

BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL



MEDMUN 2019

TOPIC 1

Political, social and economic impacts of the Khashoggi Affair

TOPIC 2

The Kurdish question after the independence referendum and the seizure of Kirkuk

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1. Presenting the Committee

In the United Nations the Security Council is one of the main six organs established in the United Nations Charter which is responsible for ensuring lasting peace throughout the world. The body has four specific goals defined in the Charter: “To maintain international peace and security; To develop friendly relations among nations; To cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect to human rights; To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations.”

The body is made up of a total of 15 members, five of which are permanent members: The United States of America, The People’s Republic of China, the French Republic, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. These five nations also hold the special distinction of veto power. This veto power allows any of the five nations to refuse a paper even if the entirety of the other 14 members approve. This power is the reason these nations are sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘The Big Five’.

The other 10 members are elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly. The current members as of 2019 are: Belgium, Côte d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland, and South Africa. These members are allowed to vote but unlike the permanent members do not hold a special veto ability.

The real power of the Security Council comes from their designated responsibilities. They are the only organ of the United Nations which can enact obligatory and binding policies. Furthermore, the Security Council can establish missions, create new committees, negotiate ceasefires, enact embargoes and sanctions and even use military action through UN Peacekeepers. These powers are established to allow the UN to respond to immediate and imminent issues in the world. However, their power is still checked and limited by the Charter which can only be amended by a full session of the General Assembly.

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TOPIC 1: POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE KHASHOGGI AFFAIR

1. Introduction

The death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey on 2 October 2018 sparked an international reaction after links with the Saudi Government were discovered and led to the so-called “Khashoggi Affair”. Jamal Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi journalist residing in the United States was assassinated at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Originally the Saudi government denied any connection at all but then later admitted that it was, indeed, several Saudi men who have since been arrested. The government, however, has denounced any direct connection with the murder and asserts that the perpetrators worked entirely on their own will with no government interference or direction.

Jamal Khashoggi has had a long history as a journalist originally having close ties to the Saudi royal family and being a prominent anti-soviet figure. Eventually he leaned more towards the progressive movement in Saudi Arabia and came into tense clashes with the Saudi government leading to his relocation to the United States where he received an O-Visa for his journalistic talents. Before his death Khashoggi was an employee for *The Washington Post*, which has had intensive coverage of his assassination in the United States helping to make the incident more prominent.

This assassination has sparked an international debate about increased protections for journalists and press rights and the role that the United Nations should play in protecting these rights. Several organizations have called for the United Nations to launch an independent inquiry into the matter to investigate to what extent the Saudi government played a role in the death of Khashoggi. Of these international organizations, the most prominent are The Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Reporters Without Borders, all of whom have called upon Secretary-General Guterres to launch an investigation

2. Protection of Journalists

Khashoggi has not been the only journalist to have been targeted by groups in the past few years in Saudi Arabia. Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, and Aziza al-Yousef have all been detained by the Saudi government for expressing their opinions and many have seen it as a violation of the notion of the free press. The Committee to Protect Journalists has used the Khashoggi incident to draw more attention to the dangers faced by journalists not only in Saudi Arabia or the Middle East but the whole world.

One of the closest issues to the ‘Khashoggi Affair’ is an increased awareness of the assassination of journalists. Journalists often face suppression and detention from governments when publishing unfavorable articles, but several high-profile cases in 2018 have called for greater attention and perhaps greater protections on an international scale. These issues are not exclusive to the Middle East by any means, in the European Union Jan Kubiak, a Slovak journalist and his fiancée Martina Kursnivona were murdered in their home by police in

Bratislava in February 2018. In the United States there was a shooting at the Capital Gazette newspaper office in Annapolis, Maryland on June 28 2018 where five journalists were killed. These incidents and many others have led to the Committee to Protect Journalists, *Reporters Sans Frontières*, and The Human Rights Watch to call for increased protections for journalists around the world.

3. **OHCHR Investigation**

Following the request of several international organizations, Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres called for an investigation into the ties of the Saudi government in the affair in late October 2018. The investigation is still ongoing, however the first preliminary reports were made available on the 7 February 2019 by UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard. Callamard was accompanied by Baroness Helena Kennedy and Duarte Nuno Vieira from 28 January until the 3 February 2019.

The preliminary observations report that: “The evidence presented to us during the mission to Turkey demonstrates a prime facie case that Mr. Khashoggi was the victim of a brutal and premeditated killing, planned and perpetrated by officials of the State of Saudi Arabia and others acting under the direction of these State agents.” While these reportings are still prima facie and require further investigation and approval by the Turkish authorities Callamard clearly finds a link between the the assassination and the Saudi government.

