**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** The Situation of Kurdistan

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**Position:** Deputy Chair

# Introduction

One of the most severe ongoing crises in the Middle East is the situation in Kurdistan. The region of Kurdistan has been plunged into a constant state of war and conflict for years and years to come until we can propose and implement a feasible solution that would put an end to the armed conflict persisting in the region. This crisis is spread out over the middle east where most of the Kurdish population reside, this region is known as Kurdistan. With an estimated population of almost forty million people, the Kurds are essentially the largest ethnic group of people in the world without a nation-state. The Kurdish people have long been fighting for an independent state, with their origins dating back to all the way to the ancient Mesopotamian tribes. The Kurdish population is currently divided mainly between 4 major countries- Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, with the majority of the population living in Turkey. This region is commonly referred to as “Kurdistan” or “Greater Kurdistan. Most of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims and they have a distinct culture and lifestyle compared to their Middle Eastern neighbors. The Kurdish people have adopted certain traits pertaining to the country in which they inhabit which differentiate them from each other. Much of the Kurdish population today aim to create a democratic and secular state called Kurdistan. 

The establishment of an independent Kurdish state seems unlikely. However, the Kurds have been granted autonomy numerous times in the past, but they have always been denied their complete political independence. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the treaty of Sèvres was signed. The provision of the treaty included a separate nation for the Kurds, but Turkey had failed in ratifying the treaty and, instead signed the treaty of Lausanne, leading to tensions between Turkey and the Kurdish population. What would have been Kurdistan was now divided between Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. This ripped the Kurdish population apart, creating demographics blocs split between the countries involved and giving the Kurds a minority status in their respective country. The Kurdish territories cover an area of almost 500 thousand square kilometers and with such a huge Kurdish population, it is easily larger than most modern states.

In more recent events, Turkey’s president, Recep Erdoğan, has attacked northeast Syria, soon after U.S. President, Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops in the region, to clear out the Kurdish forces in the region and establish his so-called “Safe zone”. Turkey strongly believes that the Kurdistan Worker ‘s Party or PKK, which consists of Kurdish nationalists and is widely labeled as a terrorist group, is linked to the Kurdish armed forces in Syria. Turkey’s invasion has been brutal and destabilizing, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries and many people trying to escape this chaos. As the SDF attempts to defend itself against Turkish forces, numerous ISIS prisons and detention camps are left unguarded, and according to Kurdish sources, thousands of ISIS members have already escaped. The situation in Kurdistan especially in northeast Syria cannot be overstated, and the Kurds, as of right now, suffer from serious repression, persecution, oppression, and destruction throughout Kurdish territories.

# Definition of Key Terms

**Autonomy**

Autonomy refers to an independent or self-governing state, organization or institution that follows an autonomous government. Most of the Kurdish people are demanding to have their own autonomy state while some demand to have a completely independent and secular state.

**Political Independence**

The term ‘political independence’ refers to an independent governing body that legally has the right to exercise freely the full range of power while still being accountable to international law. These governments have the right to create their own domestic and foreign policies.

**Ratify**

Ratification defines the international act whereby a state indicates its consent to be bound to a treaty if the parties intended to show their consent by such an act. The institution of ratification grants states the necessary timeframe to seek the required approval for the treaty on the domestic level and to enact the necessary legislation to give domestic effect to that treaty.

**Referendum**

A referendum is a direct and universal vote where an entire electorate is asked to vote on a proposal, and it can have nationwide or local forms. This can lead to the implementation of a new policy or a certain law.

**Repression**

Political repression is the discrimination and mistreatment of a person or a minority group based on their ethnicity, gender, race and so forth for political reasons, including restricting or preventing their ability to take part in the political life of society. It often is shown in the form of human rights violations, surveillance abuse, police brutality, imprisonment, involuntary settlement, stripping of citizen's rights and is synonymous with oppression.

**Sovereignty**

Sovereignty refers to a persons or nation’s state of having authoritarian power and is self-governing. The violation of a sovereignty of state could lead to international conflict and tensions between countries.

# Background Information

 The situation of Kurdistan as of 2019 is one of the most violent on-going crises of 2019. There have been numerous atrocities and war crimes that have left thousands dead and wounded millions. The Kurds have wanted their independence for hundreds of years, but several factors such as economic instability, the concept of national sovereignty and geographic location have made it quite hard for the Kurds to establish a democratic and secular state.

