

The Kurdish Problem

Sattar Kassem

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There is one more big problem in the Middle East that peoples don't know about, and the international community hardly gives it any attention. It is the Kurdish problem, the problem of the Kurds who live nearly in one geographic zone but fragmented into five states. They count around 25 million people, and form a distinguished group of people that have its own distinctive culture and language. More than half of them live in the east-southern part of turkey, around 18% in Iraq, 23% in Iran, 5% in Syria, and around 1.5% in Armenia. That is, they are living in the surrounding joint borders of these states.

The Kurds were supposed to have their own independent state according to Sevres treaty of 1920 which was signed by major victorious powers of the First World War. The Iraqis, the Kuwaitis and the Iranians had their own states, but the Kurds have been denied this right until now. Iraq, Iran and Turkey decided that the Kurds shouldn't be given a state because that would be at the expense of the area of the three states. Even Turkey made attempts to move the Kurds to the Turkish cities so as to dilute them.

With the increasing national awareness in the area, the Kurds started to feel that they have the right to assert themselves, and seek independence. They had to fight first for some civil rights such as using their own language and wear their own traditional costumes, have their own schools and daily life administration. The Middle Eastern states met the Kurdish ambition with denial.

Due to negligence and unfairness, the Kurds and the three major states of presence have been paying a high price due to the rising restlessness of the Kurds. The Iraqi Kurds started a kind of a revolt in the sixties of the twentieth century against the central government in Baghdad. It was a grave mistake that the Kurds received aid from Israel, a thing that antagonized Arab intellectuals and politicians who are supposed to defend the rights of ethnic groups. The Iraqi army embattled the Kurds, but the Kurds could finally achieve a certain kind of self rule in Iraq.

The Turkish Kurds formed their secret political organization which developed afterwards into fighting squads. The Kurdish Labor Party started to lead the political scene in Turkish Kurdistan, and started carrying out military action against Turkish targets. The party is seeking recognition of the Kurds as a distinct entity that deserves the right to autonomy.

In Iran, the Kurds started escalating their pressure to gain ethnic rights after the fall of the king and the ascendance of Khomeini to power. The Iranians haven't been easy in facing all Kurdish riots.

The most acute case of military confrontation has been in Iraq because some powers such as the US and Israel had been interested in creating instability in Iraq. Iraq used to be a traditional staunch enemy of Israel, and it was thought that a hot Kurdish problem weakens the Iraqi government. The Kurds revolted several times, and Saddam Hussein used chemical bombs against one of their villages killing 5000 of them. That was a real massacre, but the international community didn't care too much about it at the time because the US was allying with Saddam against Iran. The Iraqi army made several major attacks against Kurdish rebels and forced thousands of Kurds to flee to Iran and Turkey, the two countries that are unhappy with the Kurdish ethnicity.

Turkey continues to witness certain unrest particularly because of attacks against civil targets in major Turkish cities. Now, Turkey is saying that Turkish Kurds rebels are seeking refuge in Iraq which is under American occupation.

Before the American war on Iraq, America established a no fly zone in northern Iraq, and empowered the Kurds who live in the north to have their own independent government from Baghdad but without allowing for the establishment of an independent state. The US does not allow for an independent state for the Kurds of Iraq because Turkey, which is a NATO member stands firm against that. If the Iraqi Kurds have a state, then the Turkish Kurds will fight for their own independent state. However, the Americans have been encouraging Kurdish self-rule in Iraq, and northern Iraq seems to be independent to a great extent from the central government of Baghdad.

In the last few months, the Turks threatened that they would invade northern Iraq as long as the Turkish rebels seek refuge there. But the threats would never be implemented without the consent of the Americans who occupy Iraq. Some thought that the Americans would never approve Turkish attacks against the Kurds, but it became clear that interests have precedence to principle when the Americans ratified Turkish attacks. Lately, some posts in northern Iraq have been under Turkish bombing.

Life has been hard for the Turks, and the world seems to be extremely apathetic. Apparently, the world will not react unless the Kurds escalate their military attacks against oppressors. It is unfortunate that justice is not established at so many times before atrocities consume lives.

The international community should work hard toward solving the Kurdish problem, otherwise, a high price will be paid by so many states in the future.