



Middle East Forum
FOR POLICIES AND FUTURE STUDIES

Syria's Kurds

from Federalism
to Administrative Decentralization

By Abdul Rahim Muhammad Saeed Saeed






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Middle East Forum For Policies and Future Studies

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Contents

Introduction:	5
The Kurds of Syria before the Syrian Revolution:	6
Syria's Kurds after the Revolution:	10
Kurdish Political Projects in Syria:	14
Syria's Kurds and the Autonomous Administration:	15
On the Administrative Level:	16
At the military and security levels:	17
Education:	19
Economics:	21
Providing Services:	22
At the Political Level:	23
Kurds and the Federal System:	25
Back to Autonomous Administration:	29
Negotiating the Regime over Local Administration:	31
Conclusion:	36
References:	38



Introduction

The timeline of the Syrian Kurds witnessed an obvious disparity in terms of the national demands, coinciding with the change of the political eras, through which Syria passed, and the governments that ruled the country, from independence until today. The most prominent shift remains the one that occurred after the Syrian revolution, because the demands have been in parallel with practical practices geographically and politically, especially after the Democratic Union Party (PYD) took control of the Kurdish populated areas, and began implementing its own projects on the ground.

These projects varied, reaching their climax upwards to the announcement of the federal project in 2016, and the start of serious steps to implement this very project on the ground, and then descending again to launch negotiations on a kind of decentralized system of governance with the Syrian regime by the Democratic Union Party, or with the Syrian opposition by the Kurdish National Council. These changes came under the influence of military and political factors on the one hand, and factors related to the nature of the region - geographically and demographically - which was the ground of these projects on the other hand.

Considering this issue is of importance to most of the political and military international and local actors in Syria, in order for those forces to be able to deal properly with the Kurdish issue in Syria, whose peaceful solution would be an important, even essential step for finding a permanent solution to the current situation in Syria in the future. Moreover, it is a key matter for establishing a new political system that satisfies all parts of the political spectrum in Syria and the Syrian communities' members as well, and at the same time to avoid creating future problems with any Syrian component, as the Assad regime, which is the sole controller of the Baath Party has been doing during the years of its rule.

In this research, we relied on sources of direct information presented by the author (interviews and personal observations), in addition to credible media reports, and live testimonies from the Kurdish region as well as official statements of the parties and bodies, in addition to the political programs of some of the parties, from which we have cited in the research.



The Kurds of Syria before the Syrian Revolution:

To date, there are no accurate and credible statistics about the number of Kurds in Syria, but the numbers vary between (1.5-2.5) million Kurds in Syria, distributed in the Al-Jazira, Upper “Mesopotamia” region on the Turkish border, the Kobani region, and Afrin, in addition to the Kurdish communities in Aleppo and Damascus.

The situation of Syria’s Kurds before the revolution cannot be taken as a single political or historical era. Absolutely, the era in which the Baath Party took power in Syria, i.e., after 1963 is fundamentally different from the pre-Baath party, i.e., before 1963.

Before the Baath Party took power in Syria, there was no Kurdish issue in the form that it is now. The Kurds in Syria did not have special ethnic-based demands that amounted to a call for federalism or autonomy, with the exception of some ones by clan elders and notables to obtain an autonomous Kurdish region during the French Mandatory period (1923-1943). These demands remained within the framework of unorganized attempts, which were rejected by other Kurdish notables and figures those insisted on remaining linked to the Damascus government in those periods¹. At the same time, Syria’s Kurds were not deprived of their civil and political rights during the period before the rule of the Baath party and Assad, as happened later after the Baath and Assad family took power. In the period prior to the Baath rule, some Syrian Kurds received major leadership positions in the Syrian state, such as: (Hosni al-Zaim)², who enjoyed wide popular support at the beginning of his accession to power after the coup, (Fawzi al-Sallo), who was the Syrian Republic’s President between 1951-1953, (Mohsen al-Barazi), who was prime minister during the rule of Hosni al-Zaim, without causing -given these figures are Kurds- any problems neither in the way they ruled nor among the Syrian people.



Radical changes began to occur since 1961, i.e. after the coup that abolished the union with Egypt, and the name of the country was changed to become (Syrian Arab Republic) instead of (Syrian Republic), and the government took a decision to conduct an “exceptional census” in the Jazira region, according to which thousands of Kurds were deprived of citizenship as hundreds of thousands of people were subsequently affected by this law due to intermarriage and childbirth³. The so-called “Arab belt” was also established under the name of agrarian reform - it was not implemented in practice until 1974⁴. After the Baath Party took power, the arbitrary measures against the Kurds in Syria increased. Speaking the Kurdish language in official circles was prohibited, learning it, and teaching it in private institutes or government schools also are forbidden. Moreover, Syria’s Kurds were not allowed to celebrate Nowruz until after 1984 and under strict security measures.

The exceptional measures against the Kurds in Syria increased in the era of the Baath Party after the party confirmed itself in power, and adopted the slogan “Arabism” to affirm predominance over power, and the Kurds were denied their rights in enlisting in the Syrian army, and the government gave the heads of security branches in the Kurdish areas full powers, which turned such areas to be -for some officers and security personnel- like “Gulf states” and a source of wealth, because of the bribes and royalties that they took from the population without any deterrent⁵.

On March 12, 2004, a popular uprising broke out in the Kurdish-majority areas due to the killing of a number of Kurds in the city of Qamishli after riots resulted from a football match, and the violent response of the security forces to Kurdish fans, and following the uprising in which nearly 35 people were killed, the security branches arrested thousands of people in the Kurdish-populated cities as well as Damascus and Aleppo, and part of them were released after several days, but hundreds, however remained detained for several months. In 2006, the Assad regime’s security branches kidnapped Sheikh Ma’shuq al-Khaznawi, because of his anti-regime stances and demanding that the Kurds should be granted their rights. Al-Khaznawi was considered a social and political figure with a social standing among the Syrian Kurdish community, and nearly a week after his kidnapping, his body was found dumped in a rural area, and as a result, popular protests erupted against the regime, which arrested dozens, and sentenced a number of them to several years in prison.





