



Middle East
Institute



BORDERS BEYOND BORDERS

THE MANY (MANY) KURDISH POLITICAL PARTIES OF SYRIA

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OCTOBER 2019

POLICY PAPER 2019-21



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SUMMARY

The launch of Turkey's military incursion into northern Syria on Oct. 9 represents an existential threat for the Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria (AANES) and Kurdish parties in Syria as a whole, prompting Kurdish political factions, both within Syria and abroad, to reevaluate their survival strategies and alliances. This report explores the various political factions within the Kurdish coalitions in Syria as they functioned under the AANES and the major rifts between them. Even under these dire circumstances Kurdish political factions in Syria have responded to the Turkish invasion independently. At the back of the report there is also an appendix that includes profiles of most of the political parties mentioned in the text.

INTRODUCTION

On Oct. 9, Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring¹ and Turkish forces began shelling border towns in the Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria (AANES). After administering the destruction of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fortifications² along the border with Turkey, U.S. forces abandoned their allies and withdrew³ from the area. As of Oct. 21, most U.S. troops had crossed over the border into Iraq, with the last several hundred set to depart within weeks.⁴

Four days after Turkey announced Operation Peace Spring, a 35-year-old Kurdish politician named Hevrin Khalaf was brutally murdered on her way home from a meeting in Hasakah. Her party, the Future Party in Syria, called for a pluralistic society in the northeast and included an Arab co-chair. Like nearly all Syrian Kurdish political parties, it was tied up with external politics. Turkish state media claims that the party was founded at the request of U.S. officials.⁵ Future Party representatives ardently refuted these claims, stating that the party is a local and independent movement that opposes the Assad regime.⁶ After Khalaf's death, the Future Party requested that the Kurdish National Council (KNC) sever its ties with the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) movement known as the Syrian National Coalition. The KNC has since suspended its membership in the Coalition.

Kurdish political factions within Syria and abroad are currently reevaluating their survival strategies and alliances as civilians in the "safe zone" flee the incoming bombardment. KNC executive committee member Ibrahim Biro declared that the KNC had warned⁷ the Democratic Union Party (PYD) that its U.S. allies would desert it. Biro went on to say that the KNC would defend the AANES borders but that it was the PYD's actions that had precipitated the invasion that "will change the demographics"⁸ of northeast Syria.

The situation in the AANES is chaotic and unpredictable with alliances being tested on all sides. The KNC has called on the international community to confront Turkey militarily and condemns the systematic "demographic engineering"⁹ taking place in northeast Syria. However, each of the external actors engaging in the conflict has different goals and relationships with internal Kurdish movements. The SDF has made a deal with the regime (the details of which are not yet fully understood), which will likely push Kurdish political parties back into the shadows, as they were before the war. Likewise, Kurdish activists and parties that have strongly opposed the regime and the invasion of Afrin have found themselves caught between the invading Turkish forces on one side and the Syrian Arab Army on the other.



Pro-Turkish Syrian fighters cross the border into Syria as they take part in an offensive against Kurdish-controlled areas in the northeast, on October 11, 2019. (Photo by NAZEER AL-KHATIB/AFP via Getty Images)

This report will explore the various political factions within the Kurdish coalitions in Syria as they functioned under the AANES. The Turkish invasion represents an existential crisis for the AANES and Kurdish political parties in Syria as a whole, yet even under these dire circumstances Kurdish political factions in Syria have responded to the invasion independently.

ABSTRACT

This article will discuss the major rifts in Kurdish political parties in Syria as well as the ramifications of Turkish operations Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring. It seeks to provide context and detailed analysis of the internal Kurdish political processes in the region rather than a broader international perspective. Kurdish political

parties fall into two major categories: the KNC and the PYD-dominated Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM).

The SDF represents an attempt by the U.S. to form a political umbrella to bring together the various militias fighting ISIS and not a long-term democratic governance structure in northeast Syria. As this article will show, Kurdish political parties were hardly united under TEV-DEM. The oppressive political consolidation techniques of the PYD led to local disillusionment with the political processes supported by the U.S. but not with attempts at pan-Kurdish unification. Operation Peace Spring has been universally condemned by prominent Kurdish politicians in both factions, but the differing ideologies and alliances may present an insurmountable



A fighter of the US-backed, Kurdish-led SDF walks in front of a banner during celebrations on March 23, 2019, after announcing the defeat of ISIS's last bastion in eastern Syria. (Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/Getty Images)

barrier to cooperation for the Kurdish political administration and lead them to pursue independent survival strategies.

In order to simplify various Kurdish parties with similar or the same names, this article will employ the English acronyms or most commonly used names in English. I have provided a brief profile of most of the parties referenced at the end of this report to avoid constant introductions to smaller parties and coalitions.

WHY SO MANY PARTIES?

The first Kurdish political parties were established in the late 1950s to counter the rise of Arab nationalism in Syria. These parties were immediately targeted and deemed illegal by the Syrian authorities,

first under the United Arab Republic and later the Ba'ath Party.¹⁰ Early Kurdish parties and their predecessors differentiated themselves from popular communist movements by specifically addressing Kurdish rights and adopting a range of leftist ideologies.

Almost all modern Kurdish political parties can be traced back to offshoots of the first Kurdish political party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (KDP-S), which was founded in 1957. Kurdish parties in Syria have a long history of fragmentation for several reasons. The illicit nature of their political activities and their exclusion from Syrian politics forced them to form advocacy networks without a central authority. In order to maintain secrecy and evade the Syrian secret services, Kurdish political parties operated in a

highly compartmentalized and hierarchical structure that was vulnerable to in-fighting and un-democratic practices.¹¹ Parties split based on the will of their leaders and often ended in bitter rivalry between like-minded political opponents each eager to lead their own party. However, more importantly, Kurdish political parties have often been co-opted, funded, and supported by external actors.¹² Party alliances with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, the Barzani family in Iraq, and more recently the Turkish government have led to conflicting goals and adversaries despite similar demands and ideologies.

Before the outbreak of the civil war, it was estimated that Syrian Kurds made up about 10 percent of the population,¹³ while in Turkey Kurds make up about 19 percent of the population.¹⁴ The Kurdish conception of "Kurdistan" extends throughout Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq, where Kurds also make up a sizeable portion of the population.

Since the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey in 1937, pan-Kurdish sentiment has transcended national borders, creating complex identities and insurgencies across many different tribes. As such, Kurdish movements in Syria have been unable to escape associations with Kurds in neighboring countries and the formation of an autonomous Kurdistan. Syrian Kurds have often contributed to movements in Turkey and Iraq and these borders and national identities are somewhat fluid.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Kurdish political parties in Syria agree in their demands for democratic governance and Kurdish cultural rights. The vast majority also call for a Kurdish autonomous region or federation inside Syria. The difference between these two power-sharing models has warranted considerable attention from both the Syrian regime and its neighbors. The KNC has advocated for a federation similar to the KRG while the PYD promotes its autonomous administration.

