UNITY WITHOUT POWER-SHARING: SYRIA'S STANCE ON KURDISH FEDERALISM

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Abstract

Since the establishment of the Syrian Arab Republic in 1946, successive regimes have systematically denied the Kurdish population its fundamental national rights. The outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 sparked a renewed Kurdish political awakening, as Kurdish-majority regions in northern Syria transitioned from initial caution to assertive political and military mobilization. Rejecting President Bashar al-Assad's (2000–2024) limited reform proposals and centralist vision, Kurdish political actors, backed by the United States, established a de facto autonomous administration in 2013, structured around three self-governing cantons. This development significantly altered the trajectory of the Syrian conflict and expanded the scope of foreign intervention, particularly by Turkey. Despite facing considerable territorial, demographic, and infrastructural losses, Kurdish-led forces, in coordination with international allies, successfully resisted existential threats, most notably from ISIS. The ousting of President al-Assad in December 2024 and the subsequent peace agreement between Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Commander Mazloum Abdi and interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa in March 2025 further underscored the Syrian state's enduring opposition to Kurdish aspirations for de jure autonomy. This article examines how the Syrian civil war (2011–2024) reshaped the Kurdish national movement, analyzing the interplay between Kurdish political mobilization, state fragmentation, and regional constraints that limited the realization of Kurdish autonomy within Syria's political landscape. Through historical and political analysis, the study argues that the Kurdish struggle under al-Assad's regime laid a critical foundation for future claims to broaden national rights. The experience of de facto sovereignty, despite its limitations, provides a crucial framework for advancing Kurdish political agency within a reconfigured, post-conflict Syrian state.

Keywords: *Kurds, Syria, SDF, federalism, sovereignty, security.*

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Introduction

Since the formation of the modern Syrian state in the aftermath of post-colonial restructuring, the Kurdish question has remained a deeply contested and unresolved dimension of Syrian politics. Despite representing one of the largest stateless ethnic groups in the Middle East, the Kurdish population in Syria has been systematically denied recognition, political rights, and cultural autonomy. Successive regimes have consistently pursued a policy of Arabization toward the Kurds, trying to replace them in a Sunni environment. This entrenched policy of marginalization began to unravel with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, which precipitated the fragmentation of state authority and created unprecedented opportunities for non-state actors to assert territorial and political control. Within this volatile landscape, Kurdish political and military actors in northern Syria, inspired by the PKK and having close ties with this movement, which originated in Turkey, proclaimed an autonomous administration in 2013.

This development, later institutionalized as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), represented a significant rupture in the historical denial of Kurdish agency and constituted a pivotal moment in the broader struggle for self-determination. However, the establishment of de facto autonomy was not solely a product of internal dynamics. It was also facilitated by shifting international alignments, most notably the tactical partnership between Syrian Kurdish forces and the United States under the Obama administration, forged in the context of the global campaign against the Islamic State (ISIS). This alliance temporarily elevated the geopolitical relevance of the Kurdish question in Syria. However, over time, the Kurdish project became entangled in the broader complexities of the Syrian conflict, including regional rivalries, Turkish military interventions, the fluctuating commitments of external powers, and intra-opposition political competition. Between Syrian Kurdish forces and the Syrian government, there were cold and tense relations, but no war or military struggle. This article examines the tendencies of historical continuity of the Syrian state's refusal to recognize Kurdish autonomy and traces the emergence and evolution of the Kurdish self-governance project since 2013. It places particular emphasis on the security challenges confronting the autonomous administration and the fluctuating role of U.S. foreign policy under the Obama and Trump administrations. By situating these developments, the article aims

to offer a nuanced analysis of how local aspirations for autonomy intersect with, and are shaped by, broader geopolitical forces.

