Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

Gülistan Gürbey
Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin
guerbey@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Arzu Yilmaz
Asia-Africa Institute, University of Hamburg, Hamburg
yilmaza02@gmail.com

Vol. 16/2022

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

1

Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

Gülistan Gürbey
Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin
Arzu Yilmaz
Asia-Africa Institute, University of Hamburg, Hamburg

1 Reflections on the Return of Geopolitics and the Current State of the Kurdish Conflict

The return of geopolitics in international relations (Bergesen and Suter 2018; Almqvist and Linklater 2021; Kroenig 2020; Guzzini 2012) and the reemergence of geopolitical rivalry in the early part of the 21st century has led to further deterioration in a global security environment already experiencing risks associated with climate change, cybercrime, health and food insecurity, population displacement and overwhelming humanitarian crisis (United Nations 2021). Although such issues demand robust international cooperation to ensure an equitable and sustainable response and recovery, the world is instead fracturing into spheres of influence defined by national interests. Growing and deepening geopolitical divides, as United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres says, are making the world more complex and dangerous (Guterres 2022).

In such circumstances, the rise of nationalism, autocratic regimes and dictators (Dikötter 2019; Guriev and Treisman 2022) coupled with the crises of liberalism (Cooley and Nexon 2022; Hobson 2019; Ikenberry 2018) put human rights and democracy at serious risk. Yet, "political rights and civil liberties have declined worldwide for each of the past 16 years, raising the prospect that autocracy could overtake democracy as the governance model guiding international standards of behavior" (Freedom in the World 2022). Given the strong link between democracy and peace, therefore, the number of violent crises since 2010 has increased by more than half from 139 to 180 (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research 2022). Moreover, half of all conflicts between 1989 and 2018, including those settled with a peace agreement, have flared up again (PRIO Annual Report 2020). In light of the growing threat of global recession triggered by the Russian war in Ukraine since February 2022 (International Monetary Fund 2022), projections indicate that two-thirds of the world's population living in extreme poverty could be affected by armed conflict, fragility, and violence by 2030 (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank 2022).

One of the violent crises that has recently flared up again is the Kurdish conflict in the Middle East, which is embedded in the regional and international context and at the same time influenced by the return of geopolitics and the rise of geopolitical rivalry. The conflict involves a century of political and armed struggle by the Kurdish people against the denial, assimilation and annihilation policies of the nation-states in which they live, namely Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The ancestral homeland of the Kurds is namely divided into four parts under the rule of those four countries. Violence ranging from political oppression to military operations threatens both the well-being of approximately 35 to 40 million Kurdish people (Gürses 2018, 1) and the efforts to advance peace and stability in the region. Escalating violence coupled with the lack of a foreseeable peaceful solution undermines reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Syria, two fragile countries that have been a source of instability with worldwide implications. Success in efforts to bring about "democratic change" in Iran or revive the

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

2

democratic process in Turkey also relate fundamentally with tackling the Kurdish conflict. The political fallout from the Kurdish conflict today even hampers the enlargement of the world's largest security alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), through Turkey's opposition to the accession of Finland and Sweden because of their stance towards the Kurds (Lukov and Murphy 2022).

These developments, coming amidst global geopolitical turmoil, raise the prospect of secession as opposed to coexistence. The 92 percent support for independence in the 2017 referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan (BBC 2017) and the increase in the proportion of Kurds in Turkey who desire independence (even after the first ever peace talks) (Karakoç and Özen 2020), confirm that perspective. Nevertheless, in its annual Conflict Barometer the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research has since 2012 categorized the Kurdish conflict as an issue of "autonomy" in each country involved. That definition echoes the historic moment of a century ago, when Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan revolted for autonomy and independence (McDowall 1996; Olson 1989). In fact, the root causes of the Kurdish conflict essentially lie in the failure of those revolts and the establishment of other new nation-states in the Middle East after World War I. Kurdish unrest in different forms has continued to the present day. The past decade, however, is "the first time in the history of the region that we are witnessing concurrent active conflicts in all parts of Kurdistan" (Güneş 2019, 3) whereas autonomy appears to be a common goal – as it was a century ago.

Accordingly, given the diverging socio-political dynamics in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, addressing the "Kurdish Question, or -'Questions', of the twentieth century" (Stansfield and Shareef 2017, xviii) on a country-by-country basis fails to provide an adequate explanatory framework today. It was relevant in the past when the Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan were largely disconnected as a consequence of the central authorities' control over the political borders coupled with harsh domestic assimilation policies. Under such circumstances, the struggle for basic human and political rights on the basis of citizenship was the main trajectory of Kurdish political mobilization, rather than autonomy. Many Kurds in Turkey, for instance, joined Turkish political currents without any significant reference to Kurdish autonomy, such as the revolutionary leftist movements around the Workers' Party of Turkey in the 1960s (Jongerden and Akkaya 2019, 271) for decades. The Kurdish parties in Syria, on the other hand, abandoned all demands for autonomy after World War II and sought no more than "recognition of the Syrian Kurds as an ethnic group with the right to their own culture" (Tejel 2019, 371). Even the Iranian Kurds' demand for cultural autonomy after the demise of the Mahabad Republic in 1947 was "to attain full citizenship rights in the country" (Entessar 2017, 312). The Kurdish political orientation in Iraq constitutes an exception, since autonomy with a prospect of independence has always been the goal of all Kurdish parties in Iraq (Lawrence 2009). But even in Iraq, the Kurdish political orientation was shaped largely in interactions with Baghdad.

