



TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PROGRESS – THE NATIONALISTIC MOVEMENTS OF THE KURDS TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

Mahnaz Deihim*

Abstract: *Ethno-nationalism is nationalism connected to ethnicity. Nationalism can be based on geographical boundaries, or a community. An ethno-nationalism is based on connecting a community to their common origins as one ethnic group, and includes a common language, race, faith and cultural inheritance. Ethnicity combines tribe, occupation, ideology, class and region. An inclination towards tribal supremacy is a classic feature of ethno-nationalism. Twenty-first century nationalisms and ethno-nationalisms are present in many continents. One political movement in the Middle East is Kurdish nationalism, a nation deserving of a sovereign homeland and the largest ethnic stateless group. This could be why though many Kurdish national parties' agenda is bringing forth a land of Kurds - Kurdistan - tribal thinking, and internal squabbles are limiting factors. This article explores political aspects of Kurds for autonomy in the twenty-first century.*

*Research Scholar, DOS in Political Science University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Mysore



INTRODUCTION

The name 'Kurd' dates back to the seventh century AD and 'Kurdistan', means 'land of the Kurds'. Kurd territory is located in the geographic heart of the Middle East, and, covers parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Azerbaijan. Kurd territory has been at the cusp of regional political and economic interests. The presence of multiple resources makes the area volatile, and because of these, the creation of a Kurdish state has been stifled. Kurdistan is blessed with fertile soil, good climate, a diverse agricultural economy, and is a reservoir for grain, meat, butter, cheese, wool, and animal hides for the Middle East. Kurdistan is rich in petroleum, with a lot of Iraq's oil resources in Kirkuk and Xaneqin, Iran's resources around Kirmanshah, Turkey's oil resources in Batman, Diyarbakir, and Adiyaman, and Syria's oil resources around Cezire, plus iron, copper, chrome, coal, silver, gold, uranium, and phosphate. Kurdistan also hosts the petroleum pipelines of Iraq and the Caucasus. Kurdistan's rivers are a water reservoir, the source of the life-giving Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Iraq, Syria and Turkey have built dams across these rivers.

From family, to tribe, to one nation, the Kurds are slowly progressing towards Kurdistan. The Kurds' traditional way of life was pastoral, agricultural and semi-nomadic and Kurd society was tribal based. The family clan comes first in the hierarchy of loyalty, followed by the tribe, which has a mix of blood ties, and territorial allegiances associated with strong religious loyalties, with over 800 tribes in the Kurdish regions.³ Kurds are loyal to the sheikhs¹, agha² and tribal chiefs. In the rural hinterlands, the traditional power structure of segmented, agrarian Kurdish societies continues. Kurdish regions retained their autonomy and tribal chiefs, their power. The Kurds identify themselves as Sunni, and used Sharia to rule. The Kurd language, Kurdish, is an Indo-European, and, Iranian language.

The Kurdish people have not had an independent country for millennia. Today, the Kurds are the largest stateless nation in world. They are subject to discrimination due to their stateless ethnicity. During the 19th century, the first Kurdish nationalists demanded political independence without Turkish or Persian intervention and major Kurdish movements such as PKK³, KDP⁴, PUK⁵, and KDPI⁶ and Komala⁷ were founded. The Marxists influenced Kurdish

¹ Local leaders of religious brotherhoods

² Islamic scholars

³ Kurdish Workers' Party in Turkey

⁴ Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iraq



nationalism ideas to oppose traditional authority. Ethnic cleansing programs, “Arabization” and “Turkification” were used to suppress Kurds, and fraudulent parties like the Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, or SAK) were set up. To preserve their interests, foreign powers promised and assured freedom to Kurds at different times, but afterwards broke it. In the past, Kurds suffered many abuses of international law and human rights.

HISTORY

The Kurds have had a colorful history for millennia. For centuries, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Sassanid, the Ottoman and Persian Empires used Kurdistan as a combat zone, the Kurds faced many invasions. From beginning to end, the Ottoman Empire (1299 – 1923) had no control over the Kurds because of geographical location, but governed through informal contracts with tribes, which increased their autonomy. In 1514, after the battle of Chaldiran, Kurdistan was distributed between the Ottoman and Persian empires. The 1636 Treaty of Zuhab divided Kurd territory further. Centuries later, Britain and France split the land into three parts. In the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, an independent Kurdish state was one condition. But after Turkey’s independence, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne divided Kurd regions between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

Throughout history, Kurd struggle for autonomy was suppressed. A national Kurdish movement organized in 1908, was the first effort, and after two years, the Hewa Society movement was established in Iran. During World War I, Kurds supported the Ottomans and also contributed for the independence of Turkey. During the 1950s, Kurds gained political office and worked towards political autonomy, but this halted with the 1960 Turkish coup. The 1970s witnessed Marxist political thought influencing Kurdish nationalism. In the twentieth century, Mustafa Barzani was a preeminent Kurdish leader who contributed towards Kurd struggle for independence. One terrible event was Kurd genocide in the "al-Anfal" ("spoils of war") campaign in Iraq.

