

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2017 INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM OF THE
KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ ON THE
KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY

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General Studies

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ABSTRACT

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2017 INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM OF THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ ON THE KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY, by Major Hayk Amalyan, 89 pages

This is a study of the effects of the 2017 independence referendum of Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The study begins with a summarized introduction to the modern Kurdish history, key Kurdish organizations in the region, such as the PKK, KDP, PUK, GORRAN, and description of the strategy of Turkey and Iraq towards the KRG and the PKK. Then, the study analyses the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK; the transformation of the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq after the referendum; the perspectives of the KRG relations to the PKK; the Political-Economic, Military-Security, and Infrastructure considerations; and the role of the basing in the Northern Iraq mountains for the PKK. This study identified the transformation of the KRG after the referendum in 2017. This transformation includes the increase of Iraqi government control over the region. The KRG lost a considerable portion of sovereignty after the referendum of independence. The study concludes that the PKK as an organization became significantly more vulnerable, because of involvement in the changes of the status of the KRG.

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ACRONYMS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
PCDK	Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party
KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union
PJAK	Kurdistan Free Life Party
PMESII-PT	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IS	Islamic State

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kurds have no friends but mountains.

—John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends but Mountains the Tragic History of the Kurds*

The Kurds are often referred to as the largest stateless ethnic group in the world. The territory where they are largely concentrated, which includes Southeastern regions of Turkey, Western regions of Iran, Northern regions of Iraq and Northeastern regions of Syria, is a strong ethnic zone, based on resilient Kurdish culture and economic potential; especially considering the large oil fields of Northern Iraq.¹ The exact number of the Kurdish population in the region is difficult to define, because of large differences between the official statistics from the countries, and the numbers which are presented by different Kurdish organizations. Overall, these numbers fluctuate between 25 to up to 43.6 million in the region.² This large population makes the Kurdish nation one of the largest ethnic groups living in the Middle East.³

¹ Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1991), 78-112.

² Fondation-Institut kurde de Paris, “Les Kurdes,” January 12, 2017, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-population-1232551004>.

³ *BBC*, “Who are the Kurds?” March 14, 2016, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440>.

Background

In 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson declared his famous Fourteen Points, which were the principles for peace after World War I. The Twelfth principle stated the non-Turkish ethnicities of Ottoman Empire must have security of life and an opportunity for autonomous development. These ideas were further developed in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 that described the territory of the future Kurdistan and the referendum to be conducted.⁴ Even the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 had an article about the Kurds and Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.

Very soon after the Treaty of Sevres, General Mustafa Kemal overthrew the Ottoman ruler, deported the Greek and Armenian populations in Eastern Turkey that remained after the genocides during WWI, and repelled the Greek forces from Western Turkey. Mustafa Kemal created the Turkish Republic, with a strong military and nationalist rule, that forced the Allies to sign the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. This treaty did not discuss any of the conditions for Kurdish autonomy or independence in the territories of the Turkish Republic. The following decades witnessed numerous Kurdish rebellions in the region and the rise of the Kurdish question.

In October 1927, during one of the rebellions against the Turkish government, the Kurds declared the Republic of Ararat, in the East of Turkey, next to the borders with Persia and Soviet Armenia. The self-declared state was led by the Xoybun Kurdish party. Three years later, in 1930, the Turkish military was able to regain control over the territories.

⁴ Ed Kashi and Christopher Hitchens, *When the Borders Bleed* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 18-22.

In January 1946, the Kurds successfully used the situation caused by the occupation of Iran by the Soviet army to their own advantage. Qazi Muhammad, a Kurdish politician and the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, founded the Republic of Mahabad with its capital in the Iranian town of Mahabad. The Soviet Union supported the new republic. Qazi Muhammad became the president of the state, but after the Soviet forces left Iran, the Iranian army regained control over the territory of the Republic of Mahabad. In December 1946 the country ceased to exist. Iranians captured Qazi Muhammad and hanged him. The main weaknesses of the Republic of Mahabad were the landlocked territory, and the tribal social organization.⁵

Although all Kurds are ethnically and culturally similar, at the same time they are divided by religion, language (e.g. Kurmanji and Sorani), and different political organizations, ideologies and agendas. The formation of diverse Kurdish political organizations is explained by the differences in the environments where they were found.

To defend their minority rights and political interests, Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria formed political organizations. Most of these organizations were established during the 20th century, in times when Kurds were facing a serious threat of assimilation by the ethnic majorities of the countries where they were living. Assimilation processes were characterized by the limitations by the state authorities on the use of Kurdish language, culture, and traditions. Kurds were repressed severely, especially in Turkey and Iraq.

⁵ Kashi and Hitchens, *When the Borders Bleed*, 44-51.

Political elites of the modern republic of Turkey have always perceived the Kurds as a threat to Turkish territorial integrity, sovereignty and security. These perceptions formed the policies of the Turkish leaders towards Kurdish minorities. The policies were mainly focused on solving the Kurdish issue by assimilation of the Kurds with Turks. The situation became especially critical after the military coup in Turkey in 1980. Until 1991, the words Kurd, Kurdistan, and Kurdish, as well as the Kurdish language, were prohibited. Kurds were called “Mountainous Turks.” Mordechai Nisan described the situation of the Kurds in eastern Turkey after the 1950s as a classic “internal colony” situation, where raw resources are mined and exported, but underdevelopment and rural poverty are used as means of governmental policy.⁶

PKK

Kurdish political and social life in Turkey was limited by the central government in Ankara. The Kurdish population in Turkey demanded an organization that would defend its minority rights. Turkish policy of the 1970s created a solid base for the creation of the Kurdish Workers’ Party in 1978.

Initially formed as a political party, very soon the party started an armed rebellion against the Turkish national forces, which became famous as the Kurdish-Turkish conflict and continues today. PKK activities in the region cost more than 40,000 lives, from both Kurdish and Turkish actions. At the same time, over 3,000 Kurdish villages

⁶ Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*, 89-95.

were destroyed by Turkish troops during the clashes.⁷ PKK had a revolutionary socialistic and Kurdish nationalistic ideology, which in 2005 was changed into a democratic confederalism by the founder of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan described democratic confederalism as a democracy without a state, and as an adaptable, intercultural, anti-oligopoly, and consensus-oriented administrations model.⁸

The PKK is the dominant Kurdish movement in Syria and Iran, and supports many NGOs. Also, the PKK runs many Kurdish community centers worldwide. Several TV and radio stations, as well newspapers in Europe, are related to the PKK.⁹ The PKK is a member of the Kurdistan National Congress headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. The PKK is affiliated with the Free Life Party Kurdistan in Iran, the Democratic Union Party in Syria, and the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party in Iraq. These four parties are unified under the umbrella of the Kurdistan Communities Union. The Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party was created in 2002 in the KRG. The party conducted an armed struggle, which stopped after the Iraq war in 2003. It was banned from participation in the KRG elections in 2009. Turkish influence forced the KRG leadership to close several offices of the party.

⁷ Rodi Hevian, “The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey: A Research Guide,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (August 2013), accessed September 20, 2017, www.rubincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Hevian-YA-SG-YA-au2.

⁸ Abdullah Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (London, England: Transmedia Publishing Ltd., 2011), 111.

⁹ Hevian, “The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.”

Because of various acts of a terrorist nature conducted during the conflict with Turkey, the PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization by various countries, including Turkey and the USA, and organizations, including NATO and the EU. At the same time, the UN has never included PKK on terrorist group lists and many countries refuse to recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization. The main characteristics of the PKK armed actions are raids against Turkish military convoys, military police stations, police stations and military units. But at the same time, for most of the Kurds living in the south eastern regions of Turkey, the PKK was a benign organization for many years, committed to the protection of Kurdish ethnic and cultural identity.¹⁰

After the military revolution in Turkey in 1980, PKK leaders moved to Lebanon and, from 1982 until the mid-1990s, the PKK had training camps in the Bekaa Valley, controlled by Syria. These camps, and in overall the PKK itself, were supported by Syria, because of the long lasting political issues between Syria and Turkey. This support was suspended in 1988, after a Turkish-Syrian diplomatic agreement, which forced the PKK to cease all actions from Syria against Turkey. This time it had to finally concentrate itself in Northern Iraq, where the PKK had camps since 1983. After three years of existence saving cooperation between the PUK and the PKK in 1980-83, the PKK signed an agreement with the KDP, called the “principles of solidarity”. In 1984, within this framework of relations, Barzani and Ocalan met and discussed their collaboration. This collaboration opened a window of opportunity for the PKK to deploy into camps in

¹⁰ Stephe Kinzer, *Crescent & Star Turkey Between Two Worlds* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 222-223.

Northern Iraq, a place which will play a strategic role for the PKK future. The KDP shared with the PKK a large camp called Lolan, where the KDP itself had regional headquarters.¹¹

In 1999 Abdullah Ocalan was sentenced in Turkey, and since then the party has been led by Camil Bayik. After the arrest of Ocalan, the organization announced a ceasefire with the Turks and withdrew a large number of fighters from Northern Iraq. This ceasefire was not the first one. In 1993 Ocalan, with mediation of the PUK leader Talabani, announced the first unilateral ceasefire. The 1999 ceasefire lasted almost 5 years, but the fighting restarted in 2004. In 2002 and 2003, the organization twice changed names, trying to rebrand and to create a new image but, in 2009, returned to its original name. From 2008 until 2011, the PKK and Turkish special services were conducting secret peace talks in Oslo, Norway. These talks failed and a new wave of violence started. From July through August 2012, the PKK conducted a large scale attack on Turkish forces alongside Iran-Iraq border with Turkey, in the Semdinly region. The PKK was able to take control of a 150-mile-long border region neighboring Northern Iraq. This attack was unprecedented in scale and tactics. In 2013, once again the Turkish government and the PKK discussed, and agreed to, ceasefire conditions, but the ceasefire lasted only until 2015, when a new phase of the conflict started.

¹¹ Hannes Cerny, "Fallout From Independence Referendum Turns Iraqi Kurdistan Into a Land of Despair," *World Politics Review*, January 19, 2018, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/24021/fallout-from-independence-referendum-turns-iraqi-kurdistan-into-a-land-of-despair>.

The PKK armed conflict against Turkey has never generated any positive results. Quite arguably, any reforms or policy changes by Turkey towards the Kurdish population is the result of the PKK activities.

KDP

Similarly, in Iraq, the self-determination of the Kurdish people became the fundamental basis for the creation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The KDP was created on 16 August 1946 by the unification of three Kurdish organizations; Rizgari, Shursh, and the Committee of Sulaymaniyah of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran. Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the famous leader of Iraqi Kurdish rebellions, became the founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq. He stayed in his post until he died in 1979 and was replaced by his son, Idris Barzani. Idris Barzani ruled the party for only 8 years and, after his death in 1987, Masoud Barzani became leader of the organization. Nachirvan Barzani, nephew of Masoud Barzani, was elected as vice-president of the party, after the 13th congress convened in 2010.¹²

The KDP is affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, the Kurdish National Council in Syria, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party North. The Kurdistan Democratic Party North is an illegal organization in Turkey, has its headquarters in the Qandil Mountains and is following a goal to create a unified and independent Kurdish state in the Kurdish populated regions of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The KDP has representatives in Turkey, most European countries

¹² Hevian, “The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.”

and in the United States. At the same time, the KDP controls several TV and radio stations within the KRG. The headquarters of the party is in Erbil.

With his small, but experienced, army, Mustafa Barzani retreated from Iraq to the Republic of Mahabad, where he supported Qazi Muhammad, in 1946. When the Republic collapsed, Barzani returned to Iraq. From 1947 until 1958 he was in exile in the Soviet Union, where he received significant support from the Soviet Army. Barzani returned to Iraq in 1959, one year after the revolution. The new constitution of Iraq declared Arabs and Kurds as equal partners. Barzani even fought loyally for the newly formed government against other rebellious groups, but this partnership did not last long. In 1961, the Kurds started another uprising against the Baghdad government, demanding the right of self-determination, which came to replace the ideas of broad autonomy. The Kurdish Peshmerga (“those who face death,” the name of Kurdish militia forces) were successful enough to take control of territories in Northern Iraq, which they have protected since that time.