However, since the 1990s the "Kurdish political space" (Bozarslan 2012) has gradually become alienated from the centers of each constituent state and restructured in a transnational context with increasing political interaction within the territory of Kurdistan as a whole. The drivers of this development were the establishment of de facto Kurdish autonomy in Iraq in 1992 after the First Gulf War (which became a de jure federal entity in 2005 after the United States invasion of Iraq); the electoral successes of pro-Kurdish parties and their rule in Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey; and finally, the emergence of a Kurdish autonomous region in Syria in 2012 amid the Arab Spring. In this process, the Kurds have reconnected and reorganized mainly through the frameworks of immigration, armed struggle, trade/business, and the media. Migration reconstructed the formerly strictly separated identities of Kurds from the different nation-states into one Kurdish identity with an emphasis on a common – and threatened – ethnicity. Armed struggle has weakened ideological differences in the name of the defense of Kurdistan, while the Islamic State (IS) emerged as a "common enemy" of all Kurds. Increasing cross-border trade and commerce has allowed the capitalization of transborder kinship and tribal boundaries and helped new interest groups to emerge. More than one hundred TV channels as well as various radio stations and social networks have en-

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

3

abled Kurds in different states to communicate with each other, despite certain difficulties due to linguistic differences (Yılmaz 2018). Globalization and digital communication technologies have accelerated the process of nationalization and created a new transnational Kurdish public sphere that can exert influence as a transnational civil society force. This cross-border, transnational space brings Kurds in different states closer together and can mobilize masses. This was particularly evident in the Syrian Kurds' fierce resistance against the IS in Kobane in 2014–15 and the victorious liberation of Kobane from IS. People from all parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora rallied to support the Syrian Kurds and international solidarity grew rapidly.

Consequently, the Kurdish question in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, where the Kurds were identified, at best, as a "minority group" (Gürses 2018, 1), transformed into the Kurdistan question, an ethnonational-territorial conflict in the region with a Kurdish majority. At the same time, however, the concentration on the territory of Kurdistan triggered a power struggle among leading Kurdish actors and sparked an intra-Kurdish conflict that still occasionally flares up. Concurrently with the military and political interference by international and regional actors in the Kurdish region of Iraq after 1991 and in the Kurdish region of Syria (known as Rojava) after 2014, the territory of Kurdistan has become a "geopolitical interface" (Matin 2020) of a competitive rivalry. At present, this rivalry involves regional powers like Turkey, Iran, Israel and the Gulf States, and international actors like Russia, China and the United States (Cook and Green 2021). At a regional level, these countries "adopt different strategies and approaches based on their capabilities and strategic economic and security interests — often, in deep contradiction with one another" (Jones and Marc 2021, 1).

Initially, the power vacuum created by such contradictions and the weakening of central authority in the fragile states of Iraq and Syria provided the Kurdish entities with an opportunity to deepen and expand their political and military control over Kurdistan. During the fight against Islamic State (IS) since summer 2014, in particular, the Kurdish forces in Iraq succeeded in annexing oil-rich territories (Anderson,

2019) while one-third of Syrian territory fell under Kurdish rule (Savelsberg 2019). Even a section of the Iraq-Syria border, beginning at the Iraqi-Syrian-Turkish triangle and extending 150 kilometers southward (including four border crossings) (Hasan and Khaddour 2021) came under Kurdish control between 2015 and 2017, removing the political border between the southern and western parts of Kurdistan for the first time in a century. On the other hand, the Kurdish authorities in Iraq and Syria gained recognition in the international arena not only as legitimate representatives of the Kurds but also as "strategic partner of the West" (Finer and McGurk 2019). Thus the Kurds, who had been perceived for decades as a source of instability in the region were gradually turning into a potential source of stability in the eyes of many (Gürbey 2018). From an American perspective, for instance, the Kurds in the Middle East were "largely secular and pro-Western. … U.S.-Kurdish rapprochement would serve as a counter-weight to political demagogy and Islamist extremism. It can also leverage reforms in countries where Kurds reside" (Phillips 2012).

However, the geopolitical rivalries that created the opportunity of the "Kurdish Spring" (Phillips 2015) have also determined the constraints. Yet, given the cross-border nature of the Arab Spring and its destructive fallouts in the region and beyond, maintenance of the status quo in the Middle East has become a foremost priority of the international community. This prioritization even persuaded the US to reconsider its withdrawal from the Middle East and to lead the fight against IS. Once the IS threat was contained, however, leading actors began rolling back the Kurdish political and military achievements in the name of safeguarding the political borders and territorial integrity of the states in question. The reaction to the Kurdistan Region independence referendum in Iraq in 2017 reflected that international stance, which was seen again in Syria, this time in the form of indifference, vis-a-vis Turkey's incursions in 2018 and 2019 (Siccardi 2021). In fact, however, the outcome in both cases put the political borders and territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria more at risk. In pursuit of expanding its sphere of influence, Iran took advantage of Kurdish losses in Iraq and strengthened its influence by seizing control over disputed areas via its

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

4

proxy Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) (Mansour 2021) and Turkey almost annexed the Kurdish-ruled cities of Afrin, Tel Abyad (Girê Spî)) and Ras al-Ayn (Serê Kaniyê) in Syria by taking control of all administrative structures including security, economy and education (Holmes 2021). Meanwhile, Turkey also expanded the scope of its military operations more than sixty kilometers into Kurdistan-Iraq, establishing one hundred military bases there (Taştekin 2022). The status quo in the Middle East is still at stake today, whereas the international community's toleration of massacres, dictatorships, and human rights violations generates risks but cannot lead to peace and stability.

