

BOOK REVIEWS

Gunter, Michael M. *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990.

The Kurds are in the headlines again. They were the focus of attention immediately following the Iran-Iraq War due to allegations that the Iraqis had used gas against them. They re-surfaced in the aftermath of the Kuwait invasion, as various Kurdish groups took up arms against Baghdad — a fight that, as of this writing, the Baghdad government seems successfully to have suppressed.

In both instances, influential voices were raised for the United States to avenge the plight of the Kurds by undertaking specific reprisals against the Iraqis. Indeed, in the matter of the failed insurrection it was actually proposed that American troops occupy Iraq to bail out the rebels. Thus, we see that the Kurdish problem is one about which Americans ought to be knowledgeable. In line with this, Michael Gunter's book is quite timely.

Gunter addresses a specific aspect of the Kurdish problem — the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. (There are roughly 10 million Turkish Kurds, two million in Iraq, four million in Iran and perhaps 500,000 in Syria). He gives us a good, detailed rundown of the various groups making up the Kurdish opposition, devoting considerable space to one of these, the PKK (The Kurdish Workers Party).

All of this is to the good. Unfortunately, by scanting the economic and sociological aspects of the problem, Gunter's treatment is ultimately unsatisfying. We need to know more about the Kurds than merely the pedigrees of the leading opposition groups. Without this information, it is hard to understand why Americans ought to be concerned about them.

For example, the PKK — which Gunter evidently feels is the most important of the groups — comes across as little more than a terrorist organization. If this is a true representation, then what does that say about the situation of the Turkish Kurds generally? Are they carrying on an authentic liberation movement or what?

Gunter has an obligation to come down on one side or the other of this problem. He refuses to commit himself, however, saying in the introduction that he proposes to tell the story of the Turkish Kurds from their perspective and from that of the Turkish government. Intellectually, that's not very satisfying.

The reader is left to conclude that Gunter has not really thought the matter through, a conclusion that is reinforced by the book's curious organization. At the very end he brings up several related issues about the Turkish Kurds, such as their involvement with the Syrians, the Soviets and the Armenians, as well as a discussion of the expatriate Turkish-Kurdish community in Europe.

These are all aspects of the overall Kurdish problem that need to be addressed, but they should not be handled as after thoughts; rather they should be worked into the main presentation. It is as if someone wrote a two character play, and then in the last act introduced a group of additional — important — characters with no attempt to weave them into the plot.

There ought to be — and as yet there does not exist in English — a scholarly work about the Kurds that tackles this problem head on. Are the politically active Kurds primarily concerned with promoting the cause of self-determination, or do they rather serve as useful foils by means of which others seek to sabotage the national struggles of the Iraqis, Iranians and the Turks?

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O'Ballance, Edgar. *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka 1973-88*. London: Brassey's, 1989.

O'Ballance has provided a balanced and objective study of the 1973-88 Tamil insurrection in Sri Lanka. There are a few inaccuracies as to dates and events (as for example, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam died in 1977, not 1976, Anton Balasingham is not an Oxford graduate) but these need not be cavilled at in the context of a well-constructed documentary. In most places the author has successfully mineswept an area replete with misinformation, disinformation and blatant falsehoods sown by both sides. All credit to him, for the Sinhala-Tamil conflict has ethnic, social, economic and political factors criss-crossing a multicultural landscape.

The last chapter (9), "Retrospects and Prospects" provides valuable clues to an understanding of the situation on the ground. O'Ballance correctly attributes the crisis to "Sinhala nationalism" (is "chauvinism" more appropriate?) becoming "rampant" once "freed from British colonial rule" when "the government began to discriminate against the Tamil community in Ceylon." (p. 124) He is apocalyptically correct when he states that "future prospects for tranquillity in Sri Lanka are not good" (p. 126), an understatement and quite prescient, writing as he did in 1989 before the great inter-ethnic tragedies of 1990 began to unfold.

The author opines that the two most dangerous men to peace and compromise in Sri Lanka are Prabhakaran of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and Wijeweera of the JVP (People's Liberation Front). (p. 127) The latter and his command structure have been killed by the Sri Lankan army and the JVP uprising consequently is now under control. But can Prabhakaran's elimination pave the way for a peaceful resolution? Or will his deputy, Mahathaya alias Mahendrarajah, be more intractable? The irony is that the Sri Lankan government now and the Indian peacekeepers on previous occa-