

Секция «Политические конфликты в современном мире»

Kurdish role in Iraq political conflict

savasta lucrezia lucrezia

Кандидат наук

Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», Факультет социальных наук, Москва, Россия

E-mail: lucrezia.savasta@hotmail.it

Kurds have a long history of marginalization and persecution, and, particularly in Iraq and Turkey, have repeatedly risen up to seek greater autonomy or complete independence [6]. At the outset of the twenty-first century they have achieved their greatest international prominence yet, most notably in Iraq. Iraqi Kurds were an important partner for the U.S.-led coalition that ousted Saddam Hussein from power in 2003 [1]. Even while asserting their autonomy, Iraqi Kurds are still considered by policymakers as the «glue» that holds the country together amid sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Arabs. The Iraqi Kurdish fighting force, known as peshmerga (Kurdish for «those who face death»), and Syrian Kurdish fighters have played a significant role in fighting the self-proclaimed Islamic State [2].

The role of Kurdish forces in the fight against the Islamic State in particular has raised their international profile. Some countries, including Germany, have directly armed and trained Iraqi Kurdish forces, while the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Islamic State has supported Kurdish ground operations with air strikes [3].

The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have enabled Kurdish forces in both countries to make significant territorial gains, with the help of weaponry and air support from various foreign powers. Besides the Iraqi government, the Kurds are the only party in the multi-layered conflicts in both countries that enjoys the support of key members from both coalitions. The impetus behind Western military aid to Kurdish forces - besides long-standing close ties between the United States and Iraqi Kurdistan - is their reliability and organisation, making them effective against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). More recent Russian support, particularly in the form of air strikes in Syria, stems from tensions between Moscow and Ankara sparked by the latter's downing of a Russian warplane over Turkish airspace in November [1].

US military support to Iraqi Kurds has caused unease in Baghdad - another major ally and coalition member - where there are suspicions that such aid may eventually be used in pursuit and defence of independence. Loosely organised in an ad hoc coalition, Western countries rushed military aid to Iraqi Kurds in the face of a lightning assault by the Islamic State (IS) in June 2014 [2]. They failed, however, to develop a strategy for dealing with the consequences of arming non-state actors in Iraq, a country whose unity they profess to support [2].

Coalition military aid is premised on a belief that giving weapons and training to Kurdish forces, known as peshmergas, will in itself improve their performance against IS, a notion Kurdish leaders were quick to propagate. But the evolving state of Iraqi Kurdish politics makes for a rather more ambiguous picture: the dominant, rival parties, the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), have been moving away from a strategic framework agreement that had stabilised their relationship after a period of conflict and allowed them to present a unified front to the central government as well as neighbouring Iran and Turkey [4].

This is, therefore, a particularly fragile moment. Rather than shore up Kurdish unity and institutions, the latest iteration of the «war on terror» is igniting old and new internecine tensions and undermining whatever progress has been achieved in turning the peshmergas into a professional, apolitical military force responding to a single chain of command. In doing so,

it is also paving the way for renewed foreign involvement in Kurdish affairs. On the face of it, after an initial delivery directly to the KDP in August 2014, Western military aid has been provided to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with prior approval from Baghdad [2]. While coalition members have tied military assistance to acceptance of the central government's sovereign role in its distribution, they are jeopardising their stated interest in preserving Iraq's unity [2]. Indeed, by upsetting the fragile equilibrium among Kurds, between Kurds and Sunni Arabs and between the Kurds and the governments in Baghdad, Tehran and Ankara, they risk weakening it; moreover, by empowering Kurdish party-based forces, they hasten the state's de-institutionalisation and invite external interference [4]. Given how fragile and fragmented Iraq has become, one can only wonder how pouring more arms into it could have any chance of making it stronger.

What the government of Iraq should do for restoring the balance and taking in their hands the ongoing conflict? The most reasonable and smart idea is to develop a joint security strategy with the KRG to counter IS, and work with the KRG to settle outstanding disputes over oil exports and budget allocations [3].

Foreign policy experts say U.S. and international support for Kurdish secession from Iraq is unlikely due to commitments to a unified federal Iraq and close ties with Turkey, a NATO member and candidate for membership in the European Union. Some countries may also be reluctant to support Kurdish independence due to minority secessionist movements within their own borders. However, if Kurdish independence follows rather than precedes Iraq's dissolution, it may be met with less resistance. International and regional support are seen as critical to the viability of an independent Kurdistan since it would be landlocked and reliant on its neighbors for the passage of goods and people [5].

As Masoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan regional government in Iraq, said: «The time has come to decide our fate, and we should not wait for other people to decide it for us» [5].

Источники и литература

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