Forum: United Nations Membership Council (UNMC)

Student Officers: Beomjoon (BJ) Park, Thu Tran, Seungwoo (Sean) Jang

TOPIC 3: On the Membership Of Rojava

Include a link to the specific LibGuide for the topic

I. Introduction to the Topic

Rojava, also known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), is a disputed autonomous region located in northeastern Syria. The region runs along the border of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, and is home to over a million Kurds, which are one of the ethnic groups in the Middle East. As of today, there are currently no foreign governments that recognize Rojava as an independent state, mostly due to its tumultuous political state with Turkey and Syria as well as its lack of contiguity that is crucial for stable governance and economic viability. With constant change and deep tensions with other nations, the membership of this country deeply resonates with the theme of the conference "How can we use multilateral diplomacy to surmount the challenges of rapid societal change?" Considering the local, regional, national, and international contexts of this country will be crucial in forming diplomatic resolutions in this council.

Rojava emerged as a de facto autonomous region when the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011. Opposing Al-Assad's dictatorship regime, the rebels in Syria provided an opportunity for an already-existing Kurdish political party named the Democratic Union Party (PYD) to govern the empty northern region, which they named "Rojava". In the regional context, Rojava stands in conflict with the Syrian regime due to Syria seeing the independent Kurdish organisation to be a threat to national security.

In the international context, Rojava is in deep conflict with a country directly above - Turkey. Conflicts have escalated between the Turkish government and the Kuridstan's Workers Party (PKK) due to concerns over the rights of Kurdistans in Turkey. Turkey views Rojava as a branch of the PKK, and therefore has launched several air strikes and terrorist attacks.

For Rojava to be accepted into the UN, Rojava would have to settle its tensions with Syria and end its conflict with Turkey. Its unstableness in a region of war calls for international cooperation between member states to help ease the conflict.

II. Definition of Key Terms & Concepts

Autonomous Region: Autonomous Region refers to an area or a territory within a country that has a degree of independence and self-governance. Although this region is not an officially recognized state, it may have its own laws and customs. In this context of the topic, Rojava would be considered an autonomous region.

Human Rights: Human rights refers to the set of rights that all human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, language, or any other factors, are entitled to. Some key human rights in the context of

this topic are: right to live, no torture, no discrimination, etc. The conflict in Rojava essentially has its roots from the human rights violations of the Kurdish people in Turkey and Syria, so this is a very important factor to consider.

Safe Zone: In the context of the conflict between Turkey and Rojava, the "Safe Zone" refers to the Northern Syria Buffer Zone, which is a demilitarised zone established on the Syrian side of the Syria-Turkey border aimed to maintain security along the border. Turkey aims to expand this zone to relocate one million Syrian refugees into that zone. However, with a lack of safeguards and political instability in that region, this could exacerbate the Syrian displacement crisis by further displacing hundreds of thousands of Syrians in that area.

Ceasefire: Ceasefire refers to the cessation of acts of violence against the civilian population. In the conflict of Rojava, there have been multiple temporary ceasefire agreements made by both parties. However, this has been continuously violated, as for example Turkey launched an invasion in northern Syria in 2019 despite the ceasefire agreement made prior.

Demilitarisation: Demilitarisation is the act of removing military arms and forces from an area. Although there have been attempts of demilitarisation in the borders of Turkey and Rojava, it has been mostly unsuccessful. To deescalate the tensions present in Rojava, this will be a crucial factor for countries to implement.

III. Key Stakeholders

Turkey: Turkey's stance towards Rojava has been characterised by economic blockades, opposition, and international isolation through means such as military attacks on the Rojava territory. Turkey has continued to undermine any social progress made in the region, such as advances in women's liberation and most importantly self government. With the complex geopolitical and security conflicts, Turkey has continued to become relevant in the Rojava conflict, and will stand as the greatest opposition of Rojava to the membership of the region in the UN.

Russia: Russia's relation to Rojava is complex. During the Syrian conflict Russia has shown its relevance by making several moves that support the Kurdish forces in Rojava. Moreover, Russia allowed Rojava to open its first foreign mission in Moscow, which was shown to be a retaliatory move against Turkey. Although subtle, Russia aims to use its relationship with the Kurds to influence Turkey's political and economic policy.

USA : The US has provided support towards the Kurdish military during its fight with ISIS. However, with the fall of ISIS, its support for the region has diminished and ultimately led to breaking its alliance with the military group. This has in turn led to the conflict between Turkey and Rojava, as the US withdrew its troops on the border.