2 Geopolitics of Kurdistan

Against this backdrop, the course of developments in the Kurdish political space was mainly determined by the geopolitical considerations of international and regional powers. The geopolitical dimension of the Kurdish conflict has therefore received considerable attention as seen in the growing number of studies in the last decade (Sunca 2022; Yeğen 2021; Eklund et al. 2021; Demir 2019; Güneş 2019; Kardaş and Yesiltaş 2018; Ünver 2016; Ahmed and Gunter 2013; Barkey 1997). It is widely agreed that the history of Kurds has been a projection of "geography is destiny" (O'Shea 2004). Kurdistan is located in the Taurus and Zagros mountains between the plateaus in Turkey and Iran, the deserts of Syria and Iraq, and the Caucasus mountains. Historically, the geostrategic significance of Kurdistan derives primarily from this "liminality" (Matin 2020) in the area where Europe meets Asia. Since the eleventh century, in particular, Kurdistan has been a "buffer zone between greater powers" (Ünver 2016, 67). After the fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate, Kurdistan found itself between the Seljuk Turks and the Byzantine Empire (Güneş 2019, 4). The rise of the Ottoman Empire in the region from the early sixteenth century brought a large part of Kurdistan under the rule of the Ottomans as "a frontier defense against the Safavid Empire" (Ünver 2016, 68). The Russian Empire joined the competition over Kurdistan in the nineteenth century as a result of Russian expansion into the Caucasus, and Kurdistan became a "flashpoint of rivalry" (Ünver 2016, 68) between the Russian Empire and the Qajar Dynasty respectively

the Ottoman Empire. In the modern era, finally, Kurdistan, partitioned between four nation-states, represented the farthest flank of alliances developed against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) between 1949 and 1991, and then, partially against the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 onwards.

As this historical survey shows, the Kurdish Conflict of the past hundred years has been "too big to resolve, but not big enough to be of primary concern to an international community that was effectively a club of sovereign states largely acting to preserve the integrity of its members" (Stansfield and Shareef 2017, xix). Thus, the Kurdish Conflict has remained out of international sight as a security issue of concern in the Middle East, even when the Kurds were targeted with genocidal attacks in, for instance, Dersim in 1938 (Türkyılmaz 2019) in Turkey and the Anfal Campaign in 1988 in Iraq.

An international effort to seek a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict emerged for the first time in 1991, after the then President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurds in Iraq in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. The US-led international coalition's military intervention in northern Iraq, dubbed Operation Provide Comfort, aimed to protect the Kurdish refugees fleeing their homes and deliver humanitarian aid. The no-fly zone imposed in this connection was one of the main factors allowing the creation of the Autonomous Kurdistan Region in 1992. Nonetheless, as many scholarly studies argue, the creation of a Kurdish entity in Iraq was an unintended consequence of the peculiar political circumstances of the 1990s (Bengio 2012; Stansfield and Shareef 2017). In fact, the motivation behind Operation Provide Comfort was neither recognition of the Kurdish right to self-determination nor to seek a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict in Iraq, but simply to alleviate human suffering in a humanitarian crisis resulting from the flight of millions of the Kurds. Yet, the international community's military and political intervention in Iraqi affairs did not result in any resolution of the Kurdish conflict (unlike for example Bosnia or Kosovo). On the contrary, the result was isolation of the Kurds from the rest of Iraq. Even though the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 opened a new chapter in Iraq and the Kurds gained extensive federal rights un-

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

5

der the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, unresolved disputes over territories and oil resources have continued to prevent the achievement of peace – unless one considers the absence of war between Erbil and Baghdad since 2003 to represent peace itself.

In Turkey, too, the 1990s marked a relative change in the international community's stance towards the Kurdish conflict. Between the liberal promises of a "new world order" and Turkey's EU membership process, the Kurdish conflict in Turkey gained more visibility on the international agenda as a matter of democracy rather than security. In response to the escalation in the war between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state, the European Union, in particular, paid more attention to human rights violations in Turkey. In this regard, a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict became one of the conditions that Turkey had to meet to join the European Union (Karakoç 2010). However, that condition has never constituted a political obstacle to the development of EU-Turkey relations and largely remained no more than a moral responsibility voiced occasionally by the EU institutions. What ultimately determined the EU's approach to the Kurdish conflict in Turkey was its members' geopolitical interests, which prioritized energy supplies and the rising threat of Islamic radicalization. Even the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in cases concerning Turkey's human rights violations were subject to such geopolitical considerations (Kurban 2020). Meanwhile, listing the PKK as a terrorist organization first in Germany in 1993 and then in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and finally by the EU in 2002 largely returned the Kurdish conflict in Turkey to the security frame, where it has remained to this day. As David Phillips argues, the American decision to include the PKK on the list of terrorist organizations list in 2002 was made in exchange for Turkey's support for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) and its cooperation with Global War on Terror (GWOT) (Phillips 2015, 132).

3 Peace in the Kurdish Conflict and the Significance of Turkey

Geopolitical developments have also occasionally paved the way for peace between Turkey and the

Kurds. Following each episode of geopolitical turmoil in the Middle East – the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the Arab Spring in 2011 – Turkey held negotiations with the Kurds. In 1991, Turkish President Turgut Özal contacted the Kurdish political leaders in Iraq, namely Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani (Çandar 2020, 26). Developing relations between the Iraqi Kurdish leaders and Turkey soon evolved into unofficial peace negotiations with the PKK in 1993, in which Jalal Talabani played a decisive role as a mediator between Turkey and the PKK. Özal believed Turkey would gain advantage by partnering with the Kurds in the Middle East instead of the United States (Gürbey 2010; Gürbey and Ibrahim 2000). Talabani felt that pleasing his sponsor [Özal] "could contribute to enhancing the overall standing of the Kurds across the Middle East" (Çandar 2020, 124). However, this process ended abruptly when Özal died on April 17, 1993, as the Turkish establishment did not share his approach. Another revival of peace talks with the Kurds occurred after 9/11, when the US invaded Iraq in 2003. In fact, peace with the PKK, in particular, was on the cards even before 9/11, as the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan had been imprisoned on the island of Imrali in Turkey since 1999. In addition, the PKK had declared a ceasefire in 1999 and even disbanded itself in 2002, reforming as the Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan (KADEK) to negotiate a peaceful settlement (Al Jazeera 2003). In fact unofficial negotiations with the PKK did not start until 2008 when Turkey initiated an "Opening process" with the newly established Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. This time, unlike 1993, a rapprochement with the Kurds was supported by both the Turkish state and the international community, as both agreed on the necessity of Turkish-Kurdish peace to pave the way for Turkey to assume a leading leadership role economic and political in the Middle East (Barkey 2009). Even though this second round of negotiations between Turkey and the PKK was suspended for a couple of years during the post-2011 Arab spring, it resumed after 2013 with the full and explicit commitment of all parties – Turkey, KRG, PKK and Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) – within the context of a negotiation process (the İmralı process) where Turkey

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

6

and the Kurds positioned themselves as strategic partners in the Middle East "under the banner of Islam" (Türkmen 2021).