⁵ Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Iraq

⁶ Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran

⁷ Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan



TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NATIONALISMS

According to Kurdish Diaspora, Kurdish nationalism had a growth spurt in the twenty-first century. In 2003, the Kurds achieved a de facto independent and governed as federal, with its own parliament, administration and militia, and with Erbil as its capital, and protected them. In 2014, millions of Kurds live as refugees within state borders – the borders stopping them from migrating back to their homeland and professions. And hundreds of thousands more live as asylum seekers across the world.

A recurring feature of Kurdish political parties is a country ban, which results in a Phoenix-like rebirth of the party in a new guise. Movements in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and, abroad are covered briefly.

Iran

Kurdish culture is connected to the Persians and Islam. So they are differences in other Kurds region. The USSR had encouraged Kurdish autonomy during World War II. Iran banned several Kurdish political parties. Important political movements include:

PDKI (The Democratic Party of Kurdistan in Iran) and KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party):

Qazi Muhammad in Mahabad initiated the PDKI in 1945 in eastern Kurdistan in Iran. He established the Republic of Mahabad after four months during the invasion of Iran by Allied Forces in World War II, and reinforced the agreement between the Soviet Union, the government of Iran and the PDKI. Hitherto, it had eight leaders and fifteen Congress Parties. Currently, the central committee is located in the city of Erbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. During the Iran-Iraq War, along with Komalah, they contributed to the war effort of the Iraqi regime against Iran. In 2004, the KDPI congress changed the watchword, "Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan" to "Federal, democratic Iran". In 2006, Khalid Azizi created KDP, an offshoot from PDKI, because of dispute over leadership, but the objectives remain the same.

Komalah: Komalah is the left-wing, Kurdish branch of the Communist Party,⁸ which aims to protect the working class and pursue the formation of a socialist community. It has a guerrilla group called the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan. It combined with Marxist and socialist groups to form the Communist Party of Iran, which struggles

⁸ Romano, David. *The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilization and identity*. No. 22. Cambridge University Press, 2006.p.239.



against the Iranian government for autonomy. Today, its offshoots include the Worker-Communist Party of Iran, the Socialist Workers' Party, Worker-Communist Party of Iran – Hekmatist and more.

PJAK (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane): The Free Life Party of Kurdistan is a branch of the PKK⁹ and is located on the border between Iran, Iraq and Turkey. The PJAK is a militia led by PKK to establish semi-autonomous Kurdish states through military maneuvers and is regarded as a terrorist group. Older parties such as PDK and Komalah do not accept PJAK's political strategy.

Iraq

After World War I, Iraq was a colony of the British, who helped establish autonomy for the northern Kurdish region in 1970. Up to 1980s, Kurds and Arabs were partners within the nation. With the rise of the Ba'ath and especially during the Iran-Iraq war, Kurds were faced with discrimination and violence. Since 2003, with downfall of the Saddam regime, a federal autonomy has been established in Iraqi Kurd area. Powerful political parties include KDP and PUK, whose policies are divergent and conflict ridden.

KDP (The Kurdistan Democratic Party): After WW II, KDP was formed to work for Kurdish rights and battled against despotism in Iraq. Barzani's family led this party. Recently, they brought in democracy, unified Kurds world over, and established Kurd identity in the international arena. Masoud Barzani is president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Nechirvan Barzani is prime minister. Erbil and Dahuk are two territories of KDP. They believe in separating Kurdish and Iraqi governments. KDP has solidarity with PDK in Iran, KDP and KNC in Syria, and KDPB in Turkey.

PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan): In 1975, after the failure of the Kurdish revolution, Jalal Talabani¹⁰ initiated PUK in coalition with the Marxist-Leninist party with the goal of establishing democracy, guaranteeing Kurd self-rule and human rights. PUK is located in Sulaymaniyah. PUK has strong ties with Komalah and KDPP in Syria.

Gorran (the Change Movement): In 2009, Gorran was established as a liberal and reformist party by Nashirwan Mustafa. It is the main opposition to KDP and PUK. Gorran pursues reform to end corruption, and distribution of power in Kurdistan.

