

<b>Committee:</b>	Special Political 2
<b>Topic:</b>	The Question of Permanent Homeland for the Kurdish People
<b>Chair:</b>	Ella Jones
<b>School:</b>	Royal Russell School

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## Summary

The prospective nation of Kurdistan is a region composed of land from Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, part of Azerbaijan, and Iran. The Kurdish people are a prominent ethnic group coming from that region, but were largely not taken in to account when borders were drawn and land was divided up in that area. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle Eastern states as they stand today were created without any notion of a permanent state or homeland for the Kurdish people.

The dissolution of the Ottoman empire was largely organized by foreign nationals, specifically the allied winners of World War One. The Treaty of Lausanne saw borders for modern Turkey drawn up with no consideration of the Kurdish people, and divided similar cultural and ethnic groups and grouped together vastly different ones.

In the following century, the mistreatment of minorities in countries in this region has been a prominent problem, the Genocide of Bosnian Muslims in 1995 being a prime example of the problems stemming from the division of land. Along the same vein, the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) have become engaged in violent conflict with the government of Turkey. They originally aimed simply to secure a permanent homeland for the Kurds, but later extended their fight to achieving better rights, freedoms, and democracy in Turkey.

## Definition of Key Terms

**The Kurdish People and Kurdistan-** The Kurdish people are those of an ethnic group known as the Kurds, originating from the north of the Middle East. They have no permanent homeland state, and Kurdistan is not a country, but a region which historically the Kurdish people have inhabited, and now have a large population of roughly 40 million.

**Territorial Dispute-** A disagreement over the control/possession of an area of land over which two or more entities feel they are entitled to own.

**Genocide** – The deliberate killing of a large group of people, generally a specific ethnic group, and usually due to racial or cultural prejudices.

**Peshmerga-** The military forces of the region of Iraqi Kurdistan, heavily involved in the fight against ISIS.

**ISIS-** Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Daesh, and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, is a Salafi jihadist militant group that has been designated a terrorist group by the UN and many individual countries.

## Background Information

### Overview

The majority of modern Kurdish history has been in relation to their involvement in fighting ISIS, the Kurds being a valuable ally to western nations attempting to do so as well. They first became involved in 2013 after ISIS fighters began conflict on the northern border of the Syrian territory they occupied, targeting three Kurdish areas. The capture of Mosul, which has since been reclaimed, in 2014, motivated the local Kurdish population to send the Peshmerga (their own armed forces) to defend areas left behind by fleeing Iraqi soldiers. They held out against ISIS until the summer of 2014, when an ambush forced the Peshmerga to retreat. ISIS then captured towns home to religious minorities, publicly and systematically executing the local ethnic minority population of the Yazidis.

US-led coalition airstrikes backed Kurdish offensives, and sent tactical assistance to the Peshmerga fighters. Other assistance arrived from the PKK and the YPG (People's Protection Units), and allowed ISIS forces to eventually be driven out of Iraq. Hostile attitudes fostered between the Turkish government and the Kurdish people, as Turkey did not become involved in the fight that was occurring just along their own border and prevented Turkish Kurds from crossing the Syria-Turkey border to contribute to the fight.

A ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish government was signed in 2012, but fell apart after a suicide bombing in 2015 attributed to ISIS killed 33 Kurds. The PKK resumed attacking the Turkish police and armed forces, and were tarred with the same brush as ISIS when the Turkish government began their "synchronized war on terror" which resulted in the killing of many in clashes in south eastern Turkey, as well as airstrikes on a PKK encampment in northern Iraq. Turkey was later persuaded to permit Kurdish forces to fight ISIS in Kobane alongside the multinational coalition, and Kobane was liberated. This was followed by a series of significant ISIS defeats.

The involvement of the Kurdish military since the liberation of Kobane has since been fairly universally backed by the US led coalition, both politically and physically. Conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurds remained a problem, with Turkey shelling a YPG encampment in response to a suicide bombing in Ankara in 2016, which Erdogan's government attributed to the Kurds. The fight against ISIS has since all but disappeared from international consciousness since the liberation of Raqqa, but tensions continue to fluctuate between Erdogan's government and the Kurdish people.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

**Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)** – A militant Kurdish nationalist organization founded in the late 1970's, originally focused on creating an independent Kurdistan, but now has extended to call for further autonomy for the Kurds. It is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union.

