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## **The Kurdish struggle: Stand and Fight**

**History and contradictions: from the Treaty of Sèvres to  
the (III) Geneva peace talk**

Relatore

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Alla redazione dell'Intellettuale Dissidente, grandi amici, ottimi colleghi,  
compagni di un progetto importante;

## **The Kurdish struggle: Stand and Fight**

### **History and contradictions: from the Treaty of Sèvres to the (III) Geneva peace talk**

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Ahmad-i Khani's poem, *Mem-II-Zin*:

*Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians,  
The Kurds have become like towers.  
The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them.  
The Kurds are on all four corners.  
Both sides have made the Kurdish people  
Targets for the arrows of fate.  
They are said to be keys to the borders  
Each tribe forming a formidable bulwark.  
Whenever the Ottoman Sea [Ottomans] and Tajik Sea [persians]  
Flow out and agitate,  
The Kurds get soaked in blood  
Separating them [the Turks and Persians] like an isthmus.*

**Abstract**

The Kurdish cause achieved international notoriety only with the entry on the socio-political scene of the Turkish PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), to the point that the Kurds are usually confused and identified solely with it and with Turkey, in what is obviously a narrow and distorted view of the issue. The very ubiquity of the "Kurdish factor" in the various Middle East conflicts clearly shows the importance of this issue and how, over time, it continues to be a constant that is unlikely to be solve, at least until a solution is provided to create a new and lasting balance. In light of all these considerations and of those that will be here exposed, it will be clear that in order to outline an independent Kurdistan it is not enough that Turkey solves its internal Kurdish problem, or that Iraqi Kurdistan becomes even more independent, or that the Syrian Kurds constitute their own self-administrated areas (as, moreover, they began to do in the context of the Syrian civil war). Two factors are essential: first that all the kurds populations find a common path to be tread in armony; then, that those international actors which tapped the kurds at their advantage, now start to respect and reasonably treat all those kurds population who have been widely and solely used for their personal interests.

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## **Introduction: Kurdistan, the Kurds and International actors involved: An Overview**

For Kurdistan is intended an area wide about 450.000kmq, inhabited by ethnic Kurds, but divided between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Most of Kurdistan lies within Turkish borders, in an area of about 230.000kmq, which corresponds to the 30% of the turkish territory. “It is a strategically important area for oil wealth and water resources, but it finds itself in a situation of underdevelopment.”<sup>I</sup> This is due to a lack of political<sup>II</sup> and administrative unit. It is crucial to underline that 75% of Iraq’s oil comes

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<sup>I</sup> Casillo, M., 2006, “Per capire e non dimenticare: breve storia del Kurdistan”, Telematica per la Pace: <http://www.peacelink.it/conflicti/a/14329.html>

<sup>II</sup> For further informations: Randal, J.C. 1998, “I Curdi: Viaggio in un Paese che non c’è”, Editori Riuniti

from Kurdistan<sup>III</sup>. The only deposits of Turkey and the most important of Syria are in Kurdistan, and also in the Kermanshah area - Iranian territory inhabited by Kurds – there's a strong presence of this precious resource. Also, it is the necessary step of some important communication routes, such as between the Central Asian republics, in Iran and Turkey, and is located in the heart of one of the hottest points of world politics. The area's geopolitical position has greatly affected the vicissitudes of the Kurdish people, preventing political unity. "The Kurdish people are descended from the ancient medium (Medi), a population of Indo-Iranian origin, who headed Central Asia, around 614 BC, towards the mountains of Iran<sup>IV</sup>." The modern troubled story of the Kurds began at the beginning of the 19th century, when strong limitations were imposed by the Ottoman Empire. The desire for privileges, rights and autonomy from the side of Kurds led to riots that were targeted to the unification of the Kurdish people and its formal recognition. When you looked out the European powers that played a significant role in Kurdistan, it's easy to see that the area was exploited in the interests of Britain, France, Germany and Tsarist Russia, all focused in order to weaken the Ottoman Empire. With the first World War, which spelled the end of the great empires, it seemed possible the emergence of a Kurdish entity. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed August 10, 1920, stipulated that in eastern Anatolia was to be created an autonomous Kurdistan, as well as an independent state of Armenia. This time it was the ostracism of the nascent Turkish Republic that prevented the formation of a Kurdish autonomous state. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923 by Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece and Romania cancelled the Treaty of Sèvres. It was then that the territories inhabited by the population of Kurdish origin were divided between Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Thus, from 1921 to 1925, 25 million Kurds were dispersed in 5 nations becoming 5 minorities; the following years are therefore indelibly marked by this primordial division. The fact that the Kurds have been transformed into 5 different minorities inevitably makes a unique complex discussion of the issue. Therefore, to be able to give a picture as comprehensive as possible, and in order to present the actual role that this minority is interpreting in the syrian conflict while following their struggle for the proclamation of an independent state, it is necessary to present the different forms of indipendentism that Kurds developed

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<sup>III</sup> For further informations: Franza, M., 1999, "Kurdistan, Lo Stato Introvabile", Limes on-line: <http://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/kurdistan-lo-stato-introvabile?prv=true>

<sup>IV</sup> Casillo, M., 2006, "Per capire e non dimenticare: breve storia del Kurdistan", Telematica per la Pace: <http://www.peacelink.it/conflicti/a/14329.html>

depending on the sovereign state against which they fought, and still fight, for their autonomy. In order to outline the vicissitudes that from 1923 to the breakout of 2011 Syrian conflict shaped the Kurdish modern history the text here exposed will be supported and integrated not only with old reporter' witnesses in Kurdistan, as Jonathan C. Randal who met Barzani himself, or by books published by experts. The path of the Kurds, from 1923 to 2016, will be here presented in order to give a picture of the various possibilities tied to the proclamation of a Kurdish legitimate state in Middle East. To support all the thesis and facts exposed in the text every single chapter has been builded following journalists experts in Middle East conflicts as Alberto Negri (Il Sole 24 Ore), Gian Micalessin (Il Giornale), Fulvio Scaglione (Famiglia Cristiana) and many others, together with a due comparison with international organizations reports on the issue such as ISPI (Istituto per gli studi di Politica Internazionale) and Rudaw Media Network. The different stages here presented, from the Treaty of Sèvres and the division of Kurds into four nations to the Syrian conflict and the possibilities of the proclamation of a Kurdish legitimate entity, are hereby exposed with the intention to objectively pose questions on the Kurdish issue. When the Syrian conflict will be over – keeping into consideration the 12 September 2016 ceasefire<sup>V</sup> granted by the cooperation between U.S.A. and Russia – what will happen to the Kurdish minority, the only militia who fought the Islamic State with 'boots on the ground' and not just with coalition airstikes? A legitimate and proclaimed Federal Kurdish Region is actually possible to arise, or actors like Turkey and Iran will be too strong protesters to deal with? And which are the planes of the U.S.A., Israel and Europe?