⁹ The Workers' Party of Turkey

¹⁰ He is President of Iraq right now.



KDSP (Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party): In 2002, the secular KDSP began as the branch of the PKK¹¹. The aims of KDSP are autonomy for the Kurds, support for self-rule and rights for children and women.

KIU (The Kurdistan Islamic Union): Set up in 1994, the KIU was formed by religious Kurds with an Islamic perspective. Goals include establishing an Islamic state in Iraq, improving trade, combating corruption, and support for human rights. They want modern democracy within Shari'a law.

Syria

In recent times, civil war across Syria has caught the attention of the world. Syrian Kurds remain in weak positions, though the Kurdish political movement began in 1920. It opposes Arab nationalism and supports democracy, autonomy, and Kurdish rights. In 1957, the First Kurdish Political Party was left-wing and nationalist. KDPS was led by a Kurd. Kurds are still victims of human rights abuses in Syria. The Kurdish Patriotic Movement Conference in 2011 had the participation of Kurd politicians, who aimed to change the authoritarian system to a democratic structure, with self-rule for Kurds in a united Syria.

KDPS (The Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria): KDPS is the second strongest party in Syria¹² (after the PYD), originating in 1957 in northern Syria. This underground party¹³ supports democracy, Kurdish rights, and wants its own Peshmerga forces but the PYD opposes this. This party has close relationship with KDP in Iraq.

PYD (The Democratic Union Party): In 2003, PYD rose as a prominent opposition party, and offshoot of the PKK. Their main objectives were equality, justice and freedom in Kurd society, political parties, and democracy. The regional police force of PYD is Asayish. After the crisis in Syria, clashes between the Bashar government and the Syrian opposition, PYD moved its forces to Northern Syria. They captured Ras al-Ayn, thus establishing the first step toward creating a Kurdish state in Syria.

KDPP (The Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria): Abdulhamid Hadji Dervish - a senior politician among Syrian Kurds - left the "Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria" and formed KDPP in 1965. KDPP has a good relationship with PUK in Iraq. KDPP aims include

¹¹ Kurdistan Workers' Party

¹² Democratic Union Party (PYD) is a largest political party in Syria.

¹³ It was never legally recognized by the Syrian state because constitution does not accept basis ethnic, religious, regional and tribal in political parties.



recognition of political and cultural rights of Kurds in the Constitution, creating a decentralized structure in the new Syrian Government, and opposition to any external intervention in Syria.

Yekiti (The Kurdish Union Party): In 2009, Yekiti was formed to achieve free and fair elections, freedom of press, political pluralism, individual rights and national groups. Yekiti strives for Syrian federal rule on the Iraqi model. The Yekiti is one of ten political groups that created the Kurdish National Council (KNC).

Azadi (The Kurdistan Freedom Party): Azadi was founded in 2005. There are two Azadi parties - one headed by Cuma and the other by Mustafa Hidir Oso. Azadi held anti-Bashar Assad demonstrations among Kurds along with Kurdish Union Party and Kurdish Future Movement. Azadi is currently the member of the Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and the KNC.

KNC (The Kurdish National Council): In 2011, KNC, an amalgamation of ten parties, was established to unite Kurdish parties and help Kurds in Syria. KNC is controlled by Masoud Barzani, and led by Abd al-Hakim Bashar¹⁴. PYD did not join the KNC. The KNC demands recognition of Kurd rights and decentralization of government.

The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria: In 1999, Meshal Tammo, Syrian leader, formed the 'Committee for the Revival of Civil Society'. In 2012, a coalition between Jandigar Muhammad and Rezan Bahri Shaykhmus resulted in a new movement called the Kurdish Future Movement in Syria. They wanted to topple the Syrian government through external military intervention, and economic embargoes or political pressure from Europe or the U.S., and recognition for Kurdish rights.

Turkey

Kurdish movements incorporate both peaceful political activities, and armed and guerrilla warfare. Although Kurdish nationalist movements are focused on Kurd autonomy and rights, but they are not unified. Kurds abuses include torture, army aggression, and prosecution of those opposed to the state, and suppression of Kurdish culture.

AKP (Justice and Development Party): AKP, named "Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi", has both liberal and conservative ideologies, and is a center-right Kurdish party – the largest in Turkey

¹⁴ The leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS)



-led by Erdogan and Gul, in 2001. This pro-Islamist party progressively increased its voter base with each election. Though developed from the tradition of Islam, they rejected the Islamist label because the Turkish Constitutional Court advocates the separation of religion and politics. AKP wants to be a Western styled party, and is a member of European Union.