Two years later, in 2008, Bashar al-Assad issued Decree 49, according to which he prohibited the sale of real estate and agricultural lands in the Kurdish region without the approval of most of the security branches, and the Ministries of Interior and Defense. This decision caused the economy to stop and unemployment spread, and thousands of families migrated to the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and others to work and secure their food source and their livelihoods.

Since the Baath Party took power in Syria, the Kurds, due to the exceptional measures in their areas, began to feel the existence of a kind of discrimination against them, targeting their ethnic affiliation not their national belonging. Therefore, the Kurdish parties began to organize their work more, so, since then, they have developed their political programs demanding the removal of this discrimination.

The demands of most of the Kurdish parties in Syria did not go beyond the demand for “constitutional recognition of the rights of the Kurdish community in Syria,” “the abolition of exceptional laws,” and “the granting of citizenship to those deprived of it,” and to allow the teaching and learning of the Kurdish language⁶, with the exception of the Kurdish Yekiti Party in Syria, which called in its sixth conference in 2009 for granting the Kurds in Syria autonomy, and the Kurdish parties did not raise the ceiling of their demands at that time for several reasons, the most important of which are:



- - Fear of the regime's security grip, and the violent reaction to demands that the regime may find as an attempt to secede, or that it finds dangerous to its continuity in power.
- -The association of a number of Kurdish parties in Syria with other Kurdish parties that were in harmony with the Assad regime. The Assad regime had good relations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which was headed by Jalal Talabani, which was founded in Damascus, and did not have a bad relationship with the Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Masoud Barzani, and most of the Kurdish parties in Syria were orbiting these three camps.
- -Most Kurdish parties in Syria used to have no will to establish federalism or autonomy except after the experience of the Kurdistan region of Iraq after 2003, as it has become a source of inspiration for most Kurdish parties in Syria and others to achieve a similar situation that could be close to what happened in the Kurdistan Region.
It should be noted that during the Baath Party era, the Kurdish parties in Syria had some activities, but under security and political limits, been meticulously drawn up by the Syrian regime. For instance, the regime allowed the PKK to operate freely and recruit young people to fight in its ranks, because the PKK did not have political goals regarding Syria and its Kurds on the one hand, and for Assad to use in his conflict with Turkey on the other hand. The regime also allowed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party, which was led by (Jalal Talabani), and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by (Masoud Barzani) to open offices in Damascus and other areas. This is, in fact, because of the Assad regime's differences with Iraq's Saddam Hussein's regime at the time, but the two parties were operating according to specific security controls that prevented them from communicating freely with their affiliates or the parties associated with them in Syria.





Syria's Kurds after the Revolution:

Syrian Kurds participated in the revolution that began in March 2011 from its very beginnings. On the first of April 2011, the cities of Qamishli and Amuda witnessed anti-regime demonstrations, followed by other cities such as al-Darbasiyah, Derik, Kobani, Afrin...etc. However, with the help of some pro-regime Kurdish parties and individuals, the regime tried to put an end to the demonstrations erupted there, depending on spreading gossips and ideas that say: Syrians in other regions did not show solidarity with the Kurds neither in the 2004 uprising, nor their demonstrations after the assassination of Sheikh Ma'shuq al-Khaznawi, to reduce the severity of the demonstrations and popular participation throughout the northeastern region. Such tactics did not work in stopping the Syrian Kurds from demanding radical and serious reforms in Syria, and interacting with the Syrian revolution, whether with its slogans, demands, or solidarity with cities and towns that witnessed massacres committed by the regime. The Kurds, especially the youth groups, continued to organize demonstrations, sit-ins and events participating in the revolution.



The regime's policy with the Syrian Kurds changed after the revolution. It did not respond to the demonstrations with violence, as it did in other Syrian regions. It issued several decisions, including granting citizenship to the majority of those deprived of it⁷, and the abolition of Decree 49 of 2008, which prevented the sale of real estate without the consent of the security branches and the Ministries of Interior and Defense, in order to attract the Kurdish residents and stopping the momentum of the demonstrations that were increasing, and showing the revolution as sectarian protests for a specific sect, not for all Syrians.

Also, the regime tried to mute influential voices in the Syrian Kurds, so it assassinated Mishaal al-Tammo on October 7, 2011, and arrested Jamil Omar, head of the (Union of Kurdish Democratic Forces) in Qamishli on July 13, 2012, and also arrested human rights defender Hussein Esau (writer and journalist) in the city of Al-Hasakah on March 9, 2011, and the last two persons are still unaccounted for until today.

The Kurdish National Council in Syria was established on November 10, 2011 by a group of Kurdish parties, but it did not have enough power to administer the Kurdish-majority areas in which the regime withdrawal caused a security, service, and political vacuum on the one hand, and the regime did not find it the favorable and appropriate ally that could control these areas because of the Council's ties with the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the latter is considered an ally of Turkey on the other hand. This prompted the regime to rely mainly on the Kurdistan Workers Party and its Syrian branch, the Democratic Union Party, whose cadres had begun to return to Syria and work again since May 2011, after more than 10 years of banning the party and its activities across Syria.

As a matter of fact, the Democratic Union Party did not participate in the establishment of the Kurdish National Council due to differences over the proportion of seats, so the party established (the People's Council of West Kurdistan) as the latter, in turn, established several service and social institutions, the most important of which was the "People's House" that it carried out tasks similar to the tasks of the municipality in each city, and consequently, the regime let it provide some services like distributing diesel, gasoline, gas, and bread, and established a (Women's House) for women's issues and related matters, and in 2012 the People's Protection Units and the Asayish forces were established.



The regime began handing over the Kurdish areas to the Democratic Union Party, starting with the city of Kobani, after opposition factions took control of areas from the countryside of Aleppo, followed by handing over headquarters in the city of Afrin. After the Syrian opposition factions took control of the city of Ras al-Ain in November 2012, the regime began gradually handing over the Jazira areas to the Democratic Union Party and its security institutions. In 2013, most of the Kurdish areas became under the control of the party, which began to crack down on youth groups and demonstrators those were against the regime. The demonstrations ended completely after the “Amouda massacre”, which was committed by gunmen affiliated with the Democratic Union Party on June 27, 2013, when they shot at a peaceful demonstration that was calling for the release of detainees from the party’s prisons⁸.