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<sup>V</sup> For further informations: Iannuzzi, R., 2016 “Siria: perché è così difficile il cessate il fuoco di U.S.A. e Russia”, Il Fatto Quotidiano: <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/09/16/siria-perche-e-cosi-difficile-il-cessate-il-fuoco-di-russia-e-usa/3034884/>

## The Treaty of Sèvres

The Ottoman Empire was defeated by the Allies in 1918, and this marked the first step toward the beginning of a series of events that would have shaped the Middle East history, inevitably including the Kurds and their troubled vicissitudes. As David McDowall report, “after the end of WWI British forces occupied all Mesopotamia, including Kurdish areas in the proximities of Sulaymaniya and northwards to the east and north of Mosul<sup>VI</sup>.” The remaining Arab areas of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine “had also been lost in favour of the British and their Hashemite Arab allies. Apart from this, Allied plans for a peace settlement had included the dismemberment of the remaining Turkish parts of the old empire, allocating parts to Greece, Russia, Italy and France.”<sup>VII</sup> But this never occurred because of a geopolitical event that changed everything. Indeed the collapse of Tsarist Russia in 1917, and the internal upheaval inside Turkey - provoked by the collapse of Ottoman authority - rendered such plans impracticable. Therefore, France and Britain took the chance to impose their plans. From now on the strategic interests of these two nations shaped what would have been the Middle East that we know today. Historically French and English have often been entangled in this area of the world. “Even after WWI their focus was primarily with the Arab areas of the old empire, and it seemed that what they wanted to achieve was the completion of the principles of civilizations”<sup>VIII</sup> as proposed by the American President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Point Program for World Peace. Point twelve of which stated that the “non-turkish minorities of the Ottoman empire should have been assured an absolute and unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.”<sup>IX</sup> This - in view of the Armenian genocide that had only just taken place at the hands of the Ottoman authorities - it was undoubtedly an admirable sentiment, though one which was likely to excite unrealistic aspirations among the different and intermingled ethnic groups of the old empire. “The appeal to ethnicity implicit in point twelve had unsettling

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<sup>VI</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>VII</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>VIII</sup> Torelli, S.M., 2016, “Kurdistan: an invisible nation”, ISPI, online:

[http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN_TORELLI/KURDISTAN_TORELLI.pdf)

<sup>IX</sup> Torelli, S.M., 2016, “Kurdistan: an invisible nation”, ISPI, online:

[http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN_TORELLI/KURDISTAN_TORELLI.pdf)



implications for people used to living within a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional empire. Many, for example and in particular the aghas (honorific title for a civilian or military officer), still felt they were Sunni Muslim subjects of a Islamic empire marked by fundamentalism,<sup>x</sup> and had no interest in an unpredictable Kurdish entity in which their own status might have changed for the worse.

“The outcome of the Allies’ deliberations and intentions was the Treaty of Sèvres, signed reluctantly by the Ottomans in August 1920.”<sup>XI</sup> But what was the content of this treaty? It can be summarised with a look to the Art. 62:

“A Commission Sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II. (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made to the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.”<sup>XII</sup>

This step forward for Kurds, in theory, represented what they have always been asking throughout history. “It promised interim autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas of Turkey with a view to full independence if the inhabitants of these areas wanted this”<sup>XIII</sup>, including those falling within the British-occupied province of Mosul. The Treaty of Sèvres was the nearest the Kurdish people ever got to statehood. However, “while many Kurds today look back ruefully to the failure to implement the treaty, it is

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<sup>x</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>XI</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>XII</sup> Torelli, S.M., 2016, “Kurdistan: an invisible nation”, ISPI, online:

[http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN_TORELLI/KURDISTAN_TORELLI.pdf)

<sup>XIII</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

more than likely that the proposal would have triggered new conflicts”<sup>XIV</sup>, mostly between the Kurds and those other groups, notably surviving Armenians and also the Assyrian Christians, which aspired to a path to be tread on their own, and whose lands overlapped and intermingled with areas where Muslim Kurds predominated. Furthermore, one must ask whether the proposal would have not also triggered conflicts between rival Kurdish tribes, each probably eager to achieve predominance first in its own area and then in the whole Kurdish region. “One can also envisage the tension between *aghās* and others subscribing to the traditional social order who ruled the passing of the old order”<sup>XV</sup> on the one hand, and the intellectual progressives who hoped to forge a new nation on the other. “Furthermore, given that the outcome would have probably been an entity in which tribal identity remained fundamental, neighbouring states would have found it tempting to entice any dissident and repress *aghās* in a case of rebellion.”<sup>XVI</sup> In any case, the possibility for such a state never occurred, since a Turkish officer, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), repudiated his government’s submission at Sèvres, raised the flag of revolt in the name of the Muslims of Anatolia, and drove out the Christian forces in the west, in Greece, and the east, in the Armenians and Soviets provinces. “Many Kurdish *aghās* and their tribes willingly helped Atatürk in this task, in the belief that they were fighting for the Muslim Patrimony in which they had a share.”<sup>XVII</sup> When victory was achieved, however, and the borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran were stabilized, they found their prospects, as with their Kurdish sister communities elsewhere, greatly altered. “The one common feature in the new states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran was the determination of their governments to compel Kurdish submission to essentially non-Kurdish but ethnically nationalist governments.”<sup>XVIII</sup> It was a recipe for recurring conflicts.

## Kurds in Turkey

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<sup>XIV</sup> McDowall, D., 1992, pg 23-24 “Kurds: a contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>XV</sup> McDowall, D., 1992, pg 24-26 “Kurds: a contemporary overview”. Routledge

<sup>XVI</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>XVII</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

<sup>XVIII</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S., 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

With the victory in Turkey by Atatürk, in 1923, it was asserted the principle of the unity of a secularized Turkish state; an ideology of this kind made the existence of the Kurdish ethnic group in the Turkish state an irreconcilable dichotomy, feeding, therefore, a relationship far from peaceful. The abolition of the Sultanate in 1922 and the Caliphate in 1924 symbolized the end of the world order in which Kurdish society had a place. “It challenged the role of the *aghas* as secular leaders, and of the *shaykhs* as religious ones”<sup>XIX</sup>, in that the new Republic was explicitly secular. It has only recently come to light that Atatürk toyed with the idea of autonomy for the Kurds in 1923, but the idea was never discussed publicly, not to say implemented. And indeed in those ‘hot years’ – in the 1920s and 1930s – there were repeated and virulent revolts by the Kurds against the constraints of the new order. These revolts were very useful to study the different attitudes of the various Kurdish minorities, and in fact they represent one of the modern examples of how fragmented is the nature of the Kurdish society. At that time there was no such thing as a sense of national unity between them; this became clear when it was recognized that their revolts were often not made up by different Kurdish groups, but instead were more independent acts of rebellion against an oppressor, easily to stifle and neutralize. The different Kurdish tribes weren’t tied at all, thing that can’t be said about the government’s against which they were (and still) fighting. The response of the Turkish government to these violent revolts arrived immediately and mercilessly. Their officials planned to execute all the Kurds’ leaders and to raze offending villages while deporting their inhabitants out of the area. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds lost their lives during the repression. One of the most terrible theatre of this destruction was the Dersin region of central eastern Anatolia, which we now call Tunceli region: it was almost wiped out and the civilians went close to a complete extermination. Then, after the end of the WWII, in 1946 Turkey decided to take the democratic path and consequently its focus were primarily on the development of a new and renewed political system and on the aftermaths of the war. For this reason it loosened the country’s military repression and Kurdistan strove to take this opportunity. While Turks were

