
Kurds and the Possibility of a European War

25-02-2022

Authors

Ziryan Rojhelati

Summary : Kurdistan is about 1500 kilometers far from the Donbas region where Russia has generated the instability. However, the political effect of the crisis on Kurds is not as far as the geographical distance.

Kurdistan is about 1500 kilometers far from the Donbas region where Russia has generated the instability. However, the political effect of the crisis on Kurds is not as far as the geographical distance.

The decision of Vladimir Putin, to support the independence of two "new republics" and to send military forces to Luhansk and Donetsk, has taken the crisis to a level close to war. Certainly, if conflict occurs or not, the situation in Ukraine is not only limited to that particular area and it might be the starting point of a great change in international policy in which it has effect on the Middle East and Kurdistan; through the use of cards of pressure of changing borders and with the manifest of "war or threat of war" as one of the most ancient but the most effective ways of change in international policy!

The answer that I am looking for is how the Ukraine crisis can have effect in the Middle East and what could this mean to Kurds?

What is happening?

How does the world, or more particularly westerners, act with Russia? In fact, albeit Washington has stated that they will back their allies and Europe decided to put sanctions on Russia, but still both America and Europe have not reached the point of no return with Russia!

President Josef Biden has announced that they are deploying their personnel and military equipment to Baltic States, countries as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in which this demonstrates that Washington's concern is more likely a northern line in Eastern Europe. This is while the instability is in the southern part of the region and above the black sea. This might affect to stop the Russian overreaching, but the fear of Russia by the European is not something useless for America! The existence of a Russian threat on Europe can be a reason for Europe to have more reliance on America for its own security and, also in other global matters, to be more agreeable with America, in which Europe has shown some ignorance to the country in the past few years. At the end of the day, no country wants her allies to be powerful in a way where they no longer need the country's support and or get out of control. Beside that it is not in America's interest to be very tough with Russia, encouraging a strong alliance between Russia and America's adversaries. Moreover, the "atomic fear" and the possibility of putting nuclear weapons to work by Russia is another reason not to put pressure on Putin very much!

At least up until now, America has acted in a way that the big concern is China not Russia. For instance, in the past ten years, America has engaged in some important military and security alliance around China and the Pacific Area where it displeased some European allies like France. In 2021, the strategic alliance of AUKUS between Britain, Australia and America was announced¹ which eases the generation of a class of nuclear-propelled submarines and garrisoning larger amount of western military forces in the Pacific Area, and it will probably strengthen the southern line in the Pacific Area against China. Additionally, in 2021 the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between America, India, Japan and Australia was strengthened and the name of the dialogue changed from Quad to Quad+ where New Zealand representatives, South Korea, and Vietnam joined. This agreement was established with Japan's preference in 2007, but it was put away after a while, and then in Trump's administration, 2017, it was renewed. In the past few years, the Five Eyes Intelligence Group activities worried China more.³

Another reasonable argument is that even Europe hasn't showed a huge reaction against Russia. For instance, regarding imposing sanctions on Moscow authorities, they have isolated the number one authority which is Vladimir Putin himself which is akin to leaving a door open. In fact, beside conflicts and military power, Europe has relations with Russia in many other sectors like energy and economy and it cannot get rid of them quite or at least in a short amount of time. Russia is the fourth largest commercial partner of European Union. In 2020, 36.5% of Russia's product import was from Europe, and 37.9% exports of Russia were to Europe. In 2019, direct income of European Union in Russia was reached 311.4 billion Euros, while Russia's investment in Europe was only 136 billion Euros⁴. Russia can also do, and did before, generate

a refugee crisis on Europe, for instance, the refugee crisis on the Belarus-Poland border in 2021.

Beside all that, Europe and America have punished Russia for other reasons before, but as it is clear, punishment, as experienced with Iran, North Korea, and even Russia, doesn't seem to be an effective tool to change a country's practice. Russia on the other hand, is not out of choices, for instance, whenever the possibility of looking for new exporter of natural gas by Europe heads up, Russia will be looking for new buyers and new agreements, akin to the agreement with China in which the Gazprom Company and Chinese National Oil Company signed a 30 year agreement of a 10 billion cubic meter natural gas annual export by Russia to China⁵. According to the report of Security Conference in Munich, European Union is importing 173 types of product outside Europe and the Union has to find a solution about that issue⁶. The natural gas that the Union imports from Russia is for sure one of those products. In short, any further actions that Europe and America will perform against Russia might not be significant, if direct conflict doesn't happen.

