

**Situation
Assessment**



Middle East Forum
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An Initiative to Unite

Syria's K u r d s

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Introduction

Mazloum Abdi, commander-in-chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an initiative to unite Syria's Kurds shortly after the Turkish military operation conducted in Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad. This very initiative, which is still in existence, has not been clear enough because of the secrecy and lack of transparency that surrounds its facts and talks, given that the two main parties involved in the initiative are (the Kurdish National Council - KNC and the Democratic Union Party -PYD), those have a few things in common, as there are a lot of differences between the two parties, topped by the relationship with Turkey, the forward-looking prediction of the Kurdish issue in Syria, and the relationship with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as well as the matter of the Kurdish National Council's existence within the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) and other issues.

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss this initiative, its future, the potential scenarios whether it successes or fails, and its impact on the Syrian arena in general, and the Syrian Kurdish one in particular, as well as its impact -if happens- on Turkey, which is the foreign country most likely to be affected with any Kurdish-Kurdish agreement in Syria, especially after the emergence of a number of articles in some media outlets in parallel with contradictory statements by some officials from both sides about the results of these talks. In this respect, it is essential to present the following report.



The Nature of Intra-Kurdish Rivalry within Syria's Kurdish Movement:

The two main Kurdish parties disagree on a number of issues, most notably how to manage the Kurdish regions within Syria. The Democratic Union Party does not want any party other than itself to govern the region, while the Kurdish National Council (KNC), on the other hand, wants real participation in this process.

Militarily, the PYD rejects the presence of any Kurdish military force other than the People's Protection Units (YPG), while the KNC demands that the Roj Peshmerga be allowed to return to the Kurdish areas in Syria and participate in the military and security institutions. Economically, the PYD solely makes advantage of the economic resources of the region, harnessing to serve its own partisan interests. Meanwhile, the Kurdish National Council demands to be engaged in the management of these sources. In terms of the political affairs, the PYD basically believes in the theory of the democratic nation, wants to implement it in areas under its control and considers that a model close to the geographical federal system could be applied, while the KNC adopts the nationalist Perspective and demands that Kurds have their national specificity in their geographical areas and wants to implement a model close to the national federation of the Kurds in Syria.



The Reasons for Disputes within the Kurdish Movement

Although the age-old challenges of numerous schisms, divisions and treason accusations among Kurds within the political movement, however, since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, the Kurdish-Kurdish relations in Syria have witnessed major differences, to be added to the old ones, especially between the two main camps (Democratic Society Movement DEM-TEV / Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council in Syria ENKS).

Consequently, these disputes deepened after the Democratic Union Party and its military and security arms seized over the Kurdish areas, which assumed other dimensions, reaching the point of carrying out assassinations targeted a number of leaders of the Kurdish National Council, arresting many of them, preventing them from being engaged in political activities freely, imposing more restrictions on their own popular base, as they barred the KNC's supporters from holding offices or to be hired in the Autonomous institutions, not only that, but also they prevented them from receiving some public services, such as having diesel and gas. As a result, despite many parties launched initiatives to unite the Syria's Kurds, but all were unsuccessful.



These disputes could be attributed to numerous reasons:

- The fact that the Democratic Society Movement / the Democratic Union Party seeks to manage the region unilaterally in terms of the administrative and military affairs, and to make advantage of the region's economic and human resources, refusing any participation by any party or force only if these parties came under the umbrella of either the People's Protection Units (YPG) or the Syrian Democratic Forces.
- The two camps are associated to other historically conflicting Kurdish parties. The Democratic Society Movement is linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the Kurdish National Council is linked to the Masoud Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), all of which have long-standing historical conflicts.
- The weakness of the Kurdish National Council in Syria, and the internal conflicts between the parties that make up the council made it weak in the face of the Democratic Society Movement, and made it lose the ability to confront the latter's projects.
- The Democratic Society Movement's possession of a military and security arm that it used against the Kurdish National Council and other opponents.
- International support for the People's Protection Units (YPG), the military arm of the Democratic Union Party, making the party considers itself the sole power that can manage and protect the areas.
- The Syrian regime's refusal to approve any party or force to participate in the administration of the areas that had been handed over to the Democratic Union Party, especially before 2015, that is, before the establishment of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and before receiving any international support when relations and coordination between the regime and the Democratic Union Party were good, as the regime was one of the main supporters of the Democratic Union Party.



During the period from 2011 to 2019, the Syrian Kurdish arena witnessed many initiatives aimed at uniting the Kurds, or to bring the Kurdish parties closer, and to conclude an agreement of understanding between the two parties, most notably the initiatives launched by the former President of Kurdistan Region, “Masoud Barzani” which led to several agreements between the two parties: (Hawler 1 on November 6, 2012, Hawler 2 on December 23, 2013 and Dohuk 1 on October 10, 2014), however, most of these agreements did not work, due to the PYD’s evasion from implementing the provisions related to the two parties’ participation in the administration of the region because it intended to have the Kurdish National Council under its own control.