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<sup>XIX</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S. 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

busy in rebuilding a new nation<sup>XX</sup>, Kurdish people built schools and hospitals and the big previous Kurdish owners were called home and got back their assets. But this hint of relative positive times ended with the coup of 1960, when Turkish that have revolted against the legitimate junta decided to “close some 500 Kurds in a concentration camp, exile other 10, exclude any right to the Kurdish detainees, and to replace with Turkish names all Kurdish places’ names”<sup>XXI</sup>. The new Constitution of ‘61 recognized citizens fundamental freedoms, but considered the integrity of the state an absolute priority, rule that will always be interpreted in concrete by subtracting the Kurds their independence. In the second half of the ‘60s the Kurdish nationalist movement was organized in revolutionary parties, like the Socialist Party of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, who fought for democracy in Turkey and self-determination for the Kurdish people<sup>XXII</sup>. In 1971, with the second military intervention, it was established the martial law in certain Kurdish provinces and thousands of people – including women and children - were arrested and detained in horrible conditions and subjected to torture and violence. In the ‘80s arrests and torture against the Kurdish population were carried out sistematically, guilty of being born in that specific minority and to ask for their own self-determination. Precisely in the ‘80s it was outlined that Turkish policy towards the Kurds which to all effects reflect the one in use nowadays; in other words, the basic assumptions that represent and explain the turkish attitude towards the Kurds are as follows:

1. There are no national minorities in Turkey, and consequently the Kurds are not considered as such;
2. The Kemalist principle of integrity of the State, which emphatically say that “the Republic and the turkish people is an indelible foundation of the Constitution”
3. The security forces must enjoy total impunity for their behavior in

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<sup>XX</sup> For further informations: Torelli, S.M., 2016, “Kurdistan: an invisible nation”, ISPI, online:

[http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN_TORELLI/KURDISTAN_TORELLI.pdf)

<sup>XXI</sup> McDowall, D, 2007, “A modern history of the Kurds, L.B. Tauris

<sup>XXII</sup> For futher informations: Ozcan, A.K., 2006, “Kurds: A theoretical analysis”, Routledge

the Kurdish region, subject to the state of emergency, which are managed by the National Security Council, without any parliamentary interference.<sup>XXIII</sup>

This is the framework in which the Kurdish rebel movement in Turkey has developed, and more precisely in two directions. On the one hand the nationalist wing, represented by the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, that demanded autonomy. While, on the other hand, the most extremist wing, composed by socialists, that claimed independence. The '70s, eventually, saw the birth and the structuring of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, whose main purpose was, and still is, the recognition of the language and of Kurdish rights. Its founder and leader was Abdullah Ocalan, but his people used to call him "Apo", which in Kurdish means uncle. The party plan was outlined during the founding congress of the PKK, on November 27, 1978. Its revolutionary project involved two phases:

1. An initial phase of national revolution, namely the creation of a Kurdish Marxist republic in Turkish territory, in order to achieve the unification of single and formal recognized Kurdistan, and,<sup>XXIV</sup>
2. A second phase, the democratic revolution, which should have provided for the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat capable to eliminate the exploitation system of the landowners<sup>XXV</sup>

In total contraposition to the sentiment that was spreading at that time, the Turkish Constitution of 1982 was declared. It prohibited the use of the Kurdish language and criminalized any expression that was even close to remember Kurdish identity. As Kreyenbroek puts it, since then, "the PKK began its armed struggle against the central power, creating a growing unease even within the same Kurdish population and giving the opportunity to the government to label the Kurdish problem as a problem of

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<sup>XXIII</sup> McDowall, D., 2007, "A modern history of the Kurds", L.B. Tauris

<sup>XXIV</sup> McDowall, D., 2007, "A modern history of the Kurds", L.B. Tauris

<sup>XXV</sup> McDowall, D., 2007, "A modern history of the Kurds", L.B. Tauris

terrorism.”<sup>XXVI</sup> As today it is in most of the the world. The turkish government has never agreed to consider the PKK as a popular movement, but simply as a terrorist organization that operates with intimidation and violence, and it has always tried to solve the Kurdish problem from an economic point of view avoiding the ethno-national question. Therefore, the violence went on. The Liberation Army of Kurdistan, a branch of the PKK, continued on the road of the bombings and the turkish government continued on the road of condemnation and ostracism. Many international organizations publicly warned the turkish government, calling for a peaceful resolution of the struggle for self-determination of the Kurds. But this happend only when the story of the Kurds became famous and began to appear on the newspapers or on televisions. This international character was achieved in 1998, thanks to the PKK leader Ocalan, which drove from Syria the armed campaigns since 1984. Then he was forced to flee first to Moscow and later in Rome. Abdullah Ocalan was later extradited under the D’Alema administration, sold by Kenyan officials to Turkey, and, in 1999, sentenced to death in Kenya. He never faced the death sentence anyway, and he is still imprisoed under regime of strict surveillance in the prison situated on the Imrali island. The conflict between Turkish government forces and the PKK has in fact lost momentum at the time of the capture of Ocalan, but the Kurdish question is still unresolved and repression of Kurds in the southeast of the country continues.

### **Kurds in Iraq**

In the 1921 it was discussed, in occasion of the Cairo Conference, the future Arab state of Iraq. Since then the British government’s Middle East Department have raise their voice to express their thoughts about the issue, a memorandum wrote at that time is proof of their belief: “We are strongly of the opinion that purely Kurdish areas should not be included in the Arab state of Mesopotamia, but that the principles of Kurdish unity and

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<sup>XXVI</sup> Kreyenbroek, P.G. & Sperl, S. 1992, “Kurds: A contemporary overview”, Routledge

nationality should be promoted as far as possible.”<sup>XXVII</sup> Even Winston Churchill -that in those years were heading the Colonial Office - expressed his view, that later on it would have revealed as truthful as only him recognized in those years. Churchill prophetically predicted that an “Arab leader in Iraq would ignore the Kurdish sentiment and oppress the Kurdish minority”<sup>XXVIII</sup>. So even for his contribution it was decided to keep Kurdistan under separate administration headed by a British High Commissioner. The High Commissioner in Iraq, Sir Percy Cox, was convinced to incorporate the Kurdish areas into an eventual Arab state. His line of thought was shared by the new Arab King of Iraq, Emir Faisal, chosen by the British and shuddering to consolidate his weak support and authority. Cox continued his rethoric to press for the incorporation of the Kurdish minority, but eventually, fuelled by fears of renewed Turkish claims on the area, even Churchill agreed in October 1921. As Yildiz remember, “He accepted that the Kurdish areas should have been included in Iraq and should have participated in the National Assembly, although still on condition of local autonomy.”<sup>XXIX</sup> After various vicissitudes the League of Nations accepted the Commission’s recommendation against partition of the area and decided in favour of attaching Mosul to Iraq. Another recipe for conflicts was being created. The modern history of the Kurds resistance in Iraq started in the ‘60s. As Casillo puts it, “The Kurdish separatist movement was organized in the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and has been conducting since 1961 his fight against the regime of Saddam Hussein”<sup>XXX</sup>, who against Kurdish villages in northern Iraq has adopted techniques of brutal repression, even using chemical weapons, causing one hundred thousand deaths and two and a half million refugees. From 1961 to 1975, the scene is dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mustafa Barzani<sup>XXXI</sup>, a tribal leader who died in 1979 and who was succeeded by his son Massoud. A Barzani has always opposed the leftist intelligentsia led by Jalal Talabani, who in 1975 founded the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Iraqi Kurdistan is and independent and federal entity subject to the government of Iraq, it has it’s own army and