The Kurdish National Council did not join any of the Syrian opposition blocs until 2013, when it agreed in August of 2013 to join the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. As for the Democratic Union Party, it joined the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, which was established on October 6, 2011. Saleh Muslim became vice-chairman of the Committee, and remained there until the first Riyadh conference in 2015, when the party withdrew from the Committee because the Riyadh conference skipped the party and not invited it to attend the conference. After that, the party established the (Syrian Democratic Council) to be a political umbrella not only for parties and personalities close to it at the level of Syria, but also for the areas under its control, and the party considered it an alternate to the Coordination Committee and the National Coalition. After that, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which was established in October 2015, announced that they considered the (Syrian Democratic Council) as the political umbrella for them.

The demands of Kurdish forces began to be more after the Syrian revolution due to the absence of the regime’s security grip on the one hand, and the influence of Kurdish parties by regional and international forces, and Kurdistan region on the other. Further, all the Kurdish National Council parties have been influenced by the Kurdistan region, which gave them the green light to adopt federalism as a political demand⁹, and the Democratic Union Party is linked to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. The Kurdish parties added another reason, which is that the Syrian opposition, since the beginning of the revolution, has not taken positive attitudes towards the Kurdish issue in Syria. This, as a result, made those parties afraid of repeating the experience of the Baath Party era in dealing with the Kurdish issue.



Currently, most Kurdish parties demand that Syria be a “federal state”, but their view of this federation varies. The Kurdish National Council calls for a national federation for the Kurds in their regions¹⁰, and rejects the term “East of the Euphrates”, or “Northern and East Syria” as a geographical term that expresses one region, it sees that the Kurdish areas in Syria are contiguous with the other parts of Kurdistan, which is a geographical extension, under the name “Syrian Kurdistan”, while the Democratic Union Party has waived the principle of the ethnic-based state, and demands geographical federation in the regions of northern and eastern Syria, or self-administrations that apply the principle of a democratic nation among them¹¹.

In practice, it is likely that achieving federalism of both types is extremely difficult due to the current geopolitical situation in Syria and northeastern Syria in particular. Turkey, on the one hand, rejects any form of ethnic-based federalism for Syrian Kurds or any geographical federation on its borders with Syria because it sees it as a threat to its national security. The Syrian opposition factions, on the other hand, reject federalism, and question the intentions of the Kurds demanding federalism, and consider it a step towards secession. In fact, these are the same opposition factions that currently control each of Afrin and Ras al-Ain, so it is better for the Kurdish parties to agree on realistic and applicable demands could be implemented in the Syrian geography, and that would be accepted by the Syrians in other regions, and it is wrong to link their fate to the fate of the Kurds in other countries, or to link their demands to the demands of non-Syrian Kurdish parties those might have no ideas about the Syrian geopolitical affairs.



Kurdish Political Projects in Syria:



Kurds of Syria have implemented 3 projects of a seemingly different political, geographical, and administrative nature, and with different titles, and all of these projects were carried out by the Democratic Union Party and its allies, and the People's Protection Units, so most of these projects were similar in their practical features from the administrative point of view, which were to a large extent identical. As for the Kurdish National Council, its project and demand for Syria to be a federal state and for the Kurds to have a national federation in Syria remained just a draft because of its inability to implement it and not having a military force or an international ally to help it implement its projects, and because the Democratic Union Party (PYD) monopolizes the management and economy of the Kurdish region.

The Democratic Union Party began implementing the Interim self-administration project, but later canceled the term of "Interim". Instead, it announced in 2016 the federal project and took several practical steps towards putting the project into practice, and finally announced the project of self-management in northern and eastern Syria, and we will discuss each project separately in order to give a brief about it, and clarify the reasons behind the implementation of the project and why those projects were not marked with sustainability and continuity.



Syria's Kurds and the Autonomous Administration:

After the Democratic Union Party took control of most of the Kurdish areas in Syria, it announced in November 2013 the “Interim Self-Administration” project - later deleting the term “Interim” - and in January 2014 it announced the establishment of three provinces / cantons (Al-Jazira, Kobani, Afrin) and also announced the establishment of 3 legislative councils, and 3 executive councils, by way of appointment, not election, to administer these cantons.

The Kurdish National Council rejected the declaration of self-administration project, and considered it as an individual step, and in violation of the agreements of Hewler 1 (June 2012) and Hewler 2 (December 2013) between the two parties¹². As for the Syrian regime, it did not announce at that time any positions rejecting the declaration of self-administration, and this could be explained by the good relations that were between the two parties at the time. Not only that, but it also exceeded that, because the Syrian regime trained some employees of the Autonomous Administration on administrative routine and how to run and process official documents within the institutions the latter has recently established¹³.

For better understanding the reality of the Autonomous Administration, we can discuss it from several aspects, because it is the first project on which the rest of the projects were built, and the projects that followed it largely preserved the administrative, economic and military system of the Autonomous Administration and did not change much of it:



After the announcement of the Autonomous Administration, it gradually began to establish quasi-governmental institutions that run things in a routine manner that is very similar to the way in which the regime works, but under the supervision and authority of a person who is often screened by the Democratic Society Movement, called (Kadro), who is usually a former fighter within the ranks of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, whose approval is essential for any official document or decision within the institutions. Therefore, most of these administrative bodies and institutions as well as those who run them from the Syrian Kurds remained mere formal ones, practically subject to the decision of (Kadro), which is often a person who has no experience in the affairs of the institution that he runs, and most of his decisions stem from political, security, and not administrative backgrounds.

After the announcement of the Autonomous Administration, most of the regime's service institutions remained operating in their previous centers, but gradually the newly established Administration began to take over public and service centers and utilities, and kept regime employees within their own offices, but with limited powers, with the exception of a number of regime institutions that continued to operate with full powers, such as (Civil Registry, Courts¹⁴)

On the Administrative Level:

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At the military and security levels:

Before the establishment of the Autonomous Administration, the party had formed a military faction, People's Protection Units, and a security faction, the Asayish, and in practice the region was governed by military leaders in the first place, and most of the leaders of the Autonomous Administration have a previous military background with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and after the declaration of the Autonomous Administration, the People's Protection Unit still retains its capacity as the highest authority in the region, which has the right to what no one else is entitled to.

