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Perspectives of the Kurdish knot in the Middle East

As Józef Kukułka wrote: "Although the theory of international relations, as well as other branches of social sciences, is not intended to predict the course of events, it sometimes allows some speculations"[1].

As a result of the end of the Cold War, the current system of polarization of forces in the Middle East has been severely shaken. The result of these changes was the relaxation of the classic patterns of regional cooperation against the Kurdish independence aspirations. This in turn created opportunities to change the current status of the Kurdish *status quo*. The first step in this direction was the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish political body operating as a *de facto* state in the areas of South Kurdistan. Also in Turkey and Syria, the status of the Kurdish case has received some positive changes. However, in Iran, the Kurdish case has not recorded any changes so far. The changes in status spread over time do not constitute the final goal of the Kurds. Every researcher of the Kurdish affair knows that an independent Kurdish state is the dream of every Kurd. However, a number of objective and subjective conditions blocked the possibility of achieving this goal for almost the entire twentieth century. However, dramatic political and social transformations in the Middle East and their implications, especially since the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, indicate that the Kurds' dream is not an abstraction. International public opinion is also increasingly raising its voice to support such a venture[2]. In addition, the course of events in the Middle East countries since spring 2011 indicates that several of them are waiting for the process of balkanization[3]. The possible change of the political map in the region, the current polarization of regional forces and the current bloody course of events in the Middle East constitute

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[1] J. Kukułka, *Historia współczesnych stosunków międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 2003, p. 118.

[2] J. Hallen, *Time for an Independent Kurdistan*, World Watch, http://www.aei.org/publication/time-for-an-independent-kurdistan/ [access on: 10.05.2018].

[3] S. Avineri, *The Balkanization Of The Middle East*, http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2012/04/27/the-balkanization-of-the-middle-east/APR 27 2012 [access on: 13.05.2013].

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a set of premises on the basis of which it is possible to develop a series of forecasts regarding the future of the region and one of its oldest problems, namely the Kurdish case.

Realities of the Middle East in the shadow of the Arab Spring

For centuries, the Middle East was characterized by certain qualities that tempted the powers to conquer its areas. The discovery of oil there at the end of the nineteenth century made the participation of world powers in its history wider and more dramatic[4]. The turning point in the history of this region was the World War I, because losing it by the Ottoman Empire allowed to establish the current political map of the Middle East. Its new structure, which did not correspond to the proper ethnic and religious map of this region, was itself a conflict-making element. Demarcation lines of newly emerging countries: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon or Turkey, were not consistent with the will of their residents, but in this matter the interests of the then great powers: Great Britain, France and Italy prevailed[5]. This fact added to the existing historical conflicts in the Middle East a new dimension, of which the Kurdish case is an obvious example. Its bloody symptoms in the interwar period and the Cold War did not bring results. The failure of the Kurds could be partially explained by the subjective conditions of the Kurdish national movement, such as the lack of a clear vision, disintegration of factions and internal conflicts[6]. Most scholars agree that objective conditions had a decisive role in shaping the realities of the Kurdish case. These include the cooperation of the region's states against the independence aspirations of Kurds. The mechanisms of operation of the international political system, especially during the Cold War, are also classified as objective conditions[7].

The rivalry of ideological dogmas and economic interests during the Cold War period was not favourable to the aspirations and interests of the Kurds in the Middle East. The more severe forms it maintained (East-West), the more its demarcation lines shifted deeper into the Middle East[8]. The struggle for influence meant that both blocks were

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[4] The Middle East has become a "zone of extreme wars" characterized by the intensity of extremely bloody conflicts, occurring simultaneously in many places and specific due to the direct participation of the western armed forces, see: A. Gresh, *Bliski Wschód w amerykańskiej wersji*, http://www.kampania-palestyna.pl [access on: 12.08.2017].

[5] Most of the borders in the Middle East and North Africa were drawn up by imperial powers – Great Britain, France and Italy – either after the World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (from the Sykes-Picot agreements) or earlier, as in Libya and Sudan. But in no case they are borders bound by local will or ethnic or historical boundaries.

[6] S. Avineri, *op. cit.*

[7] The Kurdish case fell victim to international affairs because Kurdish uprisings were supported or provoked by the United States as long as they needed them.

[8] The withdrawal of British troops in 1956 from the Middle East region made it the centre of interest of the superpowers during the Cold War, however, the first attempts to global political competition for the Middle East took place already in 1946. In the face of postwar chaos, Stalin counting on winning the first outposts, withheld the withdrawal of the Red Army from northern Iran. In the end, he was forced to withdraw by the reaction of American President Harry Truman, who threatened him with serious consequences. Since

increasingly reaching for ill-considered steps. Each party on its own systematically supported authoritarian-totalitarian and dictatorial systems of Middle Eastern countries. In addition, in the spirit of competition, each side also supported the opposition in the countries of the opposite block. The West supported fundamentalist movements against pro-Soviet governments, while the USSR supported leftist movements, even extremist ones, in pro-Western countries[9].

