

The Political Situation of the Kurds in 2026

Geopolitical Analysis

Informative Report - Rapidly Evolving Situation

Kurdish Youth Association in Lausanne



January 13, 2026

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1 Important Warning

This document is a geopolitical analysis compiled from freely available sources on the Internet.

1.1 Limitations and precautions:

1. **Accuracy not guaranteed at 100%:** The information presented comes from public sources (media, think tanks, Wikipedia, organizations) and may contain errors, biases, or outdated information.
2. **Verification recommended:** Readers are encouraged to **independently verify** the facts presented, particularly for important decisions. This document does not replace thorough academic research with access to primary sources.
3. **Nature of sources:** Although 34 sources are cited, some are secondary sources (Wikipedia, media) which may themselves contain inaccuracies. Figures (military forces, death tolls, economic data) are **estimates** often contradictory according to sources.
4. **Potential biases:** Each source has its own biases (geopolitical, ideological, national). This document attempts to balance perspectives, but may involuntarily reflect certain biases.
5. **Evolving situation:** The geopolitical situation in the Middle East changes rapidly. The information reflects the state of knowledge as of **January 13, 2026** and may be outdated.

1.2 Purpose of the document:

This document aims to provide:

- A **general overview** of the Kurdish situation in 2026
- **Working hypotheses** to understand regional dynamics
- A **starting point** for more in-depth research
- An **accessible synthesis** of scattered information

This document is NOT:

- An absolute truth
- An official or governmental document
- A primary source for political or military decisions
- Free from factual errors

1.3 Recommendations:

For thorough and verified understanding:

- Consult primary sources (official reports, government documents)
- Cross-reference with analyses from recognized experts
- Verify figures with international organizations (UN, HRW, etc.)
- Consider multiple perspectives (Kurdish, Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian)

Use this document as a general understanding tool, not as a definitive reference.

2 Glossary of acronyms

2.1 Kurdish organizations

- **AANES**: Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava)
- **ANF**: Firat News Agency (pro-PKK)
- **DEM Party**: People's Equality and Democracy Party (Turkey)
- **ENKS**: Syrian Kurdish National Council (opposition to PYD)
- **FDS/SDF**: Syrian Democratic Forces
- **HPG**: People's Defense Forces (armed wing of PKK)
- **HPŞ**: East Kurdistan Defense Forces (armed wing of PJAK)
- **KDP/PDK**: Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraq)
- **KDPI/PDKI**: Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
- **KRG**: Kurdistan Regional Government (Iraq)
- **KRI**: Kurdistan Region of Iraq
- **PAK**: Kurdistan Freedom Party (Iran)
- **PJAK**: Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (Iran, linked to PKK)
- **PKK**: Kurdistan Workers' Party (Turkey)
- **PUK/UPK**: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Iraq)
- **PYD**: Democratic Union Party (Syria, linked to PKK)
- **YPG**: People's Protection Units (Syria, branch of PYD)
- **YPJ**: Women's Protection Units (Syria)

2.2 States and international organizations

- **UAE**: United Arab Emirates
- **IS/ISIS**: Islamic State / Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- **HTS**: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Syria)
- **IRGC**: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran)
- **NATO**: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- **UN**: United Nations
- **EU**: European Union

2.3 Military and political organizations

- **Basij:** Iranian paramilitary militia (under IRGC)
- **FARAJA:** Iranian police
- **MHP:** Nationalist Movement Party (Turkey, ultra-nationalist)
- **PMF/Hashd al-Shaabi:** Popular Mobilization Forces (pro-Iranian militias in Iraq)
- **SNA:** Syrian National Army (Turkish proxy)
- **SOMO:** Iraqi State Oil Marketing Company

2.4 Media and agencies

- **ISW:** Institute for the Study of War
- **RT:** Russia Today (Russian state media)
- **TRT:** Turkish Radio Television (Turkish state media)

2.5 Technical terms

- **b/d:** Barrels per day (oil)
- **MRAP:** Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (armored vehicle)
- **TB2:** Bayraktar TB2 (Turkish drone)

3 Overview

In January 2026, the Kurds find themselves at a critical moment in their history. Spread across four main states (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran), they represent one of the largest stateless nations in the world, with an estimated population between 30 and 40 million people. The fall of Assad's regime in Syria at the end of 2024 and the massive protests in Iran in early 2026 have radically transformed the regional geopolitical landscape.

