The division of the Kurdish people among four modern nation states--Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran--and their struggle for national rights have been constant themes of recent Middle East history. The Kurdish lands have been a contested territory for many centuries. Drawing on his two-volume Modern History of the Kurds, McDowall examines the past, chronicling events as recent as the war between Iran and Iraq. The study also includes an extensive bibliography and a detailed chronology of events. 

This second edition includes a new introduction and an expanded bibliography. In this comprehensive history, McDowall has added a significant new section on Kurdish society and culture in the contemporary period and has updated his account of Iranian Kurdish politics in light of the new regime in Tehran. He includes an increased discussion of Kurdish social life, reflecting the rich variety of cultures that make up the Kurdish society today. McDowall has also included a section on the Kurds in North Iraq and has updated his account of the Kurdish military. The result is a history that is more up-to-date than any other available and a more balanced, comprehensive account of Kurdish history than any previous one. 

McDowall concludes that the Kurds have not had a political identity of their own since the rise of nation-states, nor any chance to develop such an identity. In the absence of a Kurdish state, the Kurds have been reduced to the status of a nation in the making, and they have been fighting to establish their Kurdish identity. This has been done by means of revolution and the creation of independent states, or in the absence of such states, by the use of guerrilla warfare. The result is a history of the Kurds that is both a political and a cultural history, and that is both a history of the past and a history of the present.