

Ibrahim, Ferhad, and Gulistan Gurbey, eds. *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: Obstacles and Chances for Peace and Democracy*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

*The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: Obstacles and Chances for Peace and Democracy* is a collection of nine essays on this decades old conflict which might have been given the more fitting subtitle of External Aspects of an Internal War. The majority of the book's chapters deal with international factors of the war, and those chapters written on more localized subjects also look at issues encountered by international relations scholars, such as migration, globalization and state collapse.

In the introduction, the editors outline their belief that the "... hard-line military and Kemalist core of Turkish society ..." should give way to the "... democratic and liberal forces ..." and give the Kurdish southeast region autonomy if not independence. More interestingly though, they also introduce the international theme that runs throughout the book with their statement,

The Turkish government strategy which slowly proved successful resulted from various regional factors such as the intensified military and political ties between Turkey and Israel, encouraged by the US. This strategy however was also facilitated by the political and conceptual stagnation of the PKK and its inability to adapt to the new reality after the demise of the bipolar world system . . .

Two chapters in the book, one by Michael Gunter and the other by Norman Paech, deal with questions of international law on self-determination as it could be applied in the Kurdish case. Despite the seeming suitability of much of that law, as often is the case, it is up to the dominant actors to apply the law, and currently the dominant actor's interests do not lie with those of the Kurds. Ferhad Ibrahim's chapter examines the foreign policy of the PKK and its involvement in Europe, Syria and with its Iraqi neighbors. Robert Olson examines the bargaining and balancing process between Turkey and Syria over the PKK, which came to involve Greece, Iran, Israel, the US and Europe. Amr Hamzawy discusses the Arab perception of this Turk and Kurd issue, and how it changes depending on its relevance to Arab-Israeli relations and other regional issues. Gulstein Gurbey discusses a history of the Kurds' recent struggle and the Kurds' past autonomous eras.

In my opinion, the best article included in the text is Baskin Oran's "Linguistic Minority Rights in Turkey, the Kurds and Globalization," which, despite its rather limited sounding title, outlines clearly the cause of the ongoing conflict and a solution that should be effective and acceptable to both the Kurds and Turks. Oran explains the background behind Turkey's anti-Kurd policy, specifically the legacy of the Millet system, the ideology of the Young Turks, the fear of disintegration and the fear of Russia. Oran also explains where the Kurds' desire for autonomy originates. The economic troubles of Turkey have left the generally poor Kurds, "people without running water watching at their color TV all sorts of exorbitance," living in "slums next to luxury apartment buildings." It is here that Oran pinpoints the problem, when all the Kurds have left is their group identity: "The Turkish state, by denying the group identity and the mother language of the Kurds . . . simply facilitates the nationalist terror of the PKK," and

“When the individual has no other identity than that of his primary group, his/her only chances to be ‘noticed’ in the group will materialize if he/she becomes an extremist.”

The Turkish government should allow some autonomy to the Kurds, allow them language rights and involve them in government. At the same time, the government should continue to emphasize the terrorism and criminality of the PKK. This, to use the accurate but antiquated phrase, will win the hearts and minds of the majority of Kurds, undercut the PKK and solve the problem. After all, as Yashar Kemal states, and as Oran quotes, when one wonders if the Kurds will demand independence after being granted a degree of cultural autonomy, the reply should be, “Won’t they ask for independence if we don’t give them cultural autonomy?”

This idea was introduced earlier in the text. In Hamit Bozarslan’s chapter “Why the Armed Struggle,” Bozarslan states, “The PKK’s violence and popularity among some parts of the Kurdish population is largely a product of the state’s coercion, of the impossibility of conducting a legal opposition and the feeling that there is ‘no other way out.’” The editors at the beginning of the book also discussed this idea. “The more intransigent the Turkish state appears the more stubborn will be national Kurdish resistance.” Here again enters the international aspect as the editors suggest, and they may be correct, that “Without permanent and concerted external influence a lack of which has been more than obvious so far there is hardly a chance Turkey changes its policy on the Kurds which would make it possible to arrive at a peaceful conflict settlement.” Specifically, the editors are referring to the EU, but other actors may also affect change in Turkish internal policy.

The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey is a liberal but valuable overview of Turkey’s internal war, with an emphasis on international aspects. It would make a welcome addition to the library of anyone with an interest in Turkey, the Kurds, the region, struggles for self-determination or internal conflict.

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