## Historical context

The origins of the Kurdish people date all the way back to 2200BC, along with the Mesopotamian tribes at the foothills of the mighty mountains of Zagaros. It is there, where an ancient tribe of Kurdish ethnicity is said to have lived. From there on, the Kurds would be a part of a series empires and bear witness to the numerous battles and wars fought to take over the land. From the great Sassanids and Byzantines empires later to the Islamic Caliphates. Throughout this period, the Arab population observed that the Kurdish tribe had spoken a language similar to Persian and he called them “Al-Awards”. The Kurds under the Arab rule could set up independent principalities under the Caliphs. There have been other times when the Kurds were granted partial autonomy under the sovereignty of the ruling party. At around 1055, the Seljuq Dynasty had taken over most of the region and defeated the Caliphates, which brought an end to the Kurdish independence, however, one of the last Seljuq monarchs, Ahamad Sanjar, established a jurisdiction in the region and called it Kurdistan. In 1171, Sultan Salah-ad-Din, a fierce warrior with Kurdish origin, founded the Ayyubid Dynasty and the Kurds prospered under his rule.

 Later, the Kurdish territory was split once again amongst the Ottomans and Safavid empire. The two empires had been rivals and fought many wars, while the Kurds had to undergo destruction, deaths, and sufferings for over 3 centuries. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the treaty of Sèvres had been signed which restructured the remaining middle eastern countries. The terms of the treaty included the possibility of an independent state for the Kurds, known as “Kurdistan”. However, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, an officer in the ottoman empire, gathered his remaining troops and retaliated against the allies, and had demanded for completed independence, which they had received after four years of struggle and which led to the creation of Turkey. Turkey had failed in ratifying the treaty and, instead, the treaty of Lausanne had been signed.

Hope for an independent Kurdistan was becoming tougher as the Kurds now found themselves separated between 4 nations. This helped lay the foundations for early 20th-century nationalism and the Kurds started considering the creation of a homeland which is generally referred to as ‘Kurdistan’. Soon, the Iraqi-Kurds started revolting against the British demanding independence. After the First Iraqi–Kurdish War, a peace settlement in 1970 between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, granted the Kurds their own autonomous region along with an independent Kurdish government. Eventually, the peace settlement had still failed, resulting in the Second Iraqi–Kurdish War in 1974 which further intensified the Iraq-Kurdish conflict. Despite the several national uprisings and even establishing the short-lived Kingdom of Kurdistan, none of these bore long-lasting results and the Kurds still had not succeeded in their struggle for independence. In 1991, when Saddam Hussein, former President of Iraq, invaded Kuwait because of its oil reserves resulting in a national uprising within all of Iraq. However, when Saddam returned with his ruthless army, almost 2 million people were forced to flee 75% of whom were Kurdish. Soon, the United States along with the coalition forced Saddam to withdraw his army. In October of 1991, Iraq fully withdrew its troops and resulted in the creation of an autonomous region for the Kurds in Iraq. However, it wasn’t until 2005 when a new Iraqi constitution was in place, which recognized Kurdistan as an autonomous federal region.

## Fight against ISIS

In 2011, with the rise of ISIS, the United States grew increasingly concerned and as resulted required a trustworthy ally within northeast Syria. So, in 2015, along with the support of the U.S., the Kurdish fighters along with the Arab forces joined together to form the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF which would help aid them in the ongoing armed conflict with ISIS. In addition to that Britain, France, and several additional countries supplied the SDF with weaponries. And ever since then, the Kurdish people and the United States have led an alliance, which had been crucial in defeating ISIS and the capturing of over 10,000 ISIS members which are now detained in Syrian detention centers and prison camps.

As the SDF became a vital part of the United States' mission to defeat ISIS, Turkey grew more concerned about the Kurdish Forces increasing influence near the border, becoming allies with the Americans and establishing institutions. Within its own borders, Turkey in conflict with the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), an armed militant group that has been widely designated as terrorist group and that has been in conflict with Turkey and has launched several attacks throughout the country for Kurdish nationalism, which has resulted in the deaths of tens and thousands of people. Turkey’s president, Recep Erdoğan, views the Kurdish forces within Syrian border as a terrorist group connected to the PKK.

## Turkey’s safe zone

The Kurdish people make up 18% of Turkey’s total population and according to Kurdish sources, there are around 15 million Kurdish people living in Turkey, more than any other country. Turkey has also been hosting refugees for years, there are around 3.7 million refugees in Turkey and over 95% are Syrian refugees. However, Turkey is now facing a serious economic crisis, and as a result President Erdoğan, is being put under pressured to work out a solution to the mass unemployment and refugee crises concurrently. The solution proposed by him includes the establishment of a “safe zone” within the northeastern Syrian borders, where millions of these refugees would be relocated. He has promised to clear Kurdish fighters near the Syrian border and has ‘doubled down’ on his idea of establishing this “safe zone”.



