

KURDS OF SYRIA

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Syria are a distinct ethnic group in Northern Syria, making up 12% of the total Syrian population. They exist in three main cantons: Afrin Canton, Cizre Canton and the Kobani Canton. Together they make up the region known as Rojava. These cantons are not contiguous, but the Kurds aspire to join them. In 2016, the Syrian Kurds established Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê, or the Federation of Northern Syria-Rojava. They have historically been abused, displaced and marginalized by the Syrian regime. Since the 1930s, Arabization was forced upon the Kurds in a systematic manner that suppressed their culture and social and economic mobility. This has created a narrative of self-reliance, distrust of Arabs, martyrdom and resistance. Their economy is currently in shambles due to the Syrian civil war, but they have the potential to establish agricultural and petroleum export industries.

Key Interests

- Protect themselves from brutal military incursions. This security can come in the form of civil rights guarantees from the state.
- Achieve political representation in the national government. They are also not represented in the peace talks underway to restructure Syria. They seek a seat at the table and to be seen as a legitimate party.
- Gain autonomy or federalism – Rojava has already established a federal region that preserves both the territorial integrity of Syria, and the integrity of the autonomous Kurdish region that is already established and self-administering.

Sources of Leverage

Energy – Future potential to establish agricultural and petroleum export industries.
Military – The Yekîneyên Parastina Gel , or the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are armed and formidable forces for the Syrian Government. Moreover, they are able to, at times, garner Western support.
Soft Power – Use of social media and other media outlets, such as documentaries. The West is entranced with the female fighting unity, the Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê, or the Women's Protection unit (YPJ), and the Syrian Kurds have done well capitalizing on their fame. Additionally, the Kurds across greater Kurdistan can exploit the enmity between their host states to manipulate and mobilize them.

Regional Strategy

In their situational vision, the Kurds of Syria hope to quell Ankara's fear that they are a proxy for the PKK and to show the Western world that they are a legitimate actor, capable of administering their own federal region. Additionally, the Syrian Kurds have begun to warm relations with Moscow, as they realize that Russia is increasing its sphere of influence into Syria. For their grand strategy, Rojava will likely move to establish ties to develop its petroleum industry, possibly with the KRG, Turkey and Iran.

Powerful Individuals

Salih Muslim Muhammad (Co-Chairman of the PYD)
 Asya Abdullah (Co-Chairwoman of the PYD)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Activate global partners - Like the US, Russia, or the UN, to advocate for them while Turkey tries to pressure the Syrian Kurds out of the Syrian peace talks, which will attempt to restructure Syria.
Leverage potential future oil wealth for a more advantageous negotiating position.
Partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

Syrian Kurds complain that the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat , or the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is monopolizing the political scene and silencing smaller dissenting parties, such as the Kurdish Yekiti Party (Kurdish Union Party).

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, RUSSIA, UNITED STATES

Rivals

N/A

Adversaries

SYRIA Government

Active Armed Opponents

ISIS

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

RUSSIA, UNITED STATES