

# Turkey's Kurdish Peace Process from a Conflict Resolution Perspective

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## After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe

*Edited By* Bill Kissane

Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 312 pages, \$69.95, ISBN: 9780812246520

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## Comparative Peace Processes

*By* Jonathan Tonge

Cambridge: Polity, 2014, 228 pages, £55.00, ISBN: 9780745642895

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## Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

*By* Mustafa Coşar Ünal

New York: Routledge, 2012, 244 pages, \$54.95, ISBN: 9780415607490

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**E** edited by Bill Kissane, *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe* is an ambitious attempt to explore the formation and reconstruction of identity and nation after internal wars. The book covers a large spectrum of cases of reconstruction after internal wars: reconstruction in Finland, Ireland and Spain as exemplary of the reconstruction of the nation in interwar Europe; reconstruction in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey as cases of reconstruction without conflict resolution; and reconstruction in Bosnia-Her-

zegovina, Kosovo and Northern Ireland as cases of reconstruction under external supervision. The scope and extent of the internal wars under examination are wide-ranging, including both ethnic and non-ethnic struggles; this quality allows the reader to detect the challenges and opportunities on the way to reconstruction. Additionally, *After Civil War* focuses on three layers of reconstruction: reconstruction at the elite level, reconstruction between elites and citizens, and reconstruction at the society level. The contributions brought together in this

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volume are also important in terms of applying different theoretical perspectives, including political economy, to the study of nationalism and reconstruction.

*Comparative Peace Processes* by Jonathan Tonge is an illuminating book for peace and conflict studies as it critically engages with the main concepts used in the field, namely mutually hurting stalemate and ripeness for peace. Joining in critiques of analyses using these concepts, Tonge demonstrates that peace processes may falter and fail even though conditions are purported to be ripe and mutually hurting stalemate exists. He also dissipates the euphoria that generally clouds the peace agreements, demonstrating that not all peace deals lead to sustainable peace. While peace processes pave the way for dealing with conflict in a non-violent atmosphere, their implications permeate society over generations. Examining peace processes from a critical eye, *Comparative Peace Processes* is a timely and helpful reference book for anyone interested in peace processes and conflict resolution.

Mustafa Coşar Ünal's book *Counterterrorism in Turkey* examines the impact of counterterrorism strategies in Turkey on the policies of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). Using qualitative and quantitative analysis concurrently, this book is a valuable contribution to counterterrorism studies in Turkey and abroad. Ünal provides compelling data and a rigorous methodology on the impact of

counterterrorism efforts on the PKK's strategies, however, his introduction remains weak compared to the overall text due to crude misinterpretations of historical phenomena, extended statements, and inaccuracies. Good examples are as follows: Ünal notes that "for many years, especially the one-party era, Turkey reflected an unconsolidated democracy" (p. 2), but the one-party era cannot be considered as any kind of democracy. It is highly suspect that military coups brought about political stability in Turkey, although Ünal assumes that "a chaotic atmosphere in the social and political context resulted in political stability induced by two military coups in Turkey during the 1970s and the 1980s" (p. 3). The Sivas incidents were not instigated "by the Turkish Islamic movement" (p. 4) as it was a communal riot involving not a cohesive Islamic movement but a heterogeneous mob involving Islamic networks. Vague statements also weaken the introduction, for example: "the Kurds overall have had, in their history, a (re)awakening of their national consciousness as a distinct community for a thousand years" (p. 5). Overall, the book offers a clear analysis of counterterrorism strategies used by the Turkish state against PKK terrorism and is useful for military and security specialists, scholars and students interested in terrorism, security and political violence studies.

This review will apply the insights and tools offered by these studies to assess Turkey's Kurdish peace process between 2013 and 2015 from a

conflict resolution perspective and identify its benefits and shortcomings.

### **Turkey's Kurdish Peace Process: Was it a Genuine Peace Process?**

In *Comparative Peace Processes*, Jonathan Tonge first of all clarifies the concept of 'peace process,' as not every ceasefire or declared willingness of combatants to negotiate can be considered as a peace process. Rather than focusing on the terms of peace deals, Tonge gives attention to the dynamics that accelerate or impede peace processes. Tonge converges with Darby and Mac Ginty that a genuine peace process should have these necessary but insufficient components: "negotiations conducted in good faith; inclusion of the main combatants; a willingness to address the key points of dispute, the disavowal of force; and prolonged commitment."<sup>1</sup> During the peace process in Turkey, although the conflicting parties, the AK Party government (Justice and Development Party, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) and the PKK, declared their willingness to resolve the conflict through democratization, they often stated that they did not believe in either the "good faith" or the "prolonged commitment" of the other side to engage in peace negotiations. The actions of the state and the PKK were exemplary of the "war-embeddedness" of reconstruction, as argued by Kissane. Both sides continued to send each other war-prone signals, as the state continued to build new fortified mil-