Syria: Syria's relationship with Rojava can be described as "eased hostility" rather than mutual agreement. In similarity with other governments, the Syrian regime viewed the independent Kurdish state to be a threat of national stability, but due to the invasion of ISIS in Syria, both groups have set their hostility outside in their fight for survival. Currently, Syria's approach to Rojava has been largely

influenced by the military, as Rojava's Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has been used to protect Syria from the Islamic State. Although there are some aspects that Rojava could negotiate to gain recognition of its decentralised state, the possibility continues to shrink as international endeavours for independent settlement declines.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): The SDF is the official military wing of Rojava founded in 2015. It is considered to be one of the most important stakeholders in the Rojava conflict due to its influence and conflicts it has brought. As a key military power in Syria, it has established military relations with the US to fight against ISIS which has ultimately made the US involved in the Syrian conflict. The SDF also presents itself as a link of collaboration between Syria and Rojava, as the SDF has been used to protect both Syria and Rojava from the Islamic State. However, the SDF is essentially the cause of Rojava's conflict with Turkey due to its ties with the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), which is a Kurdistan militant group that aims to create an independent Kurdistan state. Both Turkey and the European Union have listed the group as a terrorist organisation. Rojava's conflict with Turkey will most likely not end until the issue of the SDF's connection with PKK has been resolved.

IV. Key Issues including Background Information

Conflict with Turkey: As aforementioned, Rojava's conflict with Turkey stems from the SDF's connection with PKK. In the past years Turkey has continuously launched military incursions on Rojava. Most recently in October 2023, it carried out several assaults on Rojava's security forces as well as civilian infrastructure in response to an attack made on the ministry in Ankara by the PKK. Furthermore, Turkey strives for extension of the Safe Zone between Turkey and Syria for its plan to relocate the 1 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey.

Conflict with Syria: As a democratic region in Syria, Rojava has been in conflict with the Syrian government in terms of its democracy and self-governance. Although the hostility has eased out, there are no signs of Syria recognizing Rojava as an independent self-government. Furthermore, Syria has made sure to exclude Rojava from international conferences and agreement talks, further diminishing the chance of recognition.

Conflict with the Islamic State: The SDF has successfully dismantled ISIS in Syria, and as a result Rojava currently holds many prison camps full of ISIS prisoners. In 2022 the ISIS launched an attack in Rojava to free its prisoners, leading to a continued escalation in the conflict. As the conflict with the Islamic State continues, Rojava's internal state becomes more and more unstable, making it difficult for the region to be registered as a UN member state.

Kurdish displacement: The Kurds are historically one of the largest populations without a state, and have been fighting for their rights, autonomy. However, their endeavours have been marked with marginalisation and persecution. Since the Syrian civil war in 2011, over 2 million Kurds have been displaced, struggling with water and sanitation, finding health centers, and many more. This issue is further exacerbated in the Rojava conflict as Turkey has depopulated up to 3 million Kurds in their fight against the PKK, and have executed more than 15,000 Kurdish people in that process. The continued

conflict causes a serious concern for the displaced Kurdish people, and it will be crucial for countries to resolve this conflict through a diplomatic approach.

V. Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1920	The Treaty of Lausanne is signed, and the Kurds are dispersed around the new borders of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.
1962	Syria displaces 120,000 Kurds who cannot prove that they resided in Syria before 1945 by stripping their citizenship. This causes them to become stateless and unable to travel.
1974	The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is founded by Abdullah Ocalan. It uses violence and terrorism, aiming to establish an independent Kurdish regime in southeast Turkey.
2003	The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) is founded in Syria, advocating for Kurdish rights and autonomy.
2013	In the midst of the Syrian civil war, the Kurdish PYD declares autonomy in northeastern Syria, known as Rojava.
2014	The SDF battles the Islamic State with the US supporting them with air strikes and armaments. This causes concerns for US-Turkey relationship as the US is seen to be supporting a PKK-affiliated group.
2018	Turkey captures Afrin, one of the cantons of Rojava. Tens of thousands of Kurds flee their homes.
2019	With the fall of ISIS, the US withdraws its troops from Syria. Turkey takes this chance to invade Rojava with the aim of creating a twenty-mile "Safe Zone". The SDF calls the Syrian government for help, allowing Syrian troops to enter Rojava. The conflict pauses with a ceasefire agreed by the US and Turkey.
2020	The UNHRC releases a report investigating Turkey's war crimes in Rojava. The inquiry shows the human rights violations committed in Rojava towards Kurds.
2022	Turkey launches Operation Claw-Sword, where it launches air strikes to Kurdish militants in Syria and Iraq in response to a bombing made by the PKK.