Sources:

- Norwich University, "Precarious Alliances: Turkey, Israel, Öcalan, and the Kurds Amid Shifting Middle Eastern Geopolitics", January 2025
- Wikipedia, "2025–2026 Iranian protests"

4 Geographic and demographic context

4.1 Distribution of Kurdish population:

- **Turkey:** 15-20 million (the largest Kurdish population)
- **Iran:** 8-10 million (second largest population)
- **Iraq:** 5-6 million (autonomous Kurdistan region)
- **Syria:** 2-3 million (northeast, AANES region)

4.2 Key regions in 2026:

- **Iraqi Kurdistan (KRI):** Autonomous region recognized since 1991
- **Northeast Syria (AANES):** De facto autonomous administration since 2012
- **Southeast Turkey:** No autonomy, historical repression
- **Western Iran:** Kurdish provinces under strict Tehran control

5 Main Kurdish actors

5.1 In Syria

5.1.1 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

- Main military force in northeastern Syria
- Approximately 70,000-100,000 fighters
- Allied with the United States since 2014 in the fight against the Islamic State
- Control approximately 25% of Syrian territory

5.1.2 YPG (People's Protection Units)

- Main Kurdish component of the SDF
- Ideologically linked to the PKK
- Considered terrorists by Turkey

Source: Wikipedia, "Turkish–Syrian National Army offensive in Northern Syria (2024–2025)"

5.2 In Turkey

5.2.1 PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

- Founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan
- Armed conflict since 1984 (over 40,000 deaths)
- Designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the EU, and the United States
- Bases in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan

5.2.2 DEM Party (People's Equality and Democracy Party)

- Legal pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey
- Representation in Turkish parliament
- Subject to regular repression

Major development 2026: In October 2024, Devlet Bahçeli (leader of the ultra-nationalist MHP) proposed that Öcalan address the Turkish parliament for a peace process, marking a potential historic turning point.

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

5.3 In Iraq

5.3.1 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

- Autonomous entity recognized since 1991
- President: Nechirvan Barzani
- Controls Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok
- Oil exports (problems with Baghdad)

5.3.2 KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party)

- Led by the Barzani family
- Relations with Turkey
- Opposed to the PKK

5.3.3 PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan)

- Historically close to Iran
- Controls Sulaymaniyah

5.4 In Iran

5.4.1 PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan)

5.4.2 Komala

5.4.3 PJAK (Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan)

- Armed and political opposition groups
- Bases in Iraqi Kurdistan
- Active in the 2026 protests

Source: Wikipedia, "2025–2026 Iranian protests"; ISW, "Iran Update, January 7, 2026"

6 Who harms the Kurds: Adversaries and means

6.1 1. TURKEY - Main adversary

6.1.1 Military means:

Constant cross-border operations

- December 2024: Turkish offensive in Northern Syria
- Capture of Manbij and Tel Rifaat
- Over 100,000 Kurdish civilians displaced
- Bombing of dams (Tishreen) and critical infrastructure

Syrian National Army (SNA)

- Turkey's military proxy (approximately 80,000 fighters)
- Accusations of war crimes and ethnic cleansing
- Control of buffer zones in Syria (Afrin, Jarablus, al-Bab)

Source: Wikipedia, "Turkish–Syrian National Army offensive in Northern Syria (2024–2025)"

6.1.2 Turkish strategic objectives:

1. **30 km buffer zone** along the Syrian border
2. **Total elimination of YPG/SDF**
3. **Prevent any Kurdish autonomy in Syria**
4. **Weaken the PKK in Iraqi mountains**

Key quote: President Erdoğan declared in October 2024: "The Israeli administration [...] will set its eyes on our homeland after Palestine and Lebanon."

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

6.1.3 Political and economic means:

- Pressure on Baghdad to stop KRI oil exports
- Water control (dams on the Tigris and Euphrates)
- Economic blockade of Syrian Kurdish zones
- Internal repression against pro-Kurdish parties (DEM Party)

6.1.4 Why does Turkey oppose?

- **Fear of contagion:** Kurdish autonomy in Syria/Iraq could inspire Turkish Kurds
- **Turkish nationalism:** Kemalist ideology refuses any recognition of minorities
- **Territorial integrity:** Fear of Turkey's dismemberment
- **PKK:** The 40-year conflict has created deep hostility

6.2 2. IRAN - Systematic repression

6.2.1 Means of repression:

- **Security forces:** Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Basij
- **Lethal violence:** Live ammunition fired at protesters
- **Mass arrests:** Thousands of Kurds imprisoned
- **Executions:** Kurdish activists regularly executed
- **Internet shutdowns:** In Kurdish provinces (Chaharmahal, Bakhtiari, Ilam)

Major event 2026: In January 2026, massive protests erupted in Iran, with strong Kurdish participation. Seven Kurdish organizations (PDKI, Komala, PJAK, etc.) called for a general strike on January 8, 2026.