During the Cold War, not only ideological dogmas were the main motive for the operation of world powers towards the Middle East. The multi-level uniqueness and economic values of this region were also an important motive for the activities of the great powers towards the region. On the one hand, the Middle East from prehistory occupied a strategic geopolitical location in the form of an intercontinental bridge and had control over land and water trade routes. On the other hand, it was an important market. In addition, its natural resources, especially oil and gas, were the basic energy source needed for industrial development. Control over them became a vital need to sustain the economic condition and prevent stagnation[10].

The disruption of the current polarization system of international forces after the end of the Cold War period began the so-called unipolar system of international relations. Its essence, based on the US hegemony as the only world superpower, also failed the exam. In contrast to the Eastern European example, the political, social and economic transformations that formed since the beginning of the unipolar system of international relations and their consequences did not serve the real interests of the Middle Eastern peoples. Political changes, initiated in this period, led to the collapse of some political orientations and the creation of new ones in their place. Such a direction of change was partly due to the strong recession of left-wing political orientation, which, as a result of the fall of the Eastern Bloc, partially lost its legitimacy for its functioning[11].

In the Middle East, the defeat of socialism as a vision of a system of social justice weakened the liberal movements with a secular vision of the world in favour of political Islam. The greater part of them went more and more to radicalization, broadening the

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then, until the early 1970s, little had changed in the Persian Gulf, see: W. Ferfecki, *Zatoka Perska – pół wieku napięć i konfliktów*, http://www.stosunki.pl/?q=node/693 [access on: 31.05.2017].

[9] A good example is the promotion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in the 1970-80s by the West against the pro-Soviet Syrian government. On the other hand, when it comes to an opposing example, one can mention the support of the Kurdish PKK movement by the USSR against Turkey.

[10] Arab oil states in conflict situations repeatedly used oil as a pressure card, threatening to stop exports in order to persuade opponents to make some concessions. Such a situation occurred during the Arab-Israeli war in 1973. In 1973, the oil shock shook the world. Well, in the face of the next Arab-Israeli confrontation, the oil ministers of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates decided to increase their oil price fourfold. There was fear in the Western camp. Some American advisers, such as Kissinger, began to persuade their president that he would use force if this situation were repeated, see: W. Ferfecki, *op.cit.*

[11] Some of the left-wing movements fell, and the rest began a long process of ideological reflection and settlement with historical ideological dogmas. The reforms resulted in left-wing movements of a more liberal or social-democratic character. In practice, we have several known examples, such as the PZPR (the Polish United Workers' Party), from which the Democratic Left Alliance emerged, as well as the Swedish Communist Party WPK, which after a deep reform changed its name to the Swedish Left Party.

foundations of religious extremism in the Middle East. The increase of this phenomenon was influenced by a combination of objective and subjective aspects. Objective manifestations include the destabilization of the current Middle East balance of regional forces and the prevailing chaos in international relations just after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The subjective perspectives concerning the Middle East itself include socio-economic transformations dictated by the fast pace of the globalization process and its negative regional implications[12].

In the field of economic changes, the collapse of the Eastern bloc led to the acceleration of the process of liberalization of the economy in many countries by withdrawing from the idea of state protectionism for the free market economy. The result of these changes was the abolition of a significant part of the existing barriers in the trade and movement of international capital[13]. As a result, a global economic system was created that was manipulated by transcendental economic corporations, accelerating the pace of the globalism process and its negative socio-cultural and climatic effects in an uncontrolled manner[14].

Accelerated economic transformations in the Middle East in the globalization era had many social implications. In parallel to the increasingly broad liberalization of the economy, the concept of state intervention was reduced. In practice, this meant a general reduction in the public services sector. The effect of this was the birth of new disadvantaged social groups and the building up of rebellious tendencies among the broad social masses. Using the perfidious rhetoric, referring to divine justice and charity, religious movements attracted the masses and those affected by poverty. They willingly accepted them because they managed their rebellious tendencies to pursue their own goals[15].

The interactions of these aspects and their convolution with the development of the regional and international situation of the unipolar system of international relations paved the way for the monopoly of extremist Islamic religious forces in the Middle East. These conditions were an ideal basis for the emergence of new forms of pathological re-

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[12] Already in the early 1970s, religious movements in the Middle East showed a greater tendency to militarize methods of action. Afghanistan and Syria are examples of how Islamic movements were supported by the West against the pro-Soviet governments of these countries. The then support maintained by these movements enabled them to expand their experience, military infrastructures and the international communication network, see: J. Howell, *The global war on terror, development and civil society*, "Journal of International development" 2006, No. 18, doi.org/10.1002/jid.1266.