He has already gone through with these plans despite the humanitarian issues and has agreed to a 5km wide zone where the Kurdish and U.S. troops patrol the border. Erdoğan planned to increase the area of his “safe zone” but their allies weren’t on board with this idea, which created a problem, until recently when the United States President, Donald Trump had ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops and effectively breaking their alliance with the Kurds. Turkey immediately seized this opportunity and ordered airstrikes and invaded northeast Syria. Turkey’s invasion into northeast Syria has been brutal and destabilizing, in numerous deaths and injuries and many people trying to escape this chaos. As the SDF defends itself against Turkish forces, numerous ISIS prisons and detention camps are left unguarded, and according to Kurdish sources, thousands of ISIS members have already escaped.

# Major Countries and Organizations Involved

## Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

 The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) more commonly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a terrorist militant group that is located within the middle east predominantly in Syria and Iraq. ISIS gained recognition in 2014 when it drove Iraqi forces out of key cities and is now currently in an armed conflict with the SDF. The sudden uprising of ISIS activity within Syria helped establish a U.S.-Kurdish alliance more importantly, it was the main motive for the United States to merge the Kurdish forces (YPG) and the Arab forces in the region to create the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF. The SDF along with the help of the U.S. were able to defeat ISIS and take back control in the region. And in 2019, the SDF along with their US allies were able to break the ISIS strongholds and effectively defeating ISIS and capturing thousands of ISIS members who were imprisoned and sent to detention camps.

## Kurdistan Worker ‘s Party (PKK)

 The Kurdistan worker’s party is an armed militant separatist group that is based in Turkey and its main goal is to create a separate Kurdish state within the country. It had been created in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan. It is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey and all its NATO allies including the United states, United Kingdom, France and also the European Union but not by Russia, China, India, Brazil, Switzerland or Egypt. It is also worth noting that the United Nations do not officially recognize the PKK as a terrorist group. Even though efforts were made to establish peace between the Turkish government and the PKK, such as the negations to a ceasefire in 2013, it was not effective as it descended back into armed conflict 2 years later. Most of the Kurdish people living in Turkey support the People's Democratic Party or HDP, to which the Turkish President, accuses of being connected to the terrorist group.

## Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

 The Syrian Democratic forces or SDF, which was founded in 2015, is an armed militant group that is in alliance with the Syrian Civil war and its primary goal is to create a secular, democratic and decentralized Syria. 2015, along with the support of the U.S., the Kurdish fighters along with the Arab forces joined together to form the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF which would help aid them in the ongoing armed conflict with ISIS. In addition to that Britain, France, and a several additional countries supplied the SDF with weaponries And ever since then, the Kurdish people and the United States have led an alliance, which had been crucial in defeating ISIS. A majority of the SDF consists of Kurdish People's Protection Group or YPG. The SDF has helped capture ISIS members and helped retake power and control in North-East Syria with the help of the United States in Syria and parts of Iraq.

## United States

 The United States has been a powerful ally towards the Kurds. In 2011, with the rise of ISIS, the United States grew increasingly concerned and as resulted required a trustworthy ally within northeast Syria. So, in 2015, along with the support of the U.S., the Kurdish fighters along with the Arab forces joined together to form the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF which would help aid them in the ongoing armed conflict with ISIS. In addition to that Britain, France, and several additional countries supplied the SDF with weaponries. And ever since then, the Kurdish people and the United States have led an alliance, which had been crucial in defeating ISIS. However, later in 2019, Trump had ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region, effectively breaking their alliance with the Kurds and leaving them to fend for themselves.

# Timeline of Events

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| **Date** | **Description of Event** |
| **30 October 1918** | Marks the end of the Ottoman Empire, after World war 1  |
| **10 August 1920** | The Treaty of Sèvres is signed, which includes the possibility of an independent “Kurdistan”. However, it is never ratified.  |
| **24 July 1923** |  The Treaty of Lausanne is then signed by the allies, which acknowledges Turkey as an independent nation but fails to include an independent state for the Kurds, forcing them to be separated among several countries.  |
| **March 1970** | After years of fighting for their independence, a peace settlement between the Iraqi government and the Kurds grants the Kurds in Iraq full autonomy and Kurdish was officially recognized as a language.  |
| **1978** | The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) was founded by Öcalan in Lice, Turkey. Its main goal was to create an independent Kurdish state within Turkey.  |
| **10 August 1997** | The PKK is designated as a Terrorist organization by Turkey and all its NATO allies including the US.  |
| **1991** | Iraq’s national uprising  |
| **2004** | Formation of the YPG  |
| **2005** | A new Iraqi constitution is in place, which states Kurdistan as an autonomous federal region.  |
| **2011** | The uprising of the armed terrorist group known as ISIS started becoming a threat after taking over huge portions of the Kurdish regions in Syria.  |
| **2015** | Kurdish forces joined forces with Arab groups and created the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The United States, France, Britain, and a few other countries provided the SDF with weapons. |
| **24 July 2015** | Marked the beginning of the Kurdish-Turkey conflict |
| **2016** | The SDF with the help of the US military became a potent rival and proved to be a valuable ally. |
| **25 September 2017** | Iraqi Kurdistan Referendum, which had an overwhelming majority, however, the Iraqi government rejected the referendum.  |
| **2019** | The SDF along with their US allies were able to break the ISIS strongholds and effectively defeating ISIS and capturing thousands of ISIS members who were imprisoned and sent to detention camps.  |
| **6 October 2019** | Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops within the Syrian borders. |
| **9 October 2019** | Turkey’s offense on Northeast Syria |
| **18 October 2019** | Agreement to a cease-fire between Turkey and Syria |

