

# History of turkish occupation of northern kurdista analysis essay



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Since 1984, and especially the last few months, the domestic problems of a major N. A. T. O, Middle Eastern, and American ally state have come to the forefront of the international news scene. That state is the Republic of Turkey

and it's primary troubles stem from the past seven decades of acrimonious policies directed at the indigenous ethnic Kurds. The main problem, now, is the

Kurdish popular insurgency on it's hands, in Turkish occupied Northern Kurdistan.

The Kurdish question has long been covered up and denied by the state of Turkey,

but recent events has forced Turkey to concede that it has a serious Kurdish insurgency on its hands. Turkey's inability to deal with this situation is the result of the past seventy years of cultural, political, and human rights

abuses directed against the Kurdish population. In fact, this " separatism" is so

out of hand that the Turkish government has incessantly appealed to it's allies

and advisories alike to help counter the escalating Kurdish asperation to succeed from the Turkish republic. Turkey's sputtering and deteriorating economy

is directly related to the long Kurdish struggle for independence. Turkey has spent over eight billion dollars or twenty percent of her GDP to combat the ever

deteriorating predicament in northern Kurdistan, and should spend more in the

future(Laber). Because of the violence, the once prosperous tourist business of

Turkey, has now lost about \$1. 5 billion dollars annually since 1990. Many people

now talk openly of another possible military coup, there were three major military coups during the last thirty years (Alister) These circumstances in the

state of Turkey have also hurt her chances of ever joining the ever wealthy

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European Union and battering its ailing economic situation. The depth of

Turkey's domestic and ethnic dilemma is one of the many that have arisen after

the end of the cold war, yet the cold war is a simple answer to a much more

complex one. The factors that have arisen to contribute to this civil war were

created far before Capitalism versus Communism, East versus West, or U. S versus

the Soviet Union. In order to really comprehend the holistic situation in

Turkey one must first be familiar with the complete history of the Turks and

Kurds.

The Kurds of Turkey constitutes, by far, the largest ethnic minority group in

Turkey. The estimate of their population, however, are very dubious because of

the past Turkish policy to deny the very existence of any minorities within the

borders of her state. In fact, past Turkish rhetoric has been that there is no

official Kurdish problem in Turkey, because officially no Kurds exist. We can

ascertain that the kurds make up between twenty-five and thirty-three percent

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of the Turkey's population. This would put the Kurdish population about twelve

to twenty million (Morris). Because of past and present forced Turkish assimilation practices, the Kurds live in all parts of the country, but most of the Kurdish population is concentrated in the southeastern part of Turkey.

They

represent a high percentage of the population in fifteen provinces and take up a

total of thirty percent of all of Turkey (Kendal). Economically, the Kurds are the poorest inhabitants of the country. The per capita of a Kurd is one-tenth of

a Turk living in Istanbul; well below the poverty line (McDowell). While the rest of Turkey has modernized and adopted some capitalistic practices, the Kurdish areas, by contrast, are underdeveloped and exploited by feudal landlords.

The wealth of the area is “ drained and channeled to the Turkish metropolis (Kendal).” Much of the region is relatively unchanged since the last seventy years of Turkish rule or has suffered even worse economically. The thirty

million Kurds of the Middle East have lived in Kurdistan before record of modern

history was kept. The very first mention of the Kurds in history was about 3,000

BC, under the name Gutium., as they fought the Summerians(Spieser). Later around

800 BC, the Indo-European Median tribes settled in the Zagros mountain region

and coalesced with the Gutiums, and thus the modern Kurds speak from as Aryan

language (Morris). The Kurds are mentioned by Xenaphon, a Greek mercenary, as he

retreated from Persia with ten thousand men in 401 BC, he says of the Kurds,

“ These people, lived in the mountains and were very war-like and not subject to

the Persian king. Indeed once a royal army of 120, 000 thousand had once invaded

their country, and not a man of them came back..(Morris).” When the Arabs spread

Islam to the Middle East in the seventh century, most of the Kurds gradually adopted the religion but fiercely resisted Arab rule, much like today in modern

day Iraq and Syria. This is evident in a legend about the prophet Mohammed; when the prophet called all the princes of the world to embrace the new religion,

they all hurried to submit to the prophet of the new religion. When the Prophet

saw the Kurdish representative, named Zemin, with his giant size and piercing

eyes, the prophet prayed to God that such a terrifying people never unite as a

single nation (Morris). Around the tenth century the Kurds became a military force to be reckoned with in the Middle East and defended Islam against the invading Christian crusaders and defeated the Mongolian armies at both Cerq De

Chavalier and the fortress of Irbile. Saladine, and the majority of his troops were Kurdish (Safrastian). The Kurds established independent principalities,

that never united, but often fought each other for the benefit of foreign powers.