Source: ISW, "Iran Update, January 7, 2026"; Wikipedia, "2025–2026 Iranian protests"

6.2.2 Iranian objectives:

- Maintain control over resource-rich Kurdish provinces
- Prevent any autonomy that could inspire other minorities
- Counter American and Israeli influence via the Kurds

6.2.3 January 2026 protests: Bloody repression

Scale of protests:

- **January 8, 2026: 156 protests in 27 provinces** (doubling from January 7)
- **Kurdish provinces:** Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari
- **Massive Kurdish participation:** Kurds at the forefront

Source: ISW, "Iran Update, January 8, 2026"; Human Rights Watch, January 2026

Death toll (December 28, 2025 - January 8, 2026): At least 28 deaths documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (but many more):

- **Lorestan:** 8 deaths (Kurdish/Luri province)
- **Ilam:** 5 deaths (Kurdish province)
- **Kermanshah:** 4 deaths (Kurdish province)
- **Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari:** 4 deaths
- **Fars:** 4 deaths
- **Isfahan, Hamedan, Qom:** 1 death each

Method: All killed by gunfire (rifles, metal pellets)

Source: Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Authorities' Renewed Cycle of Protest Bloodshed", January 8, 2026

Documented cases: Azna (Lorestan), January 1, 2026:

- **6 deaths:** Vahab Mousavi, Mostafa Falahi, Shayan Asadollahi, Ahmadreza Amani, Reza Moradi Abdolvand
- **Taha Safari, 16 years old:** Body withheld by authorities, severe head injuries
- **Verified videos:** IRGC agents firing on peaceful protesters

Malekshahi (Ilam), January 3, 2026:

- **5 deaths:** Reza Azimzadeh, Latif Karimi, Mehdi Emamipour (killed instantly), Fares Agha Mohammadi, Mohammad Reza Karami (died from injuries)
- **Testimony:** "IRGC agents opened fire from inside the base, shooting without caring who they hit. Three to four people were killed instantly, and many others were injured. The protesters were completely unarmed."
- **Videos:** Agents firing from a Basij base at fleeing protesters

Jafarabad (Kermanshah), January 3, 2026:

- **3 deaths:** Reza Ghanbari and two brothers, Rasoul and Reza Kadivarian
- **Method:** Plainclothes agents in three white vehicles, metal pellets

Source: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, January 2026

Repression tactics: Forces deployed:

- **IRGC (Revolutionary Guards):** Used for the first time to suppress protests (sign of severity)
- **IRGC Ground Forces:** Deployed in at least one province
- **Basij:** Paramilitary militia
- **FARAJA:** Iranian police

Weapons used:

- **Rifles:** Live ammunition
- **Shotguns:** Metal pellets (characteristic spray injuries)
- **Water cannons**
- **Tear gas**
- **Beatings**

Other measures:

- **Mass arrests:** Thousands of people
- **Internet shutdowns:** Chaharmahal, Bakhtiari, Ilam provinces
- **Pressure on families:** Forced to appear on state television to deny murders
- **Threats:** Secret burials if families speak out
- **Body retention:** Refusal to return remains

Source: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, ISW

Regime's perception: The Iranian regime considers these protests an "extremely serious security threat":

- **Use of IRGC Ground Forces:** Rare, indicates either security force capacity constraints or a change in threat perception
- **Intensified repression:** Increased violence compared to previous protests

Source: ISW, January 2026

Role of Kurdish organizations: **January 5, 2026:** Meeting of 7 Iranian Kurdish parties

- Condemnation of violent repression
- Solidarity with victims' families
- **January 8, 2026:** Call for national general strike

Participating organizations:

1. PDKI
2. Komala
3. PJAK
4. PAK
5. Revolutionary Toilers Association
6. Kurdistan Toilers Association
7. Khabat Organisation

Statement: "Full support for protests and popular uprisings against the Islamic Republic. Need for effective joint cooperation to strengthen these movements."

Source: PDKI.org, "High-Level Meeting", January 5, 2026

Economic context: **Trigger:** Deep economic crisis

- **Inflation:** Galloping
- **Sanctions:** Western sanctions for years
- **Corruption:** Widespread
- **Unemployment:** High, especially among youth
- **Kurdish provinces:** Among the poorest in Iran

Slogan: "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life for Iran" (rejection of regime's foreign policy)

Comparison with 2022 protests: Mahsa Amini (2022):

- Trigger: Death of a young Kurd killed by morality police
- Hundreds of deaths
- Strong Kurdish participation

2026:

- Trigger: Economic crisis
- Even wider participation (27 provinces)
- More violent repression
- Kurds still at the forefront

6.2.4 Why does Iran repress Kurds so harshly?

1. **Fear of domino effect:** Kurdish autonomy = inspiration for Baloch, Azeris, Arabs
2. **Natural resources:** Oil, gas, agriculture in Kurdish provinces
3. **Border with Iraq:** Fear of links with KRI
4. **Kurdish secularism:** Threat to Islamic theocracy
5. **Western support:** Kurds perceived as pro-American/Israeli
6. **History of resistance:** Republic of Mahabad (1946), continuous armed struggle

6.2.5 Position of Iranian Kurds in 2026:

Strategy:

- **Armed struggle:** PDKI, Komala, PJAK (bases in Iraq)
- **Political mobilization:** Coordination between parties
- **International support:** Lobbying with EU, United States
- **Participation in national protests:** Alliance with other opposition groups

Hope:

- Fall of Islamic regime
- Democratic federal system
- Autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan

Risk:

- Increased repression
- Missile attacks on bases in Iraq (precedents 2018, 2022)
- Executions of activists

6.3 3. IRAQ (Baghdad central government) - Economic and political tensions

6.3.1 Context 2026: Recurring disputes

The Baghdad-Erbil relationship enters 2026 **stuck in a familiar cycle**: disputes, delegations, reassuring declarations, but fundamental problems remain unresolved.

