

Shadow of Three Wars on the Political and Economic Crises of Kurdistan Region

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Introduction]

Kurdistan Region is going through difficult times. Likely collapse of KRI's economy due to fall of oil prices and recent Baghdad decision to halt KRG's budget made it worse. In addition there is shadow of three presumable wars that will affect the situation more, expanding war on ISIS, likely return of Kurdish civil war and clash between US and Iran!

The current situation is very risky, but the crises carries opportunity to change the system that created the problems and first step is to change the views. Because" the crises won't solve with that view made the problems."

Shadow of Civil War

The ongoing tension between KDP and PUK made the Kurdistan situation tenser. There has been tension between political parties in Kurdistan region from curbing coronavirus until Zini Warte developments (recently there was standoff between Kurdish ruling parties Peshmerga and PKK in that area) if this was only media and political issue then it would be normal political competition between the parties, but the concern is that it has military dimension too. The Kurdish Party leaders have different dreams. They have changed their nationalist dreams to identity based smaller than nation such loyalty to a party and region. And the issue is that is not only the mentality problem but it has objective side too, despite dream and different interests of leaders, the conflict is a source of living for many of their supporters which from warlords extended to media and party organs cadres. And there are other important factors in the current tensions such while Kurdish government is trying to impose power but ruling parties are lacking of trust in each other. And some of the second generation of political leaders are seeking to strengthen their position through overlook their rivals. Bad economy and struggle over revenue resources are other reasons to deepen the tensions. After electing new leadership of PUK, the party is willing to have radical review of its relations with KDP and its partnership in government. And KDP so far is less interested in that. Therefore both parties instead of starting an actual war they see use of threaten to launch war and shadow of civil war as more useful to make their policy works. But in case of losing control over tensions, due to existing other factors there is potential to turn these tensions to fight and another political and administrative divide in KRI.

Likely Resume of War on ISIS

Since January there has been more of ISIS attacks and movements across Iraq. Although still did not reach that level that we speak of continuous war on ISIS, but from inside got real threat. Some Iraqi groups' pressure to expel US troops, coronavirus, political and military instability in the Kurdistan areas out of KRG and Sunni regions are key motivators to re-emerge ISIS.

Likely return of ISIS strongly, not just in term of war expenses during such bad economy amid covid-19 but politically and security wise will add more difficulties to KRG. The political Islam is about to grow in KRI which is not only can create humanitarian shield for political Islamic parties in KRI, but with existing bad political and economic situation can create humanitarian shield for radical groups as well. Disappointment from changing current political and economic situation and past agenda of Islamic parties can open door to radicalize Islamism trend in the region.

US-Iran tensions

The US-Iran tensions have increased since early of this year. Tehran supporters in Iraq via attacking US military bases are pressing and asking US to leave. And in the gulf tensions are more direct between both rather than through proxies. Iran launched its first military satellite into earth's orbit which led to more tensions with America, because US consider this as

violation of UN Security Council resolution 2231. Also recent Iranian boats approach to US navy ship in the Persian Gulf escalated the tensions. And the UN Security Council arms embargo set to expire in October. Although Iranian economy is weak but this will make rivals of Iran more concerned if the embargos lifted, because based on nature of the Iranian political system, the regime might find a way to get finances to buy weapons. If US cannot convince Security Council to extend arms embargo on Iran then might take other actions to press Iran.

Question here how this will affect Kurdistan Region?

First of all Iran due to economic embargos and coronavirus, in need for Iraqi market more than anytime. And Iraq due to fall of oil prices has less capability to buy. The American pressures on Iranian energy make Iraq to seek another option to get it from. Iran want to stick to the Iraqi market especially in selling natural gas and power to Iraq. One of the issues in the recent talks between Erbil and Baghdad was to study KRI gas resources and provide power from KRG to Iraq. On this point Iran and KRI economic interest will clash and if this does not work by the end whether due to internal Kurdish divisions or dispute Baghdad and Erbil this will be in the interest of Tehran.

After killing Soleimani, KRG and Iran's political trends on America have divided more. Especially Tehran and Erbil took different stand on the Iraqi parliament resolution to expel US troops, withdraw some of these troops to KRI and import patriot missile defense by US to Iraq. Iranian proxies in Iraq have increased their anti-Kurdistan and Peshmerga statements and pressures. And Iran's limited response after killing Soleimani as launched some missiles against US bases and launched one against Kurdistan too. This was clear indication that Iran in its tensions with US does not see KRG as neutral actor. It will not be a realistic view to look at the Zini Warte recent events as to avoid domination of Kurdish groups loyal to Iran, because PUK and PKK also have ties to US and most likely during decisive condition they would stand with US camp rather than with Iranian one. PUK and PKK have pragmatic policy and have potential to change their policies with Iran and Tehran knows this very well. Therefore during these sensitive times intra-Kurdish parties' conflict will be more in the interest of Iran than US!

Conclusion

The Kurdish internal tensions, collapse of economy and Baghdad pressures on Erbil brought difficult times to Kurdistan region. Continue tensions and shadow of war will worsen the situation. In the history of nations there are important moments to make crucial decisions and these days are available for Kurdistan region. If Kurdistan region willing for a change can create opportunities out of these risks. First condition for KRI to step up towards this is to normalize internal situation. And to make this happen the institutional and personal role of Kurdistan presidency will be a key to mediate and bring all Kurdish parties together. Also government through some quick reform steps can build trust among citizens, when these steps made then deal with external crises and challenges will be easier.