During the harsh reign of Shah Ismail in Persia, most of the Kurds who were Sunni Muslims, allied themselves with the Ottoman Sultan Selim “ the Cruel” and

played the pivotal part in defeating the Persian armies at Chaldiran in 1514, and thus most of the Kurds in Iran are still Sunni Muslims among a predominately

Shiite majority. The Kurdish principalities, at this time were free from the central government and struck their own coinage and had Friday prayers in the

name of the local prince (Morris). At that point of Kurdish history Kurdish culture and literature flourished. This lasted until the nineteenth century when the Ottoman empire tried to expand its rule into the Kurdish territories.

Using the tool of divide and conquer, the Ottomans use Kurdish tribes to fight

fellow Kurds. Though, the Ottoman government gained nominal control of the



Kurdish areas, they were never able to establish direct rule(McDowell).

During

World War One, many Kurds actually remained loyal to the Empire. They

fought

bravely in many battles. The Kurds inflicted such heavy damages against the

Tsarist government that they almost conceded to evacuating the entire

Caucasus

region. Some historians also suggest, they were eighty percent of the

Ottoman

casualties at the infamous battle of Galilopi (Gunter). During the war the

Young

Turk government, in pursuit of a purely Turkic empire, massacred more than

one

million Armenians and seven hundred thousand Kurds. After the Ottoman

loss, the

Empire collapsed and was on the verge of fragmentation when a young army

officer

by the name of Mustafa Kemal emerged on the scene.

Following the fatal defeat of the Ottoman empire after World War one, the

remnants of the former empire were divided up among the victorious allied powers,

even the Turkish speaking region were to come under the mandate of foreign

administration. In fact, much of Anatolia was already occupied by Greek or

Armenian forces. On August 10, 1920, Turkey and the allied powers signed the

treaty of Sevres. This treaty allowed for the creation of an independent

Kurdish and Armenian state on the remittance of the former Ottoman empire. This

treaty was to become null and void. Around the same time the Sevres treaty was

being discussed, Mustafa Kemal gained power of what remained of the military and

political infrastructure in Anatolia. Kemal, starting in the Kurdish region and

proclaiming the unity of Turks and Kurds, organized resistance to the Armenian

and Georgian forces in eastern Anatolia. These forces were defeated by almost

entirely Kurdish armies, who thought they were fighting for a state where,

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“ Turks and Kurds would live as brothers and as equals (Kendal)” as stated by

Mustafa Kemal. However, after the defeat of the Greek armies in western Turkey,

Kemal declared to an assembly that “ The state the we have just created is a Turkish state (Kendal)” Immediately after, a strengthened Turkey renegotiated

the Treaty of Lausanne with the allies. With much more favorable terms for the

Turks, but no mention of the Kurds in the treaty. Thus the Kurds went from equal

partners to non-existent citizens in the new Turkish state. After the treaty of

Lousanne, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk proceeded to integrate the country and start a

process of Westernize the once orthodox Islamic empire. Kemal abolished the

Caliphate Arabic alphabet, and adopted the western Latin alphabet, thus

implementing some capitalistic measures in the name of a newly established

secular government. Mustafa Kemal enacted harsh laws on Islam in general.

Kemal

made the Islamic call for prayer illegal and went as far as banning Islamists.

The most important of these decisions against Islam, was the outlawing all

Islamic holy houses of teaching. This was to have profound impacts on the

spreading of Islamic fundamentalists within Turkey. This backfired against

Mustafa, by forcing Islam to go underground, the form of fundamentalism

that

manifested in Turkey was much harsher than the ones that existed before

being

banned by Kemal. Kemal trying to create a nation state, came upon a

problem.