Source: Shafaq News, "Into 2026, Baghdad and Erbil face the same disputes", January 2026

6.3.2 Baghdad's means of pressure:

1. Budgetary control

- **Federal budget:** Baghdad regularly withholds KRI funds
- **Salaries:** KRG employees often unpaid for months
- **2026:** Iraq enters the year **WITHOUT A BUDGET**, worsening the crisis
- **Dependence:** KRI depends 80% on budget transfers from Baghdad

2. Oil crisis (major problem) March 2023: Turkey stopped Kurdish oil exports following international arbitration

- **Losses:** 450,000 barrels/day offline
 - 400,000 b/d from Kurdistan
 - 50,000 b/d from Kirkuk
- **Cost:** Billions of dollars in losses for KRI

Fragile agreement (late 2025):

- Partial resumption of exports via Baghdad
- KRG must deliver **230,000 barrels/day minimum** to SOMO (Iraqi oil company)
- **Extension until March 2026**
- **Problem:** Temporary agreement, no permanent solution

Economic impact:

- **Financial crisis** in KRI since 2023
- **Frozen projects:** Infrastructure, public services
- **Brain drain:** Young Kurds leaving the region
- **Increased dependence** on Baghdad

Source: Shafaq News; OilPrice.com; FPRI

3. Disputed territories (Kirkuk) Issue: Oil-rich zones between KRI and federal government

Kirkuk: Strategic oil city

- **2017:** KRI controlled Kirkuk
- **October 2017:** Baghdad retakes Kirkuk after failed independence referendum
- **2026:** Still under Baghdad control
- **Ethnic tensions:** Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen

Other disputed zones:

- Sinjar (Yazidis)
- Makhmour
- Khanaqin

Article 140 of Iraqi Constitution: Supposed to resolve the status of these territories via referendum, never implemented since 2005.

4. Pro-Iranian militias (Hashd al-Shaabi/PMF) Security threat:

- **Presence** in disputed zones
- **Attacks** against KRI (sporadic)
- **Iranian pressure:** Tehran uses militias to influence KRI
- **Disarmament:** Ongoing debate in Baghdad (January 2026)
 - Visit by General Ghaani (IRGC Quds Force): Pressure for militia unity
 - Internal divisions on disarmament

Source: ISW, "Iran Update, January 8, 2026"

5. Iranian influence on Baghdad Geopolitical reality:

- **Iraqi government:** Heavily influenced by Iran
- **Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani:** Close to Tehran
- **Anti-KRI policy:** Under Iranian pressure, Sudani penalizes KRG
 - Blocking independent oil exports
 - Favors pro-Iranian militias (PMF)

Iranian objective:

- Weaken KRI (pro-Western, pro-American)
- Prevent complete Kurdish autonomy
- Counter American influence in Iraq

Source: Middle East Council, "Baghdad has tied itself to Iran", 2025

6.3.3 Why does Baghdad oppose KRI?

1. **Resource control:** Oil from Kirkuk and Kurdistan
2. **Territorial integrity:** Fear of Kurdish secession
3. **Arab nationalism:** Historical resentment
4. **Iranian pressure:** Tehran wants to weaken pro-American KRI
5. **2017 referendum:** Baghdad never forgave the independence attempt

6.3.4 KRI's position facing Baghdad:

Survival strategy:

- **Constant negotiations:** Delegations to Baghdad
- **Compromise:** Agrees to deliver oil via SOMO
- **American support:** Counts on Washington to pressure Baghdad
- **Relations with Turkey:** Counterbalances Iranian influence
- **Internal divisions:** KDP and PUK have different approaches
 - **KDP:** Firmer with Baghdad, close to Turkey
 - **PUK:** More conciliatory, historically close to Iran

6.3.5 2026 prospects:

Cautious optimism:

- Nechirvan Barzani's visit to Baghdad (January 2026)
- Creation of a **Supreme Council** to unify industries
- Discussions on permanent oil agreement

Risks:

- No Iraqi budget in 2026 = worsened crisis
- Oil agreement expires March 2026
- Growing Iranian influence in Baghdad
- Regional instability (Syria, Iran)

Key quote: "2026 could offer an opportunity to reset relations. With clearly written agreements, enforcement mechanisms and transparency, disputes over oil, federal budget and disputed territories could finally stop dominating an endless political cycle."