Another revolution in Iraq, in 1968, brought the Ba’ath party to power. The Ba'ath party followed the ideas of socialism and equality. In 1970 the Ba’athist leadership of Baghdad proposed a conflict solution plan, which offered considerable autonomy for the Kurds in Northern Iraq; the right to practice Kurdish culture and language. The program was accepted with enthusiasm among the Kurds, but the Kurds and the Arabs strongly mistrusted each other in Iraq. As a result, some of the agreements between the sides were not implemented. Barzani refused the plan and started a new rebellion. There were several reasons why Barzani rejected the project. One of the reasons is the Arabization policy. Other reasons were the low financing of Kurdish regions and two assassination

attempts against him. At the same time, according to Nisan Mordechai, Barzani hoped to use the support from Iran, Israel, and the USA, to gain independence, instead of suggested considerable autonomy.¹³

A year later, in 1975, the Iraqi Army suppressed the rebellion. In fact, the US, as well as Israel, suspended any support to the Kurds. Prior to 1975, the U.S., Israel, and Iran were supporting Mullah Mustafa Barzani with weapons, equipment and training. U.S. support to Iraqi Kurds was a favor to the Iranian Shah, and was conducted according to the Nixon-Kissinger doctrine.¹⁴ The same year the Iranian Shah and Saddam Hussein reached an agreement on the Shatt al-Arab water-way, which was the cause of conflict between the two states, and the reason why Iran was supporting the Kurds as a destabilizing factor against Baghdad. After the agreement was made, Iran cut off supplies to Barzani's fighters. Iraq started a search-and-destroy campaign. During the campaign, thousands of Kurds were killed, and over 200.000 Kurds were displaced. Mustafa Barzani left Iraq and moved to the United States of America. The search-and-destroy operations continued during the Iraq-Iranian war (1980-1988), and even after, and are commonly known by the term used by the Iraqi Defense Minister in 1988, "Operation Al-Anfal." Many acts of genocide and atrocities against Kurds were conducted by the Iraqi forces during this time period. During the Iraq-Iranian war in the 1980s, Iraqi Kurds continued the armed struggle for autonomy under the command of Masoud Barzani, son of Mustafa Barzani, and the leader of the KDP.

¹³ Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*, 74-85.

¹⁴ Kashi and Hitchens, *When the Borders Bleed*, 11-16.

PUK

While the KDP and Barzani were in an armed struggle against the Iraqi government for the autonomy of the Iraqi Kurdish region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan was trying to negotiate that same autonomy. This political party was created by Jalal Talabani, Mustafa Amin and Ali Askeri, on June 1, 1975. They had broken off from the Kurdistan Democratic Party and that resulted in the consolidation of several mainly left-wing organizations; the Marxist-Leninist League of Kurdistan (Komala), Socialistic Movement of Kurdistan and etc. The main ideas of the party are based on the political solution of the Kurdish question and the support of the right of Kurdish self-determination.

The PUK is affiliated with the Kurdish Democratic Progressive party in Syria and the KOMALA organization in Iran. The headquarters of the PUK are in Sulaymaniyah.

The PUK also has representatives in Europe and in the United States. The PUK also has good relations with Iran. The party owns several TV and radio stations, as well as newspapers. Jalal Talabani became the leader of the party until his death in 2017. In 2005 and 2010, he was elected president of Iraq. After his death, Kosrat Rasul Ali became the leader of the party. Jalal Talabani was ill from 2012 until his death, which gave a unique chance to the KDP to exercise greater power in the KRG, because the PUK was not as unified and capable as previously. In fact, after the death of Talabani, the PUK divided into three parts; one part is controlled by the wife of Jalal Talabani, Hero Ibrahim Ahmed. She controls most of the economic and security resources of the party. The second part is under the official leader of the PUK, Kosrat Rasul Ali. The third part is led by Barham Salih, the ex-prime minister of the KRG, who left the PUK and formed the

Coalition for Democracy and Justice. The faction considerably weakened the PUK political positions in the KRG.

Between 1979 and 1980, the PKK was marginalized by Turkey. A large number of the PKK members were arrested by the Turkish law enforcement services and the PKK leaders were in exile in Syria and Lebanon. The PUK played a critical role in saving the PKK. The PUK supported PKK leadership by developing relations with the Syrian government and the Palestinian groups. Subsequently, the PUK, the Syrian government and these Palestinian organizations organized the movement of the PKK members from Turkey to the Bekka Valley, and helped to establish training camps and receive necessary weapons and equipment.¹⁵ This support lasted until 1983, when the KDP and the PKK signed a document commonly known as the “principles of solidarity”. But the KDP and the PKK cooperated only until 1988. By 1988 the PKK was strongly entrenched in the mountains of the Northern Iraq, and actually did not need much support from the KDP. After the relations between the PKK and the KDP stagnated, the PUK and the PKK reached a new agreement of collaboration in 1988.

In 1992 the PUK discovered and published top secret Iraqi documents that were related to PKK-Baghdad cooperation during the previous years. According to these documents, the PKK was supposed to provide information about the KDP and the PUK, and to receive, in response, military equipment and materials.¹⁶ Publication of these

¹⁵ Hannes Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1-30.

¹⁶ Cerny, “Fallout From Independence Referendum Turns Iraqi Kurdistan Into a Land of Despair.”

documents severely harmed both the PKK's image within the Kurdish social-political circles, and the trust between the traditional Iraqi Kurdish parties and the PKK.

Gorran

Gorran is the third strongest political party of the Iraqi Kurdish region and was created in 2009, by separating from the PUK. Gorran is a liberal-reformist party. Gorran was created by Nashirwan Mustafa, a person who commanded the Kurdish Peshmerga from 1970-1992, and was one of masterminds of the Kurdish uprising in 1991. Currently the leader of the party is Omar Said Ali. The party owns a newspaper, a TV channel and a radio station. The party is represented in the KRG parliament and the council of representatives. The party is considered to be in opposition to the KRG ruling parties. In February 2011, the party conducted demonstrations demanding political, social and economic reforms, which were suppressed by police. Over 10 people died and hundreds were injured.¹⁷ After the referendum, in December 2017, when at least 5 people were killed during antigovernment protests, the Gorran party withdrew its ministers from the government of national unity of KRG.¹⁸ The Gorran Party is also a member of the Kurdistan National Congress in Brussels, Belgium.

¹⁷ Hevian, "The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey: A Research Guide."

¹⁸ Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 97-99.

Turkey

Turkish political and military leadership during modern times have always looked at the Kurdish issue as a threat to the national security of their country. Since its creation, the PKK became one of the main concerns of the Turkish government, especially from a security perspective. The main instrument of power used to solve the PKK problem was the Turkish military. Although the Turkish military was the main means used to counter the PKK, Turkish leadership also created unique types of groups in Kurdish villages, which were located in the conflict zone. These groups were called “village guards.” They were ethnic Kurds, armed and trained to resist the PKK fighters¹⁹. The military solution was not effective, as the PKK has continued its activities for more than 40 years. Even though not effective, the use of the military still remains the main method.

Currently, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which he founded and is leading are ruling Turkey. Erdogan has been in power since 2003, and, during his rule, Turkey and the PKK conducted unsuccessful attempts to reach a peaceful settlement. Overall, Erdogan never surrendered the official approach of Turkey towards the PKK as a terrorist organization, and mainly insisted military tools to be implemented against the group. Additionally, Erdogan’s strategy is to actively try to eliminate the possibility of new Kurdish autonomy in Syria, equating the PYD to the PKK.

In contrast to the war situation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey along the borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran, the situation between Kurdish and Turkish political groups in

¹⁹ Cerny, “Fallout From Independence Referendum Turns Iraqi Kurdistan Into a Land of Despair.”

the capital Ankara is quite different. The third parliamentary power of the Turkish parliament is the People's Democratic Party (HDP). This is a political organization formed by the unification of many smaller political groups, mainly representing the minorities of Turkey. The party received the majority of its votes from the Kurdish regions of South-Eastern Turkey, which is an example of Kurdish public support and trust. The party concentrates efforts on minority rights, among other issues. As the HDP has the trust of the Kurdish population and is a legal political party represented in Turkish parliament, the HDP became an essential actor in the Kurdish peace process of 2013 to 2015. Eventually the process failed and the organization was targeted by the law enforcement agencies of Turkey after the failed coup in 2016. Over 10 members of the party, including some leaders, were arrested. The example of the HDP shows that even considering the numerous democratic problems in the relationship between the government and the HDP, the government still has the opportunity to dialog through the political representatives of the majority of the Kurds living in Turkey. This opportunity requires the diplomatic instrument of national power.

Turkey has always supported the territorial integrity of Iraq. That policy is the result of fear of an independent Kurdish state on the border with the Kurdish populated territories of Turkey. Interestingly, the policy of territorial integrity of Iraq was never an obstacle for relationship-building and development between Ankara and political parties in Northern Iraq, such as the KDP and the PUK. The center of the relationship is the economic component, especially the energy resources of the KRG, but PKK basing in Northern Iraq was never ignored.

Although Turkey successfully developed relationships with the KDP and the PUK, and had strong economic ties with the KRG, Turkey was the first opponent of KRG independence during the referendum of 2017. The Turkish foreign minister and the chief of national intelligence were sent to the KRG in August 2017, in an unsuccessful framework of diplomatic efforts to block the referendum movement and to convince Masoud Barzani to cancel the referendum.²⁰ The Turkish government actively engaged the key actors in the region, by successfully collaborating with Iran and Iraq. Another consideration of the KRG-Turkey relationship was the problem of Kirkuk; the city has large oil resources, and a mixed population of mainly ethnic Kurds, Turkomans and Arabs. Turkey tried to use practically all means to stop the referendum. Turkey conducted meetings with the high leadership of the KRG, released a message of being ready to suspend the economic relations, and conducted military exercises along the borders with Northern Iraq. The military exercises were conducted with armored units close to the KRG borders.²¹

The developments following the referendum gave Turkey a chance to take a stronger position with the KRG and its political leaders. Turkey also conducted several airstrikes deep in the territory of Northern Iraq. According to several news agencies, the strikes were coordinated with Iraqi forces.

²⁰ Amberin Zaman, "Turkey Elections," *Al-Monitor*, August 24, 2017, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/08/turkey-mixed-signals-krge-referendum.html>.

²¹ Ellen R. Wald, "Key Points about the Kurdistan Independence Vote," *Forbes*, September 19, 2017, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ellenrwald/2017/09/19/4-key-points-about-the-kurdistan-independence-vote/#45612ac06ec9>.

Iraq

After transformation of Iraq from a kingdom into a republic, Iraq has always had issues with the ethnic and religious minorities. Kurdish rebellions followed one after another during the 20th century. Then there were the two military campaigns of multinational coalitions in 1991 and 2003. After the First Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds were able to gain partial autonomy in the north of the country, and, after the Second Gulf War, they were successful in establishing a relatively effective and independent regional autonomy. The KRG is a territorial component of Iraq.

PKK presence in Northern Iraq has always been a cornerstone for the relations between Iraq and Turkey. The Iraqi central government in Baghdad mostly supported Turkey, and allowed Turkey to conduct military operations in the territory of Iraq. In 1984, Iraq and Turkey signed security protocols, which allowed Turkish ground forces to enter 5 km into Iraqi territory in the case of hot pursuit of PKK guerillas.²² In recent years, Turkey often uses Turkish military bases established in the territory of Iraq to engage PKK fighters.

The Iraqi government was extremely opposed to the referendum of the KRG in 2017. The political dialog between Baghdad and Erbil did not have any effect on the decision of the KRG to conduct referendum in the territories under their control, including Kirkuk region.

Disobedience to the resolution of the Iraqi parliament and the demand of Iraqi prime-minister Haidar Al-Abadi to suspend the organization of the referendum, and the

²² Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 132.

conduction of the referendum on 25 September 2017, provoked the Iraqi government to start a military operation to take control of the Kirkuk. The Shia militia groups of Iraq were also involved in the operation, by supporting Iraqi armed forces.

In fact, after this military operation, the KRG surrendered considerable political and economic positions. The referendum opened a new page of the relations between Iraq and Turkey as state-actors, and the KDP, Gorran, PUK and PKK as non-state actors.

KRG

The KDP and the PUK, the most influential organizations in Northern Iraq, were engaged in conflict not only with the Iraqi government but also with each other. Massive clashes occurred between the two parties in 1976 and lasted until 1978. While these political organizations fought, the Ba'athist government of Iraq started the displacement and colonization program in Northern Iraq to change the demographics of the provinces.

In late 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam's regime began an anti-Kurd genocidal campaign, which was called Al-Anfal. This campaign was in response to the actions of the Kurds in the Iran-Iraq war and the Kurds continued antigovernment actions, which were shaking Iraq from inside. During these years, the KDP continually cooperated with Iran, whereas the PUK collaborated with Syria and the Iraqi central government of Saddam Hussein. The KDP and the PUK Peshmerga were often fighting each other until 1986. In 1983, the Syrian regime expelled the PUK from Syria, and relations with Saddam Hussein almost divided the party from the inside. These factors forced the PUK to form a relationship with Iran and, since 1986, to be alongside the KDP.