Demography as Policy: Ethnic Reconfiguration and the Syrian State's Approach to the Kurds

The Kurdish population in Syria has historically been concentrated in three geographically non-contiguous enclaves along the Turkish border: Upper Jazirah (al-Jazira), Jarablus, and Kurd Dagh (Jabal al-Akrad). The main urban centers in these areas are Qamishli in the Upper Jazirah, Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) in the Jarablus region, and Afrin in the Kurd Dagh. Additionally, sizeable Kurdish communities have long been established in major cities such as Aleppo and Damascus. Some Kurdish tribes of Upper Jazirah have, moreover, maintained relations with their kin in Tur Abdin, Turkey, and in Iraq's Dohuk Province through marriage, commerce, and shared ethnic affiliations. Historically, the Kurd Dagh and Jarablus areas have been more disconnected from wider Kurdish activity than the Upper Jazirah region [26]. During the French Mandate period (1920s–1930s), Upper Jazirah became a significant hub of Kurdish politics. This was primarily due to the influx of Kurdish tribal chiefs and intellectuals fleeing repression in the newly established Republic of Turkey.

In exile under the French Mandate, Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant enjoyed relative freedoms of speech and organization, which supported their cultural revival efforts. Jordi Tejel's research provides a nuanced analysis of interwar nationalism and highlights the instrumental role of colonial powers in shaping minority politics across the Middle East [12:839]. Following Syria's independence from France in 1946, the Kurdish population, one of the country's most significant ethnic minorities, continued to experience systematic marginalization and the denial of fundamental national rights. Despite their significant demographic presence, Kurds in Syria have been denied fundamental social, cultural, and political rights: to travel abroad (which requires a passport), to own property; to enter into legally recognized marriage, to benefit from healthcare and food subsidies; to participate in elections; and to hold office (whether elected or as civil servants) [25]. In 1962, shortly before the Ba'athist coup of 1963, the Syrian authorities conducted a special census in the al-Hasakeh province, a predominantly Kurdish region. As a result, approximately 120,000 Kurds were arbitrarily stripped of their citizenship. The government justified this action by claiming these individuals were not "genuine" Syrians, alleging they had illegally entered the country from neighbouring states,

notably Turkey and Iraq [25]. Following this policy, the Syrian state categorized Kurds into three main legal classifications: Syrian Kurds (citizens), foreign Kurds (classified as non-citizens or *ajanib*), and "concealed" Kurds (*maktoumeen*), those who were neither registered nor recognized in any official capacity, despite being born and raised in Syria [20]. After the Ba'athist party came to power in 1963, it proved hostile towards Kurds because of Arab nationalistic ideology [6]. The Syrian government's land reform policy furthered the Arabization of the region. Beginning in the 1960s, the Syrian government sought to alter the demographics of the Hasakeh region and beyond through the settlement of Bedouin tribes.

Arabization entailed the creation of an "Arab Belt" along the Turkish border [21]. The 1958 decree outlawed the publication of materials in Kurdish, and even private schools were barred from teaching that language. The regime replaced Kurdish names of towns and villages with Arabic ones; for example, the Kurdish town of Kobane was renamed Ayn al-Arab [22:26]. Between 1973 and 1975, the Syrian government initiated the establishment of 41 new villages in regions previously inhabited by Kurdish populations, relocating Arab settlers into these areas. The state provided new Arab residents with land allocations, agricultural subsidies, fertilisers, and access to government loans to facilitate the establishment of stable livelihoods. In contrast, existing Kurdish villages were systematically neglected, particularly in terms of infrastructure and public services [2:23]. This policy of demographic engineering, intensified tensions between the incoming Arab population and the displaced or marginalized Kurdish communities. The period witnessed growing resentment, resource-based competition, and rising ethnic tensions, laying the groundwork for long-term socio-political friction in northeastern Syria.

Reconfiguring Kurdish Politics in Syria: Pre-and Post-Arab Spring Dynamics

As discussed earlier, the Syrian state has not granted official recognition to the Kurdish population as a distinct ethno-religious minority. Instead, Kurds were generally classified as part of the broader Sunni Muslim majority, a categorization that effectively marginalized their national identity and excluded them from the legal and cultural protections afforded to other recognized minorities, such as Syria's Christian denominations. Nevertheless, during the presidency of Hafez al-Assad