The investigation concludes with several calls to action by the United Nations particularly a major violation of notion of diplomatic immunity. Callamard calls for further investigation into Human Rights violations as well, citing the gruesome manner in which he was murdered. Callamard will continue his investigation which will be reported to the UNHRC in June 2019 but urges for additional assistance into the investigation of Diplomatic Immunity violations under international law and basic Rule of Law violations.

4. **Political Blocs**

As the investigation is ongoing the situation is likely to shift slightly nonetheless there are still a few distinct opinions on the matter differing on how the issue should be dealt.

The United States, France, & United Kingdom

This Bloc is largely formed on shared economic interests and a historical relationship of co-operation.

The United States stands largely among the other members of the Security Council on this matter. President Trump has strongly affirmed his faith in the Saudi government and the importance of the relationship between the two nations, yet congress has denounced Saudi Arabia. The United States has an ongoing arms deal with Saudi Arabia which while it was threatened during the Affair, ultimately remains in effect.

While Britain and France directly condemned the killing of Khashoggi, they still refused to cut off ties with Saudi Arabia, both of which have arms deals as the main reason. Nonetheless, France still sanctioned Saudi Arabia while continuing to trade actively with the country.

Macron justified this through the notion of “individual sanctions”. Nonetheless the European Union as a whole called for further investigations and condemned Saudi Arabia.

Russia & Kuwait

Both Russia and Kuwait deny Saudi involvement. Russia blames the incident on neglect of the United States to protect its own journalist while Kuwait remains incredibly loyal to the monarchy. Both nations seem to present both a positive attitude towards Saudi Arabia and deny the involvement of the Royal Family. The United States may also fall in line with these states as Trump has also kept his faith in the Saudi government. An agreement between Russia and the United States may remain difficult however given that Russia blames the matter on the United States.

Germany & Belgium

Angela Merkel has harshly condemned the assassination of Khashoggi. Germany has cut off its arms deals with Saudi Arabia until the matter is resolved and has called out other European countries for continuing to trade with them. They are deeply concerned about human rights violations and the protection of journalists.

Belgium likewise condemned the human rights violations and unlike the UK or France has little economic investment in Saudi Arabia and thus has no conflict in interest in supporting the European Union initiative to protect the press and Human Rights.

All other members

All the remaining members of the Security Council have had no strong opinion on the matter either way; this includes China, the only major consensus is that an investigation should be done to resolve the issue.

5. Additional Readings & Resources

Universal Declaration of Human Rights <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

“Preliminary observations of the human rights inquiry into the killing of Mr. Kashoggi following the country visit to Turkey”

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24143&LangID=E>

Security Council Resolution 2222

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2222%282015%29

General Assembly Resolution 175 *The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity*

<http://undocs.org/A/RES/72/175>

UNESCO 39 c/61 “Strengthening UNESCO’s leadership in the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259913?posInSet=2&queryId=707ccac7-2077-41bf-9ce7-9bf07e2dc03a>

Topic 2: The Kurdish question after the independence referendum and the seizure of Kirkuk

1. Historical Context and Introduction

During the times of the Ottoman Empire, most of the Kurdish peoples lived within the same border. However, after World War I and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the Kurds have been divided in different regions. These correspond with the four cardinal points and are located in four different countries: North (Turkey), East (Iran), South (Iraq) and West (Syria). The Kurds are a distinct people with their own languages and culture that are separate from other ethnic traditions in the area. The Kurdish languages are usually divided in different groups, the main ones being: Northern (Kurmanji), Central (Sorani) and Southern. It should be noted that different writing systems (modified Latin and Perso-Arabic scripts) are used for different varieties, explained by the fact that written Kurdish is a relatively recent phenomenon, and so the writing system of the other languages around Kurdish have determined the script in which that variety is written. A second point of division is that the two main varieties (Northern and Central) are not mutually intelligible. Religious differences are also present across different tribes in the four countries, although mostly adhere to Sunni Islam.

Despite these differences, there is a strong Kurdish sentiment in all four areas, further spurred by the repression suffered from the central governments. These claims translate into political action that has sometimes turned into armed violent struggle. The most notorious example of this would be the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) based in Turkey, that has been fighting the Ankara government on and off for over half a century and is considered a terrorist organisation by most Western powers. There are around 30 million Kurds divided between the 4 countries, although Turkey has the largest minority with around 15 million (representing under 20% of the total population), followed by Iran with under 9 million people. Even though the soil in the area is fertile and natural resources are abundant (such as the oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan) the geography and policies of the different countries have traditionally left this area inaccessible and rendered it underdeveloped when compared to other parts of their respective countries.

The nationalism movements of the 19th century briefly sparked a sentiment of unity and a political will to unite the Kurdistan areas into a single country. Cultural and linguistic differences, however, posed problems that were left unresolved and it was not until the 20th century that a new national sentiment was born.