It is therefore arguable that, firstly, the driving force behind post-1993 negotiations between Turkey and the PKK was regional rather than domestic dynamics. Secondly, even though the negotiations were between Turkey and the PKK, Kurdish political actors in Iraq and Syria were also involved at least occasionally at different levels. Third, the aim of the negotiations was ultimately a collaboration between Turkey and the Kurds as a whole in the Middle East, rather than merely a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict within Turkey.

However, the main factor that led to the termination of the negotiations was related to domestic dynamics in Turkey, rather than the regional situation. In this regard, one can argue that the fate of negotiation processes was determined by the following developments: in 1993, the power struggle between the political and the military, where the latter prevailed; in 2008–2010, the internal political struggle as Islamic cadres entered the security bureaucracy and the power of the military lessened under the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) government; and finally, the political fallout of the June 7, 2015, general elections, where the AKP failed to meet expectations while the Kurdish HDP (People's Democratic Party) achieved unexpected success. The military and political successes of the Kurds in Syria and Iraq and their visible strengthening in the course of the fight against IS have further accelerated this process.

In this context, growing authoritarian tendencies in Turkey affect the Kurdish conflict not only in Turkey, but also in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, Turkey's military interventions in the neighboring Kurdish entities undermines stabilization efforts in Iraq and Syria. Nonetheless, even if the government in Turkey changes, a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict is unlikely for the foreseeable future, given the new global geopolitical considerations (Brands and Gaddis 2021), where security interests are likely to dominate the course of developments in the Middle East. In fact, the international community's indifference (at best) towards Turkish aggression against the Kurds – both domestically and regionally – demonstrates that such

interests are already at play. Despite deteriorating relations between Turkey and the West in the past decade, the destructive consequences of Turkey's cross-border military operations elicited nothing more than statements of concern. For instance, the United States sanctioned Turkey over its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system (Macias 2020), but overlooked Turkey's war crimes and violations of international law (Holmes 2021) in the name of balancing Russia in Syria and containing Iranian influence in Syria and Iraq with Turkey, as a NATO force. In addition, even though Turkey never cooperated with the United States against ISIS (McGurk 2020), the United States did continue to support Turkey's collaboration with jihadi groups in Syria in order to combat the Assad regime and contain the Kurds. The EU and its member states, on the other hand, were primarily concerned about refugee flows, and it was this that ultimately blunted their responses to Turkey's illegal actions (Adar et al. 2020).

In this regard, the significance of Turkey for the fate of Kurdish conflict can be expected to increase, given that the "Russian threat" and the rise of China make its role in NATO indispensable (Rachman 2022). The war in Ukraine has only increased Turkey's importance as an energy hub for Europe (Tastan 2022). While the failure of efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has dimmed the prospects of a "Middle East Detente" (Ottaway 2022), Turkey's stance on the deepening rivalry between Iran and the emerging regional alliance associated with the Abraham Accords of September 2020 (a set of bilateral agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, mediated by the United States) would also be of great importance.

4 Kurdistan and the Kurds at the Crossroads of International and Regional Competition

From a geopolitical perspective, the Kurds and the territory of Kurdistan stand in the midst of regional and international power competition. In terms of natural resources, in addition to oil and gas, control over the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates is crucial today, especially as the world faces a "food crisis" (World Food Programme 2022). The Kurdistan Re-

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

7

gional Government in northern Iraq holds the world's eighth-largest oil reserves as well as significant natural gas fields (Gürbey and Yıldırım 2019; Gürbey, Hofmann, and Seyder 2017). The oil reserves under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) are much smaller, at 2.5 billion barrels, but have already been a "game changer" in developments in Syria (Rosen 2021). Furthermore, Kurdistan lies at the crossroads of oil transportation routes, with pipelines running to the Mediterranean at Ceyhan (Turkey) and Banyas (Syria). Control of the upper reaches of both the Tigris and the Euphrates is another key geopolitical asset that enhances Kurdistan's geopolitical importance.

The Kurds, with their aspiration for self-determination and almost three hundred thousand equipped, trained and experienced fighters (van Wilgenburg and Fumerton 2015; Knights and van Wilgenburg 2021) are also a factor in this competition. However, the Kurdish fighters consist of different groups loyal to rival Kurdish political parties. The support of at least one of these groups is necessary for any regional or international power to achieve its goal. In this regard, one could argue that the Kurds do not possess the military and political power required to achieve their aspirations on their own. But the same is also true for any actor seeking to project power in the territory of Kurdistan without the cooperation of the Kurdish actors.

The new position of the Kurds in the Middle East, which has been referred as "game changer" in the past decade, is also enhanced by a grassroot mobilization in favor of Kurdiyati (pan-Kurdism) (Kentel and Ete 2022). Deepening economic crisis, on the other hand, has fueled alienation of significant parts of the Kurdish population in each constituent states, while the Kurdish youth bulge, in particular, enables and strengthens a major shift in the Kurdish nationalist movement. In Iraq, for instance, the median age of the Kurdish population is estimated to be just over twenty, so about half are under that age (Ünver 2016). In Turkey, the predominantly Kurdish southeastern region has the country's highest birthrate, with an average of 4.2 births per household. According to the Turkish Statistics Institute, both the lowest percentage of old populations and the highest percentage of youth population are concentrated in the Kurdish southeast (TUIK 2021).