# Relevant UN Treaties and Events

* Treaty of Peace Between The Allied & Associated Powers and Turkey Signed at Sevres, 10 August 1920
* Treaty Of Peace With Turkey Signed At Lausanne, 24 July 1923
* Iraqi–Kurdish Autonomy Agreement of 1970
* Iraq, 5 April 1991 ([**A/RES/688**](http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/688))

# Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

As mentioned earlier, the Kurds came really close to establishing an independent Kurdish state. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the treaty of Sèvres was signed which restructured the middle east from the ruins of the huge Ottoman empire. The terms of the treaty included the possibility of an independent state for the Kurds, known as Kurdistan. However, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, an officer in the ottoman empire, gathered the remaining troops of the Ottoman Empire and fought against the allies, demanding complete independence, which they had received after four years of struggle and Turkey was created. Turkey had refused to ratify the treaty of Sèvres and in its place, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed. Hope for an independent Kurdistan was becoming tougher as the Kurds now found themselves separated between 4 nations.

In 1970, after years of the Kurds fighting for their independence, a peace settlement between the Iraqi government and the Kurds granted full autonomy in Iraq and Kurdish was officially recognized as a language. Soon later in 2005, Kurdistan was recognized as a federal autonomous region by the Iraqi Constitution and in turn, preventing further violence against the Kurds. This peace settlement could be a crucial step in finally creating an independent Kurdish state as more and more countries would follow through with this.

# Possible Solutions

If all the Kurdish states were united to form a “Greater Kurdistan”, it would include large portions of Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. This would necessitate the sovereignty of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran over the parts of Kurdistan within their own borders would have to be handed over to the Kurdish people who would form a new state. However, the establishment of an independent Kurdish state is highly unlikely considering that all the four countries have different goals and situations. While most of Turkey, Iraqi and Syrian Kurds want their independence, it’s extremely improbable that they will get it and most of the Iranian Kurds don’t want independence. But even then, if, somehow, the Kurds succeeded in creating Kurdistan, they would be without any support, since creating diplomatic ties with the neighboring countries that reluctantly surrendered their land would prove troublesome and they would virtually be “landlocked”. Receiving international aid would be equally challenging since most major countries already have diplomatic ties to their very neighbors that they have conflicts with.

Keeping this in mind, proposing a solution that solves the Kurdish problem which would stop it from being a factor for instability in the region and make sure that the Kurds are not a tool used by the colonial powers and tends to the needs of each Kurdish minority while not creating further conflict with neighboring countries would prove to be challenging. Alternatively, the countries involved could grant the Kurds full autonomy, with partial sovereignty preserved in countries with a Kurdish minority. Such an internal arrangement would not only be more realistic but also achievable. It would mean that each part of Kurdistan would remain within the sovereignty of the parent states, with an agreement between those states on how much autonomy would work. The Kurds would have the support of the country in which they inhabit allowing them to flourish. The Iraqi government could put forth a peaceful solution, allowing them to govern in Iraq in accordance with the Iraqi constitution. The Iraqi government should also protect the rights of the Kurdish people in disputed areas and withdraw troops from there.

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# Appendix or Appendices

1. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/07/brief-history-syrian-democratic-forces-kurdish-led-alliance-that-helped-us-defeat-islamic-state/>

*This website paints a good understanding of the situation in Kurdistan by going over the history briefly and causes as to why the situation is as is. It goes in depth on the recent events that took place.*

1. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150818-the-oppression-of-the-kurds-and-possible-solutions/>

*This website is great for understanding the current affiars as it gives detailed descriptions living conditions of the Kurdish people and talks a lot about the importance of this issue and why it should be addressed immediately while also giving good insight on some of the possible solutions that could help improve and even completely solve this issue.*

1. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/11/who-are-kurds-why-is-turkey-attacking-them/>

*This website goes into great detail of Turkey’s invasion on Syria and the main reasons behind why they did so. It gives great insight on Turkey’s reasoning and the current situation of the Kurds in Syria.*