect which are essential for a peaceful society.

### Release of Kurdish Prisoners

Furthermore, the problem of Kurdish activists imprisoned without sufficient evidence needs to be addressed. Instead of punishing the activists with death or lengthy prison terms, it is encouraged to start peace negotiations with these groups in order to determine the best means of resolving the sovereignty issue. In this sense, it is not an immediate form of achieving sovereignty but by starting off with peace talks first as any peace agreement and future cohabitation must be conducted with an amnesty for all political prisoners if they are to be effective in the long run.

### Demilitarization

Another serious issue is the extensive militarization of such regions. The UN specifically recommended that the PKK and Turkey resume their peace negotiations and that the cease-fire agreement be reinstated but upheld. Other actions will also be required in order, such as the pledge to a non-violent approach by Kurdish parties like the PKK etc. to maintain the conditions of the ceasefire, as well as the UN taking an active role and interest in the issue, as there has never been a significant effort made to increase acceptance and respect amongst and among various ethnic groups.

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