[13] Economic protectionism is a policy of protection of domestic production and trade from foreign competition, mainly by means of customs duties imposed on imported goods and concessions and policies of active state influence on the course of economic processes.

[14] "The faster rate of globalization after the end of the Cold War was the basic factor of drastic climate change, partly dictated by modern consumer preferences and the associated rapid pace of resource exploitation. The side effects led to greater devastation of the Earth, reduced access to goods and a greater degree of poverty and new waves of emigration from south to north [...]. We are now witnessing a growing difference in the level of development between countries and the drop in living standards in a world where three quarters of the world's population lives in poverty"; N. Fairclough, G. Cortese, P. Ardizzone, *Discourse and Contemporary Social Change*, London 2007, p. 51.

[15] J. Howell, *op. cit.,* p. 123.

ligious extremism. The most known was Al Qaeda[16]. It derived from the Mujahideen, which the CIA supported to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Therefore, it is now a vivid expression of the far-reaching implications of the political maneuvers of East-West rivalry during the Cold War. It is also an example representing a typical international religious terrorist movement with a very sophisticated international communication network[17].

The Kurdish question in the light of political and social transformations in the Middle East

After the end of the Cold War, at a time when religious extremism was rising and gaining popularity in the Middle East, the socio-political history of Kurdistan followed a different course. It can be said that the contemporary transformations in Kurdistan did not go towards strengthening the position of political Islam, as was the case with other Middle East states. In any case, the weakness of religious fundamentalism among Kurds in historical space is confirmed by almost every researcher dealing with the history of this nation. This fact has different backgrounds and is closely related to historical and political determinants[18].

The history of Kurdistan shows that the Kurdish society's reaction to the defeat of the classical theory of socialism was different than among other Middle Eastern societies. The ideological changes that took place after the end of the Cold War also triggered the transformation process among the factions of the Kurdish national movement. Their course was more moderate, and the results were more similar to the European examples

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[16] The movement was founded in August 1988 mainly by Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi multimillionaire Ingenir and Ayman al-Thawaheeri – an Egyptian doctor. Al-Qaeda, as a continuation movement of the "Mudhahidin" movement, was created and sponsored by the CIA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in 1984 to combat the Soviet forces after their invasion of Kabul in 1979, see: J.K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars, Afghanistan America And International Terrorism*, London 2002, p. 14-16.

[17] Political elites of religious movements are often highly educated people, so adjusting the products of the technological revolution to communicate and popularize their movements and views was not foreign to them, see: T.L. Thomas, *Al Qaeda and the Internet: The Danger of "Cyberplanning"* – www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/03spring/thomas.pdf [access on: 11.01.2017].

[18] Over the course of history, the Kurdish national movement has had several clerical leaders in its representation, such as Sheikh Ubaydulallah Alnahri, Sheikh Mahmoud Alhafid and Sheikh Saeed Piran. Most scholars on their role in the history of the Kurdish national movement reveal a similar opinion. Their leadership was dictated by historical necessity, a phenomenon that emerged after failed attempts to centralize power by the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Persian Empire. The result of which was the liquidation of the existing independent Kurdish principality, among others Soran, Botan, Bahdinan or Hakkar. The administrative emptiness created after the liquidation of administrative authorities, led by the Kurdish aristocracy in the above-mentioned principalities, led to a general state of uncontrolled chaos in the Kurdistan areas. Then, for the first time in history, Kurdish clergy leaders took the initiative by using their position to restore order. Analyzing the postulates of the uprising, which were carried out by Ubejdullah, it can be stated that they were dominated by national thought and often religious aspects were used to achieve higher national goals. Most researchers of this movement state that the main goal of Sheikh Ubejdullah was to unite the Kurds in one Kurdish state, see: W. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement, Its Origins and Development*, New York 1999, p. 17.

than the Middle Eastern ones. The rejection of the Marxist-Leninist vision of the world in political programmes paved the way for great Kurdish political movements, such as PDK, PUK, and the PKK to move towards liberal-nationalist movements[19]. The events in South Kurdistan after the World War II in the Persian Gulf were an additional reason for the revival of national thought among Kurds throughout Kurdistan. The first such event was the Kurdish exodus, which evoked a sense of national solidarity. Also the creation of autonomy and the parliamentary elections in 1992 awakened the hopes of the Kurds, focusing them more strongly around national thought. The results of the parliamentary elections in South Kurdistan in 1992 reflect the prevailing social moods and show how weak political Islam is in Kurdistan (5% of votes) in comparison with other political movements in this region, as well as in comparison with other Middle East states[20].