2. One Nation in Four Countries

Regarding the situation in Turkey, the Turkish Kurds might be the most vocal and most well-known example of Kurdish nationalism, or at least traditionally they were. In the first 1921 Turkish Constitution a system based on local authorities was established, which was however abolished just 3 years later when a new constitution came into force. The Kurdish language was officially banned in Turkey until 1992 and repression was widespread in the last third of the 20th century. However, nowadays there are several Kurdish language TV stations and services and in general since 1999 the situation for the Kurdish minority has improved: a plan to foster good relations was put in place under the umbrella of a broader Democratic Initiative plan by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan when he first came into power, although the current rhetoric shows a deteriorating relationship between the minority and the central government.

In Iran, the country in which the second largest Kurdish minority lives, the post 1979 revolution government repressed the Kurds and the conflict has both escalated and de-escalated over time. The Iranian Kurdistan is geographically marked by the Zagros Mountains and so Iraqi Kurdish organisations often aid their Iranian counterparts. The Iranian government is often accused of neglecting the region, such as in their response to the 12 November 2017 earthquake in Kermanshah province, which was slow and ineffective, further antagonising the local population.

The Iraqi Kurdistan is an autonomous region within Iraq, thus holding a privileged status amongst the other Kurdish areas in terms of political representation. Although this was not always true, as during Saddam's regime, and especially during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 the Kurds were violently repressed even by means of chemical weapons. The deteriorating situation in Northern Iraq prompted a response from the International Community that materialised in UNSC Resolution 688 in 1991, which will be further addressed below. In the last few years Iraqi Kurds received a lot of attention for their fight against the Islamic State, IS, as they proved themselves as the most reliable and efficient force in Iraq to contain and reduce the threat posed by the extremist organisation, something that certainly had an influence in the independence referendum on September 27th 2017, which will be also further discussed below.

Lastly, the Syrian Kurdistan has also gained attention in recent times in the context of both the fight against IS and the Syrian Civil War. The Kurdish minority participated with the rest of the general population in the 2011 Arab Spring protests that led to the Syrian Civil War. In October 2011, the Kurdish leader was assassinated in his home. In the subsequent funeral, government forces shot at the crowd that had gathered to mourn, which further galvanised the Kurdish population in their opposition.

A de facto independent region was established in northern Syria under Kurdish rule, currently named Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria but better known as Rojava. Their autonomous rule is now being threatened by Turkish intervention across the border, which has already caused the Kurds to lose some of their territory, namely the Afrin province. The decision from the US to withdraw almost all support for these groups might mean the Kurdish rule in northern Syria may be coming to an end. The situation in this regard is currently evolving.

It should be noted that the aforementioned cultural and ethnic divisions within each Kurdish region are still very visible today. Most notably, there are two opposing factions within Iraqi Kurdistan, represented by the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, each traditionally associated to a respective province within the autonomous region. Not so long ago these factions fought against each other in the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War from 1994 to 1998 and prosperity in the Iraqi Kurdistan might have more to do with foreign hands than internal (dis)unity. Alliances in between different cross-border groups have proven not to follow a pan-Kurdish rhetoric but rather an opportunistic one. However, the very existence of the Iraqi Kurdistan shows intra-Kurdish unity is a viable possibility, and the idea of a nation made of up nations is not new if certain mature examples of federalist or multi-national states are considered.

3. International Community and the Kurdish Question

The issue of the Kurdistan has traditionally been viewed as an internal question of the respective countries. Saddam Hussein's aggressive response to Iraqi Kurdish support for Iran during the 1980-89 war raised international awareness on the treatment the Kurdish people received. The aforementioned UNSCR 688 is one of the few UN resolutions that explicitly mentions repression on the Kurdish people. However, the resolution was later used by the US, France and the UK as an excuse to establish no-fly zones over Iraq in Northern (Iraqi Kurdistan) and Southern (Shia-majority areas) parts. In a later interview Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was Secretary General at the time the resolution passed, called this no-fly zones illegal, as they had not been addressed whatsoever in the document. This might be better understood in the context of the Gulf War and the international opposition that Saddam's government faced, which was unfolding at the time.

Turkey, Iran and Iraq generally follow an amicable policy towards Kurdish minorities in countries other than their own but repress nationalist and independence movements within their borders. Both Iran and Turkey threatened to take measures if the referendum took place: Turkey said it would stop trading with Iraqi Kurdish oil as currently it is Erbil's trade liaison with the world market, at a daily output of over half a million barrels on average; Iran said all security and border agreements would be put on

hold and the border closed. However, since the referendum in the end was merely intended as a show of apparent unity and no real development has resulted from it, it seems the status quo, for the time being, will remain in place.