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<sup>XXVII</sup> Yildiz, K., 2004, “The Kurds in Iraq: the past, present and future”, Pluto Press

<sup>XXVIII</sup> McDowall, D, 2007, “A modern history of the Kurds”, L.B. Tauris

<sup>XXIX</sup> Yildiz, K., 2004, “The Kurds in Iraq: the past, present and future”, Pluto Press

<sup>XXX</sup> Casillo, M., 2006, “Per capire e non dimenticare: breve storia del Kurdistan”,

Telematica per la Pace: <http://www.peacelink.it/conflicti/a/14329.html>

<sup>XXXI</sup> For further informations: Negri, A., “Il Sole 24 Ore”, online:

<http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2016-08-24/la-doppia-guerra-erdogan-contro-l-isis-e-curdi--203227.shtml?uuid=ADviem9>

economic policy and host six million people. The Kurdish Regional Government is the product of cooperation between the KPD and the PUK, the two historical parties that represent the interests of the two ‘clans’, Barzani and Taliban. The civil war between them ends with the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Nowadays, Turkish aviation regularly bomb the bases of the PKK situated in Iraqi Kurdistan, even in this at least ambiguous context the Barzani and Turkey leaders have a relative good relationship, mainly related to oil extraction. One of the reason may be also that Iraqi Kurdistan, and his army composed of the peshmerga, are considered by the United States an important and reliable ally. Western involvement in Kurdish affairs has increased exponentially in the last 25 years mostly because of political developments in Iraq. Indeed this country has always had issues with Western countries and the Kurds minority, and this is the reason why U.S. started to approach a closer engagement in Kurdish politics. It is also due noting that Western interactions has occurred with Kurds in northern Iraq a lot more than with the other Kurdish communities; they have always represented a great and strategic ally. The strong interest towards Kurds began in the 90’s, following Saddam Hussein’s genocidal attacks against the Kurdish minority that occurred in the 80’s, as international media focus the attention on the dramatic situation of this Middle East ethnic minority. However, even if the U.S.A. used Kurds against Iraq during the war against Iran in the 1980s<sup>xxxii</sup>, eventually they backed the authority of the Iraq’s government and leaved the Kurds to their own destiny<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Following the Iraqi army’s attacks against the Kurds in 1991 the U.S., UK and France imposed a no-fly zone over northern Iraq to permit the enormous flow of Kurdish refugees into Turkey, in order to create a humanitarian area in that portion of Iraq. After the 1991 war, the U.S. and its allies supported the establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, effectively establishing the Kurdish de facto self-government which continues today. U.S. used the excuse of Iraqi chemical attacks against the Kurds in 1988 as a pretext to declare war<sup>xxxiv</sup>. The strong performance of the Kurds in the war and their demonstration of loyalty to the U.S. earned greater U.S. commitment to them in its aftermath.

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Yildiz, K., 2004, “The Kurds in Iraq: the past, present and future”, Pluto Press

<sup>xxxiii</sup> For further informations: Torelli, S.M., 2016, pg 35-40 “Kurdistan: an invisible nation”, ISPI, online:

[http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI/KURDISTAN\\_TORELLI.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/EBook/KURDISTAN_TORELLI/KURDISTAN_TORELLI.pdf)

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Negri, A., 2016, “Blair e il falcone di Saddam”, Il Sole 24 ore, online:

<http://www.lintellettualeedissidente.it/rassegna-stampa/blair-e-il-falcone-di-saddam/>



The Kurds were rewarded through gaining a major role in the Iraqi affairs and a stronger autonomous government in the new settlement imposed by the U.S. on Iraq in 2005. Despite the strength of the U.S.- Kurdish alliance, in 2006-2008 U.S. opposed to independence, fearing it would have undermined the project of rebuilding Iraq. Therefore, both parties ended unsatisfied. The relationship grew stonger with another important change in stance of U.S. policy, which occured in the summer of 2014. At the time Islamic State (IS) was collecting various victories at the expense of the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army persuaded the U.S. and its allied to carry out airstrikes against IS stations. Kurdistan Region was exposed to IS military advance and Erbil, the capital city, was vulnerable. Military actions by the U.S., France, Australia and UK still continues in 2016 and have proved to be crucial for the Kurdistan's defence; Peshmerga militias then managed to reconquer some of the territories taken by IS. The position of the U.S. is often ambiguos: while americans have supported, for instance, the self-determination in South Sudan and in Kosovo, they do not support independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. U.S. surely are surely more close to Kurdish than Iraqi principles, but the reason why is also the reason that obstacle the proclamation of a national Kurdish entity: Kurdish principles of democracy are indeed and yet far from being accepted or developed in Middle East. Therefore, even if Kurdish militias proved to be of crucial importance in defeating the IS forces, they won't receive anything as a payback, or at least not want they have been asked since 1918.

### **Kurds in Iran**

In Iran the Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is fighting against the regime in Tehran since 1972, in a war that has caused so far about seventeen thousand deaths<sup>xxxv</sup>. The Kurds are about six million, mostly Sunni Muslims. The collapse of imperial power, with the Khomeini revolution (1979), and the crisis that followed before the stabilization of the Islamic regime, have constrained Iranian Kurds to gather in what became the PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan), an institution which aim was to achieve autonomy and rights, not independence.

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<sup>xxxv</sup> For further informations: Taysi, T.B., & Yildiz, K., 2007, "The Kurds in Iran", Pluto Press

Obviously the Shiite power has rejected any request of recognition and began a repression. This war in two years caused about ten thousands deaths. “In the following years the leaders of PDKI Ghassemlou developed a geopolitical relationship with Saddam Hussein”<sup>xxxvi</sup> – who at the time was the rampart of the West against the fundamentalist regime of Iran – in order to help each other against a common enemy.

Nowadays, the goal of the Iranian Kurds leaders is to convince European countries to put pressure on Iran’s power to ensure an end to the state of siege (which sees the presence of 150,000 military) that stifles the Iranian Kurdistan.

It is very likely - and so desired by many - that a stabilization of the situation in Iraq could also lead to an improvement in conditions of Kurds in Iran and Turkey, a country with the biggest Kurdish minority and in which the struggle between the army and militants of the different Kurdish factions is more lasting and bloody.