The repression of the Iraqi central government in Baghdad forced the KDP and the PUK leaders to leave Northern Iraq and stay in exile in Iran during the last years of 1980s. In exile, they formed the Iraqi Kurdistan Front in 1988, with a hope to unify their forces against Saddam Hussein.²³ In 1991, the Kurds in Northern Iraq conducted a large uprising. Iraqi forces attempted to counter the rebels by sending well equipped conventional forces to the region, which eventually created a refugee crisis involving more than 2 million Kurds fleeing to Turkey and Iran. The ethnicity-based deportations of Kurds from Iraq continued until 2003.²⁴ But the United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 became the legal base for the multinational military Operation Provide Comfort (OPC). The operation's aim was to defend the Kurds in Northern Iraq and to provide humanitarian assistance.

The KDP and the PUK were able to use the momentum during Operation Provide Comfort to establish their own Kurdish autonomous state, with an independent political system, institutions and international relations.²⁵

Turkey claimed that Operation Provide Comfort and the no-fly zone were not only protecting the lives of Kurdish civilian population in Northern Iraq, but also setting

²³ Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 28-29.

²⁴ Mohammed M.A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter, eds., *The Kurdish Question and The 2003 Iraqi War* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2005), 210-275.

²⁵ Ranj Alaaldin, "Regional Implications of the Kurdish Independence Vote," *Al Jazeera*, September 19, 2017, accessed November 4, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/regional-implications-kurdish-independence-vote-170918123748896.html>.

conditions for a safe haven for the PKK and the PKK fighters²⁶. After failing to suppress the revolt, Saddam Hussein enforced sanctions against the Kurdish region and removed all the forces and governmental employees, hoping to starve the local population by a double embargo; from the UN on Iraq, and from Baghdad on the KRG particularly. But this strategy created a political vacuum in the region, which KDP and PUK used to seize the power, and organize governing institutions of the region under their control. They also received humanitarian aid for the population, which helped them to survive through the Saddam strategy.

During the same year, Turkey conducted the largest air strike against the PKK in Northern Iraq. One of the KDP leaders reacted to the airstrikes by announcing that if the PKK intended to operate against Turkey from Iraq, the KDP would have to force the PKK fighters out. The developing Turkey-KRG relations required the KDP and PUK to take action to enforce a ceasefire on PKK.

On the other side, PKK supported the creation of the Kurdistan Liberation Party (PAK) in Northern Iraq. This was never a successful project, because the party didn't have public support, but it became a sign of their direct intervention in internal politics of the Iraqi Kurdish region. In addition, the PKK announced an embargo on trade with Turkey, which was possible because many roads were crossing territories that were under their control. In February 1992, the KDP and the PUK released an ultimatum demanding the PKK to lay down weapons and cease activities, or leave the region. Large scale

²⁶ Karen Kaya, "A Different War on Terrorism: The U.S., Turkey and the PKK," *Small Wars Journal* (May 2012), accessed October 2, 2017, <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/author/karen-kaya>.

military operations started in September 1992. Turkey joined the battle in October of the same year, which didn't leave PKK any other option but to surrender and to accept the conditions of the ceasefire agreement signed on 30 October 1992. According to the agreement, the PKK had to surrender the camps in the north of the Iraqi Kurdish region near the Turkish border, and to cease political involvement in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Although the PUK and the PKK were rivals, the PUK gave the PKK a chance to survive by providing the Zaleh camp in Suleimaniyah, which was under PUK control, and extending a right to keep its weapons.²⁷ Turkish military intelligence services started an informational campaign, which had the goal to prevent any possible positive relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the PKK. The unofficial message of the Turkish intelligence was that the Iraqi Kurdish organizations were supplying the Turkish air force with locations of PKK camps.²⁸ The PUK leadership reacted to the message by announcing their solidarity with the PKK.

At this time, the Kurdish region of Iraq gained real autonomy and conducted the first parliamentary elections in 1992. The KDP won the elections, but because of the small difference between the earned votes and seats in parliament, the KDP and the PUK agreed to form a unity government that lasted till 1994, when the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War started.

²⁷ Cerny, "Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict," 114-115.

²⁸ John Bulloch, and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But Mountains The Tragic History of the Kurds* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992), 141.

The Civil War took the lives of over 5000 Kurds. The main reasons of the Kurdish Civil War were influence and resources in the KRG.²⁹ In this civil war, the three organizations, the PKK, the KDP and the PUK, opposed each other in the conflict, with the PKK siding with the PUK against the KDP. The PKK and PUK formed an alliance because both organizations were enemies of the KDP.³⁰ The PKK also used the momentum to redeploy to the Qandil Mountains, reestablish camps, and restart the struggle against Turkey.³¹ The KDP was supported by Iraq, Turkey, and Iran (until 1995.) The PUK was mostly backed by the PKK, Iran (since 1995) and the US (since 1996.) During the active phase of the conflict, in 1994, 1995, and 1997, Turkey conducted massive military operations, involving over 50,000 troops, in support of the KDP. The KDP also received large support from Saddam Hussein when, in 1996, the Iraqi army invaded parts of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. In 1998 the KDP and the PUK signed a peace agreement, which was mediated by the U.S. After the agreement, the KRG was divided into two parts along the party lines. The Washington accords didn't include the PKK, which was left alone after the ceasefire. In 1999 the KDP and in 2000 the PUK conducted military attacks on PKK fighters in the Northern Iraqi mountains. These

²⁹ Hevian, "The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey: A Research Guide."

³⁰ Stefano M. Torelli, Cengiz Gunes, Carlo Frappi, Soner Cagaptay, Robert Lowe, and Cem Yolbulan, *Kurdistan An Invisible Nation* (Novi Ligure, Italy: Edizioni Epoke, 2017), 91-104.

³¹ Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 80-90.

attacks were intended to seize the trade lines laying through PKK controlled territories and to prove their friendship with the Iraqi Kurdish parties with Turkey.

Later, the Kurds of Northern Iraq supported the coalition forces during the fight against the Saddam regime in 2003. Then, they were active participants in the reorganization of the Iraqi government; writing the constitution and fighting against Islamic State. All this time, the question of the referendum for the independence of the Iraqi Kurdistan region was on the table and was delayed. Finally, the Iraqi Kurdish region leaders decided to conduct the referendum, the most important step of transformation from *de facto* into *de jure* independence. The KRG strategy towards *de jure* independence from Iraq was based on the idea of building *de facto* independence by establishing and maintaining stable governance system and an effective economic model.³²

The KRG has quite developed foreign relations. Its right of maintaining international relations is guaranteed by the Iraqi Constitution, mainly for the establishment and development of economic, cultural and educational areas. By 2018, the KRG had 13 foreign missions, including a mission to the EU.³³ At the same time, more than 35 states have consulates, commercial offices, embassy offices, honorary consuls, or agency missions in the KRG. The EU, the UNAMI, the ICRC, the UN Mission to Iraq, and other organizations also have offices in the region.

³² Torelli, et al., *Kurdistan: An Invisible Nation*.

³³ Kurdistan Regional Government Department of Foreign Relations, "The Role of Kurds in the Middle East," February 13, 2018, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://dfr.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?p=40&l=12&s=020100&r=364>.

During the first parliamentary elections, the KDP and the PUK were the only parties to enter the parliament. In 2005, these two parties formed a union called the “Kurdistan National Democratic List” and gained over 90 percent of the votes. In the following elections in 2009 and 2013, the Gorran movement took significant places during the elections, which showed the decline of public support to the traditional Kurdish parties of Northern Iraq.

Turkey opposed the formation of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq because, for the Turkish government, Iraqi Kurds were considered as potential supporters of the PKK.³⁴ Since the 1990s, Turkey developed a certain concept of relations with the KRG and especially with the key parties; the KDP and the PUK. Barzani and Talabani received Turkish diplomatic passports and privileges to have representations of their parties in Turkey.³⁵ Turkey was using the KRG to counter the Kurdish issue in two ways. First the Peshmerga were fighting PKK in Northern Iraq. Second, the KDP and PUK were trying to influence the Kurdish population to support their political programs, but not the PKK. Turkey-KRG relations developed from 2003 and Turkey started to influence the KRG economically, by investing in the KRG pipeline to Turkey, and also in other fields of economy.

The pipeline has operated since 2013, and is considered to be the main source of economic income for the KRG. This pipeline also increased the autonomy and self-sustainability of the KRG. However, when in 2013-2014 the oil prices dropped, so that

³⁴ Michael Rubin, *Kurdistan Rising? Considerations for Kurds, Their Neighbors, and the Region* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2016), 1-30.

³⁵ Alaaldin, “Regional Implications of the Kurdish Independence Vote.”

the KRG was not even able to pay its teachers and other government employees, social-political polarization started between the key KRG political parties. The pipeline was targeted by the PKK in July 2015. The attack caused a three-week interruption of oil exports. This attack harmed two PKK traditional rivals, Turkey and the KDP.

The KDP and Barzani were not only trying to suppress the PKK and other affiliated organization in the territory of the KRG for the benefit of Turkey-KRG relations, but also the neighboring countries. For example, Barzani organized and supported the Kurdish National Council in Syria, which became an alternative to the PYD.³⁶ Although the organization was not able to replace the PYD in Northern Syria, the balance of power changed. During 2012 to 2013 KDP and PYD relations worsened, because the KDP had closed the border crossing points with the territories, which were under PYD control.

Overall, the KRG became a unique democratic state in the region. Additionally, the KRG enjoyed large economic growth during the years. As an example, in 2012 the KRG economic growth rate was 12 percent. Over 55 percent of all investments by Iraq were invested in the KRG during the same year.³⁷ The KRG has large oil resources, which are comparable to the oil resources of Libya and Nigeria. Equally, KRG gas

³⁶ Laura Broker, *Any Hope for a Kurdish State? The United States, Germany and the Prospects of Kurdish Self-Determination Essay* (Washington, DC: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung North America, 2016), 5-17.

³⁷ Invest in Group, “Determined to Grow: Economy,” October 2013, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://investingroup.org/review/236/determined-to-grow-economy-kurdistan/>.

resources are as significant as gas resources in Algeria or Nigeria.³⁸ During recent years, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region was one of the largest export markets for Turkey. Overall trade between Turkey and KRG during the first half of 2017 was equal to 5 billion US dollars, and it was expected to reach 10 billion by the end of the same year.³⁹ The overall exports to the KRG from Turkey were close to the exports from Turkey to Germany or to the UK.⁴⁰

The KRG developed capable and well organized military forces. Peshmerga received a large amount of military aid, including arms, equipment and training, from the U.S. and many European countries. The Peshmerga proved to be one of most capable forces in the war against the IS terrorist organization.

In 2007, after a meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and Turkish Prime Minister Recep T. Erdogan, the Americans announced a readiness to begin an exchange with Turkey intelligence to locate the PKK groups, and to coordinate the actions of the U.S., Turkey and Iraq against the PKK. This announcement was recognized by Turkey as political approval of cross-border operations against the PKK in the territory controlled by the KRG. During the next two months after the meeting, Turkish

³⁸ Torelli et al., *Kurdistan; An Invisible Nation*.

³⁹ Mehmet Uyanik, "The KRG after the Referendum Blocking the Path to Independence," Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 22, 2017, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkey-and-kr-g-after-referendum-blocking-path-independence>.

⁴⁰ Asli Aydintasbas, "Why the Kurdish referendum is none of Turkey's business," *The Washington Post*, October 2, 2017, accessed November 4, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/10/02/why-the-kurdish-referendum-is-none-of-turkeys-business/?utm_term=.3f6bcd12a4b.

forces conducted four cross-border military operations in Northern Iraq.⁴¹ In 2008 the KRG and Turkey reached agreements for collaborating on the “Kurdish Initiative”, a program proposed by the Turkish ruling party, AKP, to solve the “Kurdish Question.” The relationship became stronger when, in 2008 the US, Turkey, and the KRG signed the creation of a trilateral commission against the PKK. The KRG restricted the PKK movement in the region and access of media to the PKK fighters. Turkish cross-border operations were challenged by the fact that from 2009 to 2011, all Multi-National Force-Iraq member countries, including the U.S., were withdrawing units from Iraq. In fact, since 2011, Turkey has had to negotiate cross-border military operations with the Iraqi government in Baghdad, and, because the KRG was enjoying a high level of autonomy, also with the KDP and the PUK. The PKK became a cornerstone for the relations between Kurdish political parties in Northern Iraq and the Turkish government.

The PKK played different roles for the strategies of the bilateral relations between Turkey and the KRG. The Turkish strategic end state was “to defeat the PKK”, and Turkey-KRG relations served that goal. The KRG political leaders considered the PKK as strategic mean, which is “to use the PKK” in order to reach different political and economic objectives. At the same time, Turkey developed relations with the Iraqi government in order to create alternatives to dealing with the KRG, in case the KRG achieves independence. Predictably, the KRG political leadership would try to use any possible chance to form a separate independent Kurdish state in the territory of Northern Iraq. Turkey always has perceived that possibility as a threat to Turkish national security.

⁴¹ Kaya, “A Different War on Terrorism: The U.S., Turkey and the PKK.”