At the onset of the Syrian Civil War most Kurdish political parties distanced themselves from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on several fronts. The issue of Kurdish autonomy was off-putting to many Syrian rebels and from the start many Kurdish political parties viewed the FSA as a distinct movement from their own. Yet, in the early years of the revolution many Kurds joined flanks on both sides and several Kurdish parties became part of the Syrian National Council (SNC), a coalition of FSA groups supported by Turkey.

THE TWO FACTIONS

After the 2004 Kurdish uprising¹⁵ in Syria there was a resurgence in the formation of new political parties, and between 2004 and 2010 seven new parties were formed.¹⁶ The Syrian Civil War did not halt the fragmentation of Kurdish political

parties despite the increased motivation for a unified movement. The rise of the PYD pushed opposition parties together into a hodgepodge of coalitions that eventually formed the boundary line between the KNC and the PYD-led autonomous administration. In 2012, the PYD's military component, the People's Protection Units (YPG), and its allies were allowed to lay claim to vast swathes of land in northeast Syria while the regime retreated, largely without contestation. The forces that would later form the SDF focused their manpower on pushing ISIS out of northeast Syria and the KNC developed as a response to the hegemony of the PKK-aligned PYD.

THE PYD

The PYD functions as the leading party within TEV-DEM, the legislative body of the AANES. It was founded in 2003 as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), a transnational coalition of PKK-aligned political movements in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Abdullah Öcalan founded the KCK from prison in 2003 with the hope of establishing democratic confederacies in each region.¹⁷ In 1998 Turkey and the Assad regime signed the Adana Agreement to work together to combat Kurdish insurgents.¹⁸ Previously Hafez al-Assad harbored and funded PKK training camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley¹⁹ and in some pockets of Syria in order to counter Turkey's threats to continue its restrictive dam projects on the upper Euphrates.²⁰ Assad's aid to the PKK also provided an external outlet for Kurdish insurgent movements. The Adana Agreement

prevented Turkish military intervention but also pushed the Syrian government to crack down on Kurdish resistance and become increasingly oppressive to appease its Turkish neighbors. Human Rights Watch notes "since 2004 the Syrian government has quashed public gatherings to express solidarity with fellow Kurds across international borders with harsh measures, including firing live ammunition at demonstrators, arrests, detention, and prison terms."²¹ The PYD, among other Kurdish movements, continued its political activism despite the oppression of the Syrian regime up until the revolution.

At the brink of the Syrian Civil War the PYD faced new ideological dilemmas and opportunities. Despite the fact that the party leadership "such as party chairman Salih Muslim, Hadiya Yusuf, and Anwar Muslim have all spent time in prison" the YPG has both clashed and cooperated with the Assad regime during the war. The PYD has since developed a unique ideology and has distanced itself from its origins as a political party and a PKK affiliate. Its charter no longer declares Öcalan as the leader of the PYD,²² and former PYD leader Saleh Muslim Mohammed further distanced himself from the party's origins, claiming that "the decision making [in the self-ruling areas] is no longer the PYD's — now the people rule themselves. The councils have been established, and the people decide."²³ Nevertheless, there have been many credible claims regarding the overwhelming influence of PKK leaders from Qandil in the PYD political process. Long-time PKK commander Sahin Cilo, who



Murat Karayilan, co-leader of the PKK, gestures as he speaks on September 30, 2006 during a press conference in the foothills of the Qandil Mountains near the Iraq-Iran border. (Photo by SAFIN HAMED/AFP via Getty Images)

now is often referred to as Mazlum Kobane, serves as the commander-in-chief of the SDF.²⁴ Despite the notable differences in central ideological claims and uses of violence, the PYD is both politically and practically tied to the PKK.

With the withdrawal of regime forces from the northeast in the early days of the war, the PYD was able to redefine its ideology and governance structure as it developed. As a result, what began as a weak political party transformed into an armed struggle and the only Kurdish enclave to successful attempt Öcalan's democratic confederacy experiment.²⁵ Unlike the PKK, the PYD operates as a ruling political party and functions within TEV-DEM. Its autonomy from the regime allowed it to develop as a political organization separate from its military wing, the YPG.

The transition of the PYD into a semi-autonomous governance structure allowed it to establish a reputation that was somewhat independent from the PKK in the international sphere. The YPG's reputation as one of the few "secular" and "progressive" movements in Syria won it the sympathy of many international actors. With U.S. support for the YPG in its fight against ISIS, the PYD gained political legitimacy and temporary protection from both the regime and the FSA.

THE KNC

The KNC (also known as ENKS) acts as the umbrella coalition of Kurdish political parties and movements in Syria. Founded in 2011 in Erbil, Iraq, the organization is closely aligned with the Barzani family and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq.²⁶

The KNC acts as a coalition of KDP-backed Syrian Kurdish parties. It has advocated for the use of Iraqi Peshmerga in the fight against ISIS and promotes the formation of a federation within a democratic Syria.²⁷ The KNC opposes the PYD based on its links to the PKK and oppression of opposition parties.

FSA movements and the KNC have had a rocky relationship from the start despite the KNC's continued dedication to the fall of the regime and the creation of a democratic Syria. In February 2012 all KNC parties except the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (KDUP) left the Turkey-backed FSA coalition SNC and the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) due to their outright rejection of a potential Kurdish federation within Syria. Nevertheless, on Aug. 27,

2013 the KNC rejoined the SNC despite the fact that its ally, the KDP, refuses to work directly with the SNC.²⁸ When Turkey invaded Afrin in early 2018, the KNC once again suspended its relations with the SNC, but later returned to the council to work to find a diplomatic solution.

The KNC promotes itself as abiding by international initiatives and laws and promoting dialogue. As a result the KNC has engaged with several different actors in Syria and abroad, including the United Nations.²⁹ In 2012, Turkey's former foreign affairs minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, met with KNC leaders,³⁰ and in May of the same year KNC leader Hakim Bashar met with U.S. officials. In December 2016 Russia declared that it would attempt to mediate between the KNC and the PYD, but the former rejected any dialogue with Russia.³¹ In January 2018,



Massud Barzani, the leader of the KDP, delivers a speech in Erbil, northern Iraq, on April 3, 2019. (Photo by SAFIN HAMED/AFP/Getty Images)

the KNC held a protest in Amude against the Turkish occupation in Afrin.³² In July 2012 the KNC formed a joint council, the Kurdish Supreme Council, within the overarching political body of TEV-DEM, known as the People's Council of Western Kurdistan (MGRK).³³ The KNC has experienced infighting of its own as well, however. In 2015 hundreds of protesters rallied outside a KDP-S office over allegations that the party had rigged the local KNC elections in Derik, Syria in its favor.³⁴ In 2017, Jwat Mella of the KDP-S was elected to replace Ibrahim Brio as the head of the KNC,³⁵ but Ibrahim Biro remains the most prominent and vocal KNC representative. The KNC National Assembly has 26 members with 11 independent representatives,³⁶ and the KNC currently has 14 member parties:³⁷