Source: Shafaq News, January 2026

6.4 4. SYRIA (new HTS government) - Ambiguous situation

6.4.1 Current tensions:

- January 2026: Clashes in Aleppo**

- Fighting between Syrian army and SDF in Kurdish neighborhoods
- Forced evacuation of civilians
- Fragile ceasefire negotiated

Source: Reuters, "Clashes in Syria's Aleppo deepen rift between government, Kurdish forces", January 2026

6.4.2 Syrian government position:

- Demands SDF disarmament
- Refuses de facto Kurdish autonomy
- Under Turkish pressure to act against Kurds
- Integration negotiations ongoing but fragile

7 Who supports the Kurds: Allies and interests

7.1 1. UNITED STATES - Main but unpredictable ally

7.1.1 Current military support (2026):

- **900 American soldiers** in Northeast Syria
- **Operation Inherent Resolve:** Fight against Islamic State
- **Armament and training** of SDF
- **Air cover** against Turkish attacks
- **Military bases:** Al-Tanf, Deir ez-Zor oil fields

Source: The Guardian, "Syrian forces expel Kurdish fighters as US strikes Islamic State targets", January 2026

7.1.2 American interests:

1. **Counter-terrorism:** SDF have been essential against IS
2. **Resource control:** Oil and gas from northeastern Syria
3. **Counter Iran:** Kurds as anti-Iranian proxy
4. **Regional stability:** Prevent IS resurgence

7.1.3 Major problem: Trump's unpredictability

- **2019 precedent:** Trump withdrew troops, allowing Turkish invasion of Afrin
- **Traumatic memory:** Kurds remember the 2019 "betrayal"
- **Trump Administration 2.0 (2025-2026):** Contradictory signals
 - Some pro-Kurdish members (via Israeli influence)
 - But Trump prioritizes relations with Turkey (NATO member)

Kurdish quote: "Trump betrayed us" - Kurdish refugees, 2019

Source: PBS, "Trump betrayed us: Fleeing Kurds condemn U.S. decision to leave Syria"

7.1.4 KRI (Iraqi Kurdistan) perspective:

The KRG counts on its relations with the Trump administration to:

- Secure its interests before planned US withdrawal (fall 2026)
- Encourage PKK-Turkey negotiations
- Attract American investments

Source: Washington Institute, "Kurdish Approaches to Trump's MENA Policies", January 2026

7.2 2. ISRAEL - Growing strategic support

7.2.1 Political support:

- Only head of state to support Kurdish independence referendum in Iraq (2017)
- Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar (December 2024): "I emphasized the international community's responsibility to protect the Kurds"
- Lobbying with the United States to maintain support for Kurds

Source: Jerusalem Post, December 2024; Norwich University, January 2025

7.2.2 Israeli interests:

1. Ally against Iran: Kurds as counterweight to pro-Iranian militias
2. Intelligence: Cooperation with Kurdish services
3. Stability: Kurdish autonomy = stabilizing factor against Islamists
4. Geopolitics: Weaken Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah axis

7.2.3 Impact on Turkey:

Israeli support intensifies Turkish fears. Erdoğan accused Kurds of becoming "servants of Zionists," invoking Saladin (historic Kurdish leader) to discredit them.

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

7.3 3. EUROPEAN UNION - Diplomatic support

7.3.1 Recent support (2026):

- France, Germany, Italy: Statements of support for Syrian Kurds
- January 2026: EU and US call for negotiations between Damascus and Kurds after Aleppo clashes
- Aid package to Syria: €620 million (2026-2027), but conditional on inclusivity

Source: RFI, "US and EU urge fresh talks between Syria govt, Kurds", January 2026; Euractiv, January 2026

7.3.2 Limits of European support:

- No military presence: EU cannot militarily protect Kurds
- Dependence on United States: Without US, EU is ineffective
- Relations with Turkey: Turkey is NATO member and trade partner
- Migration crisis: EU depends on Turkey to control refugee flows

7.3.3 European interests:

- Regional stability
- Fight against terrorism (IS)
- Human rights (rhetoric)
- Contain Turkey

7.4 4. RUSSIA - Opportunistic actor (withdrawn in 2026)

7.4.1 History of Russian support:

- **2018 (Afrin):** Russia withdrew its troops, allowing Turkish invasion
- **Balancing act:** Moscow used Kurds to pressure Turkey and United States
- **Cynical patronage:** Tactical support without real commitment

Source: Washington Institute, "Russia and the Kurds: A Soft-Power Tool for the Kremlin?"

7.4.2 Situation in 2026:

- **Withdrawal from Syria:** After Assad's fall, Russia lost its influence
- **No longer mediator:** Turkey can no longer play Moscow against Washington
- **Isolated Kurds:** Loss of negotiating leverage

Impact: The elimination of Russia and Iran from Syria has **strengthened Israel's role** as pro-Kurdish ally, which **increases Turkish anxieties.**

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

8 Secondary actors: Roles and influences

8.1 Regional actors

8.1.1 1. SAUDI ARABIA - Indirect influence

Position vis-à-vis the Kurds:

- No direct support for Kurdish movements
- Priority: Rivalry with Iran
- Strategic neutrality on the Kurdish question

Interests:

- **Anti-Iran:** Any weakening of Iran benefits Riyadh
- **Regional stability:** Fear of chaos in Syria/Iraq
- **Relations with Turkey:** Complex (rivalry for Sunni leadership)