The new state of Turkey was a heterogeneous one, composed of multi-

ethnic

groups, not a homogenous one of just pure ethnic Turks, as Mustafa Kemal

proclaimed. The capitalization on a new found Turkish nationalist movement

yielded a well tuned systematic campaign of obliterating the essence of the

Kurdish within the boundaries of newly formed Turkey. Kemal abolished all of

the,

" Kurdish schools, associations, publications, religious fraternities, and

medressehs (McDowell).” The Kurdish nation represented such a threat to the

territorial integrity of Turkey that all people and names of places were

forcibly Turkicized by the government. This was to become referred to as ethnic

cleansing or genocide. Old archeological monuments and structures that proved the

ancient history of Kurdish people in Anatolia were systematically destroyed.

The

words ‘Kurds’ and ‘Kurdistan’ were eradicated from all books and publications.

Anything that would lead to a separate identity of the Kurdish people were

eliminated in order to yield the assimilation of the ethnically different Kurdish

nation. Even the Kurdish language was banned, a fact unparalleled in

history! No

one in the state of Turkey was allowed to speak Kurdish, even though it was the

language of thirty percent of the people. All Kurdish students were fed

Turkish propaganda on the ethnic ancestry of the Kurdish people, they were

taught that Kurds, were a pure ' Turkic race,' whereas in actuality the Kurds are

ethnically Indo-Aryan, and the Turks are a mixture of Hun-Mongolian people.

The

Turkish education minister proclaimed that, the Kurds had forgotten their

" Turkic" language in the fastness of the mountains of southeast Anatolia, thus

referring to them as, " Mountain Turks.(Gunter)." The racist spoon feed

propaganda of the Turkish educational institutions has reached to such a degree

of reducibility, that it is often taught in the schools of Turkey, all the great

Babylonian, Summerian, Egyptian, and Hittite civilizations had been created by

the Turks(Kendal). In order to hide the fact that the Kurds had lived in

Anatolia four thousand years before one Turk stepped in. The Turkish

intelligentsia determined the Kurds came from Central Asia five thousands years

ago. The situation deteriorated to the point where to state " I am a Kurd "

was

a crime so serious as to warrant the death penalty under Turkey's anti-terrorist

laws(Kendal). All past measures were not enough in the eyes of the Kemalist government to destroy the remnants of five thousand years of Kurdish presence in

Anatolia. After these and more repressive measures were taken out, the substantial Kurdish population began to revolt from the pressures unfairly exerted on them by the oppressive and violence prone state of Turkey. The early

revolts were unorganized, lacked money, and poorly supplied. They lasted, on and

off, a little over thirteen years. The retribution of the Turkish army was so extreme, they almost destroyed, looted, and burned the entire eastern portion of

the country. Whole villages were either deported to Western Turkey to be assimilated or, if the government knew that the particular tribe or village were

not going to be assimilated that easily, they just simply massacred them. much

like the Nazi massacre of Jewish civilians(Morris). Throughout these uncivilized

methods of cruelty instituted by the Turkish governmental establishment, the

savage Turkish government managed to massacre or deport one million, five hundred thousand Kurdish civilians (Kendal). The repression was so haneous that

the entire Eastern section of the state of Turkey was prohibited to all

foreigners and under martial law for almost thirty years, so as not to disciple

to the west. In contrast to Western Turkey, the whole of Eastern Turkey was made

into a military camp, and it has remained that way until today. The Turkish

minister of justice made the relationship of Turks and Kurds clear:

I believe that the Turk must be the only lord, the only master of this country.

Those who are not of pure Turkish stock (Kurds and Armenians) can have only one

right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves (McDowell).

After Kemal's death, more successive and liberal minded regimes came to power.



The 1960 coup by the army attempted to Turkicize the whole of the Kurdish region.

Every single street, river, mountain, village, or city was given Turkish name to

the very last detail. What little hope the Kurdish population had in the hope more or less disappears as the coup never really brought out fundamental change

for the Kurdish people. The rights of the Kurds were still non-existent, the

Kurdish language denied to them, and their culture still prohibited. The

successive coups of 1971 and 1980 always tended to bring Kurdish freedom and

self-expression to a halt. To justify a coup, the army would state that there

was a planned Kurdish uprising. Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s and 1970s,

Kurdish nationalism did emanate in the form of small underground publications

and newspapers, but they were always instantaneously banned and the editors

immediately apprehended and given lengthy jail terms. Throughout all the

repression, the Kurds were able to participate in political life, although under forced Turkish identities(Gunter). Today the foreign minister of Turkey, Ardal Inunu, is a Kurd; as well as his father the late president Ismat Inunu, former presidents Fahrey Koruturk, and Cevdet Sunany, even the late president Turgut