- The Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Yekîti), chairman: Ibrahim Biro
- The Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria (PDK-S), chairman: Siud Mala
- The Kurdish Reform Movement – Syria, chairman: Faisal Yusuf
- The Kurdish Democratic Equality Party in Syria, chairman: Nimat Dawud
- The Kurdish Democratic Patriotic Party in Syria, chairman: Tahir Sa'dun Sifuk
- The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (el-Partî), chair: vacant
- The Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (Democratic Yekîti), chairman: Hajar Ali
- The Kurdistan Democratic Union Party, chairman: Kamiran Haj Abdu

- The Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, chairman: Shalal Gado
- The Kurdistan Left Party – Syria, chairman: Mahmud Mala
- The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria, chairman: Siamand Hajo
- The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria, head of the communication office: Narin Matini
- Syrian Yezidi Assembly, chairwoman: Mizgin Yusuf
- Avant-garde Party Kurdistan-Syria, chairman: Ismail Hesaf

POLITICAL PROCESSES IN AANES

With the formation of the AANES some Kurdish political parties became, practically speaking for the first time, functioning political parties instead of unelected movements. On paper AANES offered parties the opportunity to contribute to parliament as well as local communes and councils. Despite the promising prospects, many parties faced the same oppressive tactics utilized by the Syrian regime before the uprising. Members of KNC-affiliated parties were arrested and deported, offices were vandalized, and radio stations were disbanded by pro-PYD vigilantes or the AANES police force, known as the Asayish, themselves. The political parties of the KNC refused to register as official political organizations with AANES and were

ironically deemed “illegal” by the PYD. As a result, most KNC parties boycotted the election. Others broke with the KNC and joined the political process dictated by the PYD to take part in the historic elections of 2015 and 2017.

ARRESTS, DETENTIONS & POLITICAL OPPRESSION IN ROJAVA

The PYD has attempted to consolidate political and military power over the region. In order to reduce the influence of the KRG in the region, the PYD refused the Iraqi Peshmerga entry into the autonomous region and repressed political parties backed by Barzani.³⁸ While the PYD has strengthened its ties with local minorities, it has failed to earn the support of many of its Arab and Kurdish constituents.

The Asayish employed by the TEV-DEM has conducted both formal and plainclothes arrests of the PYD’s political opponents on numerous occasions. Raids on opposition party offices, attacks on political demonstrations,³⁹ and other oppressive tactics have been spurred by anti-PYD rhetoric, symbolic responses to political actions taken by the KRG in Iraq, and perceived support of Turkish operations.⁴⁰ According to a 2014 Human Rights Watch report, arrests regularly occur without necessary warrants and end in arbitrary detention, torture, and/or inadequate

trials.⁴¹ On June 27, 2013, YPG militants killed five members of the opposition party Yekiti and arbitrarily arrested and beat 50 others in response to anti-PYD protests in Amude. In 2016, the long-time KNC leader Ibrahim Biro himself was arrested and later released across the border in Iraq.

In the months preceding the 2017 elections, a wave of new arrests targeted “illegal” and unpermitted political parties, resulting in the closure of nearly all opposition party offices.⁴² The Northern Syria Observer stated that 44 organizations’ headquarters and offices were closed in just three days.⁴³ In May 2017, 13 leading members of the KNC were arrested in Qamishli.⁴⁴ In September 2017 Asayish also arrested several KNC party members and affiliates on the organizing committee for publicly celebrating the KRG independence referendum.⁴⁵

However, in January 2019 TEV-DEM announced that unlicensed parties could now legally reopen their offices in an attempt to repair relations between the two factions. The Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), a pan-Kurdish coalition of organizations with over 288 representatives, also pledged to investigate detained opposition party members.⁴⁶ This decision came in response to the threat of an impending Turkish invasion made increasingly likely by President Donald Trump’s stated intention to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria. Nevertheless, in the most recent meeting of the central committee of the Kurdish Union Party of Syria (PYKS), a KNC member, it reported that although the PYD had called for the reopening of PYKS offices, those in

Amude and Qamishli were still under the control of the PYD.⁴⁷ In September, the KNC reported that a member of the local KNC office in Qamishli, Kandri Jan, had been arrested and a cultural seminar had been shut down.⁴⁸ KNC members noted that the promised concessions were a “positive step,” but sought greater gains in power-sharing and representation.

Since the elimination of ISIS’ territorial control in Syria, SDF anti-terror operations have increased sharply. While the SDF regularly claims to arrest “ISIS agents,” there are growing reports that some of those arrested are civil activists.⁴⁹ However, many fake videos have also been published in the past year claiming to show “PKK” abuses against the local Arab population. These are often poor quality with over-the-top emphasis on showing PKK or YPG symbols during the alleged event.

FREE PRESS

In August 2015 the Kurdish Supreme Committee, a political body created in 2012 to incorporate the KNC and TEV-DEM, announced the creation of the Union of Free Media (YRA). According to Reporters Without Borders, this new body, which acts as a sort of information ministry, requires journalists and news agencies to request a permit to operate and update authorities on their movements.⁵⁰ Many media workers have reported abuse and threats that have impeded their political coverage. Zara Seyda, the former head of the Yekiti Party’s media and editor of Ara News, fled to Turkey after filming Asayish fire upon anti-PYD protesters in Amude in July 2013. According to the U.S. State Department website, the PYD “violently suppressed freedom of assembly and severely



Members of the Kurdish-led SDF attend the funeral of an Arab SDF fighter in the northeastern Syrian Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli on April 10, 2019. (Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/Getty Images)



limited freedom of speech.”⁵¹ At times opposition media, such as Orient TV and SMART news, have been able to operate in the area, but the permitting process and informal “redlines” have caused both self-censorship and active censorship to occur.⁵² The autonomous administration also requires permits for public protests — though opposition protests do still occur.⁵³ In September 2019 pro-KRG media outlet Kurdistan 24 was banned from the AANES despite having a permit.⁵⁴

ELECTIONS

On March 13, 2015 members of three cantons in northern Syria went to the polls to elect municipal council members. A total of 160 polling stations were opened in Derik, Girke Lege, Tirbespiye, East Qamishli, West Qamishli, Amude, Dirbesiye, Ras al-Ayn (Sari Kani), Hasakah, Al Yaarubiya, Al

Jawadiyah, and the villages of Ebu Raseyn. The Rojava High Election Commission stated that 565 candidates stood for 12 municipal councils.⁵⁵ The process was to be repeated after a series of reforms and changes in political parties in the region.