**Syria** – Nation involved in the conflict. Kurdish people make up between 7 and 10 percent of the Syrian population, but have been denied rights and Syrian citizenship over many years, which has led to conflicts such as the 2004 Al-Qamishli uprising against Bashar al-Assad.

**Turkey** – Nation majorly involved in the conflict. 20% of Turkey is Kurdish, and Turkish Kurds make up 23% of all Kurds globally. Over the years Kurds have been forced to assimilate through measures such as banning the speaking of the Kurdish language, as well as any education on the culture or language. The creation of the PPK in 1978 increased Turkish anti-Kurdish feelings, and has led to years of armed conflict resulting in the death of over 40,000 and the displacement of hundreds of thousands.

**Iraq**- Nation involved in the conflict, particularly Northern Iraq. Kurdish people make up between 15 and 20 percent of the Iraqi population, and have historically been in severe conflict with the national government, particularly under Saddam Hussein. The Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan have been allowed to participate in all national governments since 2003, but relations remain uneasy.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
1915-1925	Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire
1920	Treaty of Sevres promises a Kurdish Homeland, Kurdistan
1937	Between 50,000 and 80,000 Kurds are killed in Turkey
1958	Kurdistan Democratic Party created
1960-1970	300,000 Kurds denied Syrian citizenship

1978	Creation of the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party)
1980s	Kurdish literature and music banned in Turkey
1984	The PKK launch an armed offensive against the Turkish government
1988	Iraqi military planes authorized by Saddam Hussein drop chemical weapons on the Kurdish town of Halabja
1990's	Villages destroyed in Kurdish regions of Turkey, killing more than 40,000 Kurds
2004	Al-Qamishli massacre
2013	Leader of the PKK calls a ceasefire with the Turkish government
2015	Two-year ceasefire is broken
2016-February	The Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party is blamed for a suicide bombing in Ankara
2016-August	The PKK use a car bomb to attack Turkish security forces in Cizre
2017-April	Turkish jets perform deadly air strikes on Peshmerga positions near Sinjar, and Syria Kurdish fighters across the Syrian border.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1954

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,  
16<sup>th</sup> November 1972

Bonn Declaration of Common Heritage, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009

Oriental Cultural Heritage Sites Protection Alliance, 2010

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

### The Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne

The Treaty of Sevres was drawn up in 1920 following the dissolution of the Ottoman empire. It was a pact between the First World War allies and the government of Ottoman Turkey that effectively abolished the Ottoman Empire. It stated that the Kurdish people would have the right to an autonomous region of Turkey wherein they would have the power to self-govern. However, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne renegotiated these terms to state that the Kurds were no longer entitled to a self-governing homeland, leading to the issues that stand today.

### Pledges of the Turkish Government

One of the pledges President Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party made after he was first elected in 2002 related to the Kurdish problem. It aimed to “find a peaceful resolution with the Kurds”. Over the years, relations have fluctuated, with the 2-year long ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish government being the high point. Conflict has since reignited on and off, and the situation has worsened as the years go on.

## Possible Solutions

Any solution to this problem essentially belongs to one of two categories, state solutions, and non-state solutions depending on whether the result is a Kurdish nation or not. With state solutions there are many variables to be considered, such as which countries should relinquish land to Kurdistan, which political party should take charge, and what would determine the citizenship of a Kurd, locality or ethnicity? All these points must be considered for such a resolution.

A non-state solution could take many forms, perhaps with Kurds being permitted to move between the existing Kurdish regions of Middle Eastern states. Kurdish rights could be protected by the UN with punishments imposed on those governments that mistreat them, but this then begs the question of national sovereignty and to what extent the UN may involve itself.

A comprehensive and workable resolution on this topic should include the formation of a consensus between the many different Kurdish political and military factions on what they actually want. It should also include methods of easing tension between the PKK and the Turkish government, as well as steering the international community towards a decision on whether it supports a Kurdish state.

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