itary installations and dams in Kurdish-dominated regions, while the PKK sheltered weaponry and armory in its strongholds. In this regard, the reconstruction that took place during the peace process in Turkey ironically built up the infrastructure of the new phase of war that is currently ongoing in the urban areas of Turkey's Kurdish-dominated regions.

Moreover, the conflict resolution dynamic which should be intrinsic to any peace process was deficient in Turkey's Kurdish peace process. Although the AK Party government engaged in reconciliation efforts such as the use of a "wise men commission" to reinforce public consensus for the peace process, it wobbled over the key issues underlying Kurdish grievances, such as the use of Kurdish language in education, or the use of affirmative action to address underdevelopment in Kurdish-dominated regions. Leaving these key issues unaddressed increased the legitimacy of the PKK as an actor in the peace process. Indeed, it called into question the sincerity of the government regarding Kurdish rights, while the PKK benefited from this lack of progress to recruit new members and muster social acceptance by increasing its administrative skills. As Ünal displays, the government's counterterrorism strategies will fall short of halting the PKK's recruitment efforts, as long as the structural conditions that make Kurdish citizens feel like second-class citizens remain unaddressed. In this respect, the progression of the peace process in Turkey resembles to that of the Oslo negotiations between Israel

and Palestine, which could not go beyond the declaration of principles in contrast to the peace process in Northern Ireland in which the demobilization of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) was sustained while the Irish grievances were addressed by conflict resolution efforts.

### **Bottlenecks and Setbacks on the Road to Peace from a Comparative Perspective**

*Comparative Peace Processes* is powerfully valuable in casting light on the reasons behind both setbacks and progress on the road to peace deals and during the post-agreement period. Tonge highlights that intra-ethnic competition and renegade groups are an important part of the decision-making equation of negotiating parties, one that can facilitate or hinder peace-building efforts. For example, while the actions of Hamas and Jewish ultras were chipping away at both the PLO's (Palestine Liberation Organization) and Rabin government's tendency to compromise in the Oslo negotiations, the nationalist opposition in Sri Lanka and dissent within the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) made the contending parties bounce back from compromises during the peace process in Sri Lanka. However, the unfolding of the peace process in Northern Ireland displays that the perverse effects of intra-ethnic competition can be curtailed by the progress achieved at negotiations. During the peace process in Northern Ireland, the military and political prog-

ress served to dampen intransigent ethic outbidding, giving leverage to moderates over hard-liners. Tonge also stresses the importance of inclusivity and of the legitimacy of negotiations to undermine the perverse effects of intra-ethnic competition and to put pressure on clashing parties to swallow the painful compromises of peace deals, as in the case of the Taif Agreement in Lebanon and the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Turkey's peace negotiations were vulnerable to derailment by political outbidding, as the opposition parties, the CHP (Republican People's Party, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) and the MHP (Nationalist Action Party, *Milliyetçi Halk Partisi*) did not participate in the negotiations. While the peace process was limited to negotiations between the state and the PKK, there was no effective mediation composed of professional diplomats and credible third parties as had been the case in the Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Israel-Palestine peace processes. Instead, the negotiations were mediated by insider-partial mediators as it was executed by the MIT (National Intelligence Organization, *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) and the pro-Kurdish party, HDP (People's Democracy Party, *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*). In the aftermath of the June 7, 2015 elections, while the growing popularity of the MHP and the HDP at the expense of the AK Party's decreasing electoral strength thwarted the AK Party government's plans to thrive on the peace negotiations, the changing balance of power in Syria in favor of the PKK-affiliated PYD (Kurdish Dem-

ocratic Union Party) dampened the commitment of the PKK to demilitarize. In the absence of other political parties to pressure the conflicting parties to negotiate, armed conflict flared up once again while negotiations were put on hold.