4. Recent developments

Soon-to-be-held local elections on March 31st in Turkey might mean the Ankara government will double down efforts of intervention in the Rojava territory in order to offer a firm stance to voters. Despite their enmity with Syrian Kurds, Turkey is actually an ally of the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government, as they are trade partners in the oil exports the Erbil authority produces. At the same time, Turkey has scaled up its intervention, Operation Olive Branch, in Rojava and the Syrian Kurds fear their self-government will be crushed. The change in the US administration did not help Kurdish interests and now the situation seems to be at a crossroads, with the American government seeking to appease Turkey, their biggest NATO ally. On the Iranian Kurdistan, the US sanctions are felt more than in the rest of the country as unemployment is higher than the national average. Some resort to smuggling goods from Iraqi Kurdistan, although violence on both sides of the border by the respective armies is making the journey even more difficult.

5. Referendum

The referendum of the Iraqi Kurdistan took place on September 25th 2017, some 3 years after a vote was first mentioned. Kurdish senior officials signalled that the referendum would not mean the declaration of an independent state but would grant legitimacy to that idea. The vote was deemed inconsistent with the 2005 Iraqi Constitution by the Supreme Court a week before the vote actually took place. Voter turnout was over 70% and 92% of voters chose yes to the question of independence. The referendum received little to no international support from sovereign countries, because although some showed neutrality which hinted at support, most pointed to the illegality of holding a vote. Some regional countries and political organisations did show support for the Kurdish right to self-determination.

6. Resources

Council on foreign relations report on Kurdish peoples https://www.cfr.org/interactives/time-kurds#!/?cid=soc-at-the_time_of_the_kurds-infoguide%E2%80%A2

Turkey and oil threat <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/turkey-raises-oil-threat-iraqi-kurds-referendum-170929034217752.html>

UNSC opposes Kurdistan referendum vote <https://www.france24.com/en/20170922-united-nations-security-council-says-opposes-kurdistan-iraq-independence-vote>

UNSC statement expressing concern for the referendum

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13002.doc.htm>

Andrew Kane, The Reality of Intra-Kurdish Rivalry Undermines the Notion of PanKurdish Nationalism [https://www.sciencespo.fr/kuwait-](https://www.sciencespo.fr/kuwait-program/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/KSP_Paper_Award_Fall_2017_Andrew_Kane.pdf)

[program/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/KSP_Paper_Award_Fall_2017_Andrew_Kane.pdf](https://www.sciencespo.fr/kuwait-program/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/KSP_Paper_Award_Fall_2017_Andrew_Kane.pdf)

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<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/02/rojava-united-states-withdrawal-syria-erdogan>

Turkey raises oil threat after Iraqi Kurds' referendum Al Jazeera

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/turkey-raises-oil-threat-iraqi-kurds-referendum-170929034217752.html>

UN's Guterres urges Kurds in Iraq to scrap referendum

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/guterres-urges-iraqi-kurds-scrap-referendum-170917223002535.html>

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[https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Transition2017-](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Transition2017-Turkey.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23ii0inlwxZV4jj1MpbJXQHhk3XEa5En0hQWliA0C_q9PujiS9B57Obs)

[Turkey.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23ii0inlwxZV4jj1MpbJXQHhk3XEa5En0hQWliA0C_q9PujiS9B57Obs](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Transition2017-Turkey.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23ii0inlwxZV4jj1MpbJXQHhk3XEa5En0hQWliA0C_q9PujiS9B57Obs)

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/24/for-kurdish-smugglers-iran-sanctions-are-starting-to-bite/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/israel-supporting-kurdish-secession-iraq-171006105039473.html>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-41440747>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-idUSKBN18Y284>

Chairs



Francisco Rios Viñuela is a Spaniard (his name gives it away) enrolled in an exchange programme at Sciences Po Paris. He is a student of a Double BA in Translation and Interpreting and Law in the beautiful university town of Salamanca, a place he recommends everyone to visit at least once. He first discovered MUN through his home university's MUN association, of which he is now a part of. Although initially the virus did not catch on, after a while he was an avid MUN enthusiast. Other than MUN, he likes to play music, go to the cinema and watch geeky language videos on YouTube. He is excited to visit the Riviera again, as it was there that he first learned French, and is looking forward to a wonderful conference.

Jeremy Zimmerman is a second year student at Sciences Po Paris, Campus de Menton who was born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Jeremy began his MUN experience in high school where he helped to co-found the MUN organization there. Since then Jeremy has chaired and led several conferences both at the secondary and collegiate level. In Europe, Jeremy has chaired the UN Women conference at IsarMUN in 2018 and chaired last year's MEDMUN Security Council a role which he will be resuming for this conference. He is very excited to once again welcome all delegates into his lovely home in Menton and for what is sure to be an amazing conference.





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