In September 2017 Turkey was able to coordinate with Iran and Iraq the trilateral response to the Independence Referendum of the KRG.

This coordination included joint military exercises and exchanges of information. Interestingly, the military preparations were not only directed against the PKK, but against the Peshmerga of the KRG. Several days before the referendum, the PYD moved over 1,000 fighters to Northern Iraq in order to support the KRG forces. At the same time, the PKK allocated more than 200 fighters in the region of Kirkuk to participate in defense, if required.⁴² The PKK fighters were reinforcing the frontline in Kirkuk even in 2014, when the KRG Peshmerga were fighting the Islamic State terrorist organization. At the same time, the PKK guerillas defended the Yezidis after the IS terroristic organization targeted Yezidis.⁴³ The PKK left groups of fighters in Sinjar, in the governance of Kirkuk, and in several other locations after the fight against jihadist terrorists in Northern Iraq. The defensive battle of Kirkuk did not happen, and the Iraqi Army with Hashd Al-Shaabi in mid-October took control of Kirkuk, when the KRG Peshmerga withdrew, together with the Kurdish leadership of Kirkuk and large numbers of the civilian population.

⁴² *Yeni Safak*, “PKK terrorists dispatched to Turkey’s border to support Barzani,” September 26, 2017, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/en/world/pkk-terrorists-dispatched-to-turkeys-border-to-support-barzani-2794375>.

⁴³ Ishaan Tharoor, “Battling the Islamic State,” *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2014, accessed November 12, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/08/11/a-u-s-designated-terrorist-group-is-saving-yazidis-and-battling-the-islamic-state/?utm_term=.352ebc430798.

One of the reasons for the Iraqi military success in Kirkuk was the deal between Iraq and the PUK, after which PUK fighters did not resist the attacking government forces.⁴⁴ Hashd Al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization Forces, is the military organization which unifies over 40 mainly Shia militia groups. Shia militia groups comprise over 20 percent of the overall Iraqi Forces.⁴⁵ Kirkuk and several other regions came under KRG control in 2014 after the Iraqi army left them and the Peshmerga groups had to defend them against IS terrorists.⁴⁶ The other regions that were under Peshmerga control include Nineveh, Salahaddin, and Diyala. All together the KRG lost almost 40 percent of its controlled territory in just several days in October, 2017. The Kirkuk region provides almost 20 percent of Iraqi oil production. These occupied regions also have large Arab and Turkoman populations and the areas are rich in oil. The Iraqi constitution of 2005 directed the conduct of a referendum on the status of Kirkuk in 2007. This referendum did not happen and Kirkuk remained a disputed land between Erbil and Baghdad. For this reason, the dispute between the KRG and the Iraqi government degenerated into military clashes.

The independence referendum took place on the scheduled day, 25th September 2017. The referendum included the disputed areas, such as Kirkuk. Although the

⁴⁴ Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 35-45.

⁴⁵ Denise Natali, "Debunking Myths About the Kurds, Iraq, and Iran," *War on the Rocks*, October 26, 2017, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/10/debunking-myths-about-the-kurds-iraq-and-iran/>.

⁴⁶ Phil Stewart, "Kurdish Independence in Iraq," *Reuters*, May 23, 2017, accessed November 8, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iraq-kurds/kurdish-independence-in-iraq-likely-not-if-but-when-u-s-general-idUSKBN18J2WT>.

referendum was not legally binding, the referendum indicated public support of the KRG intentions towards independence. The PUK did not openly oppose the referendum, but did not support Barzani's decision at the time of the referendum. This was not the first referendum of independence. Another unofficial referendum was conducted in 2005, where over 90 percent of population, that is, those who had a right to vote in the KRG, took part and 99 percent voted for a Kurdish secession from the Arab part of Iraq. This unofficial referendum illustrated the popular support of Iraqi Kurds for the idea of independence and support to any political power which would initiate steps toward achieving independence.

Masoud Barzani left the post of the president of the KRG and Nachirvan Barzani, the prime minister of the KRG, will lead the region until the next scheduled election in the summer of 2018.

Problem Statement

The goal of this study is to define the implications of the KRG independence process on the PKK. The problem for the study is to understand the effects of KRG independence process on the PKK.

Secondary Research Questions

To answer the main question and to contribute to the solving of the problem, the research will answer three secondary questions, which are:

1. How did the KRG transformed after the independence referendum?
2. What are the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK?

3. How will KRG have to address its relations to PKK?

Assumptions

Assumptions of this research are:

1. The Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq will suspend the independence process from Iraq;
2. None of the neighboring states of the KRG will start a long-lasting large-scale military operation against the KRG during the near future;
3. The PKK will try to maintain a presence in Northern Iraq Qandil Mountains;
4. Turkey will enforce political pressure against the KRG, but will not cut off all relations;
5. Countries such as the U.S., and Turkey will not change their recognition of the PKK as a terrorist organization.

Scope

The scope of the research geographically includes the territories of the KRG and Turkey, because the PKK is operating in Turkey, but is based in Northern Iraq. The main organizations are the KDP and the PUK as ruling powers of the KRG, and the PKK. The time period for the research will include the next several years following the referendum.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study is the fact that the study is analyzing an ongoing process. The KRG independence process is changing the situation in the KRG and neighboring states rapidly. The second limitation is a lack of similar studies, because the

majority of scholars discussed the idea of KRG independence and are not analyzing the PKK widely or completely.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the research are the facts that the study is concentrating on a particular part of regional security implications of the KRG independence process, which is the PKK, in the defined time of the near future from 2017 and locations of Northern Iraq and Turkey.

Significance of the Study

The research is seeking to fill the knowledge gap in the field of study of the effects of the independence process of the KRG on the PKK because the PKK is an actor of the security environment in the parts of the Middle East, such as Turkey and Iraq.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A writer only begins a book. A reader finishes it.

—Samuel Johnson, *Works of Samuel Johnson*

Introduction

This chapter will present a review of the key existing literature related to the thesis to craft a systematic approach to the research. The literature review is divided into three parts: the sources related to Kurds as an ethnic group and their history in 20th and 21st centuries in the Middle East; the sources that describe the key Kurdish organizations, including the PKK, KDP, GORRAN, and PUK; third, the sources that provide information and analysis on the KRG, the recent referendum, and the aftermath. As far as the research is focused on the recent independence referendum in the KRG and its short term effect on the PKK, all the sources were mainly used with relation to the key Kurdish political actors in the KRG. Secondly, the sources were used to describe the interests and activities of the external powers such as Turkey, Iraq or Iran and the Kurdish parties which are not represented or are not influential in the KRG but are affiliated to one of the parties as mentioned earlier.

The Ike Skelton Combined Arms Library (CARL) became the main source of literature for the research. Additionally, because the thesis analyzed an on-going process, newspaper articles as a source of up to date information, and research articles; as a source of academic analysis, largely contributed to the collection of knowledge concerning the topic.

Kurds

Although a significant majority of the sources that were used for the research describe the Kurdish history and their culture for the introduction purposes, the *Minorities in the Middle East a History of Struggle and Self-Expression* by Nisan Mordechai, became a uniquely valuable source of knowledge. The source describes the Kurds in the Middle East with a clear focus on the fact that the ethnic group is a minority in all the countries where Kurds are represented.⁴⁷ The 2nd chapter of the book is dedicated to the Kurds. To comprehend the complexity of the Kurdish question in the Middle East, the research critically required the information as organized and presented in the book. The cause of the conflicts between the Kurds and the Turks, and the Kurds and the Iraqi Arabs primarily was ethnicity. Although the Kurds are mainly Muslim, by all other ethnic-cultural characteristics, they are distinguishably much different from Turks or Arabs. The Kurdish struggle for an independent state, in the mix with the strong will and ability to preserve cultural and ethnic identity, has collided with the Turkification and Arabization intentions of the Turkish and the Iraqi governments during the 20th century. These ethnic-based conflicts gave life to the PKK in Turkey and to the KDP and PUK in Iraq.

Kurdish Organizations

As mentioned previously, despite the general similarities of the Kurdish history in Turkey and Iraq and other Middle Eastern states, in each country the Kurdish political

⁴⁷ Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*, 116-133.

and social environments developed differently. Particularly the PKK in Turkey and the KDP and PUK in Iraq, were created around the ideas of the protection of the Kurdish minority's rights; including the right of the self-determination. But each of these organizations followed different evolution paths, which created the ideological conflict between them. Since the formation of these parties, these parties shared periods of rivalry, neutrality, solidarity, and cooperation-coordination. These periods very rapidly and chaotically shifted, depending on the overall influence of the numerous stakeholders in the region and the narrow interests of each organization. Adding to this, the Kurds are represented in the Middle East by dozens other political and militarized groups, differently affiliated to the PKK, KDP, and PUK. The researcher used several sources to analyze the critical interests of the parties, their relations, and perspectives. An essential reference for this part of work was *The Crescent & Star Turkey between Two Worlds* by Stephen Kinzer.⁴⁸ The book presents the political, social and security developments, caused by the violations of the Kurdish minority rights in Turkey, which are related to the PKK. The Turkish policies towards its own Kurdish population caused formation of different violent organization. The PKK was formed in the environment of the Kurdish minority rights violations by Turkey, and had a goal to gain an independence for Kurds from Turkey. Another significant source needed in order to understand the modern ideology of the PKK is the book *Democratic Confederalism* by the founder of the PKK, A. Ocalan.⁴⁹ This relatively new ideology, which is adjusted and adopted by the PKK,

⁴⁸ Kinzer, *Crescent & Star Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 18-22.

⁴⁹ Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 130-134.

represents the tectonic shift of the party from Marxism-Leninism to a PKK concept of democracy.

Finally, the principal resource, which described Kurdish political parties in Iraq and Turkey is *The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey: a Research Guide*.⁵⁰ This book methodically describes the ideology, organization, relations and other essential characteristics of Kurdish groups such as the PKK, KDP, PUK, and Gorran. Each Kurdish party has relatively different ideology, and capabilities. By identifying these parties and their characteristics, the study described the relation of each analyzed Kurdish party to other Kurdish parties and to the regional stakeholders.

KRG

The Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq attracted the attention of the global society in spring 2017 when the ex-president, Barzani, announced his plan to organize and conduct a non-binding independence referendum in the KRG. The poll included the Kirkuk region and several other disputed territories which came under Peshmerga control in 2014 when the KRG forces successfully defended the areas against the IS terrorist organization. The international partners of the KRG did not encourage Barzani to take that step; predicting an undesirable rise of instability in Iraq and perhaps, in the region as a whole. Despite all the calls for suspension, the referendum took place on 25th of September, 2017. A huge majority of Kurds in the KRG voted for independence from Iraq. Afterwards, the Iraqi Army, in collaboration with the Popular

⁵⁰ Hevian, “The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey: A Research Guide.”

Mobilization Forces took control of Kirkuk governance. Barzani resigned from the presidency and the results of the referendum were suspended.

The KRG is a complicated autonomous system within Iraq, which became the hub of relations and interests for the PKK, KDP, PUK, and other parties, to include regional powers. To deeply examine the recent events and their effects and to understand the KRG, this research relied on many other sources, including books, scientific writings, and news articles.

The first significant source of information is *No Friends but Mountains The Tragic History of the Kurds*, a book by John Bulloch and Harvey Morris.⁵¹ This book profoundly analyzes the Kurdish militarized movements in Iraq, Turkey, and other countries. In several episodes of history these Kurdish militarized movements were fighting side by side or fighting each other. The book provided the information necessary to understand several causes for the complexity of these relations. These causes include different ideology of the parties, relations of these parties with the regional powers and colliding interests of influence areas.

The Kurdish Question and the 2003 Iraqi War, edited by Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter was an additional major source of knowledge on the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Turkey.⁵² The book provided a broad analysis of the Kurdish problem, Kurdish political organizations, the relations between the parties, and the states of the region. Mainly the book provided deeper knowledge of the complex relations

⁵¹ Bulloch and Morris, *No Friends But Mountains The Tragic History of the Kurds*, 55-85.

⁵² Ahmed and Gunter, *The Kurdish Question and The 2003 Iraqi War*, 111-114.

system and the projections of those relations in the KRG. Iraq and Turkey had different approaches to the Kurdish issue in the respective countries. The Turkish and the Iraqi strategies towards the Kurds created an ending with two different outcomes. In Turkey the outcome is lasting Kurdish insurgency, and in Iraq is Kurdish autonomy.

Kurdistan Rising? Considerations for Kurds, Their Neighbors, and the Region and Kurdistan and *An Invisible Nation* are two considerable additional sources.⁵³⁵⁴ Both books were issued in 2016 and are significant studies of the future perspectives of the Iraqi Kurdistan region and its possible independence. These works were significantly important because they provided current knowledge of KRG perspectives. The two books did not discuss the KRG independence referendum, however they were useful in identifying the tendencies in the KRG.