Impact on Kurds:

- **Rojhelat (Iran):** Potential indirect support if anti-regime revolution
- **Rojava (Syria):** No opposition to Kurdish autonomy if it weakens Iran
- **Limit:** Riyadh doesn't want to offend Ankara (economic partner)

Probability of active support: (only if Iranian collapse)

8.1.2 2. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - Economic pragmatism

Position:

- Normalization with Israel (Abraham Accords 2020)
- Economic relations with KRI (Iraqi Kurdistan)
- Investments in Kurdish oil sector

Interests:

- **Economic:** Oil and gas from Iraqi Kurdistan
- **Anti-Iran:** Alignment with Israel and United States
- **Stability:** KRI as stable zone for investments

Concrete support:

- Investments in KRI infrastructure
- Limited diplomatic support
- No military support

Impact: Moderate, mainly economic for KRI

8.1.3 3. QATAR - Mediation and moderate Islamism

Position:

- Historical support for Muslim Brotherhood and moderate Islamists
- Complex relations with Turkey (strategic alliance)
- Mediation in regional conflicts

Potential role:

- **Mediation:** Qatar could facilitate PKK-Turkey negotiations
- **Support for HTS (Syria):** Influence on new Syrian government's position
- **Al Jazeera channel:** Media coverage of Kurdish question

Limits:

- Alliance with Turkey limits support for Kurds
- No direct support for PKK (secular/Marxist organization)

Impact: Weak to moderate, mainly diplomatic

8.1.4 4. EGYPT - Stability above all

Position:

- Absolute priority: Regional stability
- Opposition to Muslim Brotherhood
- Tense relations with Turkey (Sisi-Erdogan rivalry)

Interests:

- **Anti-Turkey:** Any pressure on Ankara is welcome
- **Anti-Islamists:** Distrust of HTS in Syria
- **No active support:** Egypt avoids foreign adventures

Impact on Kurds:

- Tacit sympathy (enemy of my enemy)
- No concrete support
- Negligible role

8.1.5 5. JORDAN - Prudent neighbor

Position:

- Border with Syria (instability)
- Hosts millions of Syrian refugees
- Alliance with United States

Concerns:

- **Border stability:** Chaos in Syria threatens Jordan
- **Refugees:** Already saturated, fears new wave
- **Iranian influence:** Presence of pro-Iranian militias in Syria

Position on Kurds:

- Prudent neutrality
- Prefers Kurdish autonomy to Islamist chaos
- No active support

Impact: Minimal, passive role

8.2 International actors

8.2.1 6. CHINA - Economic interests

Position:

- Non-interference in internal affairs
- Priority: Belt and Road Initiative (New Silk Road)
- Economic relations with Turkey, Iran, Iraq

Interests:

- **Energy:** Iraqi and Iranian oil
- **Infrastructure:** Projects in Turkey and Iraq
- **Stability:** Regional chaos harms investments

Position on Kurds:

- Support for territorial integrity of states
- Opposition to any secession
- No support for Kurdish movements

Impact: Negative indirect (support for central states)

8.2.2 7. INDIA - Diaspora and soft power

Position:

- Kurdish diaspora in India (small but active)
- Relations with Israel (convergence of interests)
- Opposition to terrorism (sympathy for fight against IS)

Support:

- Limited diplomatic
- Sympathy for SDF (anti-IS fight)
- No military or financial support

Impact: Very weak, mainly symbolic

8.2.3 8. UNITED NATIONS - Institutional paralysis

Current role:

- **Humanitarian aid:** UNHCR for Kurdish refugees
- **Resolutions:** Blocked by vetoes (Russia, China)
- **Reports:** Documentation of human rights violations

Limits:

- **Paralyzed Security Council:** Turkey (NATO), Russia, China block
- **No mandate:** No peacekeeping force in Kurdish zone
- **Sovereignty principle:** UN supports territorial integrity of states

Impact: Weak, mainly humanitarian

Future potential:

- If major humanitarian catastrophe (Turkish invasion), international pressure
- Possible resolution if genocide documented

8.2.4 9. NATO - Turkish dilemma

Structural problem:

- **Turkey = NATO member** since 1952
- **SDF = US allies** (also NATO member)
- **Internal conflict:** Two allies fighting each other

NATO position:

- Official support for Turkey's territorial integrity
- Recognition of PKK as terrorist organization
- But: Individual members (US, France) support SDF

Tensions:

- Turkey blocks Sweden's accession (2022-2024) for supporting Kurds
- Threatens veto on NATO decisions
- Uses its status as leverage

Impact on Kurds:

- **Negative:** NATO cannot officially support Kurds
- **Positive:** Individual members circumvent official position

8.3 Non-governmental organizations

8.3.1 10. HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH & AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Role:

- Documentation of human rights violations
- Reports on Turkish, Iranian, Syrian war crimes
- Pressure on Western governments

Impact:

- **International awareness**
- **Diplomatic pressure** on Turkey and Iran
- **Evidence** for future legal proceedings