All in all, the Kurdish conflict has become increasingly internationalized, with the involvement of regional and global powers. A widespread failure by the fragile states of Iraq and Syria and the authoritarian states of Turkey and Iran to respond to the aspirations of the Kurdish people is also giving rise to political tensions and social unrest. The increase in number of Kurds taking refuge in foreign countries is one of the outcomes of the devastating process. Accompanied with worldwide risks of poverty, inequality, injustice and climate crisis today, a solution in Kurdish conflict is more complex than before. Therefore a surge in diplomacy and political will for peace is fundamentally needed.

In summary, both the failed attempts to gain Kurdish statehood and the achievements illustrate how global and regional upheavals and, in particular, geopolitical constellations open up opportunities for the Kurds, how they influence intra-Kurdish dynamics, and how they affect the chances of success –or defeat. At the same time, they highlight ongoing strengths and weaknesses in Kurdish politics that continue to resonate today. The foremost strengths are:

- Unbroken will for national self-determination
- Ethnopolitical mass mobilization
- Demographics and population
- Resilient organizations and parties
- Significant position as actors in the Middle East (as the most important local forces in Kurdish-populated areas and relevant to stabilizing the states in which they live)
- Increasing transnational Kurdish public sphere due to digital communication possibilities and thus increased pressure on Kurdish parties to adapt
- Increased international public support

Nevertheless, the Kurds still face important dangers and risks with geopolitical implications. The most important of these are:

- Structural asymmetries in relations with states
- Geographic encirclement by anti-Kurdish neighbors

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

8

- Function as geostrategic buffer zone, strategic exploitation
- Lack of international support from states
- Vulnerability due to internal fragmentation

Without external support from states, conflict resolution will remain difficult. But overcoming the persistent internal fragmentation of Kurdish forces is also crucial and remains a major challenge. The future of the Kurds will therefore also depend on their success in overcoming internal fragmentation and creating synergies.

5 Focus Section: Overview and Presentation

As guest editors, we are very pleased to present this focus section of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* on "Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflict: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East." In this issue we explore empirical research and theoretical perspectives on the transformation process of the cross-border, transnational Kurdish conflict in light of contemporary and historical geopolitical shifts and changing dynamics in the world and the Middle East.

The contributions to the focus section illustrate the vibrancy of contemporary work on various facets of the Kurdish conflict, politics, and societies using a range of theoretical and methodological approaches. Our authors go beyond simple correlations of cause and effect and draw on extensive empirical data and recent findings in their analysis. We are pleased with the wide range of methods used in the contributions, ranging through qualitative field research, cross-examination of archival materials, attitude surveys, employing ethnographic, interdisciplinary and theoretical approaches. Each article makes a unique contribution. Taken together, the articles develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes of interaction and the multiple dynamics that shape the conflict over the Kurds' historically rooted quest for autonomy and self-determination. They contribute to advancing knowledge about the Kurdish conflict and broadening our understanding of how internal and external dynamics, structures, and actors interact and affect the Kurds, the trajectory of the conflict, the forms of violence, and the prospects for peaceful resolution.

This Focus section brings together eight articles by scholars based in different countries (Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom), encompassing the fields of political science, history, social sciences, law, and social justice. The articles offer conceptually insightful and empirically rich analyses of the geopolitics of the Kurdish conflict in the past and present. The following topics are addressed:

- The multi-layered relations between the Kurdish tribes and the state from the late Ottoman period to the early modern republic (Tuncay Şur and Yalçın Çakmak)
- The Kurdish Delegation in Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and its efforts to create a Kurdish state (Metin Atmaca)
- Comparative analysis of the negotiations between the governments of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey and the representatives of Kurdish movements (Naif Bezwan)
- Radicalization of the Kurdish movement in Turkey (Barış Tuğrul)
- Strategic exploitation of the Kurds in Iraq and Syria (Piotr Sosnowski)
- Kurdish parallel justice and alternative governmentality (Latif Taş)
- Youth narratives on hope and despair in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Bahar Baser and Shivan Fazil
- Comparative analysis of the Kurdish civic culture in Iraq, Iran and Turkey (Dastan Jasim)

Tuncay Şur and Yalçın Çakmak consider the multilayered and complex relations between the Kurdish tribes and the state in the period from the late Ottoman Empire to the early years of the modern Turkish Republic. Examining Ottoman archival documents and primary sources, Şur and Çakmak demonstrate how the Ottoman-Kurdish tribes existed in a relationship of subordination to the Ottoman State and developed their own spaces of autonomy, sometimes in a game of cooptation, sometimes through violence. They also analyze the brutalization of the tribal environment after the destruction of the Kurdish emirates, and amid revolts, repression, war, and the genocide and deportation of Armenians in 1915 (Çakmak and Şur 2022).

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

9

Metin Atmaca provides a profound analysis of the efforts of the Kurdish elites and their quest for a Kurdish state after World War I. Based on British, French, Kurdish, and Ottoman sources, Atmaca examines the historical process from the beginning of the Paris Conference until ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres with a focus on the formation of the Kurdish delegation under the leadership of Sherif Pasha and debates among the Kurdish leaders during the negotiations for an independent Kurdistan. Contrary to the existing studies, Atmaca argues that the Kurdish delegation did not perform less well than the other delegations of ethnic groups at the Paris Conference; in fact, it negotiated effectively for a Kurdish state and had this demand recognized. In doing so, the Kurdish elites laid the foundation for a Kurdish nationalism with a historical narrative. Their failure was, however, to foresee the importance of organizing local Kurdish leaders on the ground in parallel to the diplomatic efforts in Paris (Atmaca 2022).

Naif Bezwan traces the discussions of the Kurdish conflict from 1970s onwards by examining three cases of negotiations: between representatives of Kurdish movements and the governments of, respectively, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Drawing on conflict and negotiation research, Bezwan explores why efforts to negotiate the Kurdish self-determination conflict between the Kurds and the states involved have not been successful, the reasons for this failure, and the role played by external powers in this process. Bezwan identifies the Kurdish conflict as a constitutive conflict of self-determination grounded in a dynamic contest between direct rule and self-determination. He argues that the failure of the negotiations is related to the lack of substantive commitments by the states involved, the collective failure of the Kurds, and the negative participation of third parties (Bezwan 2022).