(1971–2000), the Syrian government pursued a policy of double standards regarding the Kurdish issue, strategically using the "Kurdish card" to serve state interests. In the late 1970s, Turkey began constructing dams along the Euphrates River, significantly threatening Syria's water security. Despite Damascus's efforts to counter these developments, it failed to halt Turkey's project. In this complex geopolitical context, President al-Assad began leveraging the Kurdish issue as a tool of regional pressure. From the 1980s onward, Syria provided support to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a means of pressuring Ankara. This policy enabled al-Assad to gain favour among segments of the Syrian Kurdish population, while simultaneously aiming to suppress domestic Kurdish dissent. Between the 1980s and 1990s, several thousand Syrian Kurds are reported to have joined the PKK. Syria's support for the group persisted until the rapprochement with Turkey in 1998 [27:4]. This fact is essential and helps explain how the Democratic Union Party (PYD) emerged as the predominant Kurdish political party in Syria soon after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The signature of the Adana agreement in 1998 formalized Syria's abandonment of its support for the PKK [28]. The empowerment of Iraqi Kurds following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 gradually drove Ankara, Damascus, and Tehran closer to the shared threat of Kurdish separatism in Turkey, Syria, and Iran [28]. The 2004 Kurdish uprising marked the first significant Kurdish mobilization against the regime. It began in March 2004 after a football match in Qamishli between a Kurdish team and an Arab team from Deir ez-Zor. Political slogans by Kurdish fans led to clashes, prompting security forces to open fire and kill at least seven Kurds. Mass funerals the next day turned into widespread protests demanding national and cultural rights, quickly spreading to Kurdish regions and major cities like Damascus and Aleppo. The government responded with a violent crackdown, arresting over 2,000, mainly students and activists. By the end of the unrest, around 30 Kurds had been killed. The uprising exposed deep-seated Kurdish grievances and is widely seen as a precursor to the broader Kurdish movement that emerged during the Syrian civil war after 2011 [2:28].

Before the "Arab Spring" events, some 300.000 Kurds, approximately 15 per cent of the estimated two million Kurds, continued to remain stateless, lacking fundamental rights. When the 2011 uprising broke out, the Syrian Kurds and Kurdish parties were of two minds about whether to join or not to join the anti-government position for fear of repression. Fifteen pro-Kurdish parties existed in the country at that time. Most of these parties, which sought formal equality between Kurds and Arabs, traced their origins back to the first Kurdish political party in Syria, the PDK (Partîya Dêmokrat a Kurd li Sûrîyê), founded in 1957. Consequently, the sense of

nationalist mobilization among the Syrian Kurds remained much lower in comparison to the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran throughout the 20th century [27:1].

Nevertheless, Kurdish demonstrations remained relatively limited in size and scope. Much like other Kurdish populations across the Middle East, Syrian Kurds were politically fragmented. From the very outset of the uprising, Kurdish political forces reacted in varying ways, broadly categorized into three main groups: 1. Kurdistan Workers' Party, 2. traditional Kurdish parties, and 3. the Kurdish youth-led coordinating committees along with the Kurdish 'Future Movement.'[7]

Young Kurds have been involved in the Syrian revolution since its inception, calling for freedom and the fall of the regime, and subsequently forming an umbrella body, the Union of Coordinating Committees for the Kurdish Youth.[7]. Young Kurdish activists primarily used social media tools everywhere. A few demonstrations in the Kurdish regions, mainly in Kamishli and Hasakeh, followed the same logic as the revolution [7].

On the other hand, there were Kurdish voices, both within tribal structures and urban communities, who opposed separatist aspirations. Many Kurds, both before the 2011 events, have opposed the separatist aspirations, favouring peaceful and democratic efforts to achieve rights and recognition within a unified Syrian framework [20]. Nevertheless, the Kurdish movement soon began to develop its own agenda. The National Movement of Kurdish Parties of Syria, a coalition of Syria's 12 Kurdish parties, boycotted a Syrian opposition summit in Antalya on 31 May 2011 because of Turkey's anti-Kurdish aspirations [23]. Over time, the Kurdish movement began to act independently, refusing to cooperate with the Syrian opposition and rebel groups. A few Kurdish parties made an exception. Among them was the "Future Movement" of Meshaal Tammo, who had just been released after three-and-a-half years in prison for dissent. In August 2011, a coalition of Syrian opposition groups formed the Syrian National Council (SNC) under Turkey's umbrella. "Future Movement" was among the few Kurdish parties joining the SNC. The Kurdish cooperation with the SNC and other conflict sides failed as the majority of the Syrian oppositional groups did not share the separatist aspirations of the Kurds. Factually, the Syrian Kurds were encouraged by the successful experience of the Iraqi Kurds, who retained their autonomous status in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. The Kurds in Syria were full of hope to create their autonomy, which they initially called "Rojava", which in the Kurdish language

means "West", denoting the western region part of what they consider "Big Kurdistan" [19].