In addition to the books mentioned above, several journals, such as “War on the Rocks” or “Small Wars Journals”, as well as newspaper and news-agency articles, from The Washington Post, Reuters, BBC, Yeni Safak, Al Jazeera, etc. were used to follow the developments in the KRG. These sources and the previously mentioned books and articles profoundly contributed to the development of the academic research.

The reviewed literature presents a considerable study on Kurdish problem, organizations, history, KRG, the 2017 referendum, its outcomes, future perspectives of the KRG as a whole and the KDP and PUK particularly. The review identified a gap in

⁵³ Torelli, *Kurdistan An Invisible Nation*.

⁵⁴ Rubin, *Kurdistan Rising? Considerations for Kurds, Their Neighbors, and the Region*, 25-34.

the associated academic studies on the possible effects of the KRG independence referendum on the PKK.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two objectionable types of beliefs: those who believe the incredible and those who believe that ‘belief must be discarded and replaced by ‘the scientific method’. Between these two extremes on the right and the left there is enough scope for believing the reasonable and reasoning on sound beliefs.

—Max Born., *Natural Philosophy of Cause and Chance*

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology of the study. The chapter also includes the primary and secondary research questions, PMESII-PT analytical framework, information collection and analysis process. This thesis will be conducted as qualitative research. The study will not include any direct engagement with living persons through interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations or other means. The principal methodology for the thesis will employ a case study of the effects of the KRG independence referendum on the PKK in Northern Iraq.

Research Question

The present study is providing an answer to the primary research question: What are the implications the independence process of the Kurdistan Regional Government will have on the PKK? To answer the question, the study will answer also the following secondary questions:

1. How will the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq transform after the independence referendum?
2. What are the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK?

3. How will the KRG have to address its relations to the PKK?

Data Collection

Different sources were used in this thesis to collect wide and unbiased data related to the main and secondary research questions. Multiple books, academic and newspaper articles, reports, journals and magazines became the informational foundation of the thesis.

Research Method

The data was collected according to the document review method. The document review method is a system of gathering specially background data about the subject of study. The documents can be external and internal to the subject (in current case to PKK), electronic or hard copy, from official, academic, mass-media or other sources.⁵⁵ The document review method is useful when answering “what” type of questions.

Problem Statement

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq conducted an independence referendum on 25th September 2017. The Kurdish political powers in the KRG had aspirations to reach independence; however, the referendum did not transform the KRG into an independent state. On the contrary, after the referendum the KRG surrendered much of its autonomy. The research analyzes the short term implications of the KRG independence process on the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), as a component of the

⁵⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: a Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, 2009), 49-53.

security environment of the Middle East region. The PKK has a serious impact on the security of Turkey. The PKK was created as a Marxist-Leninist party in the late 1970s, and was characterized as a Kurdish nationalist organization demanding self-determination for Kurds in Turkey. Over time the organization has tempered its separatist demands, but after 2002, with the beginning of the war on terror the PKK started a rebranding process by adopting a new ideology, that of democratic confederalism. The role of the PKK is not limited to Turkey, because of the close cooperation and coordination between Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in Iran and Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PCDK) in Iraq. These organizations are members of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) which is multiplying the influence of the PKK in the region. At the same time, the main base camps of the PKK are located in the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the Iraqi Kurdish region is considered a safe haven for them. The KRG leading political parties have controversial relations with the PKK. This research will concentrate on the effects of the independence process of the KRG on the PKK in the territory of the KRG and Turkey.

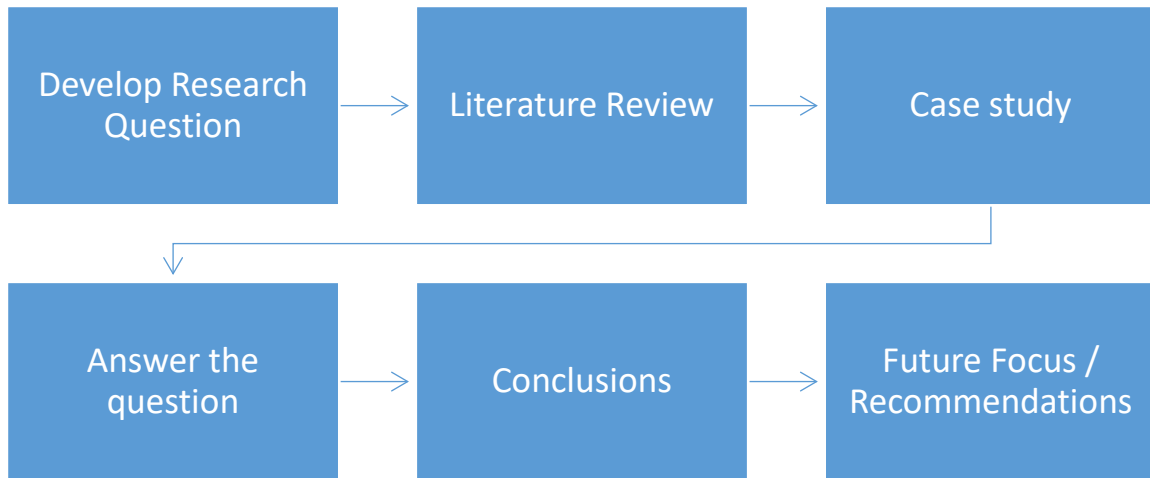


Figure 1. Process One

Source: Created by author.

Data Analysis

This study used qualitative research in the form of a case study method. A case study is an extensive characterization and analysis of a bounded system.⁵⁶ In the present study, the bounded system is formed from the political geography, organizations and time relation perspective is PKK organization in the territory of Northern Iraq and South-Eastern Turkey, after the independence referendum of KRG on 25th September, 2017.

The case study is limited by the political geography of Iraq and Turkey. The focus is the PKK in the Northern Iraq, because the PKK is basing in the Qandil mountains of Northern Iraq. Also Turkey, because the PKK is in conflict in that country and is conducting military operation from Iraq into Turkey. The PKK has also representation in

⁵⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: a Guide to Design and Implementation*, 60-62.

other countries, but the KRG independence referendum will not have direct effect on them. This why the political geography is limited with Turkey and Iraq.

The research focused on the analysis of the PKK as an organization which is the central subject of the study, and the KDP and the PUK, which are key parties of the KRG. Other parties are also discussed throughout the thesis, but that discussion is intending to emphasis different characteristics of the PKK, the KDP or the PUK, or the situation within the political geography of the defined for the purpose of the study.

The analyzed time period includes the formation of the PKK until the near future from the KRG independence referendum conducted on 25th September, 2018. The analysis was focused on current developments and future perspectives, using the historical background for discretional purposes.

The thesis research method included also the secondary research questions as pillars of the research structure. The secondary questions help to reach the answer to the primary question. The secondary questions are:

1. How did the KRG transform after the independence referendum?
2. What are the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK?
3. How will KRG have to address its relations to PKK?

Although the selected secondary research question help to structure the inquiry, the research will employ operational variables of PMESII-PT described in training circular No. 7-102 Operational Environment and Army Learning published by U.S.

Department of Army order, for systemized analysis.⁵⁷ The PMESII-PT acronym stands for: Political, Military, Economic, Social, Informational, Infrastructural, Physical and Time variables. From this only the Political and Military variables will be used. The Economic variable will be used to support the political variable, in analyses of the political interests of the State and Non-state actors involved in the problem. Infrastructure is the second auxiliary variable, as far as research is assuming that PKK will continue to be interested in maintaining the basing in Northern Iraq.

Because the relation of PKK to Northern Iraq is mainly grounded in the problem of the basing of the organization, in order to focus on the above described analytical framework, the works of T.E. Lawrence, David Galula and Gordon McCormick will be used. In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* T.E. Lawrence writes that the understanding that they have unassailable base protected even from the fear of attack is ensuring him in their success, if the war will continue long enough to win hearts of Arab population in the area of conflict.⁵⁸ This is an identification of the importance of basing for the insurgents. Contrary to the idea of Lawrence during the Arabic rebellion against the Ottomans in the beginning of the 20th century the PKK is based outside of Turkey, but still is operating against Turkish governmental forces, winning the hearts and minds of Kurds, especially the Kurds living in Turkey.

⁵⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Training Circular 7-101, *Exercise Design* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010).

⁵⁸ Thomas Edward Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 1-19.

Counter-Insurgency Warfare Theory and Practice is the work of the famous counterinsurgency scholar David Galula. In this work, he identifies four main territorial patterns of insurgent strategy; Regular basing, Guerrilla basing, Guerrilla areas and Occupied areas.⁵⁹ The PKK is fighting a guerrilla war against Turkey. This is the reason why the fundamental work of Galula in the field of counter-insurgency is used to analyze the PKK.

In his *Terrorist Decision Making* essay Gordon McCormick argues that terrorist organizations must navigate between two constraints, Security and Influence.⁶⁰ These two constraints are interrelated, because the terrorist groups are trying to maintain their security, but have to balance it with their activities, which are the guarantee of their influence. The PKK is considered as a terrorist organization by many countries including Turkey and the United States. The PKK also had issues with relevancy and security, but was able to balance between the two.

Summary

As described, this thesis uses the bounded case study method, which is constructed around three secondary research questions:

1. How did the KRG transformed after the independence referendum?

⁵⁹ David Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 71-73.

⁶⁰ Gordon McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science*, June 2003, accessed October 2, 2017, www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.6.121901.085601.

2. What are the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK?
3. How will KRG have to address its relations to PKK?

PMESII-PT operational variables and their relation to the role and importance of basing in Northern Iraq for PKK will be discussed. In overall the research methodology will have the following summarized structure.

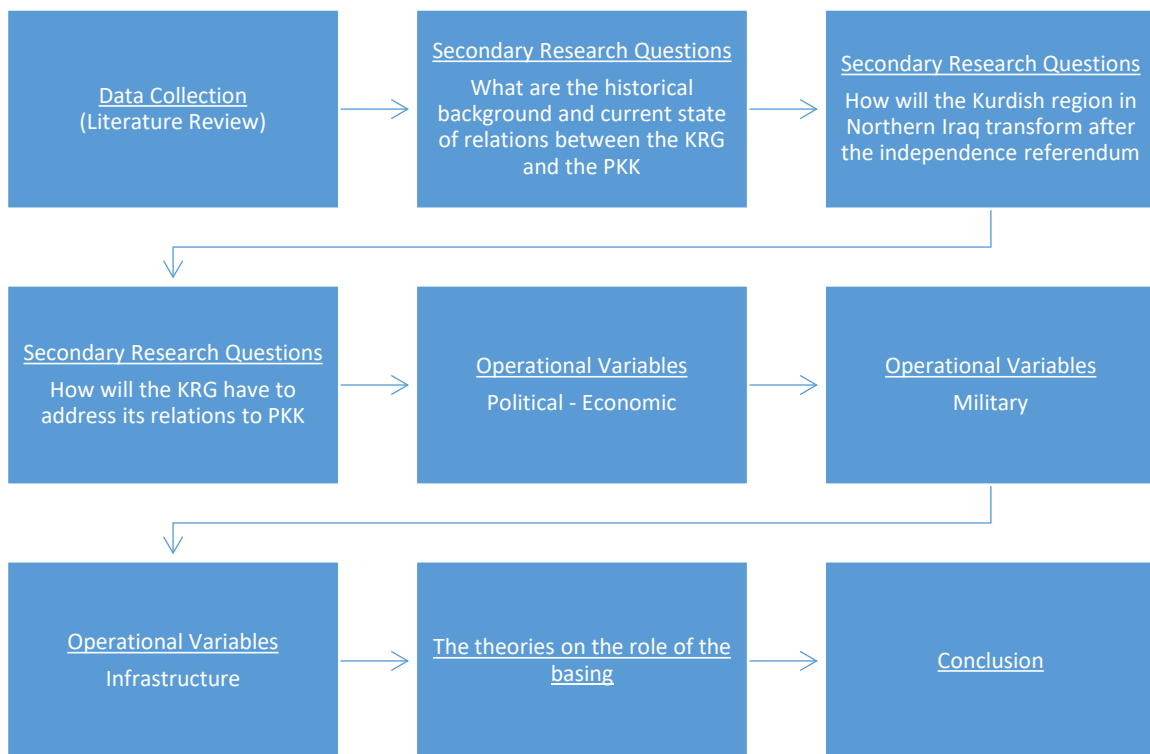


Figure 2. Process Two

Source: Created by author.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter 4 of this study includes the analysis of the research on the implications of the KRG independence process on the PKK. The study will address three secondary questions to define the effects of the KRG independence process on the PKK:

1. How will the KRG transform after the independence referendum?
2. What are the historical background and current state of relations between the KRG and the PKK?
3. How will the KRG have to address its relations to PKK?