The People's Protection Units increased in strength in men and armament after the establishment of the Syrian Democratic Forces and receiving support from the US-led International Coalition, and their control over large areas of the governorates of Raqqa, al-Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo.

Consequently, Arabs involvement and enlisting have increased for financial reasons due to the spread of unemployment and lack of jobs only for those who would be enlisted and fighting within the Syrian Democratic Forces and the People's Protection Units, those now pays nearly \$200 per month to each fighter, and for other reasons related to the willingness of some clans to take revenge on ISIS group, such as the Al-Shaitat clan.



وحدات حماية الشعب



In 2014, the Autonomous Administration imposed compulsory conscription under the name “self-defense duty” and gradually increased the period of conscription to reach from 6 months at the beginning of the imposition of the decision to 12 months at the last amendment of the decision. This conscription law forced a large number of young people to immigrate especially from those who feared that they would be involved in battles against ISIS group or the opposition factions, in addition to the emigration of young people who refused to fight under the banner of the Democratic Union Party, especially supporters of the Kurdish National Council. In 2019, the Defense Office of the Autonomous Administration determined the birth dates of those wanted for conscription, to be in 1990, and exempted those who were born before.

The Asayish - Internal Security assumes the task of maintaining security in the Autonomous Administration-held areas, and a number of subsidiary forces are affiliated to it (traffic police, emergency services, anti-terror forces HAT). Although the Asayish considers itself a neutral and non-politicized force, but in practice it is affiliated with the Democratic Union Party, as forces protect the party's interests and security, and arrested opponents of it and the Autonomous Administration. At the same time, the Asayish did not arrest the young people who burned the offices of the Kurdish National Council and its parties, and did not arrest the people who attacked members of the opposition parties, and burned their offices too.

Practically, it can be said that the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Asayish were two forces to protect the Democratic Union Party, its interests, and its supporters, and these forces did not allow any party or political bloc to open offices in the areas that it seized from ISIS with the support of the US-led International Coalition, except for the Democratic Union Party and its affiliates, and arrested opponents of the party, and closed offices were opened by unauthorized parties from the Autonomous Administration. On the other hand, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Asayish succeeded in controlling the security and military aspect in their areas and prevented security chaos and the spread of arms chaos.



Education:

In 2014, the Autonomous Administration introduced the Kurdish language to schools at the rate of one hour per day. In the 2015-2016 school year, the Autonomous Administration began imposing its curricula in schools under its control, and began with the first three grades of the primary stage. This step was rejected by the regime, most of the local residents, the Kurdish National Council and other political parties such as the Assyrian Democratic Organization and the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party in Syria. The regime responded to this step by suspending education in all primary schools (from the first to sixth grade) in schools under the control of the Autonomous Administration, and only maintained schools in the security squares and some villages under the regime control. On its part, the Democratic Union Party and the Autonomous Administration insisted on imposing its curricula in schools, and continued to expand imposing the Kurdish language curriculum every year to three additional hours. The schools in areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration currently teach students from the 1st up to the 11th grade the Kurdish language curriculum, and it has plans to impose it on the 12th grade next year.

Two types of curricula are taught in the Autonomous Administration areas: (curricula of the Administration itself), which are currently taught in the regions of Al-Jazira, Kobani and a few areas of Raqqa, and the (UNICEF) curricula, which are taught in the regions of Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Manbij, which contain basic subjects only. According to officials work in the Education Directorate of the Autonomous Administration, it is planning to unify the curricula in all its regions.



curricula imposed by the Autonomous Administration were curricula taught in (Makhmour camp) in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which is under the control of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and they were highly ideologically political curricula, but after two years, however, it began to compose new curricula, and on May 1, 2018, the Autonomous Administration opened the Curricula and Books Institution in North and East Syria, which will supervise the authoring of curricula, and setting plans to unify them in the areas of the Autonomous Administration¹⁵.

The number of students in the Autonomous Administration-held areas is approximately (789225) studying in (4317) schools spread throughout the Administration-controlled areas.

Self-administration courses do not contain many ideological materials, although they have some. In History and Ethics books, the authors focus on promoting the political and philosophical view of the Democratic Union Party, in addition to promoting the theory of the democratic nation. Also, some classes are about the history of the PKK and its leaders, but the largest number of ideological thoughts can be found in the administrative system, and the teaching staff in schools, especially in the Kurdish-majority regions, where students are sometimes forced, and often the teaching staff is also forced to participate in most of the celebrations and demonstrations organized by either the PKK or the Democratic Society Movement. Schools are also suspended during any demonstration to open the way for teachers to participate in. Pictures of Abdullah Ocalan, party symbols and slogans are raised in all schools and student events, and the space is opened for Democratic Union cadres to communicate with students and promote the party's ideas among them.

Practically speaking, each of the Democratic Union Party and the Democratic Society Movement have a full dominance over the educational institutions in the Kurdish-majority regions of Syria, as they are the decision-makers in determining the content of the curriculum, the form of the school system, and determining official holidays for these educational institutions. For example, February 15 is considered an official holiday because it is the same day on which Abdullah Ocalan was arrested in 1999, in addition to April 4, which is Ocalan's birthday, and events for students and teachers are organized on the anniversary of the founding of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Union Party, and other special partisan events, which of course are not public Kurdish ones.



Economics

In financing its bodies and projects, the Autonomous Administration relied on a number of sources, the most important of which are oil and gas¹⁶, as it took control of most of oil and gas fields in northern and eastern Syria, and began selling it as raw materials for primitive incinerators, in addition to refining such materials in its own incinerators and selling the derivatives inside and outside its regions, where it sells some derivatives to the Syrian regime, in addition to reports talking about smuggling oil derivatives into Iraq through a crossing point with the Shingal area, the revenues of the crossing points, especially the (Simalka) and (Al-Waleed), and the taxes imposed on imported and exported materials are also considered a major source of financing their projects and institutions. Several taxes have been imposed on the population, such as (Income tax, vehicle registration taxes, annual shop licensing, etc.), and later on, international humanitarian organizations became a source of funds for the Autonomous Administration-controlled areas, as the organizations started to finance a number of projects of municipalities and bodies affiliated with the Autonomous Administration. Dozens of international organizations operate in the Autonomous Administration's areas with budgets of millions of dollars annually, which they spend on infrastructure projects, relief, reconstruction, and agricultural development.