The initiatives of the Kurdistan region were followed by several local ones, the most important of which are (the initiative of the Syrian Kurdistan Writers’ Association), which began in June 2017, and (the initiative of the Kurdistan National Congress), which is close to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, that started at the end of 2018. Also, the most important international initiative was launched by France in 2019 as well as the British initiative, which came in support of the French initiative, and most of these initiatives did not succeed in bringing the two main parties together.

The intransigence of the Democratic Society Movement/ Democratic Union Party is considered the most important reason behind the failure of all these initiatives, in addition to the lack of confidence in the Democratic Union Party by the Syrian Kurdish National Council after the failure to implement the three agreements that were signed under the auspices of Kurdistan Region. As a result, the Council put prior conditions for any agreement might be held between the two sides, the most important of which is the release of detainees and disclosing the fate of the kidnapped and missing.

Unsuccessful Attempts





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Mazloun Abdi and America's Initiative

Mazloun Abdi, commander-in-chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an initiative to bring Syria's Kurdish parties together shortly after the Turkish military operation conducted in Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad. It seems to have come under American and European pressure and in order to achieve guarantees given by those countries to Turkey to keep the Democratic Union Party (PYD) away from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and involving other forces in managing the Kurdish-majority areas east of the Euphrates.

Mazloun Abdi and Shahin Gilo met with all the Kurdish parties, including the Kurdish National Council. As a result, negotiations began between the two parties - the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish National Council more seriously.

According to officials from the Kurdish National Council, four meetings have been held under American sponsorship between the delegations of the two parties in the US base, southern Hasaka city, attended by William Ruback, US Ambassador to the international coalition, and French officials, and leaders of the Kurdish National Council (Saud al-Mulla, Ne'mat Daoud, Suleiman Oso, Faisal Youssef and Faslat Youssef), and from the Democratic Union Party (Aldar Khalil, Aisha Hesso, Saleh Muslim and two other persons). The meetings had been attended by Mazloun Abdi too. Abdi had promised to achieve the demands of the Kurdish National Council, and that the Syrian Democratic Forces is to be a guarantor of the agreement, according to some officials of the Kurdish National Council, the United States also pledged later to be a guarantor in any agreement would be held between the two parties.

After the initiative was announced, the Autonomous Administration issued a decision allowing the unlicensed parties to open their offices, and canceled all the lawsuits filed against the leaders of the Kurdish National Council in its courts, but the Council did not agree to the opening of the offices and insisted, in the first place on the release of the detainees and the kidnapped and demanded the release of the detainees. Indeed, the fact-finding committee formed by Abdi issued a statement declaring that a number of detainees are in the prisons of the Syrian regime, and that only two of them (Amir Hamid and Fouad Ibrahim) were killed in Asayish-run prisons. In February 2020, as a goodwill step, the Kurdish National Council allowed its parties to reopen their offices and engage in political activities.

However, several reasons prompted Abdi to launch this initiative to conclude an agreement between the Kurdish parties, the first of which is the American and European pressure, especially after the Turkish operation launched in Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain, in addition to considering that if efforts to conclude an agreement with the Kurdish National Council do not work, new Turkish military operation might be launched in the areas of Kobane or al-Jazira. Also, the United States wants to present the Syrian Democratic Council internationally as a political opposition through the Kurdish National Council, a member of each of the Syrian National Coalition, the Negotiating Commission, and the Constitutional Committee, in addition to the American desire to keep both "SDF" and the "Syrian Democratic Council" away from the Russians, those who penetrated the area after the US withdrawal from areas in the east of the Euphrates.

According to officials in the Kurdish National Council, it has been agreed so far on the political document for the future of Syria and the future of the Kurds in Syria, and it was agreed by its two parties that "Syria will be a pluralistic federal state."

Moreover, "all exceptional laws against the Kurds to be removed, to compensate those affected, and the Kurdish nationalism in Syria to be constitutionally recognized".

Besides, details related to the nature of dealing with the Syrian opposition, and the neighboring countries, including Turkey should be taken into consideration. During the upcoming sessions later, other issues related to the administrative, military and financial aspects will be discussed, as well as the relationship of the Democratic Union Party with the Kurdistan Workers' Party.



It is likely the Kurdish-Kurdish relations to appear in one of the following scenarios, separately or jointly. However, all of which are related to what extent the Democratic Union Party and its parent organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party are serious in dealing with the Kurdish file in Syria.