In order to answer the primary question, this chapter is divided into seven subchapters according to the research methodology of the study, described in chapter 3. There are three subchapters that address the secondary questions of the research. The first subchapter addresses the historical impact on the current relations of the KRG and the PKK. The second subchapter is defines different aspects of the KRG transformation after the referendum of 2017. The third subchapter identifies possible developments of the KRG and the PKK relations.

The fourth, fifth and sixth subchapters are analysis in accordance with the PMESII-PT system using political, military and infrastructure components. The political analysis combines the economic considerations, as well as the military analysis synthesize with the security considerations.

The seventh subchapter presents the information that will be compared to the theories of three insurgency specialists, to discuss the PKK basing in the Northern Iraqi

mountains. The three theorists are T. E. Lawrence, D. Galula and G.H. McCormick. The analysis show that the referendum's results combined with a weak KRG, in combination with a more aggressive Turkish and Iraqi strategy, will force the PKK to build a stronger attachment to the Northern Iraqi mountains. The PKK based in the Qandil Mountains is becoming a strategic objective or an end for the PKK, and requires, as the highest priority, the concentration of all the resources to guarantee the continued existence of the organization. This is in contrast to T.E. Lawrence's idea of independence of the bases and communications from ground features, strategic areas.

The PKK basing in the KRG doesn't exactly match the requirements of territorial patterns of guerilla warfare defined by D. Galula. The analysis shows that the PKK is on Occupied areas level in Turkey, and guerrilla areas level in the Qandil Mountains. At the same time the PKK has had issues of relevancy several times in its history, so the PKK strategic leadership rebranded the organization by changing the name, allies and even changing the ideology partially to maintain relevance to the Kurdish population of South Eastern Turkey. The Turkish goal to eliminate the organization keeps the PKK in danger. If the security threat remains on the same level as in case of activity as in case of passivity, the PKK is not limited with balancing considerations between relevance and security, and will focus on relevancy primarily. This phenomenon is countering G. H. McCormick's idea of balance between the security and the relevancy of an insurgency organization.

The Historical Background and Current Relations between the KRG and the PKK

The Kurdistan Regional Government is a relatively new political formation in the Middle East. Although Kurds gained their autonomy in 1991 after the first gulf war, the governance was not effective because of the rival relation between the two key Kurdish parties; the KDP and the PUK, and their supporters. The traditional Kurdish political parties of Northern Iraq formed relations with the PKK in the early 1980s. The historical background between the PUK, the KDP and the PKK are effecting the current state of relations. The effect of historical relations between the KRG and the PKK, in addition to the other consideration outlines the implications of the KRG independence referendum on the PKK.

The PKK is a relatively resilient militarized organization in the Middle East. The PKK is fighting a long lasting war against the second biggest armed force of NATO, Turkey, which dwarfs the KRG Peshmerga forces. In other words, The KDP or the PUK Peshmergas engaged in several attempts to defeat the PKK using military force, but the operations did not have a long lasting effect. Additionally, the PKK fighters are relatively well organized and resilient to long lasting confrontations, as the PKK is fighting against Turkey. If the PKK and the KRG traditional parties start an armed conflict, it will either finish without any considerable long-term positive result for the sides, or will evolve into a long lasting violent conflict. This is the reason the KRG leading parties are avoiding any direct conflict with the PKK.

Additionally, public perception of the PKK in Northern Iraq is not absolutely negative. The KRG leaders, including the PUK and the KDP leaders, accused the PKK of cooperating with Saddam and his regime in Baghdad of committing violence against

other Kurds. They also blamed the PKK for provoking Turkish military attacks against them on KRG soil, which resulted in destruction of Kurdish facilities and casualties among the Kurdish civilian population. The followers of the KDP and the PUK have a negative relationship with the PKK. The KRG leading political parties used several information campaigns against the PKK to shape the public opinion against them. However, many Kurds in the KRG are sympathetic to the PKK because the PKK is perceived as a Kurdish organization, struggling for the Kurdish rights in Turkey.

Public opinion is important and the PKK is a political entity with a very different ideology and agenda than the KDP and the PUK. Although, in the past the PKK did wield political influence in northern Iraq, they still remains a challenge for the KRG traditional parties. The KRG population's growing disappointment that has tragically replaced the enthusiasm during the referendum can seriously threaten the KDP-PUK rule.

The relation between the KRG and the PKK is viewed differently by the two sides. From the perspective of the KRG, they focus on their relationship with Turkey. In contrast, the PKK is interested in maintaining its basing in the mountains of Northern Iraq. According to the Constitution of Iraq, the Kurds received large and unprecedented authority in the Kurdish regions of Northern Iraq, but the real boundaries of the region were never defined. This caused the dispute around Kirkuk, that Iraqi forces lost and Kurdish Peshmerga liberated from the terrorist organization Islamic State.

The relationship between the KRG and the PKK before the beginning of the war against IS in Iraq can be described as passive intolerance. This means that the KRG disapproves of the PKK basing in the Qandil Mountains and guerilla war against Turkey; however, they did not actively counter the PKK. Since the Kurdish Civil War, KRG

Peshmerga and PKK fighter have not clashed in battle. Rare cases of the two sides fighting each other occurred in short battles during the Iraqi Civil War, usually because of a lack of coordination. During the Iraqi Civil War, both Kurdish forces were fighting a common enemy; ISIS. From the military-security point of view, they shared a single objective, to defend the Kurdish, including the Yezidi, population from the terrorists. This period can be described as turbulent, because of changing levels of conflict and coordination, if not cooperation. During the years of Iraqi Civil War, PKK influence reached Rabia, Sinjar, Kirkuk and Makhmur.⁶¹ That is a wider area of activity for the PKK, which was mainly limited with Qandil Mountains before 2014-2017. All described facts will affect the KRG leadership decision on how to address the PKK question. And most probable set of relations in close future perspective already familiar passive intolerance.

The Transformation of the Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq after the Independence Referendum

The KRG transformed in practically every aspect after the referendum on 25th September, 2017. This transformation includes the politics, geography, economy, security, and many other aspects. An example of the political transformation is that Masoud Barzani resigned from the post of the president of the KRG, leaving the regional government under the control of his nephew and prime-minister Nachirvan Barzani. Nachirvan Barzani has a consensus-seeking approach to the problems of the KRG in

⁶¹Sarkawt Shamsulddin, *The Kurdish Policy Foundation*, January 13, 2017, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://kurdishpolicy.org/2017/01/13/can-turkey-stop-pkk-expansion-what-barzani-can-do-for-ankara/>.

comparison to Masoud Barzani. The parliamentary and presidential elections were also postponed from November 2017 until summer 2018. Geographically the KRG surrendered the Kirkuk and several other regions after the referendum. The KRG economy changed after their dependence on Baghdad's funding increased, because Iraqi central government took large control over the financial affairs of the KRG. The Iraqi Kurdistan security transformed accordingly when during the Kirkuk offensive Peshmerga fighters were in actual combat with Iraqi Armed Forces and Shia militias.

The referendum in September 2017 changed the Iraqi Kurdish region, but the change was negative for the Kurds from many points of view including the political perspective. First of all, the idea of a referendum for independence again divided the Kurdish leadership of the KRG. The KDP leader Masoud Barzani, who initiated the referendum, created a political trap for other Kurdish parties. The idea of a referendum was widely supported by the common Kurdish population, but the PUK, Gorran and other political parties in the region realized that the goal of the referendum, Kurdish independence, was not feasible. In addition, the referendum is involved in considerable multidimensional risks. But at the same time these parties had to be careful in their objections. They risked the loss of the support of the population and risked being blamed for creating the obstacle opposing the Kurdish dream. This was one reason why the Peshmerga fighters, under PUK command, were not active in the Kirkuk battle and why Gorran left the government and supported the protesters in December 2017.

Secondly, the KRG political transformation was negative because of the effects which the referendum had on KRG foreign political-relations. From this perspective the KRG lost support from all of its allies except Israel. Although the relations with the Iraqi

central government were relative to different periods of Iraqi modern history after the constitution of 2005, before the referendum there was still a chance of reasonable political dialogue. The obstacles to that dialogue were disputed territories, such as Kirkuk and hydrocarbon revenues. But on the other hand the joint experience in war against the terrorists was a great advantage that could be used in the future to establish a new level of relations between Erbil and Baghdad toward the peaceful secession from Iraq. But eventually the referendum closed that window of opportunity leaving the vacuum of relations to be filled with violence.

The other two important partners of the KRG in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran, are countries that have internal Kurdish separatist issues, fear the expansion of secession movement to their countries and stand against the KRG decision and have suspended political relations. The KRG lost the political trust that was built stone by stone during many years of political struggle for being recognized as a political entity. The political relations face a serious stagnation also between the KRG and its western partners, mainly because they did not follow the western partners' advice of suspending the referendum and not harming the already instable relations between west and Turkey and Iraq.

The referendum set conditions for an armed conflict between Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi governmental forces around the disputed territories such as Kirkuk. The Iraqi forces offensive in October 2017 involved almost 40 percent of the KRG controlled territories. These territories were seized and the key oil infrastructure of pre-referendum KRG was left by the Peshmerga. After that the KRG faced adverse economic effects of the referendum on their small economy.

Baghdad imposed sanctions on the KRG, including an air blockade for several months.⁶² The Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi removed all revenue from KRG from the country's budget for 2018, this resulted in an overall revenue decrease, from 17 percent to 12.67 percent, of the budget.⁶³ The decline limited the KRG's ability to pay the government employees and most importantly the Peshmerga.

According to the agreements between Barzani and Al-Abadi all airports in the KRG will be under Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority and the border crossings must be operated under the supervision of the central government in Baghdad and by the KRG government. Also the KRG had to hand over 250,000 barrels of oil per day to the central government.⁶⁴ As payback, Baghdad promised to provide the salaries of the KRG employees for two months as an initial step of reconsidering relations.

Turkish and Iraqi joint efforts against the KRG referendum initiative severely harmed the economic sovereignty of the KRG. Baghdad and Ankara were considering as possibilities for a new border-crossing between Turkey and Iraq in Ovakoy.⁶⁵ This border-crossing will become an alternative to the existing Ibrahim Khalil border-crossing,

⁶² *Channels Television*, "Iraqi, Kurdish PMs Try to Resolve Bitter Dispute," January 20, 2018, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.channelstv.com/2018/01/20/iraqi-kurdish-pms-try-to-resolve-bitter-dispute/>.

⁶³ *NRT TV*, "Success of NoCo Summit," February 11, 2018, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.nrttv.com/en/Details.aspx?Jimare=18702>.

⁶⁴ Suadad Al-Salhy, "Iraq's Kurdistan Airports and Border Crossings will reopen in Weeks," *Arab News*, January 17, 2018, accessed February 13, 2018, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1227436/middle-east>.

⁶⁵ *Yeni Safak*, "PKK terrorists dispatched to Turkey's border to support Barzani."

which was operated by the Peshmerga and after the referendum also by the Iraqi government officers. At the same time according to the plan, the border-crossing will develop into a trade route that will run through Tal Afar (a city populated mainly by Iraqi Turkomans) to Mosul and Baghdad. The problem with this plan is the PKK presence in the mountains near the Sinjar (50km from Tal Afar) that was liberated from ISIS terroristic organization by Kurdish fighters in 2015. Sinjar was seized by the Iraqi Army and Shia militias in October 2017.⁶⁶ Even after the seizure of Sinjar, the PKK influence over the Sinjar region remained a serious concern for the planned trade route.⁶⁷

The security situation of the KRG changed after the referendum. The political division between Iraq and the KRG, and caused the battle of Kirkuk, positioned the Iraqi and Kurdish soldiers against each other. This was in contrast to the situation during the Iraqi Civil War when they were jointly destroying the terrorists around the country. Although the war against ISIS was announced as a victory in 2017, the announcement does not mean that the terrorist threat does not exist in the country. The terrorist groups threaten Iraqis and Kurds equally, but Iraqis and Kurds do not join their forces anymore against that challenge, which decreases their fighting capabilities. On the other hand, Iran and Turkey concentrated considerable number of forces around the KRG border after the referendum. This indicated that the KRG will have to be prepared for a new type of environment where the KRG faces the external security threat of a large, well trained and

⁶⁶ Martin Chulov, "Iraqi Forces Drive Kurdish Fighters out of Sinjar," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2017, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/17/iraqi-forces-drive-kurdish-fighters-out-of-sinjar>.

⁶⁷ *Yeni Safak*, "PKK terrorists dispatched to Turkey's border to support Barzani."

equipped conventional military force. The fact that Iran and Turkey did not conduct a military operation against the KRG indicates that the KRG was threatened from a security point of view in order to surrender political positions. In the future this method can be used against the autonomous region, risking an escalation from threats to a violent war.

The overall KRG transformation affected the PKK, as the famous rule of physics states that movement of every object is relative to its environment. This describes the effect of the KRG transformation on the PKK. The PKK itself did not change considerably after the referendum, but the surrendering region transformed dramatically.