Barış Tuğrul also focuses on the post-1970 period, but with a specific interest in the mechanisms of militancy engagement for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. Tuğrul bases his work on in-depth interviews, conducted in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan between December 2014 and March 2017, with PKK militants from three consecutive generations who were active in periods between the mid-1970s and the early 2000s. Using this material, he examines the conse-quences of internal colonialism for the radicalization of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. He argues that there has been a generational continuity of internal colonial mechanisms ranging from monolingual education in early childhood to opportunities offered by engagement in militancy which constituted an essential motivation and justification for the actors who became involved in armed struggle in the ranks of the Kurdistan Workers' Party against Turkey (Tuğrul 2022).

Piotr Sosnowski examines the role of Kurdish political entities with a focus on the Kurdish de facto states in Iraq and Syria. Combining the concepts of proxy war, de facto state, and path dependency, Sosnowski discusses the history of Kurdistan and the Kurds as a long-term process of strategic exploitation of the local political entities and demonstrates how being the "client" of external aid and serving external interests affects present and future developments in the Kurdish de facto states in Iraq and Syria (Sosnowski 2022).

Latif Taş examines the emergence of Kurdish non-state justice under an authoritarian state structure in Turkey. On the basis of ethnographic research in Turkey, Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Kurdish diasporas in Europe between 2015 and 2019, Taş maps out the diverse spectrum of Kurdish parallel justice mechanisms. He analyzes how and why Kurdish de-facto judges practiced and negotiated power relations before and after the 2000s. The contribution reveals obstacles and challenges facing women and men under local justice, while also paying attention to ethnic and religious diversities, the different supporters of the Kurdish movement, and the conflicts between them (Tas 2022).

Bahar Baser and Shivan Fazil focus on youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In the midst of uncertainty and instability in the region, Baser and Fazil trace the life and prospects of the young Kurdish generation on the basis of fieldwork conducted in 2018 and 2021 with university students in Erbil, Dohuk, Halabja, and Suleimaniyah. Their article is the first academic work to examine the perceptions of the generation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq that came of age in the past decade (Baser and Fazil 2022).

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

10

Dastan Jasim provides a more comprehensive understanding of the current dynamics of Kurdish civic culture. Using the concept of civic culture and drawing on the first merged large-N dataset (Arab Barometer and World Values Survey) including Kurds and non-Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, Jasim examines Kurdish support for a democratic political system. She shows that being Kurdish is significantly associated with support for a democratic political system against autocracy in all three countries. Additionally, Jasim finds that being Kurdish has a strong positive association with support for democracy versus autocracy in all three countries (Jasim 2022).

Ending this long and violent conflict requires an understanding of the history and the status quo, as well as a comprehensive perspective encompassing the changing dynamics of both the conflict itself and the broader geopolitics of the Middle East. We hope that this focus section will enhance knowledge of Kurdish and Kurdistan geopolitics, provide new impetus, and contribute to a better understanding of Kurdish societies, Kurdish politics, and the continuity of their historically rooted quest for self-determination and autonomy.

References

Adar, Sinem, Steffen Angenendt, Muriel Asseburg, Raphael Bossong, and David Kipp. 2020. *The Refugee Drama in Syria, Turkey, and Greece: Why a Comprehensive Approach Is Needed.* SWP Comment. no. 16. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Ahmed, Mohammed M. A., and M. Michael Gunter, eds. 2013. *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds.* Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers.

Al Jazeera. 2003. Turkish Kurdish Rebels Disband. *Al Jazeera.* November 11. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/11/11/turkish-kurdish-rebels-disband, accesed 18 December 2022.

Almqvist, Kurt, and Alexander Linklater, eds. 2021. *The Return of Geopolitics: A Global Quest for the Right Side of History.* Stockholm: Bokforlaget Stolpe.

Anderson, Liam. 2019. The Disputed Territories of Northern Iraq: ISIS and Beyond. In *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds*, ed. Michael M. Gunter, 318–27. London and New York: Routledge.

Atmaca, Metin. 2022. The Road to Sèvres: Kurdish Elites and Question of Self-Determination After the First World War. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-13.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5686

Barkey, Henri J. 1997. Kurdish Geopolitics. *Current History* 96 (606): 1–5.

Barkey, Henri J. 2009. *Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan.* Carnegie Endowment or International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2009/02/09/preventing-conflict-over-kurdistan-pub-22725

Baser, Bahar, and Shivan Fazil. 2022. "They Hear Us But They Do Not Listen to Us": Youth Narratives on Hope and Despair in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-12.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5826

BBC. 2017. Iraqi Kurds Back Independence Decisively in Referendum. *BBC News*, September 27. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41419633, accessed 19 September 2022.

Bengio, Ofra. 2012. *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State.* New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bergesen, Albert J., and Christian Suter, eds. 2018. *The Return of Geopolitics.* Zurich: LIT.

Bezwan, Naif. 2022. The Politics of Negotiating the Kurdish Self-Determination Conflict: Failure by Design? *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-18.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5777

Bozarslan, Hamit. 2012. Between Integration, Autonomization and Radicalization: Hamit Bozarslan on the Kurdish Movement and the Turkish Left: Interview by Marlies Casier and Olivier Grojean. *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14:96–112. https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4663, accessed 20 September 2022.

Brands, Hal, and John L. Gaddis. 2021. The New Cold War: America, China and the Echoes of History. *Foreign Affairs* 100 (6): 10–21.

Çakmak, Yalcın, and Tuncay Şur. 2022. Margins of Allegiance and Revolt: Relations between Kurdish Tribes and the State from the Late Ottoman Period to the Early Modern Republic. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-15.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5952

Çandar, Cengiz. 2020. *Turkey's Mission Impossible: War and Peace with the Kurds.* London: Lexington Books.