CHP (Republican People's Party): Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi was founded in 1923 by Atatürk as a center-left, modern party. They followed Kemalism¹⁵ and social democracy ideology. Now, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is the leader. CHP is the oldest political party, and currently the main opposition in the Grand National Assembly.

MHP (Nationalist Movement Party): Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, a social conservative, Pan-Turkist and ultra-nationalist party¹⁶, with extreme-right ideology was founded by the late Alparslan Türkeş in 1969. Structured as a typically para-military organization, MHP was largely responsible for the escalation of violence in the late seventies. MHP became the second most important Turkish political party after the 1999 general elections.

HDP (People's Democratic Party): Halkların Demokratik Partisi is left-wing, with Kurdish nationalistic, democratic, socialistic and feminist ideologies, and led by Ertuğrul Kürkçü and Sebahat Tuncel. It supports LGBT¹⁷ rights and has a 50% reservation for women. At the 2014 municipal elections, HDP ran parallel to BDP, which ran in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated southeast. In April 2014, the entire parliamentary caucus of BDP joined HDP.

BDP (Peace and Democracy Party): Founded in 2008, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi has left-wing, feminist, nationalistic, democratic views, and is led by Gültan Kışanak and Selahattin Demirtaş. Many Kurdish parties that shuttered joined the BDP, which advocates human rights. It has equal representation at all administrative levels and municipalities it holds and supports the rights of gays and lesbians.

PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party): In 1978, Abdullah Ocalan formed the radical political party, PKK. Initially, this Kurdish militia emphasized Marxist ideology with radical transformation of Kurdish society, and sought Kurd autonomy across borders. PKK is supported by Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran, and the Kurdish Diaspora. It changed its name to KADEK¹⁸, then

¹⁵ It was taken in political, social, cultural and religious reforms design's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to establish democracy, civil and political equality for women, secularism, state support of the sciences and free education in Turkey during.

¹⁶ Also known as the Grey Wolves, from the name of its youth movement.

¹⁷ Means lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

¹⁸ Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress.



Kongra-Gel, and in 2008 returned to its original name. PKK has millions of supporters and is the best organized Kurdish movement in the world. The PKK is in armed conflict with the Turkish government, and is considered as international terrorists for many terrorist actions in Turkey and Europe.

DEHAP (The Democratic People's Party) and DTP (Democratic Society Party): The Demokratik Halk Partisi, established in 1997, is a Kurdish party alternative to the People's Democratic Party (banned in 2003 for supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party). After merging with the Democratic Society Movement (DTH), it formed the DTP. In 2009, DTP won mayor positions in 100 cities and towns in Kurdish areas. DEHAP merged with DTP, which was accused by the Turkish government of being a political wing of the PKK, and banned by Turkey's Constitutional Court in 2009, and Turk and Tugluk – its founders - barred from party membership for five years.

HAK-PAR (Party of Rights and Freedom): HAK-PAR was established by Abdulmelik Firat to counter PKK-related parties in 2007. Public support for Kemal Burkay, who heads it, is miniscule due to Burkay's connections with the Turkish government and his dislike for BDP and PKK.

KADEP (Party of Participatory Democracy): KADEP, founded by Serafettin Elci, advocates Kurdish nationalism. Elci was elected to the Turkish parliament in 2011, after his coalition with the BDP. Lutfi Baksi is current KADEP head.

Pan Kurdistan

KCK (The Kurdistan Communities Union) and Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan People's Congress): The KCK, enfolds all PKK-affiliated parties in the Kurd region, is based on 'democratic confederalism' as an alternative to the nation state and for resolving conflicts in the Middle East. The KCK's five subdivisions are ideological, social, political, the military wing, and the women's front. Cemil Bayik is the co-chair along with Bese Hozat, a female commander of the PKK. Political parties like the PJAK, in Iran, the PYD, in Syria, the KDSP in Iraq, civil society organizations, the PKK's armed wing; and the People's Defense Forces (HPG) are also in contact with KCK.

The International Scene

Kurdish nationalism has always been supported by the worldwide Kurdish Diaspora.



Kurds in the Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia: Seventy-five thousand Kurds live in Armenia. Conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan has led to expulsion of, and abuses against, Kurds caught between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh area. Two hundred thousand Kurds who reside in Azerbaijan, are affected by the differences over Nagorno-Karabakh. Forty thousand Kurds live in Georgia.