Assessing the determinants of Kurdish society, it can be concluded that in terms of the dominant liberal vision of the world among the Kurds and their general distancing themselves against religious identity, this specificity can be an asset, as well as a conflict-generating element. In the light of the religious realities of the Middle East and the vulnerability of the settlement of the Kurds, separateness changes them into a state that cannot live in harmony with the environment. From the point of view of the extra-regional political forces, the 40-million Kurdish nation inhabiting the heart of the Middle East has an important potential to be reckoned with in the democratization process of the region. Such a role was made known to Western politicians during preparations for direct military intervention after the 2001 attacks[21].

These attacks became a turning point in the history of terrorist actions, as well as in the history of collective efforts to combat terror. International efforts also gave rise to new perspectives on the Kurdish issue in the Middle East. Attempts to combat the sources of terror and its supportive states were not limited to the assimilation of external chang-

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[19] PDK, at its eleventh congress in 1993, removed the Marxist vision from its programme. Other movements, such as the PUK, which included several leftist groups, also had to pace the process of reforms clearly leading in the social democratic direction. The PKK, as one of the Kurdish movements most identifying with the Marxist-Leninist vision of the world, also underwent stages of ideological reform. These reforms changed the PKK to a more liberal-democratic attitude, approving more pragmatic and peaceful methods of operation. Starting from 1995, one can see the beginnings of ideological reforms within the PKK. A concrete change was the modification of the party name in 2002 to KADEK and the removal of the hammer and sickle from the flag. Another change of name took place in 2003 at the National Congress. Even a red star from the flag was removed, see: F. Ibrahim, G. Gurbey, *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey Obstacles and Chances for Peace and Democracy*, New York 2000, p. 131.

[20] In other parts of Kurdistan, movements with the Islamic worldview do not exist or are more marginal.

[21] Regarding the impact of the Kurds' specificity on the possibility of their coexistence with the environment, this approach of extremist religious forces to the Kurdish population during the civil war in Syria and Iraq is a very clear example. On several occasions, the spiritual representation of these groups issued Fatwa, a decree of a religious order allowing Kurd to be killed, because according to them Kurds are a pagan nation. Regarding the approach of extra-regional political forces on the distinctness of the Kurds, the example of cooperation between the US and Kurds to overthrow Saddam's regime is good. During the civil war in Syria and Iraq, more and more often we see how the West puts the Kurds, even arming them, in the fight against the spread of terrorism.

es, but additionally sought regional partners for these operations. They were supposed to be forces of similar worldview or having a common interest. The Kurds matched this context, especially since most of the countries in the region refused to actively participate in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The participation of the Kurds gave rise to changes concerning the international community's attitude towards the Kurdish issue.

The new dimension of the phenomenon of international terror, which was signaled by the attacks of 2001, also initiated a new course of thinking regarding the current doctrine of national security and its strategy in many countries. In addition, they launched a deep debate process within governmental and non-governmental decision-making centres and the scientific world on the proper sources of religious extremism in the Middle East. Studies on terror and dangers connected with it were made and the proper methods of confronting it were examined. This happened when the direct military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to combat terror and the forces supporting it, proved to be not only ineffective and gained more popularity among a wide range of Islamic religious environments in the world[22].

As Piotr Benken writes: "It is not known from today that people kill mainly for economic reasons or for fear. The elimination of these two elements should ensure relative stability of the region"[23].

It was natural that during the analysis of terrorism, its sharpness returned in the Middle East conflicts, and also affected the socio-economic situation of the countries in the region. The advanced American and European visions of blocking the more drastic spread of religious extremism and terrorism were similar. Opinions were in agreement that, first and foremost, it is necessary to combat the right sources of terrorism, in other words its economic, social and political base[24]. The first aspects concerned the fight against poverty in the Middle East, and the second related to the fact that it was necessary to democratize the political systems of the countries in the region and to try to re-

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[22] The effect of military actions was strengthening the solidarity of dictatorships in the Middle East with terrorist movements. These regimes, as in the case of Iran and Syria, openly supported and financed terrorists. In order to destabilize the situation in Iraq, Syria supported the Sunni movement, creating an enclave and shelter for the Albath division, and Iran financed and armed various Shia militias. Support for fundamentalism by some Islamic diaspora around the world also became a significant problem. The estimated number of foreigners who came to Iraq in 2003-2007 in order to make terrorist attacks against foreign troops in this country is estimated at 4,000 people. 70% of these terrorists crossed the border on the Syrian side, because this road maintained every inch of the eye by the Syrian security services, see: S. Livingston, M. O'Hanlon, *Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Brookings Center for Middle East Policy, Iraq Index, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex [access on: 12.01.2018]. See also: B. Szlachcic, *Ewolucja źródeł, przeciwdziałanie oraz walka z terroryzmem międzynarodowym*, [in:] *Katastrofy naturalne i cywilizacyjne. Terroryzm współczesny. Aspekty polityczne, społeczne i ekonomiczne*, edit. M. Żuber, Wrocław 2006, p. 39.