Ozal claimed Kurdish heritage(Gunter). The mother of all ironies, is that two people who made the bases of Turkish nationalism were Kurds, Ziya Gokalp and

Ismet Inunu, who were born in the Kurdish cities of Diarbekr(Kendal). The amount

of Kurdish people successfully assimilated into main stream Turkish society is

so infinitesimal that over ninety-one percent of the Kurdish population doesn't

even speak one word of Turkish(Kendal). Reporter, who have only recently been

allowed to enter Eastern Turkey, are amazed at how, in this integral portion of

Turkey no one speaks a word of Turkish.

During the uneasy times of the 1970s many left-wing pro-Kurdish groups manifested sporadically throughout the Turkish state. The 1980 coup put an end

to many of these organizations and political parties. After the brutal policies of the military junta that took control of Turkey, many Kurds were put in prison

and executed for "separatism" which would mean anything from guerrilla warfare

to simply speaking Kurdish in public. During those times of extremism, even by

Turkish standards, a group of socialist-Kurdish youth began to organize and formed a political party. Their simple selfless goal was to obtain the God given

right of self-determination for the worthy Kurdish nation, which included outright independence from the Turkish mainstream government. The main leader for

this independence movement was a young political science student from the Kurdish city of Urfa, named Abdullah Ocalan or Apo (Kurdish for Uncle). This

group of organizers were Marxist-Lenninst in ideology and adamantly stated that

the Kurds and Turks were separate people and hence forth, the Turkish military

force present in Kurdistan was a belligerent action of occupation of Kurdistan.

The P. K. K (Party Kereykarey Kurdistan or Kurdistan Workers Party) also called

for the abolishment of tribalism, feudalism, and the “ slave-like dependence of

women.” A great amount of the P. K. K military force were female. The P. K. K also

believed the only way to attain freedom and independence were through violence,

much like the American and French revolution of mid 1700s.

To conceive the P. K. K as completely leftist is untrue, they have adapted the

Communist theme of ideology to counter-weight the Turkish entity as a NATO state,

so it is safe to assume that the P. K. K has chosen the Marxist path by default.

Similar to the American fore-fathers choosing a republic form of government to

resist the British form of government, and France choosing a parliamentary form

of government to overshadow the history of monarchical reign of France.

This

might seem to be absurd, but not when you see a “ democratic” Turkey that

espouses a contradictory nationalism and places signs everywhere in Kurdistan

that says, “ Proud is He who calls oneself a TURK” or “ A TURK is worth the

whole universe(Kendal).” So accordingly, underneath all the ideology and

propaganda of the Cold War, what you essentially have is two combating

nationalisms.

The 1980 coup mentioned earlier pretty much halted all of P. K. K’s political

activities and other similar left-wing organizations. But the P. K. K’s political

politburo immediately regrouped in Syria and Lebanon. With help from some

neighboring countries, the P. K. K was able to launch small raids into Turkey

in

1984. After the attacks grew in strength and number, the Turkish government

became seriously alarmed. The P. K. K was as violent as it advertised, many times

killing Kurds collaborating with the Turkish government. This didn't raise their

popularity with the local populous. But, one thing they did accomplish was that

no other party or group in Turkey ever did, was the recognition of a Kurdish problem in Turkey and a recognition of a Kurdish people in Turkey (Gunter). Thus,

the Kurdish situation was brought out to the international arena for the whole

world to witness the ever dynamic predicament in Northern Kurdistan. The Kurds

went from " Mountain Turks" to a " Kurdish reality in Turkey." The Turkish army

then extended martial law to thirteen provinces in Eastern Turkey. The Turkish

army chief of staff admitted that " condition of war...exists in southeast

Turkey(Smyth).”

The P. K. K then began to adopt a less hostile attitude towards the civilian population, realizing they can not operate without the help of the people.

