

Teaching Notes:

CFR InfoGuide on the Kurds

The following discussion questions, essay questions, and in-class activities are designed to help educators use “The Time of the Kurds” InfoGuide in the classroom.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Ideas for questions to use in facilitating full-class discussions, assigning small-group discussions, or posting on a class discussion board. Questions allow students to critically reflect on the material provided in the InfoGuide and hone their communication skills.

1. The Kurds are one of the world’s largest ethnic groups that do not have a state of their own. What factors have prevented the Kurds from achieving independence?
2. What are the differences among the various Kurdish communities in the Middle East?
3. What were the consequences of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–88 for Iraqi Kurds? What were some of the defining events of this period?
4. How is the fate of Syrian Kurds affected by developments in Iraq and Turkey? Have Iraqi or Turkish Kurds exerted more influence over their Syrian brethren?
5. How has the U.S. relationship with the Kurds evolved over time? How has it been affected by the rise of the Islamic State group? Is the United States a trustworthy collaborator or ally of the Kurds?
6. How have the Kurds navigated the difficulties posed by the region's Sunni-Shia sectarian divide?
7. How would you characterize the Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) relations with the rest of Iraq generally, and the government in Baghdad specifically?
8. The KRG’s relations with Turkey have been transformed over the last decade or so. What explains this transformation? Is it durable?

9. How has the threat of the Islamic State group affected the Kurds? What was the significance of the siege of Kobani in September 2014?
10. Is the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) likely to succeed?
11. Explain what divides the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and what divides the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)? Are these divisions surmountable?

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

Suggestions for essay topics that enable students to dive deeper into the material found in the InfoGuide and conduct their own research and analysis.

1. Has the time come for Kurdistan to become an independent state? What would its borders be? Do you think that the United States and its Western allies should back Kurdish independence?
2. How have the Kurds figured in regional geopolitics since the end of World War I? How have governments in the region interacted with Kurds in their own states and neighboring ones?
3. What challenges face the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the next five-to-ten years? Your answer should address security, diplomacy, domestic dissent, economic prospects, trade linkages, and oil and gas opportunities, as well as regional dynamics.
4. What has driven the U.S. approach to Iraqi Kurds since the 1970s? Has the United States taken a consistent approach?

ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS:

In-class activities based on “The Time of the Kurds” InfoGuide that promote participatory learning and critical thinking. These can be adapted based on students’ levels and classroom needs.

1. Group Activities:

- Break students up into seven groups representing the governments of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Each of group should research the position of its respective party prior to class. In class, the groups should express their preferences for what they would like to see happen in the next three years, both with respect to the region and the Kurds. In a second session, encourage the different groups to negotiate to bridge the divides among them.
- Divide students into two groups, one representing the KRG and the other, the Iraqi government. Have the students look at current divisions that plague these two parts of the federal government. Have students state their preferred outcomes, and then ask them to negotiate with each other over keeping Iraq united.

2. Debate: Break students into two groups for a debate on the resolution:

“Resolved: Kurds should not be denied their self-determination, and therefore the United States should push for an independent Kurdistan wherever Kurds want to secede and become part of an independent Kurdish state.”