A significant shift in the Kurdish movement occurred after Saleh Muslim, the head of the Democratic Union Party, returned to Syria in April 2011. He served jail time in Syria for illegal political activity before fleeing in 2010 and seeking refuge in Iraq [1]. The PYD aimed to mobilize the active Kurdish population, including women. The Democratic Union Party, well-organized, trained, and armed, became the dominant Kurdish power in Syria. The party has been the most reluctant to confront the regime. The PYD's armed branch, the People's Defence Corps (YPG), was trained by the PKK at its headquarters in northern Iraq's Qandil mountain range. According to the International Crisis Group report, the PKK sent 1,000 armed fighters to establish the PYD's military wing, the YPG [22:26]. It is noteworthy that the Syrian government decided to rely on PYD/YPG as a local proxy rather than attack the Kurdish areas itself. The PYD joined and assumed a leading role in the moderate opposition group, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, formed in June 2011 and comprising leftist Arabs and Kurds who called for regime change while remaining opposed to foreign intervention. On 7 October 2011, charismatic leader Meshaal Tammo's assassination provoked Kurdish protesters. Tammo's funeral turned into a mass rally with more than 50.000 demonstrators calling for the fall of Assad's regime. Security forces opened fire on the crowd [15]. In October 2011, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) was formed under the patronage of the President of the Kurdish Regional Government, Masoud Barzani. The KNC was composed of 15 local parties opposed to both the Assad regime and the PKK. Later, Barzani attempted to reconcile the two sides. On 11 July 2012, just before the Syrian army began to withdraw from Kurdish areas, Barzani mediated a power-sharing accord between the two leading groups. Known as the "Erbil Declaration," it stipulated that they would jointly govern Syria's Kurdish regions during the transition. It established the Supreme Kurdish Committee [22:4]. Barzani sought to strengthen the Kurds' position amid security challenges, while maintaining his influence in the Syrian mosaic[1]. Later, he exited the scene, leaving it to PYD.

Thus, the first stage of the Kurdish national movement in Syria came to a close by the summer of 2012. Even before the complete withdrawal of Syrian regime

[1]According to the agreement, first, the PYD and the KNC will stop fighting each other. Second, the PYD will henceforth focus exclusively on the Kurdish issue inside Syria, not across the border in Turkey. Third, the newly unified Syrian Kurds will expel Syrian government officials and security forces from their area [17].

forces from Kurdish-majority areas, Kurdish political actors believed they were sufficiently prepared to assert control over their own regions. In June 2012, the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) publicly called on Kurdish groups to join the uprising; however, Kurdish factions declined the invitation for political, historical, and strategic reasons. The FSA, composed primarily of Sunni Arab opposition forces, espoused a pan-Syrian nationalist agenda centered on the overthrow of the Assad regime, yet offered no credible commitment to Kurdish national or cultural rights. In contrast, the dominant Kurdish party, the PYD, prioritized a political program focused on self-governance, cultural recognition, and eventual autonomy. These objectives were largely unacknowledged or dismissed by mainstream Arab opposition groups, which contributed to deep Kurdish skepticism toward cooperation. This mistrust was further compounded by historical grievances, particularly the legacy of Arab nationalist policies and state-led Arabization campaigns under the Ba'ath regime, which had systematically marginalized Kurdish identity and rights. As such, Kurdish leaders questioned whether the Arab opposition would prove any more inclusive or democratic in a post-Assad Syria. Instead of aligning with the broader rebellion, the PYD and its military wing, the People's Protection Units, concentrated their efforts on securing Kurdish-majority areas and establishing local administrative structures. They viewed the power vacuum resulting from the regime's retreat as a strategic opportunity to create a de facto autonomous zone, one that could eventually serve as the foundation for broader Kurdish political aspirations within or beyond Syria's borders.

In July 2012, the Syrian government withdrew from the Kurdish enclaves in Afrin, Ayn al-Arab (Kobane), and Qamishli while maintaining several security and military bases and administrative offices. There was a non-formal agreement between the Syrian regime and PYD. The regime has never targeted PYD-led areas. The two sides did not engage in direct combat [17]. Ankara accused Damascus of handing over areas to the PKK "terrorists." On November 12, 2013, Kurdish groups in Syria announced the establishment of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, a semi-autonomous region divided into three zones.