Financial corruption is widespread in most self-management institutions and bodies, and there is no clear mechanism for disbursing the funds that the administration earns from oil, gas, crossings and taxes, most of which are spent by cadres who are not subject to supervision or accountability, and this has greatly affected the quality of the projects and services being implemented by these institutions and bodies, as most of them do not meet the needs for which they were established. This is happening due to non-compliance with the specifications and quality controls that the project needs for continuity and sustainability.



Providing Services:

The service sector did not develop much under the Autonomous Administration, and the old institutions continued to operate according to their own traditions, but with new cadres who were appointed by the Autonomous Administration, most of them do not have enough experiences in providing services sector that they supervise, and also relying on the equipment and institutions that they received from the regime and did not develop anything about this matter. For example, electricity production is still the same as it used to be during the regime's days. It depends on old turbines, and no new dynamics have been set yet in Tishreen and Euphrates dams and nothing has been added to develop anything in this area, and it has not established new stations, or new turbines, as well as the water sector is still dependent on the stations and wells that the regime previously dug and were not developed by the Autonomous Administration.

The municipalities of the Autonomous Administration depend for their funding on the fees they take from granting building permits, in addition to an annual budget submitted by the Autonomous Administration, but it is a simple budget if it is compared with what is spent on the military and security affairs, and international organizations are also considered an important resource for the sector of providing services in the Administration-controlled areas.

The Autonomous Administration institutions have benefited greatly from the funding of international organizations for the service sector, especially non-governmental organizations that began to come to the area since 2015 and numbered dozens. These organizations provided many services related to sanitation, drinking water and the health-medical sector, in addition to the camps and the displaced persons¹⁷.

At the Political Level:

The Autonomous Administration remained practically under the hegemony of the Democratic Society Movement and the Democratic Union Party, as it considers the commanding officer, and the party that is responsible for making decisions in all institutions. In practice, the Autonomous Administration still administers but formally, while the Democratic Society Movement, which controlled the region individually without Real involvement of any other force in the administration of the region is the real decision-maker. It did not really intend to establish real parties, instead it inserted some fictitious parties into the body of the Autonomous Administration to delude the outside world and the media outlets that the Autonomous Administration is pluralistic and participatory.

The Democratic Society Movement, in 2015 and in conjunction with the first Riyadh conference established the (Syrian Democratic Council) as an umbrella for those parties that it had formed, in addition to some other Syrian currents, parties and personalities such as the “Qamh” movement, which was headed by Haytham Manna. The latter was the head of Qamh movement, and Ilham Ahmed, a member of the Executive Committee of the Democratic Society Movement, became co-chairs of the council, but Manna and Qamh withdrew from the council after the federal project was announced in March 2016.



The Democratic Union Party tried to present the Syrian Democratic Council as a Syrian political opposition that can replace the Syrian opposition factions, those are seen by the Democratic Union Party as external opposition, especially when it talks about the Syrian National Coalition and the Negotiating Committee, but the Turkish refusal to participate in any international forum or meeting regarding Syria was an obstacle that prevents the council to present itself as an opposition party, and it did not succeed in attending any international meeting , with the exception of several meetings in Cairo and Moscow.

Since its announcement, the Autonomous Administration has failed to obtain any international recognition, whether from the countries that support it militarily or others, or local recognition of it at the Kurdish and Syrian levels (regime and opposition). Actually, the main reason is due to the Turkish rejection of any attempt to give legitimacy to the branches of the Kurdistan Workers Party in Syria. In addition, the insistence of the Democratic Society Movement on monopolizing the administration, and not involving any party in a real way, prevented it from obtaining any recognition of its legitimacy at the local Kurdish level, especially from the Kurdish National Council. The Syrian opposition rejects the self-management project in its current form because of its accusation of the Democratic Union Party of being linked to the PKK on the one hand, and the good relationship between the Syrian opposition and Turkey, which considers the PYD a branch of the PKK on the other. Nevertheless, despite the announcement of the federal project in March 2016, and the implementation of practical steps towards implementing such a project, after which the Autonomous Administration project was modified to become a general one for most areas held by the Administration, the administrative, providing services, military and even political form did not change much and the institutions remained operating in the same way as the form of Autonomous Administration, with just a small difference in processing official papers, and this comes due to the short time of the projects that came after the self-management project, as the federal project did not last more than about one year, and the self-management project in north and east Syria is still new, and it did not change anything from the first self-management system.



Kurds and the Federal System:



In March 2016, the Democratic Society Movement / Democratic Union Party took another step towards consolidating its authority in its areas of control, and the areas that were subsequently controlled by the “SDF” with the support of the US-led International Coalition, and announced with a number of parties, clans, and personalities close to it the project (Rojava and Democratic Federation of Northern and Eastern Syria). The first founding conference was held in the city of Rmelan in the al-Hasakah governorate, which resulted in the establishment of the (Constituent Council for Democratic Federation in Rojava and Northern Syria) and (Mansour Al-Salloum) from Tal Abyad, and (Hediya Yousef) from Afrin as co-chairs of the Constituent Assembly. The adoption of a political document that adopts the federal system for these regions in the name of (Rojava – Democratic Federation of Northern and Eastern Syria), and although the political program of the Democratic Union Party did not include the demand for federalism as a solution to the Kurdish issue in Syria, it anticipated the amendment of its political program, and announced this step for several reasons:

- Making advantage of the conditions that prevailed at the time, and the regime’s preoccupation with its battles against the opposition factions, and the opposition with its internal battles on the one hand, and with the regime on the other, in order to impose a fait accompli geographically and politically.

- The broad powers of the federal system compared to the self-management system in terms of political, geographical and military terms, and the party’s desire to benefit from these powers in the future if its federal project succeeds.



- Capitalizing on the war against ISIS group and the presence of the US-led international coalition strongly in the party's control areas, and thus the inability of any force opposing the federalism to take military action to stop such a project.
- The International support for the Syrian Democratic Forces, which was at its height during that period, as the Democratic Union Party believed that this kind of support would continue militarily and would turn into political push as well.
- The PKK willingness to send a message to Turkey says that it has become a country on its borders, and force it to enter into political negotiations.