Key reports:

- War crimes in Afrin (2018)
- Repression in Iran (2022-2026)
- Bombing of Kurdish civilians in Iraq

8.3.2 11. KURDISH DIASPORA

Size and distribution:

- **2 million in Europe** (Germany, France, Sweden, United Kingdom)
- **500,000 in United States**
- **Communities in Australia, Canada**

Role:

- **Political lobbying:** Pressure on European parliaments
- **Funding:** Sending funds to Kurdish movements
- **Protests:** International mobilization
- **Media:** Counter-narrative to Turkish/Iranian propaganda

Impact:

- **Moderate to strong:** Influence on Western public opinion
- **Limit:** Internal divisions (KDP vs PKK)

Example: Massive protests in Europe after Afrin invasion (2018)

8.4 Conclusion on secondary actors

Most useful actors for Kurds:

1. **Kurdish diaspora:** Constant mobilization
2. **NGOs:** Documentation and international pressure
3. **UAE:** Economic investments (KRI)

Potentially useful actors (if conditions met):

1. **Saudi Arabia:** If Iranian collapse
2. **Qatar:** Mediation of peace process
3. **UN:** If major humanitarian catastrophe

Neutral or negative actors:

1. **China:** Support for central states
2. **NATO:** Paralyzed by Turkey
3. **Egypt, Jordan, India:** Negligible role

Reality: Secondary actors have **limited impact** compared to main actors (United States, Turkey, Iran, Israel). Their role is mainly **complementary** (economic, humanitarian, diplomatic) but doesn't fundamentally change the military or political situation

9 Great powers and their strategies

9.1 Alliance map in 2026

9.1.1 Pro-Kurdish:

- United States (military, but unpredictable)
- Israel (political, strategic)
- EU (diplomatic, limited)

9.1.2 Anti-Kurdish:

- Turkey (military, economic, political)
- Iran (internal repression)
- Syria (ambiguous, under Turkish pressure)

9.1.3 Neutral/Opportunistic:

- Russia (withdrawal, loss of influence)
- Iraq (tensions with KRI, but coexistence)

9.2 Regional dynamics

9.2.1 Turkey-Israel-Kurds triangle

This is the **central dynamic of 2026**:

1. **Israel supports Kurds** → Turkey feels threatened
2. **Turkey intensifies anti-Kurdish operations** → Israel increases support
3. **United States caught between two allies**: Turkey (NATO) vs Kurds (anti-IS)

Analysis: Israeli support is **crucial** because it maintains American engagement. Without Israel, the United States would probably abandon the Kurds for Turkey.

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

9.2.2 Iran: Destabilizing factor

- **2026 protests**: If Iran collapses, a **third autonomous Kurdistan** could emerge
- **Turkish nightmare**: Encirclement by autonomous Kurdish regions (Iraq, Syria, Iran)
- **Opportunity for Kurds**: But also risk of increased repression

Source: Wikipedia, "2025–2026 Iranian protests"

10 Economic aspects

10.1 1. Iraqi Kurdistan (KRI)

10.1.1 Resources:

- **Oil:** Estimated reserves of 45 billion barrels
- **Natural gas:** Significant potential
- **Agriculture:** Fertile lands

10.1.2 Major economic problems (2026):

- **Closed pipeline:** Kirkuk-Ceyhan blocked since 2023 (Turkey-Iraq dispute)
- **Budget dependence:** Baghdad withholds funds
- **Corruption:** Problematic governance
- **Economic crisis:** Unpaid salaries, failing public services

Recent agreement: Extension of Iraq-Kurdistan oil export agreement until March 2026 (230,000 barrels/day minimum).

Source: OilPrice.com, "Iraq and Kurdistan Extend Oil Export Deal to March 2026"

10.1.3 Prospects:

- Hope for American investments under Trump
- Economic diversification necessary
- Excessive dependence on oil

10.2 2. Northeast Syria (AANES)

10.2.1 Resources:

- **Oil:** Deir ez-Zor fields (controlled with United States)
- **Agriculture:** Syria's "breadbasket"
- **Water:** Control of Euphrates (but threatened by Turkish dams)

10.2.2 War economy:

- **Turkish blockade:** Closed border
- **Syrian blockade:** Hostile government
- **Informal economy:** Smuggling, black market
- **Limited international aid**

10.2.3 American dependence:

- Protection of oil fields
- Modest oil revenues
- War-damaged infrastructure

10.3 3. Kurds of Turkey

10.3.1 Economic situation:

- **Poorest regions** of Turkey (southeast)
- **Chronic underdevelopment:** Infrastructure, education, health
- **Economic discrimination:** Less public investment
- **Rural exodus:** Migration to Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir

10.4 4. Kurds of Iran

10.4.1 Resources of Kurdish provinces:

- **Oil and gas:** Kermanshah, Kurdistan provinces
- **Agriculture:** Significant agricultural lands

10.4.2 Exploitation by Tehran:

- **Resource extraction** without local redistribution
- **Underdevelopment:** Kurdish provinces among the poorest
- **High unemployment:** Youth without prospects

Link to 2026 protests: The Iranian economic crisis (inflation, sanctions) triggered protests, with strong Kurdish participation.