[23] P. Benken, *Bliski Wschód – powtórka z historii?*,http://stosunki.pl/?q=content/bliski-wsch%C3%B3d-powt%C3%B3rka-z-historii śr. [access on: 23.02.2017].

[24] The inhabitants of the Middle East are discouraged by the low economic level of life. Hence the source of radicalization of their moods and turning to the ideology of extreme Islam, see: *ibidem*.

solve internal conflicts. The difference between existing opinions was in the expected methods of achieving goals[25].

Starting from the second half of the 1990s, the European Union was undergoing a continuous process of structural reconstruction at the level of internal and foreign policy. For the leading EU countries, such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom, the hitherto vision of national security, which had been shaped in the conditions of the contemporary system of international relations, was no longer valid. Elements of the threat to internal order more often had more severe symptoms. The drastic disturbance of the demographic balance and the failure of the existing integration policy and its implications in the form of increasing extremism and social defragmentation became everyday problems. The links between these internal problems and the problems of the nearest neighbor, namely the Middle East, forced the European Union to take a more active foreign policy towards this region. The result of this effort was, *inter alia*, the project "Union for the Mediterranean"[26]. Mediterranean cooperation to some extent had a direct positive result for the Kurdish issue in Turkey, as it was conditioned by the general respect for democratic principles and human rights[27]. Cooperation with the dictatorships of the Middle East had far-reaching implications. Above all, the position of the dictatorships of the region was strengthened, and the liberal forces weakened. In addition, Western cooperation with them indirectly became a factor accelerating the radicalization of moderate views of fundamental movements. Incorrect assumptions of this project did not have to wait long for confirmation. Already in 2008 this project was at a standstill[28].

The second vision of solving the problems of the Middle East was presented by the United States as the "New Middle East" project[29]. However, only from the beginning

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[25] R. Jakubczak, *Terroryzm współczesny – aspekty społeczno-gospodarcze,* [in:] *Katastrofy naturalne i cywilizacyjne. Terroryzm współczesny. Aspekty polityczne, społeczne i ekonomiczne*, edit. M. Żuber, Wrocław 2006, p. 27.

[26] Established at the Paris Summit on July 13, 2008 in order to continue cooperation under the Barcelona Process initiated at the Barcelona conference in 1995, it is a forum for dialogue between European countries (mainly located on the Mediterranean) and countries located in North Africa and the Middle East. The Union for the Mediterranean comprises 28 countries of the European Union, the European Commission and 15 Mediterranean countries (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Monaco, Palestinian Autonomy, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey). The main objectives are set out in the Barcelona Declaration. The most important are: creating an area of peace, stability and security and economic prosperity, observance of the principles of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and promotion of understanding between cultures and civilizations in the Mediterranean region, see: J. Zając, *Polityka Śródziemnomorska UE: między idealizmem a realizmem*, [in:] *Unia Europejska w regionie śródziemnomorskim: między polityką wspólną a interesami państw członkowskich*, edit. J. Zając, Warszawa 2014.

[27] I.C. Kamiński, *"Sprawy kurdyjskie" przed Europejskim Trybunałem Praw Człowieka w Strasburgu, Ewolucja stanowiska Turcji*, see subsection: *Wpływ spraw kurdyjskich na sytuację w kraju*, http://www.policy.hu/kaminski/kurdowie.htm [access on: 22.08.2017].

[28] It is almost certain that the European Union's Mediterranean policy has suffered quite a painful failure. The great projects announced in July 2008 collided with the reality and the unexpected Arab spring, which exceeded the EU's foreign policy, see: J. Kłoszewski, *Unia na rzecz Regionu Morza Śródziemnego w martwym punkcie?*, http://www.iz.poznan.pl/news/662_unia%20regionu%20morza.pdf [access on: 12.01.2017].

[29] During the presidency of G.W. Bush, the US doctrine changed following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The fight against terrorism and vaccination of the idea of building democracy in un-

of 2005 neoconservatives in the White House presented the basic assumptions of this project and its theoretical foundations[30]. Assessing its guidelines, which are presented in the new political map of the Middle East, developed by the authors of the initiative, it can be concluded that they were shaped under conditions of mental recovery in September, when the reality showed that the earlier American concept of "soft power" to achieve the desired changes in the Middle East was ineffective[31]. The new project included more specific plans for the future of the Kurdish case in the Middle East. Analyzing the problem of this undertaking, it can be clearly stated that it adopts a classic argument explaining the sources of Middle Eastern conflicts – a political map established after the World War I[32].

Changes on the map of the "New Mideast" project were to help create harmonious and stable countries by correctly establishing demarcation lines, proceeding in a manner consistent with ethnic and religious settlement. The vision of the future free Kurdistan included in this arrangement shows that the US strategy in this region provides for the creation of a United Grand Kurdistan covering all of its four parts[33].