The move was met with the rejection of the Kurdish National Council, which considered it a unilateral step, as well as the Syrian opposition factions, who refused to define the shape of the future of Syria with proactive projects¹⁸, and Qamh movement headed by Haytham Manna withdrew from the Syrian Democratic Council in protest against this step, and the Syrian regime rejected this step and considered it illegal¹⁹. After all, the regime's rejection to the federal system of the party and not rejecting the self-management project previously, can be seen as the self-management project when it was announced in 2013, in fact it was in coordination with the regime, in addition to the presence of military and security coordination between the two parties at that time, before the establishment of the "SDF" and the provision of military support to it by the international coalition. As for the federal project, it seems that it was not coordinated with the regime, especially since the formation of the "SDF" came with international support, not under the supervision of the central government, unlike the People's Protection Units, which was supported by the Syrian regime at the time. Therefore, the party's attempt to make advantage of the situation without coordination with the regime did not satisfy the latter, who completely rejected this step. All of these rejectionist positions did not discourage the Democratic Union Party from continuing its project, and creating conditions for implementing it on the ground, as the party organized dozens of meetings and conferences with clans, dignitaries and people to explain this very project, and to give promises that the project would not be to divide Syria, or for a federation that characterizes the Kurdish ethnic.



On December 27, 2016, the Constituent Assembly of the Federation held its second meeting, in which it decided to cancel the name “Rojava” from the project’s title, and to keep the name “Northern Syria Federation” only, in order to satisfy the Arab component, which has a large part of its administrative positions, especially after the Syrian Democratic Forces controlled large Arab-majority areas on the one hand, and abolish the idea that the federation will be Kurdish or will establish a Kurdish region on the other hand. In the second meeting, an (Executive Council) was established to implement the federalism project and supervise the practical steps for its implementation, and Ilham Ahmed - a Kurdish - and Sanharib Barsoum - a Syriac - were elected as co-chairs of the Executive Council of the federal system in northern Syria. Some administrative divisions were changed to be suitable for the new system (its areas of control were divided into three regions: Al-Jazira, Kobani and Afrin, each region to two provinces, and each province to a number of districts and towns), and it was decided to conduct three electoral rounds, starting with the elections of the communes / neighborhood committees, and then the elections of city and sub-district councils, then the provinces, and after that holding the elections of the councils of regions and the General Conference of the Federation.

Two rounds of elections were held (communes in September 2017, local councils and district councils in September 2017), and the final elections were scheduled to take place at the beginning of 2018, but the Turkish operation in Afrin - Olive Branch - which began in January 2018, prevented the third round from taking place. The operation marked the beginning to the end of the federal project once and for all.

The Turkish operation in Afrin is considered the direct cause of the failure of the federal project announced by the Democratic Union Party, but there are other reasons lurk behind the failure of the project, and its lack of continuity, the most important of which are:





- - The federal project announced by the Democratic Union Party was a one-sided project, and it was announced by one Kurdish party, and it was clear that it had a partisan trait, so the project did not receive any local Kurdish support.
- - The project did not seem to have a Kurdish thump, but, however, in practice it was under the control and leadership of the Democratic Union Party, in addition to the cadres of the Kurdistan Workers Party, so the project did not receive actual approval from the Arabs and other components of the region.
- - The opposition of most Syrians (regime and opposition) to the project to unilaterally federalize any part of Syria, so the project was fought by all Syrian political parties.
- Neither geography nor the population distribution (demography) is suitable for the federal project announced by the party. Deir ez-Zor governorate is divided between the regime and the SDF, and Raqqa has the same fate, and Aleppo is divided between the regime, the SDF and the opposition factions, and each party declares a political or geographical project, aiming to separate these areas from other ones, which has no support by the local population.



After the failure of the federal project, the (Self-Administration in Northeast Syria) was announced, but this time by the (Syrian Democratic Council) and not the Democratic Society Movement. In August 2018, the Democratic Society Movement held its third conference and announced its withdrawal from the political and administrative field, and heading for what it called the third field, which is the field of civil society organizations, professional unions, and NGOs. It gave its political and administrative role to the Syrian Democratic Council, which is a political umbrella for Kurdish, Arab and Syriac parties and groups close to the Democratic Union Party, and this movement's move came to make some changes in the administrative and political system, and to satisfy the Arabs and clans who fear the total control of the Democratic Union Party over the Autonomous Administration and its institutions, and the movement's belief that the Syrian Democratic Council will be more acceptable at the local and international levels than the principle that it represents Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, Turkmen organizations and personalities...etc.

The Syrian Democratic Council announced in September 2018 to establish the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, which includes seven administrations: (the Autonomous Administration in the regions of Al-Jazira, Euphrates, in Afrin, the Civil Administration in Manbij, Raqqa , Tabqa and the Civil Administration in Deir ez-Zor), and began to establish the General Council, which shoulders tasks similar to the Parliament ones, and was headed by Siham Qaryo (Christian) and Farid Atti (Kurdish). (9) Commissions²⁰, and a number of offices affiliated with the Council, including the Office of Defense and Self-Protection, and the Office of Humanitarian Affairs.

Also, the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration was chaired by (Abdul Hamid Al-Mahbash - Arab - and Berivan Khaled - a Kurdish person).

Back to Autonomous Administration:



The new administration does not differ from previous projects in terms of cadres controlling it, but this time with official positions, such as the vice-chairman and the advisor to the head of the authority, for example (Farhad Dirk / Farhad Shibli) was appointed as vice-chairman of the Executive Council, but in practice he leads the Executive Council. He is a member of the Executive Board of the Democratic Society Movement, and Badran Jia Kurd was appointed as Vice-President of the Joint Presidency of the Executive Council, and he is also a member of the Executive Board of the Democratic Society Movement, and the former official of the Autonomous Administration on the al-Jazira region, as well as (Amina Ossi) was appointed Vice-President of the Executive Council, and she is a former leader of the Democratic Union Party, is also a leader within the ranks of the Democratic Union Party. Moreover, the new Administration has adopted the joint presidency system for its bodies, which is a system that exists only for the Democratic Union Party.