The KRG transformation after the referendum in September 2017, opened a new page of the history of the KRG, the PKK and the Middle east overall. These changes forced practically every policy of the autonomous region, and of the political parties within, such as the KDP, PUK and eventually the PKK, to change.

Perspectives of KRG Relations to PKK

The referendum is forcing the KRG to restart all foreign relations. In order to recover the previously well-established cooperation with Turkey, one of the key partners of KRG for economy, KRG leaders will have to surrender the latitude they enjoyed concerning the PKK.⁶⁸ The Turkish stand has become stronger and the Kurds of Iraq lost their political maneuverability. However the KRG political leadership also has a considerable issue with its own population's public demand that was emotionally

⁶⁸ Cerny, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations; Theory and Ethnic Conflict*, 10-13.

prepared for independence, and observed the rise of solidarity of Kurds living in other states. The KRG high leadership now faces a situation of being between a rock and a hard place.

First of all, the traditional KRG parties' main contradiction with the PKK strategy was related to the conduct of military type operations from the Northern Iraqi soil. However, the PKK attacks on Turkey from the Iraqi Kurdish region were provoking Turkey to conduct air-strikes and small scale ground operations, which were damaging not only the PKK camps, but also the Kurdish civilian infrastructure. The PKK ideology was moved into a second position of interest. Additionally, the PKK popularity is relatively stable, compared to the KDP and the PUK. The KDP and the PUK lost their political power because of the active counteractions of Turkey, Iran, and specially Iraq against the referendum. This causes a risk of the PKK expanding influence from Qandil Mountains into the KRG. Although the KRG ruling system is based on tribal or clan principles, contrary to the PKK ideology based systems, the wave of tectonic changes in the overall region can also threat the fundamentals of weakened influences of the KDP and the PUK.

The KRG political leaders will have to tolerate Turkish military operations deep in the Kurdistan region as negotiations will be between Ankara and Baghdad and not between Ankara and Erbil, as once was. Any alternative to this format of tolerance would amount to support for the PKK. Also, the KRG would become a target for large scale military operations, which would heavily damage the remaining autonomy in the region and likely damage the key parties themselves.

On the other hand, the Turkish airstrikes and limited small scale ground operations will stimulate opposition towards the Turkish government, and, probably, towards the KRG government for being unable to take action, mainly diplomatic, to prevent such situations inside the country. The most dangerous development for the KRG leadership will be, when the PKK will have to migrate from the Qandil Mountains to other territories of the KRG. Then, the KRG government will have to either fight the PKK on their own or to clear the highways and the roads from any cars to support the Turkish Army unit movements towards the retreating groups of the PKK. Open support of the PKK is not discussed because of the possible outcome which would be the same as open opposition towards Turkish military operations.

This means that the KRG should actively use diplomatic means first to negotiate with the PKK a mutually acceptable compromise solution that will eventually prevent Turkey from conducting military interventions in Kurdistan region of Iraq. A desirable solution for the KRG can be suspension of the PKK attacks from the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan. The PKK attacks can provoke an increase of Turkish military cross-border operations in the KRG against the PKK, damaging the civilian infrastructure and destabilizing the internal security of the KRG. This can become a basis for the KRG in reestablishing the relations with Turkey that the two sides had before the referendum. This effort will demonstrate the KRG influence inside the territory of Kurdistan, to include the Qandil Mountains. On the contrary, the KRG will have very little to propose to the PKK. The PKK already controls some land with established infrastructure. Minor support from the KRG will not affect the PKK much, considering the PKK capabilities. Large support will not be feasible because large activities will be identified and

condemned by Turkey, and will collapse the intention of restoration of the relations. Additionally, the PKK itself always opposed the KRG friendship with the Turkey and will hardly support the intended relation-rebuilding actions, especially when Turkey conducts military operations against other Kurdish organizations in the region.

The military type of actions against the PKK by the KRG are limited, because the division between the key parties of the KRG who are commanding the Peshmerga and because of the PKK proven fighting capabilities, tested in the long running war against Turkish armed forces. In addition, the KRG population opposes another civil-war type scenario of brother-killing violence inside the country. The current situation of Kurdish population in the Middle East is requiring a consolidation of all Kurdish population of the region, diaspora and representing organization, to recover the KRG status and to encounter the challenges which the Kurdish minorities are facing.

These limitations leave only a single course of action for the KRG government in near future. This course of action involves all the components of national power. First, the KRG government will have to diplomatically navigate a new peace initiative between Turkey and the PKK. This will strengthen the KRG in Turkey's opinion. By reinstituting effective relations with Turkey, the KRG will have a chance to win the economic crisis, caused mainly by the surrender of the Kirkuk oil-fields. Simultaneously the Peshmerga will have to find an efficient command system in order to become a sufficient military power for the defense of the KRG interests and population and not only for the interests of the KDP and the PUK. Additionally, the informational campaigns should explain the overarching purpose of restored regional relations, which is the restoration of the autonomous status of the region to a pre-referendum level. Finally, the KRG will have to

show the PKK that a highly autonomous KRG is beneficial to the PKK, much more beneficial than a weak KRG under full control of the central Iraqi government.

In order to be able to conduct negotiations with the PKK leadership on a sensitive topic, the KRG leaders would need to establish an equivalent level of mutual trust between them and the PKK. The trust between the two entities has always been unstable, changing from distrust to a level of armed clashes to a level of accepting the KRG of being able to mitigate conflicts between the PKK and rivals. The first step toward the trust-building should be the clearly stated agreement on the conditions of the PKK basing in the KRG territories. The process should also include steps to prevent future clashes between PKK fighters and Peshmerga, PKK operations in the deep territories of the KRG against individuals, or PKK operations against infrastructures, mainly related to the Turkish companies.

Political-economic Considerations

Normally political and economic analysis in line with other variables of PMESII-PT system are conducted independently, but for this particular study and the unique characteristics of the KRG, the two variables are analyzed in combination because the KRG economy has vital importance for the KRG relations with Iraq and Turkey. The export of energy resources and import of different goods enabled the KRG to develop to a level of becoming an economic oasis in war time Iraq. The booming economy strengthened the political powers of Iraqi Kurdistan; as well as the Kurdish organizations such as the KDP and the PUK. However, the failed independence attempt adversely affected the economy of the region, and the worsening economy adversely affected the political system.

The general elections that were planned for autumn 2017, were delayed for 8 months. The president resigned, leaving his nephew, Nachirvan Barzani, the difficult task of restoring the economic and political situation of the KRG. In December 2017, the second biggest party of the KRG parliament withdrew from the government after violent actions were taken against the protesters across Iraqi Kurdistan. Five people were killed and more than 200 injured when Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Group led people to the streets to demonstrate their disagreement with the actions of the government in reaction to the developments of the independence referendum and the budget cuts. This is only one example of the extreme disappointment among the population and the disputes between the political parties.

Two key factors will put the KRG in an even more disadvantageous position. The first is the misunderstandings between the ruling political parties concerning the referendum. The second factor is the economic crisis that was caused by the heavy economic sanctions and policies of Baghdad, Turkey and Iran. The KDP and PUK reached an initial agreement in support of each other in the upcoming general elections of 2018. However, the rift caused by their opposition during the battle of Kirkuk is unsolved and remains as an indicator of the vulnerable state of the relations between the two organizations.

Turkey, Iran and Iraq also have played large parts in the political-economic situation of KRG. With economic sanctions and suspended trades, in conjunction with closed airports and border crossings, the crisis in the region has deepened. This adversely affected the external political positions of the KRG. The KRG government must pay serious attention to the demands of the three countries. In this situation, the Turkish

strategy against the PKK is becoming more aggressive, because Turkish leadership clearly realizes its economic influence on KRG. This economic influence transforms into a political silent agreement of the Turkish strategy of attacking the PKK in Kurdistan region. Direct confrontation with Turkey around the PKK is not a feasible political choice for the KDP or the PUK.

The political-economic crises have effect on the security of the KRG. The military forces of the KRG guarantee the security and defense of the autonomous region. At the same time, they maintain loyalty to the KDP and the PUK. The Peshmerga is playing a key role in the KRG systems. Finally, the Peshmerga are paid by the KRG government and the weak economy risks not being able to sustain a required number of troops for the defense and security of the KRG.

Military-security Considerations

The modern security environment of the Middle East; Turkey, Iraq and KRG particularly, is defined not as much by conventional military threats, but by non-conventional terrorist threats. Because the security, para-military and police forces are not capable of countering this type of threat, classic military forces of the region are involved in a war inside of the geographic territories of the states. The Iraqi armed forces; in cooperation with different ethnic and religious militias, and the Kurdish Peshmerga, are fighting the IS terrorist organization. KRG Peshmerga were effectively engaged in battle against terrorists, and proved to be a highly effective force in this battle. On the other side, Turkish armed forces including land forces and air forces, jointly with the other government agencies and the Turkoman population of Iraq, are countering the IS fighters and the PKK. The PKK militarized wing had to include the Islamic State terrorist

organization in the list of rival groups and to fight the terrorists in Sinjar, which was a quite different area of operations and type of enemy for PKK. Before this, the PKK always concentrated on countering the Turkish military and security forces mainly in the territory of Turkey.

This illustrates the considerable change in the military-security environment of the region since the beginning of the Iraqi Civil War. For this study, the culmination of the changing environment was the operation in Kirkuk conducted by the Iraqi Armed Forces in collaborations with Shia militias.

The KRG military forces are divided between the KDP and the PUK. These two parties control and command the armed forces, which creates considerable command and control issues for the Peshmerga. The same problem also decreases the military effectiveness of the forces, because of the mandatory and convoluted political coordination which must be followed whenever the forces belonging to the different parties are fighting alongside each other. The most recent example is the battle for Kirkuk, the Peshmerga fighters were not able to coordinate their efforts and had to retreat because of lack of political consensus between the political centers of the two the KDP and the PUK. The failure in Kirkuk also illustrates that the Iraqi armed forces were reorganized well enough to fight Kurdish Peshmerga in Kirkuk. In 2014 the Iraqis were incapable of countering the terrorists in Kirkuk, and the Peshmerga, despite having fewer human and material resources, were much more effective. The Peshmerga forces, being one of the cornerstones of the KRG, in one day lost their image of the all-capable defenders of the KRG security and “independence”.

The Iraq government declared a victory in the war against the Islamic terrorists in late 2017. This victory was reached by collaboration of many international allies of Iraq and non-state actors. One of that non-state actors was the KRG with its Peshmerga. The Iraqi armed forces and Peshmerga conducted many successful joint operations against the terrorists, liberating many villages and towns of the country. However, the referendum and the ineffective political dialog between Erbil and Baghdad, left the joint military experience in the shadows of political conflict. The Popular Mobilization Forces came to replace the Peshmerga in the public's perception of their "brothers in arms" for Iraqi governmental forces. Although victory was declared in December 2017, Islamic terrorists conduct attacks in different regions of Iraq, including Kirkuk, proving that the security threat still exists.

The Turkish armed forces have military bases in Iraq and, according to different media sources, in Northern Iraq they are maintaining their main focus on the PKK, but the changing environment is forcing Turkey to commit resources also against ISIS terrorists.⁶⁹ The main tool against the PKK fighters in Northern Iraq remains the Turkish Air Force, but the possibility of limited ground operations is quite high. Because the Turkish forces are concentrated also on the other areas of operations inside and around Turkey, including the South Eastern regions of Turkey and Northern Syria, they are limited in capability of conducting the multidirectional military efforts against the PKK.

⁶⁹ Ekurd Daily Editorial Staff, "Turkish Military Bases," *Ekurd Daily*, July 20, 2016, accessed March 5, 2018, <http://ekurd.net/turkish-military-bases-kurdistan-2016-07-20>.

PKK militarized forces, with their robust basing, training and command and control systems maintain positions in and around the Qandil Mountains and conduct military operations in Turkey. The Iraqi Civil War gave a chance to the PKK to act as an organization that has an investment in the war against the Islamic State terrorist organization. The PKK fighters were involved in the defense of Yezidi civilians, who became victims of the genocidal acts committed by ISIS jihadist terrorists in Sinjar. PKK fighters successfully countered the terrorists. However, after trying to maintain control over Sinjar, armed clashes between pro-PKK and pro-KDP armed groups in March 2017 broke out. These clashes ended when the PKK and KDP negotiated a truce.

The KDP declared Sinjar as a KRG territory, and that KRG had the exclusive right to use of violence in control of the territory. In response, the PKK left its traditional boundaries in the Qandil Mountains and began operating in Sinjar. The PKK and even created proxy armed groups in the territory. All this supports the opinion that Peshmerga were ineffective in operations within the announced KRG territories, whereas the PKK was able to react effectively to the threats. The PKK was also able to gain support among the local Yezidi population, organize small armed groups, and counter the better equipped and trained Peshmerga, leaving as the only solution to the disagreement a political solution.