Kurds in Europe, North America and Australia: Kurdish Diaspora in Europe began in the 1960s. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the 1980 Army coup in Turkey and the Iraqi extermination in Anfal, successive waves of Kurdish refugees arrived in Western Europe and North America. Forced evacuation and destruction of Kurdish villages, political assassination of Kurdish elites by Turkish “death squads” and paramilitary forces, inter-Kurdish clashes in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1994, have increased Kurdish exodus to Europe. The Kurdish Diaspora numbers about 850,000 in Western Europe, 20,000 in the United States, over 6,000 in Canada and 10,000 in Australia.

KON-KURD (The Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe): KON-KURD, an international organization located in Brussels and headed by Ismet Kem, works within the democratic framework of Europe, has the goal of delivering social, economic, political, and cultural rights to the Kurds. Two hundred groups in Europe, North America, and Australia are members. YEK-KOM in Germany is the largest federation, with 100 members. The federation in Austria is FEY-KOM; Great Britain's is FED-BIR; Belgium's is FEK-BEL; Denmark's is FEY-KURD; France's is FEYKA; Netherlands' is FED-KOM; Sweden's is KURDISKA-RADET; and Switzerland's, FEKAR. In June 2013, KON-KURD was renamed KCD-Europe (Kurdish Democratic Society Congress in Europe).

Kurdistan National Congress (KNK): KNK - established 1999 - is a coalition of organizations from Europe and Kurdistan. Headquartered in Brussels, the KNK wants to promote a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish question. It lobbies foreign governments, the EU, the UN, and many international organizations to raise awareness of Kurdistan through the media. KNK also coordinates with politicians, human rights activists, and NGOs to bring attention to Kurd political issues and human rights violations. The KNK elected co-chairs are Tahir Kamalizadeh, and Nilufer Koç after the May 2013 elections. All terms are for 2 years, and the current ones expire in May 2015.



KNCNA (The Kurdistan National Congress of North America): The KNCNA was established in 1988 after the deadly chemical weapons attacks by Iraq on Halabja and other Kurdish areas. It brings together Kurds in North America for a free, democratic Kurdistan.

Common features of Kurd ethno-nationalism

Women's rights, human rights, Kurd identity, Islamic perspective, pan-nationalism, democracy, communist perspective in the past, are different features of Kurd political parties. Many Kurdish parties have a Peshmerga, the military arm composed mainly of men, except the PYD and PJAK who have women fighters. Due to volatility in Kurd political parties, many are banned and re-emerge as new parties. Media has been used to lobby for Kurd autonomy and the right to practice Kurd culture. Kurd pan-nationalism seeks to unite all Kurds under an umbrella Kurd identity. For the highly dispersed Kurds, heritage is the glue that holds the Diaspora together.

CONCLUSION

Resource mobilization is a key feature in Kurd political history... no country wants to give up their 'golden goose'. Kurdistan's extraordinary wealth and strategic location are important reasons for its people's suffering. Kurdish tribal culture is short sighted, with limited support for a nationalism that could aid the whole of Kurdistan.

Kurdish parties are based on a politicized sense of ethnic identity, an ethno-nationalism. The twenty-first century is witness to important progressive nationalistic movements for the Kurds. Iraqi Kurdistan emerged after the 2003 US invasion with a Kurd elected president of Iraq - a first. In 2014, the Kurds have made progress in Syria and Turkey but not in Iran where the situation is stagnant. In June 2014, Iraq faced instability impacting the gains of the Kurds.

WORKS CITED

1. Gunes, Cengiz. *The Kurdish national movement in Turkey: From protest to resistance*. Routledge, 2012.
2. Gunter, Michael M. *The Kurds of Iraq: tragedy and hope*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
3. Harris, George S. "Ethnic conflict and the Kurds." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 433.1 (1977): 112-124.



4. Jwaideh, Wadie. "The Kurdish nationalist movement: its origins and development." (1960).
5. Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse University Press, 2006.
6. Olson, Robert W. ed.: *The Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1990s: its impact on Turkey and the Middle East*. University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
7. Romano, David. *The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilization and identity*. Vol. 22. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
8. Strohmeier, Martin. *Crucial images in the presentation of a Kurdish national identity: heroes and patriots, traitors and foes*. Vol. 86. Brill Academic Pub, 2003.
9. Vali, Abbas. "The Kurds and their "Others": fragmented identity and fragmented politics." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 18.2 (1998): 82-95.
10. White, Paul J. *Primitive rebels or revolutionary modernizers? The Kurdish national movement in Turkey*. Zed Books, 2000.
11. Rogg, Inga, and Hans Rimscha. "The Kurds as parties to and victims of conflicts in Iraq." *International Review of the Red Cross* 89.868 (2007): 823-842.