### **Syrian Kurds militias against the Islamic State**

The stance of Western actors towards Kurds in Syria have shifted many times since 2014 and remain in evolution. Until the break up of the Syrian civil war the Kurdish national movement in this area was the least internationally recognized between the four Kurdish movements. The revolts against Bashar Al-Assad’s regime in 2011 and Syria’s subsequent path into a long and violent war has provided an unprecedented opportunity for Kurds. “In 2012 Kurds took control of three areas in northern Syria, where the majority of the population were already Kurdish, and established an autonomous administration called Western Kurdistan, otherwise known as Rojava.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> The YPG (People’s Protection Units) Kurdish militia has proved as a crucial actor in resisting and pushing back the Islamic State forces<sup>xxxviii</sup>. One of the most strong example of cooperation occurred during the siege of the town of Kobane. Indeed thanks to U.S. led airstrikes

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> Taysi, T.B., & Yildiz, K., 2007, “The Kurds in Iran”, Pluto Press

<sup>xxxvii</sup> McDowall, D, 2007, “A modern history of the Kurds”, L.B. Tauris

<sup>xxxviii</sup> For further informations: Negri, A., 2016, “Dai datteri al gas come ricostruire un Medio Oriente all’anno zero”, Il Sole 24 ore, online:

<http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2016-09-06/dai-datteri-gas-come-ricostruire-medio-oriente-all-anno-zero-192734.shtml?uuid=ADIfU6FB>

Kurds regained the territories lost in favour of IS forces, and today there is infact a small U.S. military presence in Kurdish area coordinating the support and providing advice. But the West has not always provided military support to the Kurds, and the reason why lies in the Turkey presence on the Syrian northern boarder. Turkey cannot accept the presence of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in its souther boarder because is a group closely related to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) against which Turkey has been conducting war following the Kemalist principles of the Turkish state. Turkey rejects the legitimacy of the Rojava administration and strongly oppose any form of Kurdish autonomy in Syria. In August 2016 Turkey, with the excuse of striking the IS bases, has crossed the boarder to fight the Kurdish forces and prevent the formation of an independent an autonomous Kurdish region in the area between Syria and Turkey. Western powers are not supporting the Kurdish because the goal of the United Nations peace talks is to maintain a national unity government that keeps Syria united. One outcome of Western reluctance to move closer to the Syrian Kurds is that Russia has been able to step in, in 2015-2016, and forge an alliance to be part of its military intervention in Syria to support the Assad Regime. The Kurds haven't many allies and therefore welcome international support; and if support is given by Russia, a country which wasn't on good terms with Turkey because of the downing of the SU-24 russian Jet, Kurds appreciate even more.

### **Kurdish Resistance again the Islamic State in Syria: The episode of the liberation of Al Hasakah as a summary of the Syrian War**

The Syrian issue is so unusual and tangled, that even before the war ends it is already possible to point out the consequences of the immediate post-war period; therefore even if weapons in the country have not yet finished to fire and even if the Damascus government has successfully regained a strong position, is possible to glimpse the chaotic situation that will occur when the terrorists of Al Baghdadi will be forced out of the area.

The skirmishes that have arisen between Kurds and Syrian with increasing frequency and intensity particularly in the Al Hasakah<sup>XXXIX</sup> province, represent nothing but the effects caused by the ambiguos and contradictory

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<sup>XXXIX</sup> For further informations: <http://www.globalist.it/world/articolo/204539/nuovo-fronte-in-siria-scontri-curdi-lealisti-ad-al-hasakah.html>

alliances that have been builded up to fight ISIS. Indeed, now that the caliphate is imploding, is possible to see the effects of those contradictions. In the above-mentioned province, during the period of the greatest expansion of the Islamic State, Al-Baghdadi's militias have threatened the capital and so the Kurds, who live in this area of Syria, formed the coalition known today by the acronym SDF. As Indelicato puts it "The objective was to begin the advanced that has led, in August 2016, to the capture of Mambij."<sup>XL</sup> Al Hasakah city however is not entirely Kurdish, so the legitimate central syrian government has managed to mantain a significative number of soldier who control much of the neighborhoods.

Except for a few isolated fights, from 2013 to 2015 coexistence between Kurds and Syrians remained relatively calm. Anyway it has always been obvious that this area would have been, someday, theatre of contrasts. Two opposite aims collide, inevitably destabilizing the harmony in the zone: on the one hand the will to erect a Federate Kurdish Region, while on the other hand the will of Damascus' forces to restore the status quo prior to the conflict. The relationship between Kurds and the Syrian government was totally ruined when in the Summer of 2016 the Kurdish forces, supported by U.S.A. airstrikes, tried to took control of villages and territories where the majority of the population is of Arab origin.

Even if the SDF includes in its forces Syrian troops not loyal to Bashar Al-Assad, the Arabs within these militias began to rebel against Kurdish claims to a significative enlargement of their autonomous zone. Mambij itself, despite hosting a strong Kurdish component, has always been considered as a city of Arab customs and traditions. The crumble of the Alliance between the forces loyal to Al-Assad and the Kurds militias has lead to dangerous close encounters between the U.S. and Russia. This is because the Syrian Army, which have the aim of defending the Al-Hasakah city from the Kurdish invasion, has used its Jet and heavy artillery in order to resist the SDF attacks, and in these skirmishes few bombings were carried out very close to the American Bases in the province. The U.S.A. response was to menace the Damascus Regime of downing their Jets, if it had continued to send its Air Forces above Al Hasakah. If this situation was occurred, Russia, that defend the Syrian Army, would have reacted in a way that, with all probabilities, would have led to more destabilization. Therefore the vicissitudes occured in Al Hasakah represent the firsts informations of how the postwar period will be. On the one hand the Regime of Damascus that

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<sup>XL</sup> Indelicato, M. 2016, "L'isis a Manbij non ha combattuto", Gli Occhi della Guerra, online: <http://www.occhidellaguerra.it/isis-a-manbij-non-ha-combattuto/>

want a unitary State; on the other hand the Kurdish forces inhabiting the Rojava that ask for more autonomy and less dependence from the Central Syrian Government. In the middle, there are all the interests of the international entities involved: U.S.A. which uses the Kurdish forces both against ISIS and Assad; Iran which opposes the proclamation of a Federate Syrian Government; Russia that on its part agrees to the formation of a legitimate Kurdish entity; and Turkey, that will do anything to impede a Kurdish State along its south border.