In 2017 TEV-DEM scheduled a series of elections to fill positions on both a local and parliamentary level. The local commune election was set to take place in September 2017, followed by municipal and provincial elections in November the same year. While both elections were carried out, the regional and Democratic People's Congress elections scheduled for January 2018 never came to fruition.⁵⁶ They were postponed, and later postponed indefinitely, due to “administrative issues.” Thus, as of 2019 the PYD administration still appoints rather than elects all parliamentary positions.



Nonetheless, the 2017 elections provided residents with a ballot (a right which “stateless” Kurds⁵⁷ were previously denied under Assad) and was met with a relatively high turnout rate. Delegations from the KRG and Turkey’s People’s Democratic Party (HDP) were allowed to observe the election process.⁵⁸ Two lists dominated the polls: the opposition’s National List and the PYD-aligned Democratic Nation List (LND).

The LND included 18 parties: Democratic Union Party, Arab National Body, Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria, Kurdish Liberal Party, Syrian Union Party, Kurdish Left Party in Syria, Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party, Kurdistan Democratic Peace Party, and several smaller parties.

The National List included four parties: Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria (Yekiti), Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria

(al-Party) Reformist Movement of Syria, and Syrian Kurdish Democratic al-Wefaq Party.⁵⁹

Additionally, the Syrian National Democratic Alliance acted as a small grouping of primarily Arab opposition allies of the PYD.⁶⁰

LOCAL COMMUNE ELECTIONS

On July 27-28, 2017, 13 observers from Iraqi Kurdistan witnessed 70% of residents of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria take to the polls to vote for representatives of 3,700 local communes. Candidates were elected in pairs, one man and one woman (hence double the elected officials per seats available).⁶¹

Results in Cizire Canton: In Cizire Canton 437,142 voters cast their ballots for 7,687 candidates competing for 5,102 seats in 2,551 communes. 8,370 of the voters were internally displaced people (IDPs).

Results in Euphrates Canton: In Euphrates Canton 135,611 voters cast their ballots for 3,192 candidates competing for 1,698 seats in 849 communes. 772 of the voters were IDPs.

Results in the Afrin Canton: In Afrin Canton 155,697 voters cast their ballots for 1,440 candidates competing for 830 seats in 415 communes. 5,395 of the voters were IDPs.⁶²

LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The second round of elections was scheduled for November to elect local council members for towns, cities, and regional councils, but was postponed to December.⁶³ On Dec. 5, 2017 69% of residents finally went to the polls.⁶⁴

Rejected candidates: Of the 3048 candidates, 102 were rejected by the PYD in Cizire Canton, 4 in Euphrates Canton, and 48 in Afrin Canton.⁶⁵

Results in Cizire Canton:

- The LND won 2,718 seats out of 2,902 candidates.⁶⁶
- The National List won 40 seats out of 99 candidates.⁶⁷
- Independent candidates won 144 seats out of their 267 candidates.⁶⁸

Results in Euphrates Canton:

- The LND won 847 seats out of 954 candidates.⁶⁹
- The Syrian Democratic Unity Party in Syria's list (Yekiti) won 40 seats out of 124 candidates.⁷⁰
- Out of 95 independent candidates, 67 were elected.⁷¹

Results in Afrin Canton:

- The LND won 1056 seats out of 1175 candidates.⁷²
- The Syrian Democratic Unity Party list won 72 seats out of 197 candidates.⁷³
- The list of the Syrian National Alliance won 8 seats out of 48 candidates.⁷⁴
- Independent candidates won 40 seats out of 86 candidates.⁷⁵

DIVISIONS OVER AFRIN

Turkey views the AANES as a threat to Turkish national security due to the PYD's connection to the PKK, which is designated as a terrorist group by the U.S., Turkey, and the EU. Unlike the PYD, the KNC joined the Turkish-backed SNC opposition movement. While the KNC and the SNC have had a rocky relationship over disagreements on the formation of a Kurdish federation, the KNC refused to abandon its connection to the FSA and remains obstinately anti-regime.

In January 2018, Operation Olive Branch united Kurdish movements on some fronts while confronting Kurds with the threat of Turkish invasion and control over the autonomous region.⁷⁶ Human rights abuses and the eventual occupation of Afrin pushed the rhetoric against Turkey and Turkish-backed FSA forces to extremes. The KNC's connections to the KRG, which has in recent years developed a closer relationship with Turkey and greater cooperation on operations against PKK militants in Qandil, led to accusations from PYD and PKK supporters that KNC parties were merely Turkish proxies. This accusation is further fueled by the fact that the KNC is often touted as a "legitimate" Kurdish organization by Turkey.⁷⁷

While the KNC spoke out⁷⁸ against the actions of Turkish-backed FSA groups in Afrin and called for the withdrawal of

Turkish troops, it also remained a member of the SNC, which has supported Turkey's military operations.⁷⁹ PYD officials have accused Afrin Council leader Hasan Şindi of having ties with the KNC, and upon the council's formation they issued arrest warrants for two top Yekiti officials on apparent charges of supporting it.⁸⁰ Hasan Şindi later fled Syria after receiving threats from a violent group known as the Wrath of Olives Operation Room, which has been accused of being backed by the PYD.⁸¹

Further accusations of KNC cooperation with the Afrin Council and Turkish authorities in Afrin stem from former KNC member Abdulaziz Temo, who founded the Independent Kurdish Coalition in Syria. Temo's organization supports Turkey's intervention in Syria and takeover of Afrin. Contrary to this accusation, Temo's movement has referred to both the PYD and



A Syrian woman casts her vote in local elections held in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli on December 1, 2017. (Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/Getty Images)

the KNC as “terrorists” and considers them foreign proxies. Al-Monitor reported that the organization regularly displays Turkish flags at its meetings, illustrating its ardent support for the Turkish-led administration of Afrin.

The already divided Yekiti Party, a member of the KNC, exemplifies the divisiveness of the Afrin operation and the SNC. On June 5, 2019 the party split in two.⁸² Abdulbaqi Yousef, Abdulsamad Xalaf Biro, and Hassan Salih left the party to form the Kurdistan Union Party.⁸³ Prominent KNC official and Yekiti party leader Ibrahim Biro claimed that the defectors were influenced by the PKK and had been ousted.⁸⁴ However, one of the former party members explained that the split was based on internal disputes about condemning the Turkish occupation of Afrin.