By the way, the previous agreements failed due to the PYD's intransigence and its insistence on working unilaterally and not involving any other Kurdish force in the process of the administration, and giving priority to partisan interests over the general Kurdish ones, so the whole parties worrying of repeating the previous failed attempts, despite this time is much harder than previous times and the PYD itself is not that strong party as it used to be, especially, after the two Turkish military operations in Afrin, Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad, as well as the American recent attempts to broker an agreement between the Kurdish parties in these talks to try to make them succeed, and as a result, the PKK was either deported from the region or restrictions were imposed on its own activities and moves.

Considering the initiative and its merits, we find out three scenarios:

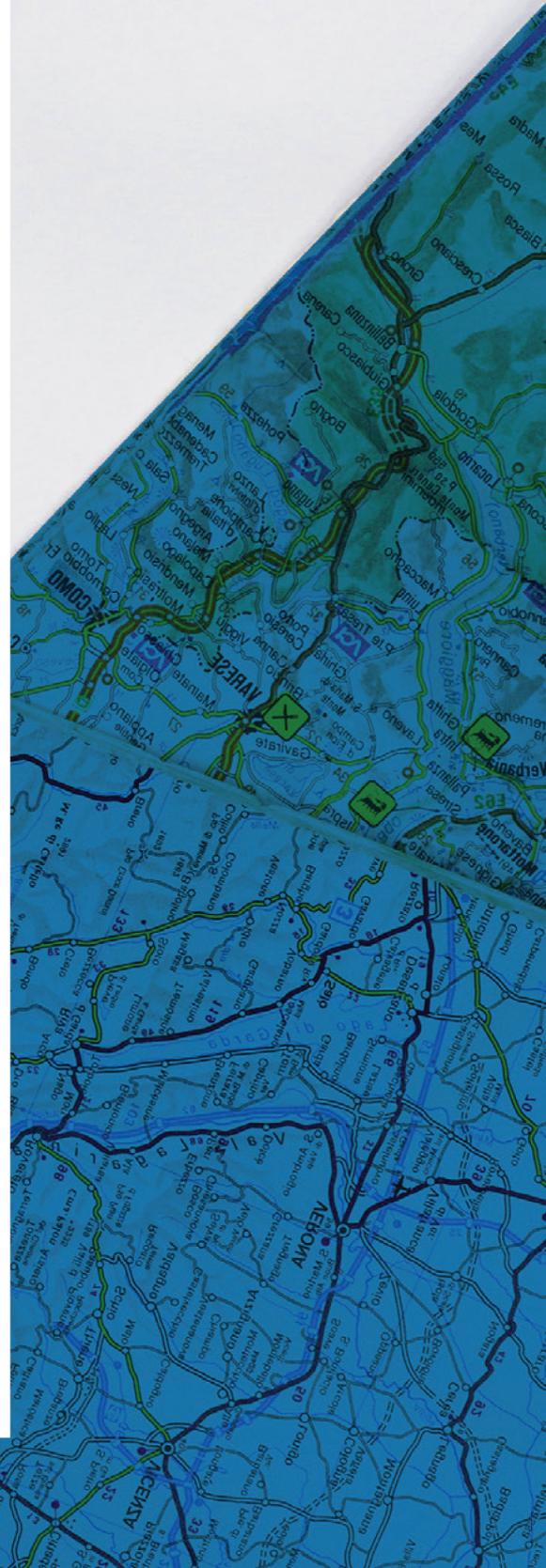
The Potential Scenarios of the Initiative



The First Scenario:

Making progress in the initiative and concluding an agreement between the two parties: It is likely that the initiative will succeed, and an agreement might be reached between the two main parties (the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Society Movement/Democratic Union Party). Further, if we take into account the extent of the seriousness of Mazloum Abdi, which appears to be great according to the testimonies of the attendees of the meetings that are taking place, as well as the American pressure and the coordinating role that the latter is playing in order to mediate between the two parties. It is most likely that achieving this scenario will have a great chance, which in return will have positive results on the Kurdish and Syrian reality in general. Undoubtedly, when either the Democratic Union Party and the Autonomous Administration break up with the PKK, or when the Kurdish National Council takes part in the administration, this will make Turkey satisfied, as it will find no reason to launch another military operation against the PKK in Syria, and consequently, Turkey will never be sanctioned by the US because there will be no military operation in the east of the Euphrates.

Also, involving the Kurdish National Council, which is a member of the Syrian National Coalition will make the Syrian opposition satisfied, as well as driving out the danger of the Syrian regime and Russia from the region, who use Turkey as a threat against the PYD so that the party make concessions in favor of the regime and Russia. All the above can be added to the demise of the PKK threat for Syrian Kurds and restricting the party's activities aiming at making advantages of and harnessing economic



and human resources for its partisan interests. Therefore, it is better for all local and international political actors, as well as the Syrian opposition, to support this initiative and work to make it getting progress, which may help the party to regain its own right position, from which the PKK deprived during the past years. However, any participatory move would be beneficial to the Kurds and the Syrians in general, but with caution and under conditions that ensure the proper implementation of the agreement by the Democratic Union Party.