This project is still in place today, and there have been no radical changes in it compared to the previous Autonomous Administration project. The new one just carries out the tasks of coordinating between administrations and unifying some decisions and regulations between them. Of course, in terms of security affairs, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the People's Protection Units have remained independent institutions in their decisions, while the Office of Defense and Self-Protection of the Autonomous Administration is affiliated with forces in the name of (Self-Protection), which is also subject to the authority of the military cadres, and the security aspect is supervised by the Asayish forces - the Internal Security Forces, which eased its grip against the opposition of the Democratic Union Party and the Autonomous Administration due to the attempt to unify the Kurdish spectrum with the help of some countries and local forces²¹.

After the Turkish operation in Ras al-Ain, Tal Abyad, and a military agreement, that was held between the regime and the Autonomous Administration stipulating the deployment of the Syrian army on the Turkish borders, the two parties began, with Russian mediation, to negotiate over the fate and future of the areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration, but this time not under the name of the Autonomous Administration or Federalism, but rather a kind of decentralization may be administrative decentralization or expanded local administration, or local government.



Negotiating the Regime over Local Administration:

Negotiations between the Democratic Union Party and the Syrian regime are not new or recent ones. Actually, the relationship between the two parties has not been cut off since the handover of the Kurdish areas in Syria to the party after the revolution, but we can say that the relationship between the two parties witnessed stations where it was not good for reasons related to different interests, allies and supporters, but both sides, however, kept the channels of communication open.

As Turkey launched the military operation in Afrin in January 2018, the regime and the People's Protection Units entered into negotiations, aiming at the participation of the Syrian army in repelling the Turkish army's attack. In the end, the two parties reached a military understanding that included the regime's participation in the battles in Afrin, in addition to the regime's participation in managing the areas under the control of the party in the countryside of Aleppo, such as Tal Rifaat, Mennegh and others, and the handover of several neighborhoods in the city of Aleppo to the regime, which the People's Protection Units had taken control of after the military operation of the regime and Russia in Aleppo, which are the neighborhoods of (Ashrafiyeh, Sheikh Fares, Bustan Pasha, Hulluk Fawqani and Tahtani and others), and after this round, the negotiations witnessed several other rounds between the two parties in the hope that the agreement would include the other areas under the control of the SDF, but those negotiations did not succeed at the time for several reasons:



- The regime's insistence on canceling the Autonomous Administration, and negotiating the Local Administration Law only, while the other party insisted on granting recognition to the Autonomous and Civil Administrations that had been declared in the SDF-controlled areas.
- The Autonomous Administration's desire to grant the SDF military privacy within the Syrian army, which the regime rejected.
- The United States' rejection of the regime's return to the areas it seized from ISIS group, and that the SDF has understandings with the United States related to the war against ISIS, as the latter was then in control of areas in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor.

After this round, direct negotiations between the two parties stopped until the Turkish military operation in Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad. As a result of this operation, the two sides entered into other negotiations under Russian auspices, which resulted in reaching a military agreement requiring the deployment of the Syrian army on all the Turkish-Syrian borders in the SDF-controlled areas, and postponing the discussion of other topics for later rounds, although the regime in previous rounds did not agree to discuss the military side without the administrative and service ones, it agreed this time due to Russian pressure, which was trying to reach an agreement requiring the regime to gradually return to the Autonomous Administration areas, as Russia unwilling to see Turkish extending military operations in other regions. The two parties held several negotiating rounds in the presence of (Ali Mamlouk) on the behalf of the regime and a number of members of his office, and in the presence of personalities from the Autonomous Administration and the Democratic Union Party, including (Badran Jia Kurd, Ilham Ahmed, Ibrahim Al-Qaftan, Sanharib Barsoum) in addition to (Ahmed Suleiman), a member of the office the political meeting of the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria, and the direct meeting between the two parties was preceded by bilateral meetings between the regime and Russia, and between the Autonomous Administration and Russia at the Hmeimim base and the city of Qamishli in December 2019, and February 2020, and then the tripartite meeting was held in Damascus in the presence of the regime, the Autonomous Administration and Russia on May,2 2, 2020, and the two parties agreed to establish specialized committees to discuss the administrative, educational and military situation, and to reach common points, but until now the committees have not started their work.





At the time of holding the negotiations between the regime and the Autonomous Administration, the latter and the Democratic Union Party²² appeared to be ready to make concessions related to the current form of Autonomous Administration, and to extend dialogues on some kind of local government or local administration, and at the same time the regime expressed its willingness to discuss these matters after it was insisting on abolishing Autonomous Administration and the dissolution of the Syrian Democratic Forces. After all, the willingness of the two parties to conclude an agreement comes from several reasons, the most important of which are:

- - The regime's desire, and under Russian pressure, to return to the remaining areas under the control of the "SDF" for fear to be under the Turkish forces control.
- - The desire of the Democratic Union Party and the Autonomous Administration to obtain an official legal status for the Autonomous Administration project, even if it is under another title, and thus its existence acquires a legal status.
- - Russia's attempt to please Turkey, and discourage it from carrying out another military operation against the PKK, by trying to remove the PKK from its borders, or limit the party's absolute control in those areas.

Negotiations are unlikely to achieve what the two parties think about, as the regime wants to return with its full powers to those areas, while the Autonomous Administration refuses that and demands to be recognized or granted expanded powers even if they are under another title. Also, any agreement between the two parties will clash with the need for the approval of the United States until its provisions are implemented, concerning the regime's return to Deir ez-Zor areas, or its acquisition of a good percentage of oil and gas located in the areas of influence of the United States, and Washington is not expected to agree to this in light of the regime remaining in its current form, which makes the implementation of any agreement between the regime and the Autonomous Administration very difficult. The military aspect is one of the complex matters that makes it difficult to achieve any agreement. The Syrian army demands the disband of the Syrian Democratic Forces within the army without any advantages and privacy, but the SDF rejects this, and demands that they be given privacy within the army, in addition to the problems related to conscription on both sides, and the unwillingness of the SDF to disengage or terminate its interests with the United States.

It is likely that the best solution is for the two Kurdish parties to enter into internal negotiations until agreeing on an appropriate administrative and political form for the Kurds in Syria, and be appropriate to the geographical and political reality of the region, and then agree on these demands with the Syrian opposition on the one hand, and prepare for an agreement with the future regime of Syria on the other. Because any agreement with the current regime will not gain international recognition, especially from the United States, as well as from the Syrian opposition.