### **The Security Council of the United Nations denies the Kurdish counterparts to participate to the Geneva Peace Talks: consequences of the absence of Kurds in discussing the Syrian question**

The Geneva peace talks on Syria, also known as Geneva III, are intended peace negotiations between the Syrian government and opposition actors and were taken in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations. The talks, prepared by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in order to resolve the Syrian Civil War, although formally started on 1 February 2016 have been eventually suspended only three days later, on 3 February 2016. UN envoy Vitaly Churkin reported that Russia's proposal to include Kurds in Geneva Syrian talks was vetoed by the UN Security Council's Western members, and commented that this action contradicts UN resolutions on Syrian reconciliation and ignores calls for inclusive talks<sup>XLI</sup>. Churkin warned that if the Syrian Kurds did not participate in the peace process, then international efforts to bring peace to Syria would have been undermined: "We are concerned that the Syrian Kurds, historically woven into the social fabric of the country, still have not been invited to the Geneva talks," he said, pointing out that by not inviting the Kurds the West was violating the spirit of inclusiveness for the Syrian talks which should have been one of the basic principles in the UN Security Council resolutions on Syria. The Russian Foreign Ministry has said that the UN's blocking of the participation of the Syrian Kurds in peace talks has been made "in order to please several regional players"<sup>XLII</sup>. The Foreign Ministry added: "It is

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<sup>XLI</sup> For further informations, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

<sup>XLII</sup> Russia Today, 2016, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

evident that this has been done to please some of the regional players, for which ambitions are more important than the real stabilization of the situation in Syria.”<sup>XLIII</sup> In March 2016 even Special UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura advocated the participation of the Syrian Kurds in the Geneva talks in order to make them “as inclusive as possible”, warning that fragmentation of Syria into smaller breakaway states would have been unsustainable. In an interview released to the Swiss *Le Temps* newspaper, the UN envoy to Syria added: “The Syrian Kurds are an important component of the country, so we need to find a formula in which they are able to express an opinion on the constitution and the governance of the country.”<sup>XLIV</sup> The subsequent escalation led some Kurds to declare the federation of the region they control in northern Syria, calling it the “Federation of Northern Syria.” Idris Nassan, an official in the foreign affairs directorate of Kobani (a city in the Aleppo province controlled by the Kurdish militia since 2012) told to *Russia Today* in an interview: “Syria’s Kurds have a long history of opposition and a long history of struggle for the legitimate rights of their people in this country.”<sup>XLV</sup> What Nassan stressed was that despite the Kurds seem to desire for more independence from Damascus, in practice this is not what the majority of Kurds actually want. Indeed what Kurds really wanted to achieve was a federalization of Syria supported by international actors. The issue lies in that the Syrian federal government immediately denounced the move, calling it a direct threat to the principles of integrity of the country: a federalization would have undermined the Syrian constitution as well as international law. The Syrian Ambassador to Russia Riyad Haddad said: “When one speaks of the federalization of our country, this directly threatens the integrity of our country, runs counter to the Constitution, contradicts the national concepts, even is at variance with the international resolutions and decisions, so all statements of the kind are illegitimate.”<sup>XLVI</sup> At the present time, however, Syrian Kurds control an area stretching approximately 400 kilometers along the Syria-Turkey border, together with a section of the northwestern border in the Afrin area.

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<sup>XLIII</sup> *Russia Today*, 2016, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

<sup>XLIV</sup> *Russia Today*, 2016, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

<sup>XLV</sup> Interview, Nassan, I., *Russia Today*, 2016, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

<sup>XLVI</sup> Interview Haddad, R., *Russia Today*, 2016, online: <https://www.rt.com/news/338566-west-blocks-kurds-syria-talks/>

## **Political Project: Democratic Confederalism**

In the Turkish Kurdistan and in the Rojava region (Syria), there's an ongoing and tirelessly political and cultural revolution that aim at creating a new society, democratic and libertarian. The idea, developed by the american libertarian ecologist Murray Bookchin, is to build a system of Democratic Confederalism<sup>XLVII</sup>. The Kurds renominated this project Democratic Radicalism: their proposal consist of abandoning the concept of 'Nation State' while endowing themselves with a political, economical and social structure which base itself on the development of those government instruments conferred by the direct democracy. Particurlarly in Rojava, the vast area of Syrian territory that we mentioned above, which confine with Turkey at North and with Iraq at East, there's an ongoing attempt to create an autonomous federal regional government.

After the break down of the sirian civil war and the abandoning of the area by the regime forces of the legitimate president Bashar Al-Assad, it became possible to organize the remaining population in autonomous political and social assemblies which began to self-govern themselves. They dealt and still dealing with issue of different natures: economic, self-defense therefore security, production and distribution of primary goods. These sort of assemblies didn't represent only a concrete possibility for the Kurdish minority to proof that they can mantain and lead a confederal democratic government, but most of all revealed as last fighting banners to the spread of the feared militias of the self proclaimed Islamic State; in the city of Kobane in 2015, also thanks to U.S. air raids, Kurds blocked the series of military successes of Isis (or IS)<sup>XLVIII</sup>. Despite the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Kurds representants affirm that the Democratic Confederalism has been adopted and accepted by the majority of the population inhabiting Rojava.

Even from the economic point of view, the collettivist system that found its strongholds on social and agricultural services seem to be the best option for a population that have never lived in an economic regime, mercilessly capitalist and advanced. The destabilization caused by the war and the

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<sup>XLVII</sup> For further informations: online: <http://www.fdca.it/paesi/turchia/kurdistan-confederalismodemocratico.htm>

<sup>XLVIII</sup> For further informations: Negri, A., 2016, online: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2016-09-05/la-turchia-allontana-l-isis-suoi-confine-tiene-curdi-sotto-scacco-105606.shtml?uuid=ADZZtAFB> , Il Sole 24 Ore

consequent fact that most of the population, both women and men since kurdish women are notorious for they braveness in combat, is busy in the war fronts, leave doubts on the concrete possibility that this socio-political experiment will resist in future, when the conflict will be over and Syria will be finally ready to begin its reconstruction (both metaphorical and concrete).

## **Conclusion**

The first concrete possibility for the Kurdish minority too see a legitimized Kurdish state occurred in 1918 and died in the occasion of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Even if today Kurds look regretful at those years the reality is that they wouldn't have been able to manage themselves in a unitary political entity. The main causes that teared apart the Kurdish dream of a unitary state which should have included all the Kurds dispersed in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria are to be found in their modern history, their actual international play and also in the stance that the various political actors adopted over time towards the Kurdish minority<sup>XLIX</sup>. The purpose of the arguments discussed above is to frame what will be the near future of this ethnic minority; they have always represented a strong ally to the Western powers, from the war against Saddam to the modern conflict against the militias of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) (one of the most notorious episode is the liberation of Kobane), but this never grant them a beneficial relationship with western actors. Kurds took advantage of the tumultuos situation occurred in the Syrian conflict and strove to carve out a portion of Syrian territory, namely Rojava region. Here they proclaimed the Kurdish Regional Government, harming de facto the integrity of the legitimate Syrian government lead by Bashar Al-Assad. Kurdistan with all probabilities will never become an internationally recognized State, but this

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<sup>XLIX</sup> For further informations: Scaglione, F. 2016, "Il Patto con il Diavolo", BUR



do not bother Kurds as we may think, because they know that at the time what would be a more wise decision is to continue to develop their project of Democratic Confederalism actually adopted in the Rojava region. As history taught, western allies are essential to pursue and reach personal goals. At the present time there are two main actors which would do anything to prevent the formation of a legitimized kurdish front in Syria: Turkey, which despite its good relationship with the Iraqi Kurdistan for oil resources would not accept another Kurdish entity right along its border; and Iran, which historically oppose to the proclamation of what would be a Kurdish Secular State. The U.S.A. and Russia, main foreign actors acting in the Syrian conflict, support the Kurdish cause but are not really eager to sacrifice their precious ties with Turkey, Iran and the other regional actors in Middle East. The chance of the Kurdish people should shrink in hoping that a Regional Federal Government lead by a Kurdish legitimized authority could in some way benefit at least one of the main actors involved in the Syrian conflict. As was exposed above, the different forms of revolts and the different Kurdish movements that have arisen in Turkey, Iran and Iraq shows how different the kurdish minorities really are, and how they could never be grouped under one single unitary state. Indeed what would be actually achievable is an international legitimation of the Kurdish Regional Government, that today is yet performing its actions in the north-east of Syria, that in this way would grant the Kurdish people another important point of reference earned fighting a war, the one against IS, which was not properly their but of the western powers who have triggered it.