The establishment of the Kurdish autonomous administration in Syria began in 2013 amid the chaos of the Syrian civil war, as the Kurdish Democratic Union Party and its armed wing, the YPG, took control of Kurdish-majority areas in the northeast and northwest of the country. This self-administration, commonly known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, implemented

decentralized governance structures, promoted gender equality, and provided public services despite ongoing conflict. However, the fragile stability of the Kurdish autonomous region was repeatedly challenged by external forces, most notably Turkey. Relations between the Kurdish autonomous administration and Turkey have been deeply hostile and conflict-ridden. Turkey viewed the Syrian Kurdish-led administration, particularly the PYD and its armed wing, the YPG, as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which it designates as a terrorist organization. Consequently, Ankara has launched multiple military operations in northern Syria aimed at curbing Kurdish autonomy and influence. Major Turkish incursions include Operation Euphrates Shield (2016), Operation Olive Branch (2018), which targeted Afrin, and Operation Peace Spring (2019), focusing on the border region near Kobane and Tal Abyad. These repeated interventions have resulted in significant territorial losses for Kurdish forces, aimed at curbing Kurdish influence and prevent the establishment of a contiguous Kurdish-controlled zone. The Turkish involvement complicated the political and security dynamics of the region, presenting ongoing challenges to the stability and future of the Kurdish autonomous administration.

Despite numerous challenges, the Kurdish-led administration managed to maintain de facto control over significant parts of northeastern Syria. During the fight against ISIS, whose territorial expansion in Syria and Iraq was declared in 2014, the Kurdish forces collaborated intermittently with both the Syrian government and international actors, particularly the U.S.-led coalition. These instances of cooperation with the Assad regime were tactical, limited, and driven by shared security concerns, rather than any formal alliance or ideological alignment. The coordination was rooted in pragmatism and mutual survival in specific battlefronts, such as Hasakah and parts of Deir ez-Zor. However, no official agreement or alliance was ever established between the Syrian government and the Kurdish administration. Both parties remained fundamentally at odds, especially over Kurdish autonomy. Following the territorial defeat of ISIS, frictions resurfaced, particularly concerning the control and governance of oil-rich regions, highlighting the persistent political divergence between the Kurdish administration and the central government in Damascus. President Bashar al-Assad has explicitly rejected federalism and separatist arrangements for Kurdish regions in Syria, asserting that "Most Kurds want to live in a unified Syria, under a central system," and warning that the establishment of separate entities contradicts the country's unity and territorial integrity [18]. Although there were moments of limited coordination, Damascus never recognized the Aautonomous Administration of North and East

Syria or supported the idea of Kurdish self-rule. Assad repeatedly emphasized that Syria would remain a centralized state and rejected any moves that could lead to decentralization or separatism. Geographically, Syria is too small to be a federal state. It is probably smaller than most of the Russian Federation's republics. Socially speaking, a federation needs social constituencies which cannot live with each other," said al-Assad in an interview conducted by SANA [18].

The Syrian regime appears intent on reasserting its authority over the Kurdish self-administered regions in northeastern Syria by proposing limited constitutional reforms, most notably, the inclusion of a clause addressing local governance. However, it continues to categorically reject Kurdish demands for a federal system. As a concrete step in this direction, President Bashar al-Assad issued a decree scheduling local elections for September 16, 2018, thereby reaffirming the state's position that the Kurdish question must be addressed strictly within the framework of a unified and sovereign Syria [16]. While exclusionary attitudes toward the Kurds persist within segments of Syria's Sunni Arab majority, the conflict has also opened new avenues for pragmatic cross-ethnic cooperation. In contrast to the regime's centralized approach, the shared experience of political marginalization and armed struggle has, in some cases, fostered collaboration between Kurdish forces and Arab tribal actors. A prominent example is the cooperation between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the *al-Ghad al-Suri* movement, led by opposition figure Ahmad al-Jarba. Arab military units played an important role in supporting the SDF during military operations, particularly in the fight against ISIS, highlighting a strategic convergence between Arab and Kurdish factions within the fragmented Syrian opposition landscape [1]. Further evidence of cross-ethnic political engagement is evident in the November 2021 meeting of Arab and Kurdish tribal leaders in the Jazira region. Participants expressed support for the Autonomous Administration project, describing it as an inclusive and viable model capable of addressing the crises facing both Syria and the broader Middle East. They characterized it as a rare and positive case of locally rooted, pluralistic governance [4].