It can be assumed that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the first step to the implementation of the project[34]. Considering the positive changes in the areas of South Kurdistan after the invasion of Iraq, it can be assumed that the possible implementation of

democratic countries (the war in Afghanistan – 2001, the Iraq war – 2003) became a priority. The project covered 22 countries from the western part of Africa to Pakistan. It was created on the initiative of the United States, as a vision of the solution to the problems of the Middle East countries, where international terror is spreading. Under the leadership of George W. Bush, the United States has also sought to use soft power in the region. The main instrument in the Middle East is a partnership initiative in which the United States aims to promote democracy, human rights and economic development. By the same token, at the end of 2003, US officials talked about the "Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI)" or the wider Middle East initiative, so the traditional attitude of favoring the US's *status quo* in the Middle East was replaced by a policy of actively supporting liberal democracy, market economy and educational reforms, see: B. Sinkaya, *The Greater Middle East Initiative And Turkey: The AKP's Perspective*, https://www.academia.edu/264984/THE_GREATER_MIDDLE_EAST_INITIATIVE_AND_TURKEY_THE_AKPS_PERSPECTIVE [access on: 12.01.2017].

[30] In an interview with Washington Post of April 19, 2005, Condoleezza Rice (US Secretary of State in 2005-2009), presented a vision for the US Department of Defense on military operations in the Middle East region, describing them as "labor pains in the birth of the new Middle East". Rice's expression often refers to the theory of "constructive chaos", accepting the shedding of blood as a historical necessity in order to bring about a new order, see: T. Meyssan, *The Neo Conservatives and the Policies of Constructive Chaos*, Voltaire Network, Paris, http://www.voltairenet.org/article142429.html [access on: 27.07.2016].

[31] T. Meyssan, *op. cit.*, s. 37.

[32] M.D. Nazemroaya, *Plans for Redrawing the Middle East: The Project for a "New Middle East"*, http://www.globalresearch.ca/plans-for-redrawing-the-middle-east-the-project-for-a-new-middle-east/3882 [access on: 14 .06.2017].

[33] On contemporary Kurdish issues in the Middle East, see: J. Jűde, *Contesting borders? The formation of Iraqi Kurdistan's de facto state*, "International Affairs" 2017, No. 93(4), doi: 10.1093/ia/iix125; O. Bengio, *The Kurds in a Volatile Middle East*, "Mideast Security and Policy Studies" 2017, No. 130; T. Berg, *Rozwój kwestii kurdyjskiej na Bliskim Wschodzie*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations" 2013, No. 47, pp. 209-232.

[34] G.W. Bush justified the US attack on Iraq in 2003 that the goal of the armed overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government was to build democracy. These are the factors that undermined the American belief that Iraq could be transformed into a stable and safe country in a short time, which would trigger a kind of democratic revolution in the Middle East.

all the assumptions of this programme could serve the general interests of the Kurds in the Middle East. However, the failure of the American army in Iraq forced the White House administration to suspend further implementation of the said project. The departure of the neo-conservatives from the White House and their replacement by the Democrats inhibited this concept. On the one hand, the sheer vision of Obama's administration had a fundamental impact on further US plans in the Middle East, and on the other, the global economic crisis in the world temporarily stopped the earlier enthusiasm for influencing the political scene of the Middle East states. Economic aspects, like alternative energy sources that could replace oil from the Middle East, have also distanced the region from the centre of American attention[35]. In addition, as a result of changes in the geopolitical environment in the last decade, China clearly emerged as a serious economic competitor, which directed the attention of the US more towards the Asia-Pacific region[36].

From the Kurdish point of view, Western involvement in the process of solving the problems of the Middle East served their general interests. The implementation of the "New Middle East" project broke previous attempts to isolate the Kurdish Autonomy in the areas of South Kurdistan by countries in the region: Turkey, Iran or Syria. In addition, as a result of the overthrow of Saddam's regime, the Autonomy received a more defined legal status and began to move towards independence in a decisive step. The second aspect, which has a positive effect on the implementation of Kurdish plans to become independent, is closely related to the polarization of regional political forces. The new arrangement created by the post-Cold War conditions in the Middle East, from the second half of the 1990s, was ominous. In this structure, the Sunni-Shiite conflict became its main core. The implications of this system influenced Iraq very much, directing this country more and more towards disintegration. These conditions were an additional stimulus conducive to the Kurdish secession aspirations. At a time when the rest of the Iraqi regions were in a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites, the Kurds firmly developed the infrastructure of their dream state. The experiences of the fratricidal war were a good lesson for the Kurds, which allowed them to understand that internal

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[35] Contrary to expectations, for the first time since 1949, the USA in 2011 became a net exporter of refined petroleum products. This energy boom is possible thanks to the technological revolution that the United States has achieved in the field of oil and gas extraction. As a result, new supplies of energy sources could be provided, including shale gas, crude oil and liquid natural gas from shale and deep sands. Numerous studies in this field predict that by the end of this decade, the US will outstrip Russia and Saudi Arabia and become the world's largest producer of oil and liquid natural gas, see: F. Zakaria, *The New Oil and Gas Boom The U.S. will soon be a net exporter of energy. That could change everything*, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2127202,00.html [access on: 29.10.2017].