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### **Kurdistan: una nazione divisa in quattro**

La causa curda è riuscita a guadagnare la notorietà internazionale di cui siamo testimoni oggi solo negli ultimi anni. Questo è stato possibile, in particolar modo, grazie alle battaglie intraprese in Turchia dal PKK (Partito dei Lavoratori Curdi), di fatto considerato da Ankara e dagli stati occidentali come un'organizzazione terroristica. Spesso i curdi sono identificati unicamente con il PKK e con la Turchia, anche se le comunità curde sono presenti in gran numero anche in Iran, Iraq e Siria; tutte con diversi rapporti tra loro e con i rispettivi governi ospitanti. I curdi, divisi negli stati appena elencati a seguito del Trattato di Losanna e del suo effetto abrogativo rispetto quello di Sèvres, nella storia sono spesso stati in contatto con le forze occidentali: dalla guerra tra Iran e Iraq fino all'odierna lotta contro le milizie dello Stato Islamico. Si sono dimostrati fedeli alleati dell'occidente, ma nonostante questo, una volta finito il loro compito, sono sempre stati lasciati soli a combattere per le loro cause, tra cui, la più importante, la formazione di uno Stato curdo in Medio Oriente. Oggi, nel mondo, i curdi sono conosciuti grazie al loro ruolo nel conflitto contro lo Stato Islamico; simbolo del loro coraggio è la liberazione della città di Kobane. Alla luce della storia moderna dei curdi, che è stata brevemente esposta nella tesi per inquadrare l'attitudine degli attori internazionali nei confronti di questa minoranza, e consapevoli delle divisioni interne alla popolazione curda sviluppate e acuite dalla dispersione in quattro stati, le domande che questo scritto vuole porre sono le seguenti: 1) E' possibile che nel caos causato dal conflitto esploso in Siria nel 2011 i curdi, dopo essersi già ritagliati una regione autonoma di nome Rojava all'interno del territorio siriano, riescano a consolidare la loro autonomia e a ricevere legittimità internazionale? 2) La formazione di uno stato curdo è possibile? In caso di risposta negativa, le motivazioni sono da ricercare in paesi avversi alla causa curda come Iran e

Turchia, o vanno piuttosto individuate all'interno della popolazione curda stessa, che ha dimostrato di avere divisioni sociali troppo grandi per potersi riunire sotto un unico stato? Per presentare uno scritto aggiornato sull'attuale situazione dei curdi e sulle possibilità che il loro esperimento in Rojava si consolidi, lo scrittore si è affidato non solo ad autorevoli manoscritti di esperti in maniera per quanto concerne Medio Oriente e Kurdistan, ma anche e soprattutto a testimonianze sul campo, come quella del reporter Jonathan C. Randal che conobbe di persona Abdullah Ocalan (leader e fondatore del PKK), e quelle dei maggiori esperti di Medio Oriente come Alberto Negri (Il Sole 24 Ore), Gian Micalessin (Il Giornale), Fulvio Scaglione (Famiglia Cristiana), così da poter confrontare le tesi che si sono volute qui esporre con i fatti riportati dai più autorevoli giornalisti italiani nel settore.

Prima però, è il caso di ripercorrere la storia dei curdi dalla fine della Prima Guerra Mondiale, momento in cui furono vicinissimi alla realizzazione del loro obiettivo: vedere un'entità legittima a guida curda in Medio Oriente. Gli anni che seguirono il 1918 videro la sconfitta della Turchia in favore degli alleati e il collasso della Russia zarista: il Medio Oriente stava cambiando e lo stava facendo seguendo le volontà di Inghilterra e Francia. In questa cornice il Presidente Woodrow Wilson presentò il suo programma diviso in 14 punti che gli stati arabi avrebbero dovuto seguire per ristabilire la pace e la stabilità nella zona: il punto 12 infatti prevedeva che le minoranze che vivevano in Turchia avrebbero dovuto godere del diritto di una determinata autonomia, libertà e legittimità. Per completare gli obiettivi racchiusi nei 14 punti di Wilson gli Alleati si consultano fino ad accordarsi e, nel 1920, presentano il Trattato di Sèvres, firmato anche dal riluttante Impero Ottomano. Nell'art. 62 del Trattato di Sèvres si legge: "La Commissione che siede a Costantinopoli e composta da tre membri designati dai governi di Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia, ha il compito di presentare, entro sei mesi dall'entrata in vigore del trattato, uno schema per favorire le autonomie locali per quanto concerne le aree curde che si trovano a est dell'Eufrate, a sud del confine con l'Armenia e tra la Siria e la Turchia..." I principi di Wilson e in particolare quelli espressi nel punto 12 non vennero mai raggiunti: Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) ripudiò la sottomissione del suo governo al Trattato di Sèvres e guidò una rivolta in nome dei Musulmani di Anatolia. I curdi aiutarono le forze turche a scacciare i cristiani nelle province armene e nei soviet russi, credendo di combattere per la comune causa della difesa del 'patrimonio musulmano'. Invece si trovarono nella stessa situazione dei cristiani, e furono così costretti a disperdersi in Iran, Iraq e Siria. Questi tre stati avevano però in