In similar cases when the PKK intervened in the KRG internal affairs, there will be a probability in the near future, especially considering the deep involving crisis in the KRG. The initial reason for the involvement in KRG internal matters can be different than the genocide of the Yezidis, by the Islamic State terrorists. However, the overall scenario of PKK defending civilians, deploying insurgency groups, gaining support and

eventually recruiting new fighter from local population is already a probable development.

Infrastructure Considerations

After more than 35 years, the PKK has well established infrastructure in the mountains of Northern Iraq. The two types of military camps in the region: ones located on the Turkish border and others in the area; deep inside Northern Iraq, are the infrastructure, that provide enough capability for PKK to survive Turkish military attacks, train new recruits on military and ideology, heal wounded and sick fighters, and conduct planning on all the levels; strategic, operational, and tactical.

Beside the infrastructure itself, the mountains where the PKK is located, are the important part of their basing concept. Effective use of the geography, which they have the expertise almost 40 years of experience in warfighting, presents PKK the advantage against Turkish conventional forces, including Air Force, Army and gendarmerie.

Another consideration, which is playing into the PKK's hands, is the political geography of their basing. Turkish military have to take into consideration that they are conducted counterinsurgency cross-border operations. Each operation includes a political-diplomatic component, because both Baghdad and Erbil insist it be taken in to account. Diplomatic negotiations with the capitals of Iraq and the KRG, wide mass media concentration on each operation and high unsalable mountain chains, in combination with developed camp systems and experience/training of PKK combatants, absolutely increases the PKK chances in their struggle against Turkey and for their strategic goals.

The first type of camp is located close to the Turkish border. These camps are mainly used to conduct attacks, reconnaissance and other military actions in Turkey.

These camps have very minimum infrastructure in order to limit their footprint. The groups that are deployed there are required to be highly mobile to be ready to change the camp location on order, in the event they are located or targeted by the Turkish forces, especially the Turkish Air Force.

The second type of camp is located deeper in the territory of the KRG. These camps are relatively well build, with quite wide capabilities. The infrastructure in this kind of camp, includes barracks, hospitals, training facilities, kitchens and headquarters. Here PKK fighter are trained to fight a guerilla war. Besides the combat training, the groups of insurgents have ideology classes. These camps became the guarantee of existence for PKK.

The camps were established in conflict with the desires of the KRG leading parties; the KDP and the PUK. Because of the PKK deployment in the region, many villages were moved to new locations.

The Role of Basing in Northern Iraq Mountains for PKK

The PKK is a unique organization from the point of view that it is fighting against the Turkish armed forces, mainly in the territory of Turkey, and is based outside of the country. The camps of the organization migrated through several countries of the Middle East, finally anchoring in Northern Iraq, which is under the KRG control. Several factors supported the decision to station the PKK camps in the Qandil mountains, one of the most influential factors is the Kurdish population of the Northern Iraq. The PKK leadership probably preferred to base in the territory controlled by Kurdish organizations with ties by ethnicity and organization. Additionally, the territory is mainly populated by Kurds, who are expected to support at least morally, the PKK. The Qandils are very

mountainous terrain, which gives the PKK an advantage, and limits their rivals. The territory also borders Turkey and Iran; countries with large Kurdish populations, that live near the borders. The majority of the factors related to the PKK stationing in Northern Iraq remain as important and are in line with the tenets of T.E. Lawrences', D. Galulas' and G.H. McCormicks' theoretical works. They are useful to build an understanding about the role of its basing in Northern Iraq for the PKK.

In his work, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T.E. Lawrence describes the role of basing for the Arab uprising in the beginning of the 20th century, where he supported the Arab leaders to fight and defeat the Ottoman occupational forces in the Arab Peninsula.⁷⁰ One of the key ideas was that the camp should be protected not only from enemy attacks but also from the fear of attack. When free from fear, this may lead to the possibility for the insurgency group to focus efforts more than on other tasks, not related to the protection of the camp, because of the calculations of the risks of being attacked in chosen location. The other tasks include the medical care of sick and wounded fighters, military and ideological training, and the planning and preparation of future operations. The PKK bases which are located deeper in the Qandil Mountains far away from the Turkish border are functioning according to the requirements set by T.E. Lawrence.

But in another part of his work T.E. Lawrence sets additional requirements for guerilla camps; independence of bases and communications from ground features, strategic areas, fixed directions and fixed points. This independence was useful for the Arab tribes fighting the same enemy of Kurds, but in different terrain, different time and

⁷⁰ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 99-101.

using different technology. The Arab tribes were required to be independent of their bases of operation because their strategy was a mixture of small raids and large scale aggressive offensive operations. They used every opportunity to exploit success by pushing the Turkish forces further out from the peninsula. The Arab tribes moved in relatively large formations, which had enough capabilities to sustain their operations. The Arabs established new camps in new locations depending on their success on the battlefield.

On the contrary, the PKK strategy is based on fighting in relatively smaller groups and exploiting success related not to the terrain but to the enemy forces. For example, the Arabs would cut the rail supply line and try to seize as much territory as possible from their enemy, whereas the Kurds tried to destroy as many enemy forces as possible. At the same time, the PKK operations are similar to what T.E. Lawrence describes because the Kurds do not have fixed directions and fixed points. The Kurds depend upon rugged features of the mountains to provide natural protection and concealment. These mountains are the Kurds' strategic base area. As in the case of the Arab tribes, the Qandil Mountains initially were just a temporary stationing area. The PKK had to anchor in the mountains of Northern Iraq, without surrendering its goal towards status of the so called Northern Kurdistan; Kurdish populated South Eastern regions of Turkey, but by defending the Qandil mountains as a strategic area. The PKK basing in the Qandil Mountains is becoming a strategic objective or an end, and requires concentration of all the resources as a highest priority guaranteeing the existence of the organization. The referendum's results combined with a weak KRG, in combination with a more aggressive

Turkish and Iraqi strategy, will force the PKK to build a stronger attachment to the Northern Iraqi mountains.

In his work; Counter-Insurgency Warfare Theory and Practice French military officer and specialist of counterinsurgency warfare theory, David Galula, describes four main territorial patterns of guerilla strategy. These patterns are regular basing, guerrilla basing, guerrilla areas and occupied areas.⁷¹

Regular bases are described as territories which are mostly controlled by the guerrilla groups. This control includes a functioning government and the existence of local troops which defend the base when the insurgents are resting, or training. Regular bases also are protected from enemy attacks. Until 2018, the PKK did not have that level of control in its territory. The PKK fighters conducted the defense of their bases on their own. The PKK did not focus on organizing government type institutions in Northern Iraq that would conduct taxation or provide public services. The main reason is that the PKK focus is the Kurdish regions of Turkey. The leaders of the organization do not assume the governmental responsibilities in *de jure* territory of the KRG. Also, the establishment of government type institutions requires considerable resources, which, with respect to the PKK are extremely limited and will not increase in the near future. The Qandil Mountains are not largely populated and are not rich in resources, which makes the territory much less attractive for implementing tight government control and building the infrastructure to provide services to the people.

⁷¹ Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare*, 28-32.

Guerrilla basing also considers the existence of local troops and insurgents themselves under the organization political control, in combination with government types of organization which operate in parallel with the existing central government of the state; either openly or from clandestine facilities depending on the situation. These bases are subject to relatively frequent attacks from enemy forces, but the enemy forces are not able to maintain control over the territories after the operations. The PKK does not organize local force type units or governing institutions. Also the Turkish forces frequently attack the PKK camps in Qandil Mountains. Because the area is in a foreign country; Iraq, therefore, and the PKK is able to resist the Turkish forces in that mountains. The Turkish military operations don't aim to maintain control over the territories because they are within recognized borders of Iraq, and long-term troop deployment will require Iraqi or UN approval.

Guerrilla areas are the areas where the guerillas and the national military of the country are contesting territorial control. The Qandil Mountains were guerilla areas until 1992 and the end of Kurdish Civil War, when the PKK had to fight the KDP and the PUK over the control and basing in the mountains.

Occupied areas are the territories where the state has total military and political control and guerillas have to operate only from underground or clandestine bases. This is the exact description of the PKK level of control in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. During its existence, the PKK several times was able to transform its territorial pattern in Turkey from Occupied to the incomplete Guerrilla basing pattern. However Turkish countermeasures always were effective enough to suppress the PKK in the occupied areas in Turkey.

Galula states that every insurgent organization has the goal to transform the occupied areas into guerilla areas and then from guerilla bases into regular bases. In this manner, the key consideration is the PKK ideology that changed from nationalism to democratic confederalism. The current PKK strategy does not aim for Kurdish independence from Turkey, but aims for a high democratic level of autonomy. This partially contradicts the concepts of the four desired territorial patterns, but in fact this concept is appropriate for the PKK in order to reach the desired level of democratic ethnic autonomy within Turkey, where independent government institutions and local forces are in control within a democratic framework.

Gordon McCormick is the third theorist who studied the key issues related to insurgency and terrorism. His work; *Terrorist Decision Making*, describes the “life cycle” of terrorist organizations from the security and influence interdependent perspective.⁷² To expand influence, the organization must conduct campaigns that appeal to the targeted audience, and at the same time, the insurgent exposes itself to his enemies, sacrificing his own security level. From the PKK perspective, if the PKK becomes passive as during the period 1992 - 1994, or 1999 - 2004, the PKK will enjoy a relative higher security level, but at the same time the PKK will lose the public support. If public support drops to critical levels, the organization will face a considerable issue of relevancy.

Similarly, if the influence of the organization increases to a level dangerous for the country in which it operates, the organization will become the main focus of the national security efforts, and will be existentially threatened by well trained, equipped

⁷² McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making.”

and resourced state military and security forces. In modern history, the PKK frequently had the problems being relevant to the existing public demands of the key audience. In this case, the key audience is ethnic Kurds in Turkey. That said, the PKK also was able to transform and rebrand itself to match the realities of the situation. The PKK security as an organization was most seriously endangered during the war against the KDP, PUK and in later phases Turkey in 1992 and after the arrest of the founder of the organization Abdula Ocalan in 1999. The PKK had to reorganize itself and review its ideologies and strategies, to maintain the relevancy and survive. Considering the changes that happened after the independence referendum in the KRG in 2017, the PKK will be able to revise its strategies, concerning Turkish aggressive policy against the PKK and affiliate groups. The PKK security level will not always relate to its activity. Because the Turkish policies against the PKK are relatively unconditional, and have a goal to eliminate the PKK in any case; independent from the PKK influence level or activity level.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter combines the results of the methodology of chapter 3 with the analysis of chapter 4, and answers the primary question of this study “What are implications that the independence process of Iraqi Kurdistan will have on the PKK?” Additionally, this chapter includes recommendations for future studies.

Conclusions

The KDP step towards the Iraqi Kurdistan *de jure* independence changed the environment considerably for all the regional actors, including the PKK. The research discovered that the relations between the PKK and the traditional Kurdish political parties of Northern Iraq; the KDP and the PUK, were always depending on the influence of the regional powers, such as Turkey, Iran or Iraq. The culture of relations between the KDP, the PUK and the PKK influenced by regional key stakeholders, transformed to the KRG, and the KRG also forms its approach towards the PKK according to similar interests with partner influential regional powers. Since the referendum until president Masoud Barzani left office, the PKK found itself in a transformed region, where the KRG did not have a high level of autonomy and most of the process was ruled by the Iraqi central government in Baghdad. Because the KRG and the PKK relations are heavily influenced by the regional players, and the KRG lost much of its political autonomy after the referendum, the future of the KRG and the PKK relations will be highly effected by the especially Turkish aggressive strategy against the PKK. The PKK’s strategically important basing in the Qandil mountains, plays an important role for the organization. The organization will

attempt to keep the camps against Turkish attacks, and in the future will not have sufficient power to focus on large operation outside the territory of Northern Iraq.

All these changes within the KRG weaken not only the KDP and the PUK positions, but also weakens the PKK. In the near future, the PKK will face a Turkish aggressive military strategy. Iraq will support the Turkish military operations against the PKK in Northern Iraq. The KRG, already has lost political influence and will not be considered key in negotiations of the anti-PKK military operation from neither Turkey nor Iraq. In attempting to recover, the KRG will have to consolidate internal political power; the KDP, the PUK and other parties, and will have to conduct quite careful diplomatic operations. Rebuilding relations with Turkey will be quite a challenging process. Turkey will demand from the KRG strict position against the PKK in the Qandil Mountains. These examples show that the referendum will have negative political and security implications for the PKK.

Questions for Future Studies

The following questions will be useful in future studies to fill the knowledge gap concerning the security environment in the Middle East:

1. What is the role of the PKK in the battle against the ISIS terrorist organization?
2. What caused Masoud Barzani to conduct the KRG independence referendum?
3. What was the role of regional and international powers on the referendum and its aftermaths?

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