Rhetoric around the Turkish occupation has also given the PYD a pretense to arrest KNC party leaders based on their alleged support for Turkey. On July 11, 2018 members of KNC member party the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (PDPKS) in Afrin were arrested⁸⁵ by an unnamed armed group despite the fact that the party has publicly condemned the Turkish occupation of Afrin.⁸⁶ KDP-S member Hussein Ibish was also arrested by military police in Afrin.⁸⁷ The accusations linking the KNC to Turkish authorities have persisted in 2019: in August a pro-PYD news agency alleged that the KNC had met with a Turkish intelligence officer, and on Oct. 3 the KNC reported the circulation of disinformation regarding KDP-S leader Mohammed Ismail's stance on the Turkish occupation of Afrin.⁸⁸ The KNC denounced both of these claims.⁸⁹



Head of Kurdish National Council (KNC) Ibrahim Biro speaks to media in Erbil, Iraq on August 16, 2016. (Photo by Yunus Keles/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

In an interview with Syria Direct in January 2018 former KNC leader Ibrahim Biro stated that the KNC had been in contact with Turkish officials, but only to warn them of “the serious repercussions of their intervention in Afrin,”⁹⁰ and their renewed involvement with the SNC after a brief hiatus was solely on a political level. The KNC began talks with the SNC to establish a joint education committee to ensure that Kurdish is taught for the first three years of school in Afrin and that youths can access certified educational degrees.⁹¹ After the KNC’s brief estrangement from the SNC, the former was also allowed to represent itself independently at the Syrian opposition’s High Negotiations Committee (HNC) for the first time, in line with its desire for representation distinct from the largely Arab SNC.⁹² Hakim Bashar, member of the KDP-S political bureau, former leader (and current member) of the KNC, and vice president of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, has been the most vocal in supporting dialogue between Turkey and the KNC.⁹³ On July 27, 2019 he and other members of the SNC met with a variety of organizations in Afrin to address the basic needs of residents, such as elementary education.

THE BEST LAID PLANS

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War Kurdish factions have increased their efforts to form a pan-Kurdish movement. In 2012 the KNC and the PYD met in Erbil and agreed to form the Supreme Kurdish

Committee as part of the first Hawler Agreement. After constant back and forth between the PYD and the KNC, in October 2014 the KNC and TEV-DEM made yet another agreement to cooperate in order to focus their efforts on the fight against ISIS.⁹⁴ The agreement envisioned the creation of a 30-member council to rule the autonomous region in northeast Syria and the formation of a joint military force.⁹⁵ Later that year, Iraqi Kurds in the Roj Peshmerga came to the aid of the YPG in Kobani, demonstrating a strong show of solidarity.⁹⁶ However, as was with the case with the previous Hawler Agreements and the Supreme Kurdish Committee, collaborative efforts failed. The Roj Peshmerga later returned to the KRG to prevent fighting between the pro-KNC forces and the YPG.⁹⁷ Ultimately, promises on both sides proved hollow, and in 2017 the KDP-backed Roj Peshmerga and the YPG-affiliated Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) clashed in a violent turf-war in Sinjar.⁹⁸

President Trump’s announcement that the U.S. would withdraw its troops from Syria in December 2018 rekindled efforts to unify Kurdish forces. France and the U.S. attempted to nudge the KNC and the PYD together through a series of diplomatic talks aimed mostly at engaging the KNC.⁹⁹ In an interview with Kurdistan24¹⁰⁰ in January 2019, KDP-S leader and KNC executive member Mohammed Ismail stated that for relations with the PYD to thaw “prisoners should be released, political activities of the KNC should be allowed, KNC offices should open, the media should be free, and people who were deported should come back.” Then, he remarked, they could

sit together and reach a solution. The KNC also requested that an international guarantor help mediate between the two factions to facilitate shared governance.

In the most recent phase of the Astana Agreement — a series of diplomatic talks about the future of Syria between Iran, Turkey, and Russia — TEV-DEM was excluded from the UN-sponsored Constitutional Committee while the KNC was allowed membership¹⁰¹ in the Turkey-backed alliance of opposition forces known as the Syrian National Coalition. Both groups, however, decried the lack of representation of Kurdish groups in the committee and again stressed the need for a united Syrian Kurdish front.

As a whole, pan-Kurdish coalitions have failed due to a lack of pressure on the PYD to offer concessions to the KNC.

Power-sharing plans lacked a dedicated international guarantor that could provide meaningful concessions. U.S. diplomacy primarily concentrated on ensuring that the YPG had the means to combat ISIS. Beyond this, the administration failed to address long-term goals in northeast Syria and inclusive representation of opposition parties.

THE NEW “ARAB BELT” AND THE RIPPLE EFFECT

The next phase of Turkey’s plan for northeast Syria, an ambitious resettlement plan, would require displacing the current (primarily Kurdish) residents, many of whom are now fleeing the violence of Operation



President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan holds up a map of the safe zone Turkey is in favor of while speaking to the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2019 in New York City. (Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)



Syrian Kurds gather around a U.S. armored vehicle during a demonstration against Turkish threats next to a coalition base outside of Ras al-Ain in Syria's Hasakah province. (Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP via Getty Images)

Peace Spring.¹⁰² This plan bears an uncanny resemblance to Assad's construction of the so-called "Arab Belt" in the 1970s¹⁰³ and attempted demographic engineering to push out Kurdish residents along the border.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that the resettled refugees and civilians would pay the price for Turkey's aggression in Syria. Cross-border shelling and mortars have already killed civilians in Turkish border towns and AANES territory alike. An estimated 450,000 civilians (including 90,000 IDPs) live within 3 miles of the Turkish-Syrian border.¹⁰⁵ If the rise of the Wrath of Olives Operations Room is any indication of what a Turkish occupation could mean in former AANES territory, new and old residents alike could face fresh dangers as they form a human barrier between Kurdish forces and the Turkish border.

The Turkish invasion of northeast Syria will be felt beyond its extended borders. On top of the refugee crisis that is bound to ensue, and heightened tensions between the KRG and Turkey, the PKK and Kurdish activists will see the invasion as a greenlight to escalate. In Turkey, the invasion threatens to tear apart the opposition coalition. The HDP, viewed by many as the "Kurdish" party in Turkey, has been unshaking in its condemnation of Operation Peace Spring¹⁰⁶ and its outspoken criticism has already been met with arrests of several HDP representatives.¹⁰⁷ Their coalition partner the Republican People's Party (CHP), however, voted in parliament in favor of extending the government's permission to launch cross-border military operations for another year.¹⁰⁸ CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu tweeted, "Our prayers are for our heroic soldiers to return home safe

and sound, after successful completion of Operation Stream of Peace. May God protect and lead our boys to glory.”¹⁰⁹ According to Ahval, on Oct. 2, the nationalist opposition Good Party reportedly left the CHP-led opposition coalition after criticizing its relationship with the HDP.¹¹⁰

KNC & SDF ALLIES' RESPONSES TO THE TURKISH INVASION

On Oct. 22 Turkey and Russia made a deal to recognize the land encompassed by Operation Peace Spring. Under this deal, on Oct. 23, Russian and regime forces would “facilitate the removal of YPG elements” in the land occupied by Turkey and Turkish backed FSA forces.¹¹¹ It is unclear how “YPG elements” will be defined. Many Kurds have viewed this as a further betrayal by Russia, as Russia had previously made statements sympathetic to representation for Syrian Kurds and offered to mediate on their behalf.¹¹²

As Turkey pushes its “safe zone” 20 miles into SDF territory (as opposed to the U.S. implemented 3- to 9-mile zone), Kurdish parties look toward an uncertain future.¹¹³ Civilians are fleeing to the remaining SDF territory around Hasakah as others attempt to enter Iraqi Kurdistan.