The inclusion of a “third eye” in Turkey’s Kurdish peace process constituted a heated subject as it was demanded as well by the HDP. The comparative reading of cases in Tonge’s *Comparative Peace Processes* reveals the limits and possibilities of external brokerage in peace negotiations. While the backing of Israel by the U.S. enhanced Israel’s reluctance to adhere to the stipulations of the Oslo Accords, its relatively impartial brokerage between nationalists and unionists propelled them to sit and settle matters at the negotiation table during the peace process in Northern Ireland. Moreover, for the success of a third party’s brokerage, it is also crucial that third parties maintain their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the clashing parties during the negotiations. Although India’s involvement in the Sri Lanka-LTTE negotiations was firstly welcomed by the Tamils, the LTTE attempted to push Indian troops back when inter-governmental negotiations obliterated the role of the LTTE in the peace process. In Lebanon, the involvement of Syria, Israel and Iran in inter-ethnic relations has served to amplify social cleavages and preexisting antagonisms. Thus, the debates on the inclusion of a “third eye” should consider these caveats and take into consideration the ability of foreign actors

to mediate impartially and the reactions of domestic actors to external interventions.

Demilitarization and demobilization are the Achilles’ heel of any peace process, and this was witnessed in the case of the PKK’s foot-dragging on demilitarization in Turkish territories. The collapse of peace negotiations in Turkey invigorated a lively debate on whether it could be possible to end the PKK by military defeat. A careful reading of cases in *Comparative Peace Processes* displays that demilitarization and demobilization require painful compromises, such as prisoners’ release or rehabilitation of militants, since militants lose their strongest leverage against the state by demobilization and should be persuaded that they can further their goals through legal means. The ETA’s (Basque Homeland and Freedom)military defeat was largely sustained due to Spain’s democratization and its ability to address Basque’s grievances. As Tonge notes, one of the major disincentives for the Spanish government to commit to peace negotiations was the ETA’s weakness compared to the IRA, and the government’s effective policies that significantly ameliorated Basque discontent with the Spanish state.<sup>2</sup> Another case of military defeat is the LTTE’s defeat by Sri Lanka forces. The end of the LTTE as described by Tonge should not be inspiring for any country struggling with terrorism. Contrary to the military defeat of the ETA which was already delegitimized in the eyes of the Basque population through Spain’s democratization ef-

forts, the triumphalist war on terror by the Sri Lanka government against the LTTE was executed despite major human rights violations during armed clashes, and left behind a depressed Tamil population that questions the legitimacy of the Sri Lanka government. Thus, those who aspire to a military defeat of the PKK along the lines of the example of Sri Lanka should recognize that unresolved grievances and mounting human sufferings will leave inhabitants devastated and more alienated than ever from the established state after the military defeat. Furthermore, the military capacity of the PKK more closely resembles to that of the IRA than to that of the ETA due to its higher capacity to maintain the armed struggle. The Northern Irish case indicates that peace negotiations can continue despite the foot-dragging of militants on disarmament. In the Northern Ireland peace process, the pace of the progress created by peace negotiations propelled Sinn Féin to participate in the negotiations and to put pressure on the IRA for demobilization.

### **Reconstructing Peace or Reconstructing War?**

The word “reconstruction” has an intrinsic appeal for war-torn countries as it suggests the possibility of a re-beginning. However, the substantive contributions of *After Civil War* delineate that post-war countries do not begin with a clean slate; to the contrary, they are haunted by the damage and wounds that the war inflicted on

society. As Kissane underlines, reconstruction after internal wars is a “war-embedded” process influenced by the rift between warring parties. The individual contributions to this volume refute as well the liberal aspirations to restore an intact civic identity in the aftermath of internal war. National identity survives the war as fractured and fragmented, bearing the traces of damages from the war. In most cases, the victors seek to impose their own version of national identity, excluding the vanquished from the boundaries of national identity. Moreover, the violence of the war shapes and recasts the boundaries of national identity. Contributor Ruth Seifert displays how Yugoslav identity as a supra-ethnic identity was torn apart in individual memories because of inter-ethnic violence and reinforced ethnic identities in Kosovo (pp. 213-244). Demetriou argues that reconstruction in Cyprus after internal war transformed the Greek identity into a more compound identity, strengthening Greek Cypriot identity (pp. 121-149). Jongerden shows that the reconstruction of Kurdish countryside in Turkey was inspired by nationalizing and modernizing ideas of the early Turkish Republic (pp. 150-183). Ünal’s analysis corroborates that forced evacuation policies which were part of the reconstruction of Kurdish areas turned out to be ineffective against the PKK in the long run. Upon these analyses, it is not hard to predict that the reconstruction of Kurdish-dominated regions after the current military operations is likely to deepen the alienation of Kurds from the state unless the gov-



ernment engages in efforts to gain legitimacy among Kurds and to address their grievances.