However, throughout the Syrian crisis and up until the change of power, the Kurdish elite consistently rejected al-Assad's proposals and refused to make any concessions. Following the ousting of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, the newly established Syrian authorities have consistently and unequivocally rejected proposals for Kurdish autonomy, reaffirming their commitment to the preservation

of Syria's territorial integrity and centralized governance. The US-backed Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria has had to navigate complex regional and international dynamics. Faced with shifting U.S. policy under the Trump administration, escalating Turkish threats, and a rapidly changing Syrian political landscape, Kurdish actors were forced to reassess and adapt their approaches to both resistance and political negotiation.

On March 10, 2025, a historic agreement was signed between the commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Abdi, and Syria's interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, marking a pivotal step in post-conflict reconciliation and state reconstruction. The agreement, signed in Damascus, outlined the integration of Kurdish military and administrative institutions into the Syrian state's framework and guaranteed the Kurds' constitutional rights, citizenship, and cultural recognition. Key components included a nationwide ceasefire, joint administration of strategic assets such as oil fields and border crossings, and a commitment to pluralistic governance [10]. This accord reflects a significant shift from fragmented governance in northeast Syria toward centralized coordination, yet it retains local autonomy within a broader national framework. The Kurds' motivation for entering the agreement stemmed from a combination of strategic pragmatism, security concerns, and the opportunity to gain legal recognition as an essential component of the Syrian policy. Notably, even after the agreement was signed, Kurdish representatives continued to advocate for the establishment of a "decentralized democratic state." In response, Syrian Interim President Ahmad al-Shara issued a statement declaring: "We clearly reject any attempt to impose partition or to create separatist cantons under the guise of federalism or self-autonomy without national consensus. The unity of Syria's territory and its people is a red line" [3]. At the end of April 2025, the Syrian presidency released an official statement rejecting renewed Kurdish demands for a decentralized or federal system of governance. The statement warned against "attempts to impose a separatist reality or to establish separate entities under the guise of federalism… without national consensus." It went on to condemn "the recent activities and declarations" of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), characterizing them as efforts to advance federalist ambitions that pose a threat to Syria's territorial integrity [24].

The internal Kurdish political process in Syria has not only shaped the country's post-conflict dynamics but also produced broader regional repercussions. Most notably, on May 12, 2025, after more than four decades of armed struggle in Turkey (1984–2025), the Kurdistan Workers' Party officially laid down its arms [29]. The Kurdish reconciliation with the Islamist government in Syria did not occur

in isolation. Instead, it appears to be closely connected to the broader transformation of Kurdish political strategies in the region, particularly those unfolding in Syria. The shifting balance of power, the Kurdish leadership's engagement in negotiations, and the redefinition of political goals within Syria likely influenced the PKK's decision to recalibrate its approach in Turkey. In this context, the Syrian Kurdish experience arguably served as both a reference point and a catalyst for broader Kurdish political reconfigurations across the region.

Conclusion remarks

One of the most consequential developments in the Kurdish struggle in Syria since the outbreak of the civil war was the establishment of Kurdish self-administration in 2013. This milestone marked a transformative shift in Kurdish political agency and territorial governance, culminating decades of Syrian Kurdish efforts to assert national rights and political identity within a historically restrictive state system. The emergence of Kurdish self-rule in northeastern Syria was closely intertwined with the dynamics of the Syrian conflict, during which Kurdish political and military forces-backed by the United States-became pivotal actors in both local governance and regional security. Simultaneously, the Kurdish movement in Syria, ideologically aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, faced escalating external pressures. These included sustained Turkish military interventions in northern Syria and persistent confrontations with hostile Sunni jihadist groups, most notably ISIS. While Kurdish forces succeeded in reshaping Syria's internal balance of power and elevating the Kurdish question to the regional and international agenda, these gains remained structurally fragile, constrained by shifting geopolitical alignments and a predominantly negative regional consensus toward Kurdish political aspirations among neighboring states. The agreement with Islamist government of Syria in March 2025 represented a significant loss of autonomy and strategic leverage for the Kurdish movement. On one hand, this setback reflected sustained pressure from Turkey on the Kurdish movement, both within Turkey and across Syria. On the other hand, it was linked to a decline in U.S. support for Kurdish armed groups-particularly under the Trump administration-amid shifting regional power dynamics following Syria's regime change in December 2024.