Before the invasion, PYD leader Salih Muslim and KNC member Kamran Hajo both expressed their anxiety at the inconclusive border zone diplomacy between Turkey, the U.S., and the SDF,¹¹⁴ but remained open to diplomatic measures endorsed by the

U.S. to avoid escalation. In an interview with Rudaw, a KNC member stated that if the safe zone “is under the supervision of the coalition — America and other countries, not just Turkey — it is a good thing as the people of the region — especially Kurds — will be protected from attacks by Bashar al-Assad and Turkey.”¹¹⁵ Ilhan Ahmed, co-chair of the SDF’s executive committee, similarly regarded the safe zone as an acceptable phase of the diplomatic process, but said that more U.S. troops would be needed to implement the intended extended safe zone. As for Turkey’s proposed resettlement plan, Ahmed stated that only refugees originally from northeast Syria would be allowed to return.¹¹⁶

As Operation Peace Spring sends northeast Syria into chaos, the KNC will look to the KRG for support — although it does not seem to be receiving any militarily — while the PYD has turned once again to Assad. In the process of condemning the Turkish invasion, allegations of the KNC’s pro-Turkey stance have further frayed pan-Kurdish coalitions. As such, when confronted with a Turkish invasion and the possibility of a new power-sharing agreement with the regime, the PYD and the KNC have responded independently.

TEV-DEM has made a desperate deal with the regime, which despite its statements otherwise threatens to end the “Rojava project” as a whole. While the future of the AANES is unclear, it seems that the experiment with autonomy is winding down. The alleged “ceasefire” struck between President Erdogan and Vice President Mike Pence portions out the 20

miles of northeast Syria to Turkey that it originally wanted. As for the KNC, which is a self-designated anti-regime movement, the party seems to have gone quiet as the regime steps back into SDF territory. Some residents, primarily in Arab majority cities in the east, have already begun protesting the return of the regime, while others have fled to the KRG border.¹¹⁷

While the KNC looks toward the KRG for support, the latter has so far only released carefully worded diplomatic denouncements¹¹⁸ of Operation Peace Spring and requested that Russia negotiate with Turkey to ensure the safety of the Syrian Kurds. Yet as U.S. forces withdrew across the border to Iraq, they were met with obscenities and curses from civilians.¹¹⁹ The international response, which the KNC has often pushed for, has been limited beyond the threat of sanctions and international

condemnation. On Oct. 10 in an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, both Russia and the U.S. failed to condemn Turkey's military operation.¹²⁰ The KNC's plea for international diplomacy seems, for now, to be falling on deaf ears.



A Syrian regime soldier waves the national flag a street in the town of Tal Tamr in the countryside of Syria's northeastern Hasakah province on October 14, 2019. (Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP via Getty Images)

PAN-KURDISH COALITIONS

Kurdistan National Congress (KNK)

- A coalition of Syrian Kurdish parties and organizations aligned with the KNC and/or the PYD.
- The KNK has largely proved itself ineffective in its attempt to bridge the gap between the two political factions.
- In January 2019 the KNK pushed TEV-DEM to reverse its party licensing laws and allow opposition parties to legally reopen their offices in an attempt to reconcile relations between the two factions.¹²¹ The KNK also pledged to investigate detained opposition party members.
- The KNK includes 288 representatives¹²² from a variety of organizations representing Kurds globally including members of: the Kurdish Democratic Party, Syria (PDK-S – El Partî), the KCK, the Kurdistan People's Democratic Movement - Başûr, Kurdistan Peace and Democratic Party, TEV-DEM, the Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, the Kurdish Communist Party - Syria, the PKK, and the PYD.

BODIES OF THE AUTONOMOUS ADMINISTRATION

The People's Council of Western Kurdistan (MGRK): A council headed by the PYD that encompasses TEV-DEM, Yekitya-Star, etc.

Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM): A coalition of parties in northeast Syria including both PYD and the Yekiti Party.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): The overarching coalition of armed units in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.

Yekitya Star (YS): A coalition of women's movements in Syria backed by the PYD.

POLITICAL PARTIES & COALITIONS ALIGNED WITH THE PYD

Kurdish Left Party of Syria

- The Kurdish Left Party was founded as an offshoot of the Yekiti Party in the late 1990s. It was originally part of the KNC but upon the KNC's refusal to join the Rojava administration, it broke away.¹²³
- The Kurdish Left Party later accused the KNC of "joining the Syrian opposition fighting against Kurds."¹²⁴
- In 2012 the party split again with both parties continuing to use the same name. One faction is led by Salih Gedo and the other by Mahmud Mala.

Kurdistan Liberal Union Party (PYLK)

- The PYLK is part of the Democratic Nation List (LND).¹²⁵
- Arif Bawecani is the acting leader of the party.
- The party supports a Kurdish federation in Syria and the end of Assad's authoritarian rule.

The Patriotic Kurdish Union (PUK)

- The PUK is a leftist Iraqi-Kurdish political party which split from the KDP in 1975.
- It was founded by Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani.¹²⁶
- The PUK put forth a proposal to recognize the Autonomous Administration in Northern Syria and was supported by 68 delegates in parliament but Turkey has pressured the PUK to rein in its support.¹²⁷

Kurdish National Alliance in Syria (HNKS, Hevbendi)

- HNKS was founded in February 2016 as a coalition composed of five original parties¹²⁸ in Hasakah and Amude. At its founding it included members of the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, and Al-Wefaq Party and the Reform Movement.¹²⁹ All but one party later left the coalition due to rivalry with the PYD.

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- The coalition supports the formation of a Kurdish federation within Syria and recognizes TEV-DEM¹³⁰ as the legitimate governing body of northeast Syria.
- HNKS parties participated in the 2017 election and the National List holds seats within TEV-DEM.
- The coalition condemns the Turkish invasion of Afrin and the Turkish proposition to resettle Syrian refugees into northern Syria along the border.

