

**ISRMUN** 2021

# **SPECPOL**

**Special Political and  
Decolonization Committee**

**Committee:** Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL)

**Topic:** The status of Kurdistan

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## I. Committee Background

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is one of the six main committees of the United Nations General Assembly. It is also known as the Fourth Committee or C4 (Special Political and Decolonization, UN, 2021). SPECPOL focuses on a variety of issues related to politics and decolonization with a special emphasis on United Nations peacekeeping missions, the impact of atomic weapons and the peaceful uses of outer space. When it was initially created in 1945, SPECPOL was responsible for trusteeship and decolonization related matters. However, when independence was granted to all of the United Nations trust territories, the committee was reorganized to address issues that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) or the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) did not have time to address (Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, 2017). Seven subsidiary bodies report to SPECPOL including the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for State of Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) (Special Political and Decolonization, UN, 2021).

## II. Topic Information

### A. History of the Topic

The Kurds are members of a semantic and racial community who live in the Zagros Mountains of western Iran, the Taurus Mountains of southeastern Anatolia, northeastern Syria, zones of northern Iraq, and western Armenia, and other adjoining regions (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). The Kurds are the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, estimated at between 25 million and 35 million people. Through race, culture, and language, they form a unique community, and while most of them are Sunni Muslims, they also live up to a number of different religions and faiths, including Christians, Jews, Yazidis, and Zoroastrians. They are considered the largest ethnic group in the world to be stateless. In the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, the victorious Western allies provided for the formation of a Kurdish state, to be known as Kurdistan, after World War I and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Three years later, their hopes were shattered when the Lausanne Treaty, which established the boundaries of modern Turkey, made no provision for a Kurdish state and left Kurds in four countries, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, with minority status (VOA News, 2019). Ever since then, the Kurds have struggled to obtain independence.

In Turkey, the Kurds make up approximately 18 percent of the population (around 14 million people). Throughout the 1900s, Ottoman and Turkish governments have taken steps to suppress Kurdish independence. These include outlawing the Kurdish language and banning traditional Kurdish clothing in major cities and administrative centers. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was formed in 1978. The Marxist organization's aim was to create an independent Kurdistan. The group engaged

in guerrilla operations against Turkish government buildings and was labelled as a terrorist organization. The capture of the PKK's leader in 1999 caused the group to cease operations (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). However, hopes for a Kurdish independent state were reignited when the Kurds became pivotal figures in the fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. The PKK partnered itself with the United States multinational coalition to drive the terrorist organization from traditional Kurdish lands. The PKK believed that it would be rewarded for its victories against the Islamic State and permitted to keep the land it had liberated. However, in October 2019, the United States pulled out of Syria, ultimately abandoning the PKK forces. At the time, a PKK representative stated that the Kurds had been "stabbed in the back" by its Western allies (BBC News, 2019).

In Iran and Iraq, the Kurds have also been suppressed and persecuted. After World War II, the Soviet Union supported the establishment of an independent Kurdish country called Mahābād, which was located in northwestern Iran. However, the country fell in 1946 when the Soviet Union withdrew from the region. While the region was incorporated back into Iran, the leaders of Mahābād forced the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) which engaged in low-level terrorist attacks against Iranian forces (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). In Iraq, the government under Saddam Hussein forcibly removed Kurds from their land in an effort to prevent them from forming opposition groups. In the 1980s, Hussein accused the Kurds of collaborating with the Iranian government and murdered thousands of Kurds in mustard gas and nerve agent attacks (CNN, 2021).

## B. Current Issues

**Canada:** Canada supports the creation of a Kurdish state. The country has an embassy in the Kurdish city of Erbil and regularly sends the Canadian military to train Kurdish soldiers. While largely dismissed by other Western powers, Canada recognized the Kurdistan region's independence referendum of 2017 and urged Iraq to allow the area to succeed peacefully (Semple, Global News, 2017). Specific gestures by the Canadian government have kept the Kurdish fight for independence at the forefront of discussions. Some of these gestures include the use of the Flag of Kurdistan on Canadian military uniforms in the fight against the Islamic State group and federal-led memorials to the victims of the 1981 Halabja massacre (Sulaivany, Kurdistan24, 2019).

**China:** Since 2000, China has increased diplomatic and commercial relations with the Kurdish region. The country's official stance on Kurdish independence has been mixed. On one hand, China does not want to cause further instability in Iraq by supporting a Kurdish state. It also fears that Kurdish independence could cause minority groups such as the Uyghurs and the Tibetans to initiate their own uprisings in Chinese territory. However, China believes that supporting the creation of Kurdistan could gain it a new ally in the Middle East. Also, Kurdish lands are rich in oil and natural resources which could be very beneficial to China. As of now, China is supporting the Kurds through humanitarian aid and as a representative in trade talks with countries in the region (Chaziza, BESA, 2017).

**France:** The Kurdistan region has received support from France since 1981. Under the presidency of François Mitterrand, the Kurdish fight for independence was widely discussed. This led to the creation of the Kurdistan Region Parliament in Iraq.

Moreover, First Lady Danielle Mitterrand co-created the Kurdish Institute of Paris which aided Kurdish refugees and funded educational initiatives (Golpy, Rudaw, 2016). In 2014, France sent soldiers to the Kurdistan region to train Kurdish soldiers to fight against the Islamic State group. Over the next two years, France sent shipments of weapons and ammunition to the Kurds. However, while France has enjoyed a close relationship with the Kurds, it soured in 2017 when France refused to recognize an independence referendum in areas of Iraq captured from the Islamic State. Instead, France has stated that it would help mediate an agreement between the Kurds and Iraq in order to maintain peace and stability in the region (The Times of Israel, 2017).

### **C. UN Action**

The United Nations has adopted a policy of "dialogue and compromise" in relation to the creation of an independent Kurdish state. The UN fears that Kurdish independence would destabilize the Middle East and cause further conflict within the region. In 2017, the United Nations Security Council denounced the Kurdistan region's independence referendum. Instead, the UN has volunteered to mediate discussions between Iraqi and Kurdish representatives (Gunter, Tennessee Technological University, 2017). The organization has published a document that outlines what it hopes to achieve in the proposed discussions. For instance, the UN aims to "reach a deal within two or three years on the "principles and arrangements" for future relations between Baghdad and the Kurdish region." While Iraq has welcomed negotiations with the Kurds, Kurdish representatives have rejected them because the possibility of establishing a Kurdish state is not mentioned nor encouraged in the document (France24, 2017).

### III. Essential Questions

1. Who are the Kurds?
2. Why have the Kurds not been successful in obtaining an independent state?
3. Why do countries such as Iraq and Turkey refuse to recognize Kurdish autonomy?
4. What is the United Nations doing to resolve the situation? Has it been successful? Why or why not?
5. What is your country's official position on the creation of an independent Kurdish state?
6. How has the treatment of the Kurds influenced the creation of separatist and armed groups? How have these groups impacted the chances of the Kurds obtaining their own state?

### IV. Resources

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