Equally constraining was the entrenched opposition of the Syrian state and the broader Arab Sunni political milieu to Kurdish autonomy or federal

arrangements, reflecting deep-seated ideological resistance to territorial decentralization. Despite these formidable challenges, the Kurdish self-administration project in Syria established a durable framework for articulating and partially institutionalizing Kurdish national rights. As such, it constitutes a significant political experiment with implications that extend beyond Syria, contributing to broader debates on minority governance, state sovereignty, and regional order in the Middle East.

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Հիմնաբառեր. քրդեր, Սիրիա, SDF, ֆեդերալիզմ, ինքնիշխանություն, անվտանգություն։

Ամփոփում

1946 թվականին Սիրիայի Արաբական Հանրապետության հռչակումից ի վեր միմյանց հաջորդած վարչակարգերը համակարգված կերպով մերժել են քրդական բնակչության հիմնարար ազգային իրավունքները։ 2011 թվականին Արաբական գարունը խթան դարձավ քրդական քաղաքական նոր զարթոնքի համար։ Հյուսիսային Սիրիայի քրդաբնակ շրջանները զգուշավոր դիրքավորումից անցում կատարեցին ավելի վճռական քաղաքական և ռազմական մոբիլիզացիայի։ Մերժելով նախագահ Բաշար ալ-Ասադի (2000–2024) սահմանափակ բարեփոխումների առաջարկներն ու կենտրոնացման տեսլականը՝ քրդական քաղաքական ուժերը, Միացյալ Նահանգների աջակցությամբ, 2013 թվականին երեք ինքնակառավարվող կանտոններում ստեղծեցին դե ֆակտո ինքնավար վարչակազմ։ Այս զարգացումը էականորեն փոխեց սիրիական հակամարտության ընթացքը և ընդլայնեց արտաքին միջամտության շրջանակը, մասնավորապես՝ Թուրքիայի կողմից։ Չնայած զգալի տարածքային, ժողովրդագրական և ենթակառուցվածքային կորուստներին՝ քրդական ուժերը միջազգային դաշնակիցների հետ համագործակցությամբ հաջողությամբ դիմակայեցին գոյաբանական սպառնալիքներին, հատկապես՝ «Իսլամական պետության» (ԻՊ) վտանգին։ 2024 թվականի դեկտեմբերին նախագահ ալ-Ասադի տապալումը և 2025 թվականի մարտին Սիրիայի ժողովրդավարական ուժերի հրամանատար Մազլում Աբդիի ու ժամանակավոր նախագահ Ահմադ ալ-Շարաայի միջև կնքված խաղաղության համաձայնագիրը ևս ի ցույց դրեց քրդերի՝ դե յուրե

ինքնավարության ձգտումների նկատմամբ սիրիական պետության մերժողական մոտեցումը։

Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է, թե ինչպես է սիրիական քաղաքացիական պատերազմը (2011–2024) վերափոխել քրդական ազգային շարժումը՝ վերլուծելով քրդական քաղաքական մոբիլիզացիայի, պետության մասնատման և տարածաշրջանային սահմանափակումների փոխազդեցությունը, որոնք խոչընդոտել են Սիրիայի քաղաքական դաշտում քրդական ինքնավարության լիարժեք իրագործմանը։ Պատմական և քաղաքական վերլուծության միջոցով հոդվածը ցույց է տալիս, թե ինչպես է ալ-Ասադի վարչակարգի պայմաններում քրդական պայքարը ձևավորել ապագայում ավելի լայն ազգային իրավունքների համար կարևոր հիմք։ Դե ֆակտո ինքնիշխանության փորձառությունը, իր սահմանափակումներով հանդերձ, վերաձևվող Սիրիայում էական գործոն է քրդերի քաղաքական առաջխաղացման համար։