PARTIES LINKED TO THE KURDISH NATIONAL COUNCIL

Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC or ENKS)

- Founded in 2011 in Erbil, Iraq, it is an umbrella coalition of Kurdish political parties and movements in Syria.
- The organization is closely aligned with the Barzani family and the KDP.¹³¹ In February 2012 KNC parties left the SNC due to their outright rejection of political decentralization and the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) — excepting the KDUP.
- On Aug. 27, 2013 the KNC rejoined the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces despite the fact that the KDP refuses to work with the SNC.¹³² The KNC acts as a coalition of PDK-backed Syrian Kurdish parties.
- It opposes the PYD and is touted as a “legitimate” Kurdish organization¹³³ by Turkey. In 2012 Ahmet Davutoglu met with KNC leaders.¹³⁴
- On Aug. 14, 2016 the head of the KNC was arrested in Qamishli. Ibrahim Biro was later released in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹³⁵ After repeated threats he sought exile outside of Rojava. The KNC is a member of the SNC but has ardently denounced Turkey's occupation of Afrin. In January 2018 the KNC held a protest in Amude against the Turkish occupation of Afrin.¹³⁶
- In July 2012 the KNC formed a joint council, the Kurdish Supreme Council, with the MGRK. The KNC has not been without its own infighting as well.

- According to ANF, 2015 hundreds of protesters rallied outside of a KDP-S office over allegations that the KDP-S had rigged the local KNC elections in Derik, Syria in its favor.¹³⁷
- In 2017 Saud Mella of the KDP-S was elected to replace Ibrahim Biro as the head of the KNC.¹³⁸ Jwad Mella is the head of the KDP-S in the UK¹³⁹ and Mohammed Ismail¹⁴⁰ acts as one of the head administrators as well as a member of the KNC's executive board.
- Roj Peshmerga: The armed branch of the KNC. The KNC claims that the Roj Peshmerga makes up a force of about 5,000 Syrian Kurdish fighters. The militants have at times clashed with the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), a Yazidi militia connected to the YPG in Sinjar.¹⁴¹
- The KNC National Assembly has 26 members with 11 independent representatives.¹⁴² There are currently 14 member organizations:¹⁴³
 - The Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Yekîti), chairman: Ibrahim Biro
 - The Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria (PKK-S), chairman: Siud Mala
 - The Kurdish Reform Movement – Syria, chairman: Faisal Yusuf
 - The Kurdish Democratic Equality Party in Syria, chairman: Nimat Dawud
 - The Kurdish Democratic Patriotic Party in Syria, chairman: Tahir Sa'dun Sifuk
 - The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (el-Partî), chair: vacant
 - The Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (Democratic Yekîti), chairman: Hajar Ali
 - The Kurdistan Democratic Union Party, chairman: Kamiran Haj Abdu
 - The Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, chairman: Shalal Gado
 - The Kurdistan Left Party – Syria, chairman: Mahmud Mala
 - The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria, chairman: Siamand Hajo
 - The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria, head of the communication office: Narin Matini

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- Syrian Yezidi Assembly, chairwoman: Mizgin Yusuf
- Avant-garde Party Kurdistan-Syria, chairman: Ismail Hesaf

Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK)

- A conservative Kurdish nationalist party led by the Barzani family in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Kurdistan Democratic Party North (PDK-Bakur)

- A sister party of the PDK active in Turkey with the aim of creating a Kurdish federation in Turkey.¹⁴⁴

Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (PDK-S, KDP-S)

- The KDP-S is one of the oldest Kurdish political parties in Syria.¹⁴⁵ It was formed as the first Kurdish-specific party, in contrast to the many Kurdish communist movements operating at the time that did not specifically advocate for Kurdish rights.
- Since its formation in 1957 by Osman Sabri and Daham Miro, it has splintered into over 20 offshoots due to the illegality of Kurdish parties in Syria.¹⁴⁶
- The party acts as the sister party of the PDK active in Syria and is opposed by the PKK.
- The PDKS has an office in its stronghold of Amude. It initially appealed to rural Syrian Kurds.¹⁴⁷
- The KDP-S rejects dialogue with the regime. In the beginning of the Syrian Civil War the PDK-S did not join the SNC.¹⁴⁸ However, later on the PDKS encouraged the KNC (of which it is a member party) to do so.
- On March 31, 2019 PDK-S member and president of the KNC in Afrin, Hussein Ibish, was arrested by military police in Afrin. The PDK-S released a statement demanding his release,¹⁴⁹ which subsequently occurred on May 1.¹⁵⁰
- On Oct. 2, 2019 KDP-S executive committee member Hakim Bashar and co-leader of the SNC called on the KDP-S and the KNC to hold formal talks with Turkey and the U.S.¹⁵¹

Kurdistan Democratic Political Union (KDPU)

- The KDPU was an alliance of pro-KDP Syrian Kurdish groups intending to challenge the ruling PYD. The union consisted of the KDP-S, the two branches of the party, and the PYKS.¹⁵²
- The KDPU was accused by some party members of seeking to absorb the other parties outside of the KDP-S.¹⁵³
- The KDPU was formed in Qamishli in 2012 by the PDK-S to create a stronger alliance of PYD opposition parties.¹⁵⁴
- The union later disbanded to form the KNC.

Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria (Azadi Party)

- The Azadi Party was formed in 2005 as an offshoot of the Kurdish Left Party.¹⁵⁵
- The party merged into KDP-S in 2014.
- Its armed wing is known as the Kurdistan Freedom Eagles for East Kurdistan (HAK-R), or Kurdistan Freedom Falcons.
- The party split in 2011 after the controversial election of one of the returning members of the party, Mustafa Juma'a (after his return from prison) to the position of first secretary general. There are now two working parties operating under the same name with different leaders.¹⁵⁶ The first is led by Mustafa Oso and the second is led by Mustafa Juma'a.¹⁵⁷ Both parties are members of the KNC.
- Juma'a's party is aggressively opposed to the PYD and the YPG. It also openly claims to support the Kurdish FSA militia known as the Selahaddin Eyyubi Brigade.¹⁵⁸

The Kurdish Union Party in Syria (KUPS, PYKS, Yekiti Party)

- The Kurdish Union Party was founded in 1992 as an offshoot of the PYDKS.
- Commonly known as Yekiti, this party operates as a PYD opposition party supported by the KDP.
- The Yekiti Party was one of the founding members of the KNC in 2011.¹⁵⁹
- Yekiti has been led by Abdulbaki Yusuf (2000–03), Hasan Salih (2003–07), Fuad Aliko (2007–10), İsmail Hami (2010–13) and İsmail Biro (2013–18).

