

KURDS OF TURKEY

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Turkey reside in the Southeastern part of the state. They make up an estimated one-quarter of the Turkish population. During the nationalization of Turkey in the 1980s, Kurds were subjected to harsh assimilation tactics, such as forbidding the Kurdish language in schools and proper political representation. Since 1983, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), has engaged in armed struggle with the Turkish Government. To date, there have intermittent ceasefire agreements, then a vicious cycle of violations, spoilers, resumptions of violence, etc.

Key Interests

- Security – they seek to have the ability to protect themselves from brutal military incursions. This security can come in the form of civil rights guarantees from the state.
- Political representation – the Kurds are not adequately represented in the national government. This, among many factors, contributes to Turkey issuing a legislation that is oppressive of the Turkish Kurdish population.
- Cultural expression – the Kurds of Turkey are severely culturally oppressed. They seek the opportunity to host assemblies featuring Kurdish Nationalism.

Sources of Leverage

Military – The PKK is an armed and formidable force for the Turkish government due to its guerilla warfare. It launches terror attacks that in turn kill and disrupt the lives of Turkish citizens. The citizens then place pressure on politicians to reform their policies to prevent further attacks

Soft Power – Media and human rights reporting groups – the Kurds utilize the media and human rights watch organizations to further deter Turkey from abusing them, due to Turkey's aversion to showing itself as the aggressor in its relationship with its Kurdish population. Further, the Kurds across greater Kurdistan can exploit the enmity between their host states to manipulate and mobilize accordingly.

Regional Strategy

As for external actors, the Kurds of Turkey do not possess a strong regional strategy policy. Their situational vision in Turkey keeps them preoccupied with their local reality and Ankara. Internally speaking, the Kurds of Turkey's most prominent political party, the PKK, has links to political parties in Iraq, Syria, and Iran. These ties are activated in certain advantageous situations. Concerning Europe, the Kurds, to some degree, activate their diaspora community there to advocate to their respective European states on behalf of the Kurds in Turkey and their situation.

Powerful Individuals

Abdullah Öcalan (Founder of the PKK; Jailed by the Turkish Government for the creation of an armed group; Still leads the PKK and due to their ideological founding's similarities, many Kurdish groups across Kurdistan are de facto under his sphere of influence.) Figen Yüksekdağ Şenoğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş (Current co-leaders of the Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP))

Potential Negotiation Moves

Keep pressure and international media attention on Erdogan as he targets what he sees as affiliates or instigators to the failed coup attempt in 2016. Moreover, with Ankara preoccupied by coup purges, ISIS and the Syrian civil war, they have failed to implement satisfactory reforms that were proposed for the Kurds.

Partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

PKK occasionally engages in guerilla tactics against HDP.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

Rivals

TURKEY

Adversaries

N/A

Active Armed Opponents

Turkey (against PKK)

Proxy

Other Kurdish groups that have ties to the PKK, such as the PJAK (political and militant organization in Iran).

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A