Effects of Russian Crisis on Kurds

First: Possibility of Conflict

There are some regions in the world where their changes widely affect the remaining places of the planet, and Europe is one of those regions. The big wars have always been initiated from Europe. WW1 and WW2 also initiated from Europe and their effects did not remain limited to the continent. After WW1, empires of the world such as Ottoman Empire collapsed and the current map of the Middle East was shaped, and the Great Kurdistan got divided. WW2 also initiated from Europe and opened the path for the political movement of Kurds to gain a new spirit, but it has never helped a character to come into existence and build a Kurdish state, therefore the borders remained in their shape.

If the Ukraine crisis turns into another European war, then positions of the two Kurdish commands of the Middle East, (the defacto command of Rojava and the recognized Kurdistan Region command), will get highlighted to the world. On the other hand, if war doesn't happen and the political campaign of the huge powers goes on, then the focus and polarity of the international policy will be on the Middle East and this region which at that time the form of Kurdish Cooperation politics will be effective on what will happen in the future.

Second: Possibility of Empowerment of the Regional Countries' Reactions

Currently, the focus of the great powers of the world is on three important areas. The important areas are Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Read Sea.

In Asia and the Pacific, the fast enlargement of China's power, a large population, and a wide area became the focus of the great powers. Eastern Europe – a line between Baltic Sea and Black Sea – is a hot zone, as the history experiences show, that area has the potential to transmit the conflicts to other parts of the world too. Throughout the last few years, the regional and international powers have had more focus on Read Sea area which is recognized as the main road of Europe and China's commerce. This is beside the effects that the area has on geopolitical campaign and security. According to Munich Security Conference 2022 Report, about 20 military bases of 14 international and regional powers and three international checkpoints are in the area⁷ where most of them are congested in Bab-el-Mandeb, Straits of Tiran and Swiss Canal, which is generally shows the value of that region. Intermediately, the focus on the Middle East partially declined which gives more "action" freedom to the regional powers.

This is beside the campaign between great powers of the world, on those three hot areas, will prioritize the status of the regional powers. For instance, the status of Turkey for Russia and NATO gained more importance than the previous year. If

war starts, Turkey can have an important impact on the on western side power of the war, nearby the Black Sea, having the authority over Istanbul "the Bosphorus and Dardanelles" Straits according to the Monteux Convention. This is also beside the military bases that NATO has in Turkey. The roll of Turkey as the guard of the Western Europe is becoming more powerful, in which this forces the Eastern Countries not to, at least at this period of time, stand against the policies of Ankara in Syria or the other remaining places, or at least reduce their dissatisfactions.

More interestingly, at the same time of the Ukraine crisis, possibility of the agreement between Iran and the West on nuclear matter has increased. Maybe at this crisis, America and Europe do not seek Iran to perform such practices akin to Russia; therefore they might decrease the level of their tensions with the Islamic Republic. The value of Gulf Countries as a resource for energy provider will increase. If the natural gas of the Kurdistan Region is also exported through Turkey, as the president of Turkey told, and the situation of Iraq allows, this can be in Hawler's interest.

Third: Reestablishing the Borders as Part of Power Possession Competition

- One of the initiates of the United Nations is respecting unitary of land and independency of states. Nonetheless this is not perfectly getting along with the rights of the other agreements that the United Nations set to nations of the world. Anyhow, the practice of Russia is disrespecting that initiate, but Russia is not the only country that performs such practice for its own political intent. There are many other countries that performed same practice.

In fact, the experience that Russia is about to record in the international policy is not in disadvantage of Kurds and other nations who still don't own their own country. Maybe one of the reasons, that immediately Turkey and a country like China condemned the act of Moscow, is exactly because such practice, in long term, might put an effect on matters of Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Kurds, not because they are against the tensions in Russia and West. Kurds, in fact, have benefited the Western administration in the region to define their political status, but the West is not into reestablishment of borders especially when the geometric pattern for most of the areas was also set by the West.

Foot notes:

¹ – <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/what-is-the-aukus-alliance-and-what-are-its-implications>

² – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

³ – <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-23/why-the-aukus-quad-and-five-eyes-pacts-anger-china-quicktake>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/c>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-russia-china-agree-30-year-gas-deal-using-new-pipeline-source-2022-02-04/>

⁶ – <https://securityconference.org/publikationen/munich-security-report-2022/>

⁷ – <https://securityconference.org/publikationen/munich-security-report-2022/>