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Conclusion



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Apparently, all projects that attempted to resolve the Kurdish issue in isolation from the general Syrian issue failed for objective (political and geographic) reasons. Nonetheless, as for the political reasons, most essential ones lie in the Syrians' general rejection of any federal project in Syria, as well as Turkey's rejection of any project that may cause the establishment of a Kurdish region on its southern borders, and consequently, such a region will host the PKK and would be a source of money and fighters. Also, the geographical reasons lie in that the Kurdish regions in Syria, are not contiguous and linked directly, and it consists of bays on the Syrian-Turkish border. The geographic areas of the al-Jazira are separate from Kobani, and Kobani is far from Afrin²³, so it is not possible to separate the Kurdish issue in Syria from the general Syrian issue, which is represented by the presence of a regime that practiced oppression on all spectrums of the Syrian people, and exploited sects and nationalities for its partisan and personal interests, and the attempt of some Kurdish parties - intentionally or unintentionally - separating the Kurdish issue in Syria from the general Syrian one, and considering it a stand-alone issue, are attempts that will not be effective, and will even be harmful to the future of the Kurds in Syria who have not historically been separated from the Syrian issues, whether during the French mandate, or after, and during periods of The successive rule of independence, right up to the years of the revolution from March 2011 until today, with the exception of the era of the Baath Party, which practiced oppression against all components in Syria without exception.



Some of the apparent advantages of some groups were nothing but an attempt by the Baath and Assad to sow strife among the Syrian people that would enable them to remain in power, and this proves that whoever opposes the regime from any sect, his fate is in detention without taking into account his sect or nationality.

This does not mean that there are no exceptional laws that the regime has dealt with and imposed on the Kurds in Syria to spread discrimination among the Syrian people, the most important of which is the (Extraordinary Statistics) Law and its consequences until today, as well as the confiscation of agricultural land for the Kurds, and Decree 49 of 2008, in addition to preventing them from working in some institutions especially security ones, and depriving them of employment. Therefore, the Syrian opposition and future governments in Syria should be aware of and recognize the existence of these laws, and promise to solve them within a law that protects the rights of all those affected and compensates and redresses them.

The relationship of the Syrian Kurds with Turkey is witnessing severe tension due to the relations of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey designates as a terrorist organization, which is a serious matter for the future of the Kurdish issue in Syria.

All Kurdish-majority areas are border regions with Turkey, and maintaining good relations and good neighborliness with it will positively return to the Syrian Kurds, which will not be achieved if the PYD does not sever its relationship with the PKK, and what will help to achieve this is the actual participation of the Kurdish National Council in the administration on the one hand, and American pressure on the party to make the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations succeed, on the other hand, and to establish a strong Syrian Kurdish front that would be able to compete with the Democratic Union Party in the event the latter refused to secede from the PKK.

Ultimately, the relationship between the current Syrian regime and the Kurds is one of old hostility, and it is unlikely to improve with the regime if it remains as it is now, and the fate of the negotiations between the two parties will fail, especially in light of the non-participation of the Kurdish National Council, which is a member of the Syrian opposition coalition, and it is not expected to participate in negotiations with the regime in its current form, in addition to the US refusal to let the regime return back in its current form to the east of the Euphrates or to allow it to benefit from the oil and gas fields.



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6 See, for example, the political program of the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria, which it adopted at its fifth conference in 2005, Al-Hiwar magazine, the political program of the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria-Yekiti, 06/26/2005, link: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=40054>

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10 Echo of the Syrian Reality, the final statement issued by the Kurdish National Council in Syria, 12/12/2017, link: <https://www.vedeng.co/54267-2/>

11 Democratic Union Party PYD, political program, link: <http://pydrojava.net/arabic/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%ac-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%8a>

12 The two agreements stipulate that the two parties share the administration of the Kurdish region in Syria (administrative, political, military and economic).

13 We obtained information that members of the regime police trained Asayish members on how to write records and archive papers.

14 The regime's courts confirm marriage and sell real estate, while the Autonomous Administration's courts are primarily concerned with crimes and misdemeanours.

15 The official page of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, the statement of the Joint Presidency of the Education Authority in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria on the unification of curricula, 3/16/2020, link: <https://www.facebook.com/smensyria/posts/1266418273548107>
See also a statement from the Joint Presidency of the Education Authority in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria on March 11, 2020, the link: <https://www.facebook.com/smensyria/posts/1262567697266498>

16 About 16,000 barrels per day of oil are invested, and between 8,000-10,000 cylinders of gas per day, according to some of the economic sources we met.

17 International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Save the Children
International Relief & Development (IRD)
Mercy Corps
Care
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)
Handicap International
People in Need
du Monde
Action contre la Faim (ACF)
UNHCR
UNDP
UNICEF
WFP

18 The National Coalition of Opposition Forces and the Syrian Revolution, There is no place for any preemptive projects that confiscate the will of the Syrian people, March 17, 2016 link: <https://www.etilaf.org/press-release/%d9%84%d8%a7-%d9%85%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%86-%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%a7%d9%82%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%b5%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%a5%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d8%b9%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a>

19 Al-Jazeera Net, the regime and the opposition reject a Kurdish federal system in Syria, 17/3/2016, link: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2016/3/17/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9>

And see also: SANA, a source in the Foreign Ministry: Syria warns any party that seeks to undermine the unity of its land and people under any title, 17/3/2016, link: <https://sana.sy/?p=354739>

20 The Authority of the Interior, the Education Authority, the Local Administrations Authority, the Economy and Agriculture Authority, the Finance Authority, the Culture and Art Authority, the Health and Environment Authority, the Social Affairs and Labor Authority, and the Women's Authority. The Defense Authority was abolished and made into the Office of Defense and Self-Protection.

21 For more on these initiatives, see: The Middle East Forum, Situation Assessment: The Initiative to Unify the Kurdish League in Syria, Abdul Rahim Saeed, link: <https://policiesforum.me/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7.pdf>

22 We met one of the members of the Autonomous Administration delegation who attended the meeting, and he confirmed that the two parties agreed to establish committees to discuss administrative, educational and military matters.

23 The Tel Abyad region separates the Kurdish areas of Jazira and Kobani, and the Manbij, Azaz and al-Bab regions separate Kobani and Afrin.