Cook, Steven A., and James Green. 2021. China Isn't Trying to Dominate the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs.* August 9.

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

11

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-09/china-isnt-trying-dominate-middle-east, accessed 16 September 2022.

Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel H. Nexon. 2022. The Real Crisis of Global Order. *Foreign Affairs* January-February. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2021-12-14/illiberalism-real-crisis-global-order, accessed 12 September 2022.

Demir, Mustafa. 2019. *The Geopolitics of Turkey-Kurdistan Relations: Cooperation, Security Dilemmas and Economies.* London: Lexington Books.

Dikötter, Frank. 2019. *How to Be a Dictator: The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century.* New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Eklund, Lina, M. Abdi Abdulhakim, Aiman Shahpurwala, and Pinar Dinç. 2021. On the Geopolitics of Fire, Conflict and Land in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *Remote Sensing* 13 (8): 1575, DOI:10.3390/rs13081575.

Entessar, Nader. 2017. The Kurdish Conundrum and the Islamic Republic of Iran 1979–2003. In *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, ed. Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, 307–17. New York: Oxford University Press.

Finer, John, and Brett McGurk. 2019. No, President Trump, It's Not "Importing the Terrorism": It's the Right Thing to Do. *New York Times*, October 29. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/opinion/trump-kurds-syria.html, accessed 3 September 2022.

Freedom in the World 2022. 2022. *The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule.* Washington, DC: Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf, accessed 3 September 2022.

Güneş, Cengiz. 2019. *The Kurds in a New Middle East: The Changing Geopolitics of a Regional Conflict.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gürbey, Gülistan. 2010. *Arızalı Demokrasilerde Dış Politika.* Ankara: ODTÜ Yayınları.

Gürbey, Gülistan. 2018. The Role of the Kurds in the Middle East: A Regional Factor of Stability or Instability? *Orient* 3:41–51.

Gürbey, Gülistan, Sabine Hofmann, and Ferhad Ibrahim Seyder, eds. 2017. *Between State and Non-State: Politics and Society in Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gürbey, Gülistan, and Caner Yıldırım. 2019. Perspectives of an Independent Energy Export of Iraqi Kurdistan. In *Iraqi Kurdistan's Statehood Aspirations: A Political Economy Approach*, ed. Emel Tugdar and Anwar Anaid, 57–85. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gürbey Gülistan, and Ferhad Ibrahim, ed. 2000. *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey.* New York: St Martin's Press.

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gürses, Mehmet. 2018. *Anatomy of a Civil War: Sociopolitical Impacts of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey.* Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Guterres, António. 2022. *Remarks to the Munich Security Conference Opening Segment.* 18 February. https://

www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-02-18/remarks-the-munich-security-conference-opening-segment, accessed 2 September 2022.

Guzzini, Stephano, ed. 2012. *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Crises.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Hasan, Harith, and Kheder Khaddour. 2021. *The Making of the Kurdish Frontier: Power, Conflict, and Governance in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderlands.* The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Hasan_Khaddour_XBORDER_Kurdish_Frontier.pdf, accessed 3 September 2022.

Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK). 2022. Conflict Barometer 2021, Heidelberg.https://hiik.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CoBa_01.pdf, accessed 4 September 2022.

Hobson, J. Atkinson. 2019. *The Crises of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy.* London: White Press.

Holmes, Amy. 2021. *Threats Perceived and Real: New Data and the Need for a New Approach to the Turkish-SDF Border Conflict.* Wilson Center Occasional Paper Series. No 39. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/MEP_210514_Threats%20Perceived-V1r2_0.pdf, 2 September 2022.

Ikenberry, John G. 2018. The End of Liberal International Order? *International Affairs* 94 (1): 7–23.

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. 2022. *Global Economic Prospects. 2022. A World Bank Group Flagship Report.* Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/18ad707266f7740bced755498ae0307a-0350012022/original/Global-Economic-Prospects-June-2022.pdf, accessed 3 September 2022.

International Monetary Fund. 2022. *World Economic Outlook Update.* July 2022. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/07/26/world-economic-outlook-update-july-2022, accessed 9 September 2022.

Jasim, Dastan. 2022. Civic Culture and Support for Democracy amongst Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-18.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5520

Jones, Bruce, and Alexandre Marc. 2021. *The New Geopolitics of Fragility: Russia, China and the Mounting Challenge for Peacebuilding.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

Jongerden, Joost, and Hamdi Akkaya. 2019. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Kurdish Political Parties in the 1970s. In *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds,* ed. Micheal M. Gunter, 270–80. New York: Routledge.

Karakoç, Ekrem and H. Ege Özen, 2020. Cultural and Political Demands of the "Kurdish street". In *Kurds in the Middle East: Enduring Problems and New Dynamics*, ed. Mehmet Gurses, Michael Gunter and David Romano, 21–47. London: Lexington Books.

Karakoç, Jülide. 2010. The Impact of the Kurdish Identity on Turkey's Foreign Policy from the 1980s to 2008. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46 (6): 919–42, DOI:10.1080/0026320-6.2010.520423

Kardaş, Tuncay, and Murat Yesiltaş. 2018. Rethinking Kurdish Geopolitical Space: The Politics of Image, Insecurity

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

12

and Gender. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30 (19): 1–27, DOI:10.1080/09557571.2017.1410098

Kentel, Ferhat and Hatem Ete. 2022. *Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik Algısı.* Ankara: Ankara Enstitüsü. https://ankaraenstitusu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/milliyetcilik_compressed.pdf, accessed 2 September 2022.

Knights, Micheal, and Wladimir van Wilgenburg. 2021. *Accidental Allies: US-Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State.* London and New York: I. B. Tauris.

Kroenig, Matthew. 2020. *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China.* London: Oxford University Press.