The definition and reproduction of national identity in a post-war period are strongly affected by political competition, which is also influenced by the preexistent cleavages. Political competition not only makes national identity a major contention between the victor and the vanquished, it also opens the way for political rapprochement in the long term. The Finnish, Irish and Greek cases of reconstruction of national identity after civil wars demonstrate that political competition can enable a normalization of relations between the victor and the vanquished in the long term. However, political and societal reconciliation takes generations and faces constant struggles on the definition and reproduction of national identity. Turkey's Kurdish peace process has also generated a heated discussion on the definition and boundaries of Turkish national identity. While the widely shared Turkish identity was criticized for its exclusive features, the term "*Türkiyelilik*" was discussed as a new supra-ethnic identity among Turks and Kurds. Hughes's chapter on Northern Ireland, and Kostovicova and Bojicic-Dzelilovic's chapter on Bosnia-Herzegovina contend that top-down institutional engineering for generating a common national identity has limits as people struggle with the scars of war.<sup>3</sup> Thus, rather than accentuating or muting people's identity preferences in the postwar period, it is better to respect people's legitimate identities, and support at

the same time multiethnic policies to build the peace process on the ground.

Another point on which the authors of *After Civil War* converge is that it takes generations for reconciliation at the elite level to filter down to the society level. Reconciliation requires the recognition of suffering and the atrocities committed during the conflict, but this is not a short-term task. As Richards shows, the transition to democracy enabled a reconciliation at the elite and society level in the long term and brought about a new narrative of the Spanish civil war based on a "war of brothers" theme, replacing the narrative of "crusade" that had emphasized the triumph of the victor over the vanquished.<sup>4</sup> However, changing a narrative can still trivialize the suffering of the other side. Demetriou detects that the narrative of civil war in Cyprus evolved from the annexation with Greece to the domination of Cyprus by a foreign state but it still hides the atrocities of Greek paramilitary squads against Turkish Cypriots.<sup>5</sup> Turkey's Kurdish peace process gave way as well to a new narrative of Turkey's war against PKK terrorism, based on recognition of the sufferings experienced and the atrocities committed by both sides during the war. The contributors of *After Civil War* agree that the more the damages inflicted by the war increase, the harder it will be to sustain the reconciliation in society. Thus, while the current clashes are destroying what was built up during the peace process, the psychological rift between Turks and Kurds is deep-

ening, rendering reconciliation at the society level more difficult.

In conclusion, even as the current clashes in Turkey are eclipsing the heated debates of the peace process on reconciliation, reconstruction and national identity; the selected books are enlightening to foster new hopes for renewed negotiations, demonstrating the challenges and opportunities on the road ahead for Turkey's Kurdish peace process. Firstly, Ünal's text underlines that counterterrorism strategies against the PKK cannot be fully effective unless the underlying grievances are resolved. Secondly, as Tonge stresses in *Comparative Peace Processes*, "Peace is not a singular event, but a conglomeration of incidents, ideas, tactics and developments" (p. 7). Rather than looking for a sudden end to the current clashes, we should continue sustained attempts at peace-building, considering the peace process as a constant struggle that aims to bridge the fault lines in the long-term. Thirdly, reconciliation on national identity is a long-term challenge that requires the translation of the political rapprochement into the society as Kissane displays. In

this sense, the ongoing polarization in parliament between Turkish and Kurdish parties and the attempts to exclude deputies of the HDP from parliament will shut the door to any further reconciliation at the society level and will be a major blow to the peace-building efforts. ■

## Endnotes

1. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty, *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 2 cited by Jonathan Tonge, *Comparative Peace Processes*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 11.
2. Tonge, *Comparative Peace Processes*, p. 170.
3. James Hughes, "Reconstruction without Reconciliation: Is Northern Ireland a 'Model'?", Bill Kissane (ed.) *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 245-287; Denisa Kostovicova and Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, "Ethnicity Pays: The Political Economy of Postconflict Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina," Bill Kissane (ed.) *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe*, pp. 187-212.
4. Michael Richards, "State, Nation, and Violence in Spanish Civil War Reconstruction," Bill Kissane (ed.) *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe*, pp. 70-89.
5. Chares Demetriou, "Political Contention and the Reconstruction of Greek Identity in Cyprus, 1960-2003," Bill Kissane (ed.) *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe*, pp. 121-149.