

3. The future of Kurdistan

Acronyms and abbreviations

AKP—Justice and Development Party

HDP—Peoples' Democratic Party

KDP—Kurdish Democratic Party

KRG—Kurdistan Regional Government

PKK—Kurdistan Workers' Party

PUK—Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

YPG—People's Protection Units

Glossary

Abdullah Öcalan: Founder and leader of the PKK since 1984. In 1999, he was arrested and tried in Turkey for treason and sedition. He is currently serving a life sentence in prison, but still plays a prominent role in the leadership of the PKK; he ordered a ceasefire, which lasted from 2002–2004, and another in 2013.

Al-Anfal (1988): Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaign against the Kurds in northern Iraq at the end of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). Chemical weapons were deployed in the wholesale destruction of villages, and over 100,000 Kurds lost their lives.

Al-Qaeda: A militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden during the final years of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989), and headquartered in Afghanistan. The international terrorist network orchestrated the 9/11 attacks.

Ankara: The second largest city in Turkey, and the country's capital.

Ansar al-Islam: A militant Islamic Kurdish separatist movement founded in 2001, with ties to al-Qaeda.

Asayish in Iraqi Kurdistan: The official security organization operating under the Kurdish National Assembly and the KRG.

Baath Party: Iraq's dominant political party during Saddam Hussein's rule (1968–2003). Under Saddam, one could not reach senior positions in the government or be admitted to university without becoming a party member. The party blends Arab-nationalist and Socialist ideals.

Erbil: The capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan, located in Iraq's northeast.

Gorran: The main opposition party to the KRG's KDP–PUK coalition. It was founded in 2009.

Iraqi Kurdish Civil War (1994–1997): A civil war fought principally between the PUK and the KDP. A U.S.-brokered peace treaty was signed in 1998; however, administration of Iraqi Kurdistan remained split between the two factions.

Jalal Talabani: A co-founder of the PUK, who played a prominent role in the Kurdish effort against Saddam Hussein beginning from the late 1970s. He was a member of the Iraqi Governing Council after Saddam's ouster in 2003, and subsequently served as President of Iraq (2005–2014).

Justice and Development Party (AKP): Turkey's ruling party, which has reformulated itself as a social conservative democratic party, with a strong pro-Western, pro-American stance. It has been criticized for increasingly authoritarianism under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who founded the party in 2001.

Kobani: A Syrian city on the border with Turkey, under YPG jurisdiction after 2012. In September 2014, it came under siege by ISIS. Thousands of Kurds fled to Turkey; many returned after ISIS lost control of the city in January 2015.

Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP): Currently the dominant political party in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was founded 1946 by Mullah Mustafa al Barzani, and is now led by his son, Massoud Barzani. The KDP is pro-Western and pro-capitalist.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG): The official government of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region (Iraqi Kurdistan), headquartered in Erbil.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK): A left-wing militant group that aspires to an independent Kurdish state within Turkey. It has been engaged in armed conflict with the Turkish government since 1984. A historic 2013 ceasefire came to an end when Turkey launched airstrikes against the PKK in northern Iraq in 2015. The party is designated by NATO as a terrorist group.

Mahmoud Barzinji: The tribal sheikh known as the "king of the Kurds" who led Iraqi Kurdish fighters in a series of failed rebellions against the occupying British beginning in 1919.

Massoud Barzani: President of Iraqi Kurdistan since 2005 and head of the KDP since 1979.

Mosul: Iraq's second largest city, located in northern Iraq, fell to ISIS in June 2014. It is now a major stronghold of the organization's self-declared caliphate.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani: A Kurdish nationalist leader, still revered today. He became head of the KDP in 1946 and led a series of revolutions against Iraqi regimes. He died in exile in 1979 and was succeeded as head of the KDP by his son, Massoud Barzani, the current President of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Operation Provide Comfort (1991): A series of U.S.-led military operations following the Persian Gulf War, which sought to provide aid and protection to Kurdish refugees fleeing northern Iraq but barred from entering Turkey. Mistakenly assuming U.S. support, the Kurds then revolted against Saddam Hussein's regime, but were brutally defeated.

Osman Baydemir: A human rights activist and the mayor of Diyarbakir, Turkey since 2004.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK): A social democratic party, which broke off from the KDP in 1975. From 1994 to 1997, the PUK and the KDP engaged in a civil war, and Iraqi Kurdistan is still largely split along party lines. Iraq's current President Fuad Masum and his predecessor, Jalal Talabani, are both founding members of the PUK.

Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP): A Turkish democratic socialist political party founded in 2012, with a pro-minority, pro-Kurdish stance.

People's Protection Units (YPG): The armed branch of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), with ties to the PKK. Amidst the chaos of the Syrian civil war, the YPG/PYD has established a small Kurdish state in northern Syria, centered on Kobani.

Peshmerga: Iraqi Kurdistan's military force, unofficially divided between the KRG's main political parties, the KDP and the PUK. The Peshmerga were instrumental in toppling Saddam Hussein's government, and have more recently coalesced to fight ISIS in the region.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: President of Turkey since 2014. He served as Prime Minister (2003–2014), and founded Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001.

Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan; Western Kurdistan): The de facto autonomous Kurdish region of Syria, consisting of three cantons: Jazira, Kobani and Afrin.

Saddam Hussein: President of Iraq (1979–2003). His dictatorship was known for its extreme repressiveness and brutality. In 2003, the U.S. and Britain predicated their invasion of Iraq on accusations that Saddam maintained ties to al-Qaeda and possessed weapons of mass destruction. He was captured by U.S. forces in 2003, and executed by the Iraqi interim government in 2006.

Shi'a: The second largest denomination of Islam, constituting 15–20% of the world's Muslim population and 40% of the Middle East's entire population. Divided with Sunnis over the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Today, there is still great tension between the two denominations.

Sulaymaniyah: The city in Iraqi Kurdistan from which the first rebellion against the occupying British was launched by Mahmud Barzanji in 1919. It also played host to one of the largest of the 1991 uprisings in Iraq, which followed the Gulf War.

Sunni: The largest single religious denomination in the world. In the schism from Shi'aism, Sunnis argued that the leaders of the Muslim community didn't have to come from the Prophet Muhammad's lineage. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph after Muhammad.

Treaty of Lausanne (1923): The concluding treaty of WWI, which defined modern Turkish borders. Unlike the Treaty of Sèvres, it did not include provisions for an autonomous Turkish Kurdistan, leaving Kurds scattered between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and small pockets of Armenia.

Treaty of Sèvres (1920): A pact between the Allied Powers and Ottoman Turkey after WWI. It provided, among other things, for an autonomous Kurdistan, but was replaced in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne.

Yazidis: A Kurdish ethno-religious community whose ancient religion, Yazidism, is linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. They have traditionally lived in isolated communities in northwest Iraq, southeast Turkey and northeastern Syria.