Kurban, Dilek. 2020. *Limits of Supranational Justice: The European Court of Human Rights and Turkey's Kurdish Conflict.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Lawrence, Quil. 2009. *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East.* London: Walker Books.

Lukov, Yaraslav, and Matt Murphy. 2022. Turkey threatens to block Finland and Sweden Nato bids. *BBC News*, May 17. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61472021, accessed 3 September 2022.

Macias, Amanda. 2020. US Sanctions Turkey Over Purchase of Russian S-400 Missile System. *CNBC*, December 15. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/14/us-sanctions-turkey-over-russian-s400.html, accessed 2 September 2022.

Mansour, Renad. 2021. *Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the State in Iraq.* Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-02-25-networks-of-power-mansour.pdf, 4 September 2022.

Matin, Kamran. 2020. Liminal Lineages of the Kurdish Question. *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)* 295 (summer). https://merip.org/2020/08/liminal-lineages-of-the-kurdish-question/, accessed 2 September 2022.

McDowall, David. 1996. *A Modern History of the Kurds.* London: I.B. Tauris.

McGurk, Brett. 2020. The Cost of an Incoherent Foreign Policy. *Foreign Affairs*, 22 January.

Olson, Robert W. 1989. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880–1925.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

O'Shea, M. Theresa. 2004. *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan.* London and New York: Routledge.

Ottaway, Marina. 2022. *United States Policy and the Kurdistan Referendum: Compounding the Problem.* Wilson Center. Viewpoint 114. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/114_ottaway_iraq_kurdistan_referendum.pdf, accessed 5 September 2022.

Phillips, David L. 2012. Looking for Friends in the Middle East: Try the Kurds. *Huffington Post*, September 26.

Phillips, David L. 2015. *The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East.* New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

PRIO. 2020. *Annual Report.* Oslo: Norwegian Peace Research Institute.

Rachman, Gideon. 2022. China and Russia Test the EU Power. *Financial Times*, January 17.

Rosen, Kenneth R. 2021. *Intra-Kurdish Unity Talks in Northeastern Syria Are Potentially in Jeopardy.* Washington Institute Fikra Forum. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pdf/view/16693/en, accessed 6 September 2022.

Savelsberg, Eva. 2019. The Kurdish PYD and the Syrian Civil War. In *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds.* ed. Micheal M. Gunter, 357-365 London & NY.: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Siccardi, Francesco. 2021. *How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy.* Carnegie Europe. September 2021. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Siccardi_-_Turkey_Syria-V3.pdf, accessed 6 September 2022.

Sosnowski, Piotr. 2022. Path Dependence from Proxy Agent to De Facto State: A History of 'Strategic Exploitation' of the Kurds as a Context of the Iraqi Kurdistan Security Policy. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-13.* doi:10.11576/ijcv-5688

Stansfield, Gareth, and Mohammed Shareef, ed. 2017. *The Kurdish Question Revisited.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Sunca, Yasin. 2022. *The Regional Kurdish Question in a Global World: Mentality, Politics, Geopolitical Dynamics.* Istanbul: Truth Justice and Memory Association Publications.

Tas, Latif. 2022. Kurdish Parallel Justice and Alternative Governmentality. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-12.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5691

Tastan, Kadri. 2022. *Decarbonising EU-Turkey energy cooperation: challenges and prospects.* (SWP Comment, 23/2022). Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C23

Taştekin, Fehim. 2022. *Perakh katliamı: Türkiye-Irak ilişkilerinde bir milat.* Al Monitor. July 23. https://www.al-monitor.com/tr/originals/2022/07/tourist-massacre-marks-turning-point-turkish-iraqi-ties, accessed 7 September 2022.

Tejel, Jordi. 2019. The Evolution of Kurdish Struggle in Syria: Between Pan-Kurdism and Syrianization 1920–2016. In *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds*, ed. Michael M. Gunter, 366–81. London and New York: Routledge.

Tuğrul, Barış. 2022. Rethinking Internal Colonialism: Radicalization of the Kurdish Movement in Turkey. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence 16: 1-13.* doi: 10.11576/ijcv-5713

TUIK. 2021. *İstatistiklerle Gençlik 2021.* Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TUIK) Haber Bülteni. no. 45634. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Genclik-2021-45634, accessed 8 September 2022.

Türkmen, Gülay. 2021. *Under the Banner of Islam: Turks, Kurds, and the Limits of Religious Unity.* New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197511817.001.0001

Türkyılmaz, Zeynep. 2019. Dersim Soykırımı Ve Kötülüğün Sıradanlığı. Agos, November 29. https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/23286/dersim-soykirimi-ve-kotulugun-siradanligi, accessed 5 September 2022.

United Nations. 2021. *Our Common Agenda; Report of the Secretary General.* 2021. New York, NY: United Nations.

IJCV: Vol. 16/2022
Gürbey, Yilmaz:
Geopolitical Shifts and Ethnic Conflicts: The Transnational Kurdish Conflict in the Contemporary Middle East

13

https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf, accessed 5 September 2022.

Ünver, H. Akın. 2016. Schrödinger's Kurds: Transnational Kurdish Geopolitics in the Age of Shifting Borders. *Journal of International Affairs* 69 (2): 65–98.

Wilgenburg, Wladimir van, and Mario Fumerton. 2015. *Kurdistan's Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshmerga Forces.* Carnegie Middle East Center. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ACMR_WilgenburgFumerton_Kurdistan_English_final.pdf, accessed 10 September 2022.

World Food Programme. 2022. *A Global Food Crisis.* Rome: World Food Programme. https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis, accessed 7 September 2022.

Yeğen, Mesut. 2022. Ethnopolitics to Geopolitics: The Turkish State and the Kurdish Question since 2015. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2022.2043146

Yılmaz, Arzu. 2018. The Changing Dynamics of the Kurdish Question. SWP Comment no.43. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2018C45_ylm.pdf, accessed 8 September 2022.