[36] The Asia-Pacific region became more important to US foreign policy during the Obama administration than ever before. This change was dictated by the fact that the main Asian countries, such as China and Taiwan, have become the engine of the global economy and more important players in international politics. The focus of the USA on cooperation with this region in this period became more spontaneous at this stage, because the economic crisis was becoming more and more apparent, see: R.A. Cossa, B. Glosserman, M.A. McDevitt, N. Patel, J. Przystup, B. Roberts, *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration*, Center for a New American Security, February 2009.

conflicts should be solved by democratic methods. Practicing these procedures helped the Kurds to consolidate the tradition of democracy and strengthen the political pluralist system. In parallel to the above-mentioned activities, despite constant conflicts over oil resources with Baghdad, the Kurdish managed to expand the infrastructure of this economic sector in a way that would serve their secession aspirations. Not only the discovery of new oil fields in Kurdistan was a conducive condition to the pursuit of Kurdish aspirations, but also political stability encouraged the largest international oil concerns to invest in Kurdistan and relinquish threats from Baghdad[37]. Economic development in Kurdish areas also paved the way for closer economic and political relations with Turkey, especially in the oil sector[38]. In addition, trade exchange with Iran, Turkey and China also had a fundamental impact on the political calculations of these countries as well as extra-regional actors[39]. The international response to the progress that Kurdistan has achieved so far can be seen from the perspective of the diplomatic rela-

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[37] Crude oil reserves in the Kurdistan region in Iraq amount to 45 billion barrels. This amount accounts for one third of all 143 billion Iraqi oil barrels, which in turn represents 8.7% of the world's total oil reserves. There are representatives of 4 international companies in Erbil, among the top 10 oil companies in the world, such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, the French company Total, Russian Gazprom, the Turkish company Genel Energia, as well as the Canadian Sharman Petroleum. Large companies consider Kurdistan as a place suitable for investment, to speed up the implementation of contracts as compared to the slow progress in Baghdad. For comparison, the oil reserves in Kurdistan are one-third of the oil reserves in Iraq and have 45 billion barrels, equivalent to 46.3% of the total oil reserves of the Arab Emirates, being higher than the oil reserves in Libya (44.3 billion barrels). In Kurdistan, a high expansion of the petroleum system is expected due to the increase in production to a high level, which is planned to reach one million barrels in 2015 and two million barrels a day in 2019, see: *Kontynuacja Walki o ropę Kurdystanu*, Dananer Economic News Agency http://dananernews.com/News_Details.php?ID=1617 [access on: 26.08.2015].

[38] The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is almost ready to build its own pipeline to the Turkish border. The construction of this pipeline will guarantee a source of revenue important to the financial independence of the KRG from Baghdad. In practice, this also means further increasing the political and energy autonomy of KRG and international oil companies from Baghdad. The pipeline is autonomous because it lies on the official borders of Iraqi Kurdistan and is fully controlled by the KRG. Unlike the current Iraq control station, on the pipeline running through Feshkabor (Turkish), the Kurdish pipeline will be equipped with its own measurement station under the KRG control. In this way, KRG can monitor and control its own exports without intervention from the Iraqi government. The pipeline is designed to transport at least 400,000 barrels a day, which means that it will provide more cost-effective means of transporting the Kurdish raw material to the Turkish border than current trucking operations, see: D. Natali, *How independent is the Iraqi-Kurdish pipeline to Turkey*, "Al Monitor", http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2013/11/iraqi-kurdish-pipeline-turkey-oil-policy-export.html# [access on: 4.11.2017].

[39] Currently, over 20 thousand companies and 100 thousand distributors compete with each other to cover the domestic demand in the Kurdistan markets, which is described as the fastest growing free market. However, research shows that only three countries monopolize almost 90% of its supplies. The first is the northern neighbor – Turkey, which supplies about 35% of the Kurdistan market, the second is Kurdistan's eastern neighbour competing with Turkey, namely Iran, which supplies about 25% of turnover, and the third monopolist is China, which covers 30% of the Kurdistan market demand. This is confirmed by the Turkish Consul General in Erbil, Mohammed Akef, that the volume of trade between Iraq and Turkey in 2013 amounted to approximately USD 12 billion, of which 70% from the Kurdistan region. He added that Turkey is trying to raise the number to 15 billion dollars in 2014. In turn, according to the Iranian Economy Minister, Tayyip Ali Nia'wa, the exchange of Iran's handball with Iraq in 2013 amounted to 12 billion dollars, almost half of the exchange was from the region Kurdistan. Iran is also seeking to double its trade with Kurdistan in 2015, see: M. Muhammed, *Kurdistan alairaq: Turkya we Iran wa alsin szurekaa fe eqtisad alqlim wa alfasad yuhaded alindziaz*, "Alhayat", 16.07.2014.