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- Currently the PYKS is a member of the KNC despite its secession from the KDPU in 2013.
- Ismail Hamo is the current party leader.¹⁶⁰
- In February 2018 a faction of the PYKS left the KNC temporarily because the KNC refused to leave the SNC.¹⁶¹
- The party operates covertly to prevent intervention from the regime and has been targeted both by the PYD and Syrian Special Forces.
- The Yekiti Party formerly had offices in: Western Qamishlo, Eastern Qamishlo, Amuda, Derek, Hasakah, and Karaki Laki. Currently it has one office in Erbil, Iraq.
- On March 3-4, 2017 the PYD arrested at least 31 members of the Yekiti Party and the KDP-S Party.¹⁶²
- Suleiman Oussou, a member of the KNC foreign affairs bureau and the Yekiti Party, was arrested without charges in Qamishli in June 2017 for reopening PYKS offices in Amude. He and other PYKS members were previously jailed in 2016 for one week.¹⁶³
- On Dec. 23, 2018 Suliman Oso was elected as the secretary of the party and its name was changed from Yekiti Alkurdi in Syria to Yekiti Alkurdistani-Syria (PYKS).
- On June 5, 2019 the party split in two.¹⁶⁴ Abdulbaqi Yousef, Abdulsamad Xalaf Biro, and Hassan Salih left the party¹⁶⁵ to form the alternative Kurdistan Union Party. Ibrahim Biro claimed¹⁶⁶ that the defectors were ousted from the party and they were influenced by the PKK. One of the former party members claims that the split was based on internal disputes about condemning Turkish occupation in Afrin.¹⁶⁷ The breakaway party elected Mohammed Zaki Ibrahim.¹⁶⁸ In the PYKS's most recent meeting of the central committee it reiterated its call for the removal of Turkish-backed forces from Afrin.¹⁶⁹

Kurdish Patriotic Party in Syria (KPP)

- In 1998, members of the KDPP broke away to form the KPP.

Kurdish Equality Party

- The Kurdish Equality Party is a minor breakaway party that is a member of the KNC. Nemat Dawd acts as the secretary of the party.

INDEPENDENT PARTIES & COALITIONS

Syria's Tomorrow Movement

- Opposition party founded in 2016 and cooperates with both National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and the Syrian Democratic Council.¹⁷⁰
- The party is backed by Egypt and the UAE.¹⁷¹
- The al-Nukhbat Brigade (Elite Forces) acts as the armed wing of the Arab-Kurdish collaborative FSA movement.¹⁷²
- As of September 2016, all remaining members of the Nukhbat Brigade joined the SDF.
- On Sept. 11, 2016 the Syria's Tomorrow Movement signed a cooperation agreement with the Syrian Democratic Council and the associated de facto autonomous administration of the Federation of Northern Syria - Rojava.

Kurdish Future Movement

- The Kurdish Future Movement was formed by Mashaal Tammo in 2005 as a liberal Kurdish movement. Regime special forces assassinated Mashaal Tammo in 2011.
- After Tammo's death the organization split in two. One party operates under the leadership of Rezan Bahri Sheikmus and the other under Cemal Molla Mahmud.¹⁷³
- In 2016 the new Future Movement Party announced its formation in Raqqa. The party is notably headed by an Arab man (Ibrahim al-Qaftan) while Hevrin Khalaf served as the secretary-general.¹⁷⁴
- The party has a more moderate stance on Turkey, but condemns the occupation of Afrin.¹⁷⁵
- The Kurdish Future Movement distinguishes itself from other parties in that it does not support a Kurdish federation or autonomous region in Syria. The movement previously aligned itself with the KNC in part but due to the KNC's perceived closeness with Turkey a faction of the party moved to the Kurdistan Democratic Peace Party on Nov. 25, 2018.¹⁷⁶

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- On Oct. 12, 2019 a Turkish-backed FSA militia killed the secretary-general of the Future Party.¹⁷⁷ The Future Party representative's autopsy revealed that she was briefly tortured before her death.¹⁷⁸ Turkish media reported the death as a “successful” operation carried out against a “terrorist” group.¹⁷⁹
- In response to the murder of Secretary-General Hevrin Khalaf, the Future Party requested that the KNC leave the Syrian National Coalition and “intensify efforts to find ways for their military forces to handle the protection of the area as soon as possible.”¹⁸⁰ The KNC has since suspended its membership in the Coalition.

The Independent Kurdish Coalition of Syria (Kurdish Coalition, KKS)

- A pro-Turkey Kurdish movement that describes itself as neither a party nor an organization.¹⁸¹ The coalition claims that neither the Autonomous Administration nor the KNC is the legitimate voice of the Syrian Kurdish people.
- Abdulaziz Temo¹⁸² acts as the chairman of the movement, which is adamantly pro-Turkey and anti-regime.¹⁸³
- It has been very active in promoting the Afrin Council¹⁸⁴ created by Turkey. Al-Monitor¹⁸⁵ reports that Turkish flags are regularly displayed at its meetings.
- Temo claims that the KDP and the PKK are working together and has referred to them as “terrorist organizations.”¹⁸⁶

Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (PDPKS, KDPPS)

- The PDPKS seceded from the PDKS in the 1965 and has remained an independent party ever since.
- The PDPKS is a sister party of Talabani’s PUK.¹⁸⁷ In its formative years the party appealed to the landowning class.¹⁸⁸
- The party has at times aligned with the regime, the FSA, and the KDP. In the beginning of the war the PDPKS urged members to join the YPG, the Asayish, or the Kurdish Front.
- The PDPKS left the KNC in July 2015.¹⁸⁹ The party has a friendly relationship with the PYD but is also party to the KNC.¹⁹⁰

- On July 11, 2018 members of the PDPKS in Afrin were arrested by an unnamed armed group. The party condemns the Turkish occupation in Afrin.¹⁹¹
- The KDPP is led by prominent political leader Abd al-Hamid Darwish.
- The party also participated in YPG-led military operations.
- Tahir Sa'dun Sifuk is the acting chairman of the party.¹⁹²

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (KDUP)

- The KDUP formed as an offshoot of the Yekiti Party in 1997.¹⁹³
- It was a prominent party in Afrin and Aleppo but it has become less well known since the death of its president, Ismail Omar, in 2010.¹⁹⁴

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS

Cover photo: A demonstrator makes the "victory" sign standing in front of a Kurdish flag. (*Photo by George Panagakis/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images*)

Contents photo: Participants in a Kurdish demonstration waving flags of the YPG and protesting against the Turkish invasion. (*Photo by Axel Heimken/picture alliance via Getty Images*)

Photo spread on pages 11-12: Syrian Arab and Kurdish civilians flee amid Turkish bombardment along the border on October 9, 2019. (*Photo by DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP via Getty Images*)

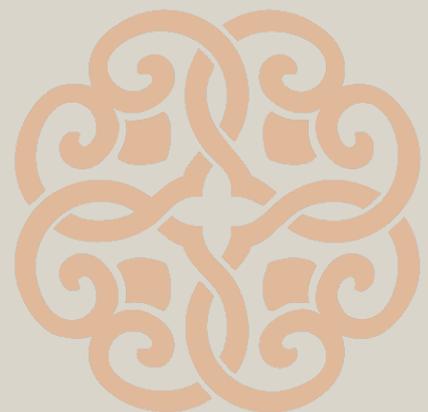


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