2023	Turkey launches drone strikes on Rojava, damaging critical infrastructure that resulted in water and electricity shortages for over 2 million people.

VI. Possible Challenges & Solutions

Conflict with Turkey: For the conflict with Turkey to settle, it is crucial that the fight between the Turkish government and the PKK must end. As both sides are currently committed to military victory, a step Rojava could take is to initiate peace talks with the Turkish government by choosing PYD delegations to visit Ankara, the capital of turkey. Connecting with the conference's theme, this diplomatic approach might not be immediately effective but is a step in surmounting this challenge. The implications of this approach are generally positive for all sides; Strengthening Turkish relations could slowly lead to investment opportunities for Rojava in Turkey, which could enhance its economy and improve Turkish businesses. For the US, this is a great outcome as well as it would no longer have to be entangled in being allied to two forces that are opposed to each other.

Conflict with Syria: In the conflict between Syria and Rojava, it is very unlikely that Syria will recognize Rojava as an independent state as it virtually has no merits for the country. Although there could be negotiations on ensuring peace, the conflict will not be resolved unless the regional civil war in Syria comes to an end. Therefore, a resolution focused on providing international aid towards the Syrian region in hopes of ending the war is a way.

Reintegration: A drastic measure that could potentially occur is the reintegration of Rojava into Syria. However, in doing so, member nations could bring changes inside the country to ensure that the human rights of Kurds are respected, and that they are not discriminated against. The reintegrated country should consider the issue of Kurdish displacement, where millions or Kurds have been suffering in a stateless status.

VII. Recommendations for Resolution Writing including Research

Given the complex conflicts Rojava is situated in, delegates should make sure to consider multiple perspectives of the issue when crafting their resolutions. When researching their country's stance, it is useful to research the country's relationship with the key stakeholders in the topic, such as Turkey and Syria, so that their country's views align with that of their allies. Delegates should also think about the impact of Rojava's membership would bring to their country to evaluate which direction their resolution should be written in. Furthermore, as the topic of Rojava is a relatively new issue, it is important to use sources that are new and up-to-date. The situation in Rojava has drastically changed within the past 5 years, so it is very important to use information that is not outdated.

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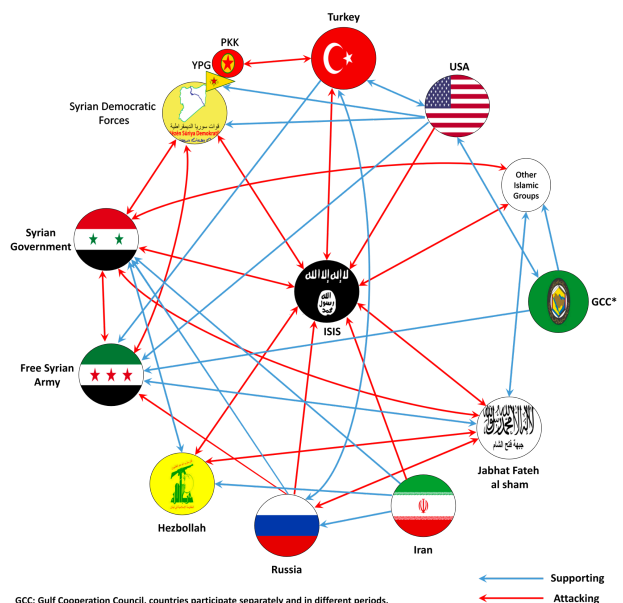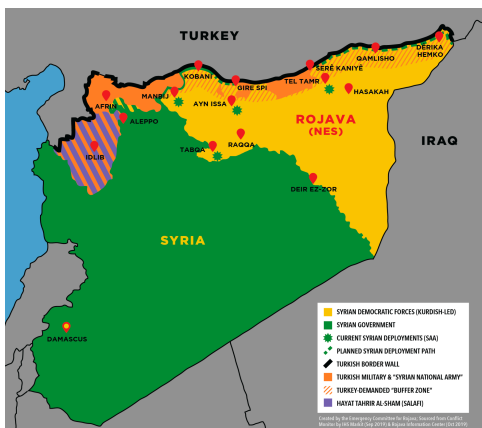www.igi-global.com/dictionary/regional-autonomy/65039. Accessed 21 Dec. 2023.

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IX: Additional Resources