comune con la Turchia un principio non compatibile con la sopravvivenza della minoranza curda. In queste quattro nazioni i rispettivi governi schiacciarono la minoranza curda con l'obiettivo di trasformarla in una minoranza etnica nazionalista e pericolosa. Si creò così una situazione di instabilità e violenza che avrebbe portato, insieme ad altre cause, alla destabilizzazione del Medio Oriente di cui siamo oggi testimoni. Le popolazioni curde che si sono insediate nei quattro stati mediorientali limitrofi alla Siria hanno intessuto rapporti diversi con le rispettive nazioni 'ospitanti'. I curdi turchi sono più celebri, in quanto la battaglia di Abdullah Ocalan e del suo PKK raggiunse l'attenzione dei media internazionali dall'inizio della sua entrata in scena - in Italia invece a causa del ruolo del governo D'Alema che concesse la sua estradizione che avrebbe poi portato al suo, ancora attuale, stato di incarcerazione. In Iran dal 1961 al 1975 la scena è dominata da Mustafa Barzani e dal suo KPD (Partito Democratico del Kurdistan), leader tribale che alla sua morte, nel 1979, lasciò il compito di terminare la sua battaglia al figlio Massoud. Il KPD si è da sempre scontrato con il PUK (Unione Patriottica del Kurdistan) in mano alla famiglia Talabani. La storia dei curdi in Iraq rimane fortemente legata fortemente agli anni '90 e al ruolo da loro ricoperto nella guerra intrapresa contro Saddam Hussein, il quale concluso il conflitto con l'Iran che gli americani speravano invece perdesse, uccise, fino quasi a sterminarli, la maggior parte della popolazione curda allora presente in Iraq. Furono così costretti, oltre che a scappare in Turchia, a raggiungere il nord dell'Iraq, dove tutt'ora si trovano, tanto che ci si riferisce a quella zona come Kurdistan iracheno. Anche in Iran i curdi si sono dovuti scontrare con i principi integralisti del nazionalismo della repubblica islamica. Il PUK (Unione Patriottica del Kurdistan) combatte contro il regime di Teheran dal 1972 una guerra che finora ha causato più di diciassettemila morti. Qui i curdi sono sei milioni e dalla rivoluzione Khomeinista del '79 non hanno smesso di combattere per il riconoscimento dei loro diritti fondamentali. Le differenze con le minoranze curde che vivono in Turchia e Siria risiede nel fatto che in Iran i curdi, uniti sotto l'egida del Partito Democratico del Kurdistan iraniano, non hanno chiesto e non chiedono indipendenza, ma legittima autonomia e riconosciuti diritti fondamentali. In Siria il ruolo della minoranza curda ha acquisito sempre maggior rilievo da quando nel 2011 è scoppiata la guerra civile. Prima dello scoppio delle rivolte e delle battaglie contro le milizie dello Stato Islamico e di Jabhat Al-Nusra (la cellula siriana di Al-Qaeda) i curdi siriani erano tra le minoranze curde meno considerate sul piano internazionale. Le milizie dello YPG (Unità di Protezione del Popolo) si sono dimostrate essenziali nella resistenza contro l'avanzata

dell'Islamic State: simbolo della loro resistenza è la liberazione della città di Kobane dai miliziani dell'IS. Gli attori internazionali in gioco sul suolo siriano hanno avuto spesso un comportamento ambiguo nei confronti dei curdi: nonostante questi si siano dimostrati come l'unica forza filo-occidentale a combattere con 'boots on the ground' le milizie sotto il comando di Al-Baghdadi, i curdi non sono stati supportati dalle potenze in gioco in Siria, tra tutti gli U.S.A., e questo per il ruolo che la Turchia giocava e continua a giocare come ponte tra Europa e Medio Oriente. Gli U.S.A. sono stati alleati della Turchia fino a poche settimane fa, quando Erdogan ha deciso di scusarsi con Vladimir Putin dell'abbattimento del Jet russo SU-24. L'anno scorso il governo turco concesse agli statunitensi perfino di utilizzare la base aerea di Incirlik. A causa di questo legame, gli Stati Uniti non sono stati in grado di poter supportare in maniera appropriata i curdi presenti sul territorio siriano. Nonostante ciò sono riusciti, nel tempo, ad insediarsi in una porzione di territorio che si trova a nord-est della Siria. Questa regione, di nome Rojava, rappresenta l'opportunità per i curdi siriani di ricevere il riconoscimento che chiedono dal 1918. La Siria, però, è uno Stato sovrano, e non può certo permettere che all'interno del territorio sotto la sua giurisdizione si crei una porzione che non sia sotto il suo controllo. Difatti, anche se passate in sordina, sono arrivate diverse notizie che hanno confermato schermaglie tra le forze governative fedeli al regime legittimo di Bashar Al-Assad e le milizie presenti nel Rojava. La Turchia non può accettare che al confine sud del suo territorio ci sia una regione riconosciuta e legittima sotto controllo curdo, perché in questo modo non potrebbe perpetrare le ingiustizie che settimanalmente compie nei quartieri curdi presenti al confine turco-siriano. Inoltre, così, ci sarebbero due entità sotto la guida curda troppo vicine, ovvero l'eventuale regione federale autonoma del Rojava e il Kurdistan iracheno, così che si potrebbe verificare, nel tempo, un ulteriore consolidamento dell'autonomia dei territori curdi. A potenze come Israele, Stati Uniti e Russia non preoccupa la causa curda. Tutte e tre vedono i curdi come schiere di milizie facilmente aggirabili e utilizzabili in eventuali conflitti da combattere nei territori mediorientali, e quindi non sono contrarie al consolidamento della sovranità curda nel Rojava. D'altra parte però non hanno neanche un estremo bisogno del fattore curdo per perpetrare i loro interessi e obiettivi, anche perché alleati più grandi e rilevanti come Iran e Turchia non gradirebbero un supporto, da parte dei 'loro alleati', alla popolazione curda. Quindi quali sono i possibili scenari quando il conflitto siriano sarà giunto al termine? I curdi adesso presenti nel Rojava riusciranno a trovare un accordo con il governo siriano per vedere riconosciuta maggiore autonomia e sovranità? Oppure, anche se

si sono dimostrati come i migliori alleati dell'Occidente nella battaglia contro le milizie dello Stato Islamico, non verranno presi in considerazione una volta che bisognerà preparare la ricostruzione della Siria? Per rispondere a queste domande è necessario presentare il progetto che i curdi stanno portando avanti in questo momento nel Rojava. La loro idea, il loro obiettivo, è quello di costruire un sistema che prende il nome di 'Confederalismo Democratico'. Avendo riconosciuto la quasi impossibilità per la loro etnia di vedere uno Stato Curdo in Medio Oriente, i curdi siriani hanno deciso di virare leggermente le loro richieste verso obiettivi più plausibili. Il confederalismo democratico, che loro hanno soprannominato anche radicalismo democratico, prevede di abbandonare il concetto di Nazione e Stato per concentrarsi piuttosto sulla formazione di strutture politiche, sociali ed economiche. In questo modo un'eventuale e riconosciuta Regione Federale del Kurdistan riuscirebbe ad aver quel tanto di autonomia necessaria per permettere la costruzione della loro struttura sociale, politica ed economica.

La scelta di optare per una ponderata autonomia piuttosto che per una vera e propria indipendenza, aumenta le possibilità dei curdi di raggiungere i loro obiettivi. Per formulare ipotesi concrete e attendibili è necessario che prima si inquadri il ruolo dei curdi nella storia moderna e che si capisca l'attitudine degli attori internazionali nei loro confronti. Oltre ciò, è strettamente necessaria una breve introduzione alle forme di ribellione che ogni minoranza curda ha sviluppato nei diversi stati in cui si rifugiarono: Siria, Iran, Iraq e Turchia. In questo modo sarà possibile avere un'idea delle forti differenze presenti tra la popolazione curda stessa. In questa cornice si dovrà inserire il ruolo dei curdi nel conflitto siriano scoppiato nel 2011, la resistenza contro le milizie dello Stato Islamico e l'attitudine delle forze occidentali in gioco sul territorio nei confronti dei curdi. A questo punto si presenterà il progetto di 'Confederalismo Democratico', attualmente in atto nella regione siriana del Rojava e cosa questo sistema, questa struttura, propongono e vogliono consolidare.

In questo modo, l'obiettivo dell'autore è quello di fornire un'immagine quanto più concisa e chiara della causa curda e del popolo curdo, così da porre la legittima quanto spontanea domanda: "Cosa ne sarà dei curdi una volta finito il conflitto in Siria?"