tions of Kurdistan with the outside world. After the international diplomatic presence in Kurdistan was limited only to the representative offices, we see that: Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Qatar, Sweden and the Arab Emirates in recent years have increased the rank of their diplomatic representation to the rank of consulate. Kurdistan itself currently has 13 diplomatic missions[40].

Following the political scene in other parts of the geographical Kurdistan, it can be stated that the stabilization and development of economic and diplomatic relations in South Kurdistan had an increasingly positive impact on the political scene of other parts of Kurdistan. The bilateral relations between the KRG and Turkey have certainly contributed to accelerating the process of a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict in the areas of northern Kurdistan. We witnessed the abolition of the existing bans on the use of the Kurdish language, the creation of forms of dialogue between the PKK and Turkey in order to end the armed conflict peacefully. The official admission of Turkey to the Kurds massacre during the Kurdish uprising in Dersim in 1937-1938 was another major step on the part of the Turkish state in this context[41].

In East Kurdistan (Iran) and in the West (Syria) it is too early to speak in which direction the changes are going exactly, although the most unexpected progress has taken place in West Kurdistan during the ongoing Syrian civil war since 2011. Abolition of the Kurdish population in Syria from participating in it automatically isolated their areas from the rest of the country. The situation was repeated here, which took place in South Kurdistan, when Iraq in 1991 withdrew its administration from Kurdish areas. Similarly, in Syria, the authorities had to withdraw most of their administration from the Kurdish regions, which created a certain administrative vacuum. The Kurds took advantage of this situation to take matters into their own hands. They created armed forces and local administration, establishing their own government. Currently, the Kurdish enclave in Syria is largely similar to that existing in the areas of South Kurdistan in 1991-2003[42].

Conflicts between Baghdad and Erbil in South Kurdistan on mineral resources, implementation of Article 140 of the constitution and the status of Kurdish armed forces (Peshmerga), deepen the distance between them. The Kurdish delegation increasingly talks about the complete secession of South Kurdistan from the Iraqi state or at least the transformation of the federation from Iraq into a confederation. The development of the political scene in Iraq since 2011 and the deeper conflict between Sunni and Shi-

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[40] *Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government KRG*, http://www.krg.org/p/page. aspx?l=12&s=030000&r=318&p=230&h=1 [access on: 13.05.2018].

[41] Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as the first Turkish leader in history, announced an official apology on behalf of the Turkish state, directed to the Kurds, for killing more than 13,000 of them by Turkish military in the late 1930s. Killing occurred when the military tried suppress the Kurdish uprising in Dersim by means of aerial bombardment and poison gas, see: *Turkey PM Erdogan apologises for 1930s Kurdish killings*, BBC News, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15857429 [access on: 23.11.2017]; *Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government KRG...* .

[42] D. Natali*, Syrian Kurdish Card*s, *Middle east research and information Project*, http://www.merip.org/ mero/mero032012 [access on: 20.03.2017].

as has been weakening this state and increasingly isolating Kurdistan from the rest of Iraqi regions. The conditions that the Arab Spring created in 2011 around Kurdistan are also conducive to the Kurds' freedom aspirations. The same opinion of the majority of experts dealing with the Kurdish issue prevails: "There has never been such a promising opportunity for the Kurds to establish their own state"[43].

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[43] M.A. Salih, *The Kurdish Future in Iraq: Independence or Confederation, Foreign policy*, http://www.lobelog.com/the-kurdish-future-in-iraq-independence-or-confederation/ [access on: 18.07.2017].

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Abstract: For centuries, Kurds have been carrying out activities aimed at obtaining their own state. Due to the cooperation of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, it was impossible in the twentieth century. As a result of Operation Desert Storm, a Kurdish enclave was created in the north of Iraq, which over the years developed and allowed for real dreams of recognized independence, at least for some of the Kurds living in the Middle East. After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011, there was a political vacuum in which we observe the weakening of the Iraqi state, the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the emergence of the Islamic State, which also had direct consequences for the Kurds. The weakness of the central government in Baghdad, the need to fight the Kurdish army against IS fighters raised the importance of arguments for the proclamation of an independent Kurdish state in the Middle East, or maybe even two, including the possible division of Syria.
Keywords: Kurds, The Middle East, Arab Spring, Iraq, Kurdistan Regional Government