Some of the terms of the agreement, on the other hand are likely inapplicable like “federalization of Syria. Such a demand is rejected by most of the Syrian opposition blocs and Turkey as well due to some geographical and political obstacles which make the proposal not enforceable. Obviously, the most important obstacle that prevents federalism is that the Kurdish regions in Syria are not geographically connected. There is a political roadblock as Turkey totally rejects any Kurdish entity to be established in the nearby area in Syria, due to the danger it may pose to the Turkish national security. Therefore, such an agreement between the two Kurdish parties likely to be opposed by Syrian parties as well as Turkey. Accordingly, it sounds that it is better for all parties to figure out a realistic formula - politically and geographically - that can be implemented for the future of Syria, instead of demanding federal system.



The Second Scenario:

The initiative to succeed, but its terms not to be implemented by the Democratic Union Party: It is also a potential scenario considerably, due to the bad timeline of the PYD in non-compliance with its previous agreements with the KNK. Actually, in such a path, the term of the agreement will not be long and the differences between the two parties will return to the way they were.

Moreover, the Syrian opposition and Turkey will also not accept the status quo in Syria's north and east of Syria as the regions over there are completely under the control of the Democratic Union Party, which might prompt Turkey to launch the third military operation against the PKK in Syria. The United States is expected put more pressure on the Democratic Union Party to implement the terms of the agreement, especially as the former has pledged to be a guarantor of the agreement on the one hand, and that failure to implement the agreement will harm the relationships between Turkey and the United States, and this is what Washington hates to see currently on the other hand.

If this scenario or signs of it went into force, the international powers supervising the agreement, especially the United States, must oblige the Democratic Union Party to implement the terms of the agreement literally, and not evade its implementation. Likewise, the Kurdish forces should, in this case, establish a political umbrella, or a united front to confront the danger that the Democratic Union Party would pose if it remained linked to the PKK and harnessed the region economically and humanly for their partisan interests.



The Third Scenario:

The failure of the initiative and not coming to an agreement: It is also one of the possible scenarios, especially in the event that the Democratic Union Party insists on its previous policies of exclusivity in managing the region, and did not disassociate itself from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and to make conditions that the Kurdish National Council must withdraw from the Syrian Opposition Coalition. In this scenario, the region likely to face multiple scenarios, including a third Turkish operation against the PKK in either Kobane or Al-Jazira regions, or the PYD handing over the region to the Syrian regime and Russia to be safe from any Turkish attack

The scenario that says the initiative will not succeed, has many contradictions, especially that handing over the region to the regime and Russia will not satisfy the Americans, and in contrary not handing it over to the regime means that there will be a third Turkish operation against the PKK, which would be a dangerous adventure as for the party, especially as the latter had figured out during the two military operations of Afrin and Ras al-Ain that it can never confront Turkey at all. However, launching a new Turkish military operation will embarrass the United States, which may impose economic sanctions on Turkey, and consequently the relationship between the two sides will worsen again after a period of improvement, and calmness, and the United States does not want this to happen. Therefore, this scenario has relatively little chance to take place, especially in light of the strong link between the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which wants to use the Syrian arena to take revenge from Turkey.

If this scenario turns into reality, it will endanger the whole region as a non-Syrian party might unilaterally control the region's economic and human resources, and thus harnessing them to serve its partisan agendas.

Therefore, the Kurdish and Syrian national forces in the regions of northern and eastern Syria must unite and build a united front to confront the projects of the PKK-linked PYD in case any settlement ensures getting the region from the hands of the Democratic Union Party failed.



It can be said that it is difficult to separate the PYD from the PKK, as most of the leaders of the former are either commanders or members of the latter, but it, however, can be said that gradual imposing restrictions on its influence and unilateral control in the region is not impossible, especially if the United States and some of the leaders of the Syrian Democratic Union Party have earnest desire in concluding a real partnership-based agreement. Ultimately, allowing other parties and other groups to work and participate in the administration will weaken the strength of the PYD and, accordingly, make the strength of the PKK in Syria lesser.

Therefore, all Kurdish, Syrian, and international parties, including Turkey, are interested in the success of this agreement, and its failure requires the unity of all parties to confront the policies, plans and projects of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) that are linked to the PKK.

Conclusion



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According to some personalities attending the meetings, the United States coordinates the meetings, sets dates, and the discussion agenda.

Also, suggests solutions...

According to sources from within the meeting, the United States threatened that a military operation by Turkey would bring economic sanctions against it.