While

the P. K. K ceased to attack civilians, the Turkish army’s attitude towards

Kurdish civilians took an even harsher tone. What happened in the days of

Attaturk, were being implemented once again. It was like the situation was

dormant for forty-five years, and once again it came back to live. Amnesty

international reported the wholesale arrest and torture of Kurds in all parts of

Turkey. The entire village of Sirnak, population 25, 000, was demolished and it’s

inhabitants forced to flee(Pilger). In all the Turkish army has destroyed an

estimated 1, 700 Kurdish villages and towns(Montalbano). The P. K. K has

successfully begun to infiltrate larger cities and organizing merchant strikes

and mass protest against the Turkish government. The Turkish army and

secret

police reacted by covert assassinations and “ death squads” that killed

anyone

that was even remotely linked to the P. K. K. These death squads have even killed

journalists who have reported the Turkish atrocities in Northern Kurdistan.

Turkey has the highest death rate for journalists in the world, even exceeding

Bosnia and Tadjikistan. Many pro-Kurdish politicians and human rights activists

have been killed, causing mass protest from the Kurdish population, even the

protest control police open fire on unarmed civilian protesters, killing

hundreds of men, women, seniors, and children indiscriminantly(Kendal).

The

state sanctioned DEP (People's Democratic Party), a legal political entity was

forcibly closed down after their top political representatives were mysteriously

assassinated, their newspaper affiliates (Ozgur Daily) bombed, and it's

parliamentarians arrested. All of these went against the established Turkish

constitutional laws. The lifting of Parliamentary immunity is a direct violation,

but when it comes to using illegal laws against Kurdish civilians there are no



limits.

Needless to say, the brutal and genocidal acts of the Turkish government have

only fanned the flare of the Kurdish drive for independence. In some parts of Turkey, over ninety percent of the people support the P. K. K(Marks). When the

people see the government burning their houses, farms, and family members how

can one really support the establishment? How can the people believe the government when they have publicly broken parliamentary laws by arresting Kurdish parliamentary members for speaking Kurdish? The people has two choices,

the foreign occupiers or their sons, brothers, daughters, sisters, or fathers.

In response to the " ethnic cleansing" and martial law, the Turkish government

has also stationed over 450, 000 troops in the area, backed by US made modern

tanks, Apache helicopters, Super Cobra helicopters, F-16 fighter jets, and

50, 000 elite contra-rebels in the Kurdish region. Many generals in the armed

forces have openly talked about using chemical weapons on the Kurds  
(Turkey used

chemical weapons on the Kurds in the 1930s, British used it in the 1920s,  
and

Saddam Hussien used it in 1988)(Kendal).

Turkey has went as far as raiding Iraqi Kurdistan with the air planes given to  
them by the US. As recently as March 20, 1995, Turkey invaded Iraqi  
Kurdistan.

They said the invation was to search for and destroy the P. K. K, but in  
actuality

the army couldn't fight the P. K. K. The 35, 000 invading force did little more  
then destroying civilian villages, killing civilian Kurds, and ruining farm  
crops. UNHCR (United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees) reported  
that

10, 000 Turkish Kurds, who escaped Turkey's systematic burning and  
destroying

Kurdish villages were forcibly detained and forced to return to Turkey. The  
whereabouts of the refugees are unknown; knowing the Turkish track  
record,

their hopes are dismal.

Abdullah Ocalan

It now appears that the P. K. K has ascertained itself as the voice of the Kurdish

people, after seventy years of unrelenting oppression. The P. K. K's unequivocal

insistence of independence is rebuffed by Ankara, who state that everyone in Turkey is equal and there are no room for minorities in Turkey. The army, an organization who operates independently from the political wing of Turkey, will

not even placate a hint of even a form of diminutive local autonomy for the Kurdish people. The P. K. K is exhibiting, and for their part proving to the Kurdish masses that their violent way is the only avenue for any form of Kurdish

independence. Since the creation of the irredentent Turkish state the Kurds have

not received anything more then a tombstone with a forced Turkish surname. The

P. K. K has given 15, 000 martyrs in the span of eleven years (Marcus), the army

has massacred more then 1, 500, 000 in the span of sixty years , more the 1, 500

villages destroyed, every form of Kurdish identity denied, and their politicians

and journalists killed by secret police. After all it is the US constitution

that has written:

" When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to

dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to

assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which

the laws of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of

mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the

separation..... whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these

ends, it is the right of the people to alter it, or to abolish it, and to

institute a new government..”

It is the very example the United States has set, that the Kurdish people wants to declare their independence. For, the only thing different between the

Kurdish revolution and the U. S one, is only two hundred and nine years. All oppressions are bad, all occupations are wrong, every nation has the right to decide their own fate.