

The Kurds in a New Middle East

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The Changing Geopolitics
of a Regional Conflict

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-030-00538-2 ISBN 978-3-030-00539-9 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00539-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018954888

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company
Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

The state system that came into being in the Middle East after the First World War left the Kurds as significant minorities in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, and turned Kurdistan—the regions of the Middle East where the Kurds constitute the majority of the population—into the periphery of these states. The Kurds' subsequent attempts to obtain their political rights and exercise self-determination were repressed, often by brutal force, which exacerbated the conflict and led to more violence.

Until the calamitous failure the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) experienced in its independence bid in September 2017, there was a growing belief among the Kurds that the 'Kurdish moment' in the Middle East had arrived. The transformation triggered by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 turned the Iraqi Kurdish political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—into important political actors and the new federal state that replaced Saddam Hussein's *Baathist* dictatorship recognised extensive autonomy for the Kurds. Kurdish demands were satisfied to a large extent but the failure to determine the final status of the disputed territories, the growing authoritarianism under the Nouri al-Maliki government (2010–2014) and political instability in the country fuelled Kurdish leadership's secessionist desires.

The growing Kurdish influence in the Middle East continued with the emergence of a Kurdish-led de facto autonomous region in Syria's north and northeast in July 2012. The central role Kurdish forces, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), has been

playing in the international military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) place Syria's Kurds at the centre of the regional political developments. The Kurds of Turkey have also been hitting the international news headlines in recent years. The rise of the pro-Kurdish movement in Turkey and its strong electoral performance in a number of elections since 2014 enabled it to establish itself as a key political actor in Turkey. Turkey's Kurdish conflict is ongoing and despite the positive developments in the past decade, so far Turkey has not been able to construct an alternative administrative framework to accommodate Kurdish demands for autonomy and resolve the conflict. In the past decade, there have been signs of revival of Iran's Kurdish movement too but its deep-rooted divisions and fragmentation continues.

This book provides a concise account of the Kurdish conflict in the Middle East. It traces the key events and developments taking place in the individual state level conflicts in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran and also examines the regional developments that have affected their trajectory. It also offers an up-to-date and accessible examination of the recent developments, highlights the inter-connections and interdependencies that exist between individual conflicts and the opportunities and challenges that Kurdish political actors involved in these conflicts face.

This is a book for students and scholars of Kurdish politics in the Middle East and Kurdish conflicts in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. However, given the regional security impact and international security concerns associated with Kurdish conflicts, it will be of interest to a wide array of readers from the policymakers, journalists to the general public.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
DBP	Democratic Regions' Party
DFNS	Democratic Federation of Northern Syria
DTK	Democratic Society Congress
FSA	Free Syria Army
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party
HPG	People's Defence Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
KDPS	Democratic Party of Kurdistan in Syria
KNC	Kurdistan National Council
Komala	Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan
Kongra-Gel	People's Congress of Kurdistan
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MGRK	People's Council of West Kurdistan
MHP	Nationalist Action Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PJAK	Party of Free Life in Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Party of Democratic Union
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council

SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNC	Syrian National Council
TAK	Kurdistan Freedom Falcons
TEV-DEM	Movement for a Democratic Society
YPG	People's Defence Units
YPJ	Women's Defence Units