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# Kurds and Turks: Poor Bets

When thinking about the relationship of Kurds with the Ottoman Empire or Turkish Republic, so many questions should be asked about this ambiguous, strange relationship which, if required, may be called the relationship of “Love and Revenge”!

Perhaps the relationship has begun in earnest with the outbreak of the Ottoman- Safavid conflict, that is, the traditional conflict between the ruler of Asia Minor and the ruler of Persia. When Sultan Selim I resolved to fight Shah Ismail Al-Safawi, the major problem that faced him was Kurdish Emirates, which was located on the border between Ottoman Empire and Safavid State. Sultan Selim succeeded in converting the Emirates to his side under the influence of sectarian motive. The Ottoman Empire declared that it was the protector of Sunni sect throughout the Islamic world. Safavids officially imposed Shia sect in Iran. Since Kurdish Emirates adopted Sunni sect, Sultan Selim was able to convert it to his side under the pretext of countering Shiism, with a promise to maintain the independence of Kurdish Emirates after victory in Chaldiran recognizing its subordination to Ottoman Empire. That is exactly what happened.

However, Ottoman Empire, especially in the nineteenth century, abandoned decentralization policy and adopted centralization policy. It abolished the independence of Kurdish Emirates, and declared its direct subordination to Istanbul.

The other poor bet of the relationship between Kurds and Turks was at the end of World War I. Ottoman Empire has been defeated in war. Allies became preoccupied with organizing conditions of the peoples of Ottoman states, including Kurds. In addition, allied armies invaded the center of Ottoman Empire until they entered Istanbul itself.

When the Treaty of Sèvres was concluded in 1920 between the allies and Ottoman Empire, due consideration was given to declaring the independence of Kurdistan. A Kurdish delegation was sent to Peace Conference in Paris to talk about the Kurdish cause, and demand the independence of Kurdistan. It was as if the future of Kurdistan was independence.

In reality, things were going the opposite way. The famous Turkish leader, Kamal Ataturk, was able to convince Kurds in eastern provinces to ally with him in order to support Islam and Ottoman Caliphate, and to expel Christian European armies from Muslim Ottoman lands. He promised them that they would have all the best after victory over the enemies. Indeed, Kurds allied with Ataturk, so foreign forces were repulsed.

However, problem came after the victory. Ataturk was able to convince some Kurdish leaders that it was in favor of their interest to remain subordinate to Turkey without gaining independence. He promoted the idea that Turkey was a country of two peoples: Turkish people and Kurdish people, acknowledging the rights of citizenship for both of them.

Conflict quickly erupted between Kurdish leaders, especially the religious ones, and Ataturk; principally, after the latter abolished the Caliphate and imposed Turkification policy. In addition, he sought Westernization and distanced from Islamic traditions. Thus, revolution broke out in eastern provinces of Turkey, which were the provinces of Kurdish majority. The revolution was led by Sheikh Saeed Al-Kurdi in 1925, and Sufi dervishes took the revolution lead. Notwithstanding, Turkish forces were able to suppress the revolution and impose a state of emergency in the country. Turkey entered the state of permanent conflict with several Kurdish sections of national current so far.

Emadulddin Hussain, an Egyptian journalist, presents an important vision about what he has called “Poor Bets” of Kurdish leaders during the last hundred years, saying:

**“(We have no friends but mountains and wends) is a saying often repeated by Kurds but most of their leaders do not follow it. This saying is considerably true in view of poor bets and great disappointments of Kurdish leaders, the last of which was Turkish aggression against them in Syria, and being sold by America for free”.**