Source: Wikipedia, "2025–2026 Iranian protests"

11 Propaganda and information warfare

11.1 Turkish anti-Kurdish narratives

11.1.1 Turkish state media:

TRT: Turkish public channel

- Systematic presentation of Kurds as "terrorists"
- YPG = PKK = terrorism (constant equation)
- Justification of military operations as "anti-terrorist fight"

Anadolu Agency: State press agency

- Dissemination of official line
- Minimization of Kurdish civilian casualties
- Glorification of Turkish operations

11.1.2 Key narratives:

1. **"No Kurdish question, only terrorism"**
 - Denial of Kurdish identity
 - Reduction of conflict to security
2. **"Syrian Kurds = PKK"**
 - Amalgamation of SDF/YPG/PKK
 - Justification of attacks
3. **"Servants of Zionists"**
 - Erdogan (January 2025): Accusation of betrayal
 - Invocation of Saladin to discredit
4. **"Security zone for refugees"**
 - Presentation of invasions as humanitarian
 - Concealment of ethnic cleansing

Source: Norwich University, January 2025

11.2 Iranian disinformation

11.2.1 Regime tactics:

- **Pressure on families:** Forced to deny murders on state television
- **Threats:** Secret burials if families speak out
- **Denial:** "Protesters died in accidents"
- **Accusation:** "Foreign agents" (United States, Israel)

11.2.2 Censorship:

- **Internet shutdowns:** Kurdish provinces isolated (Ilam, Chaharmahal, Bakhtiari)
- **Social media blocking:** WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram
- **Journalist arrests:** Repression of independent media

Source: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, January 2026

11.3 Iraqi propaganda

11.3.1 Baghdad narrative:

- **"Unity of Iraq":** Rejection of Kurdish autonomy
- **"Iraqi oil":** Denial of KRI rights
- **Iranian influence:** Pro-Iranian media attack KRI as "American agent"

11.4 Kurdish media and counter-narratives

11.4.1 Kurdish television:

Rudaw (KRI): Pro-KDP, in Kurdish/Arabic/English

- Coverage of Turkish violations
- International voice for Kurds

Kurdistan 24 (KRI): Pro-KDP

- Real-time information

Rojava TV (Syria): Pro-SDF

- Broadcasting from northeast Syria
- Often targeted by Turkish strikes

ANF (Firat News Agency): Pro-PKK

- Based in Europe
- Covers repression in Turkey

11.4.2 Social media:

- **Twitter/X:** Hashtags #TwitterKurds, #SaveKobani
- **Verified videos:** Documentation of war crimes
- **Diaspora:** International amplification

11.5 Russia's role (RT)

11.5.1 Russian narrative (2014-2024):

- **Tactical support** for Kurds against Turkey (when useful)
- **Reversal:** Abandonment of Kurds to appease Ankara (Afrin 2018)
- **2026:** Withdrawal from Syria, no more influence

Historical objective: Use Kurds as leverage against NATO/United States

Source: Washington Institute, "Russia and the Kurds"

11.6 Information warfare: Who wins?

11.6.1 Turkish advantages:

- Control of domestic media
- Massive resources
- Influence on Arab media

11.6.2 Kurdish advantages:

- Active diaspora (2 million in Europe)
- Western sympathy (fight against IS)
- Social media (circumventing censorship)
- Documentation of violations (videos, testimonies)

11.6.3 Key battle:

International perception: Kurds as "freedom fighters" vs "terrorists"

- **West:** Generally favorable (SDF = anti-IS allies)
- **Turkey/Arab world:** Terrorist narrative dominates
- **Stakes:** Maintaining US/European support

12 Covert operations and shadow warfare

12.1 Assassinations of Kurdish leaders

12.1.1 By Iran

Abdul Rahman Ghassemloou (1989, Vienna)

- **Who:** PDKI Secretary General
- **When:** July 13, 1989
- **Where:** Vienna, Austria (secret negotiations)
- **How:** Assassinated with two associates by Iranian agents during "peace negotiations"
- **Identified agents:** Mohammed Jafari Sahraroudi (Iranian diplomat)
- **Consequences:** Austria issued arrest warrants, never executed
- **Message:** Iran strikes even in Europe

Sadegh Sharafkandi (1992, Berlin)

- **Who:** Ghassemloou's successor at PDKI
- **When:** September 17, 1992
- **Where:** Mykonos Restaurant, Berlin, Germany
- **How:** Assassinated with 3 other Kurdish activists
- **Trial:** "Mykonos trial" (1993-1997) - German court established order came from top of Iranian regime
- **Verdict:** Direct involvement of Ali Khamenei and President Rafsanjani
- **Impact:** EU-Iran diplomatic crisis

Source: Wikipedia, "Mykonos restaurant assassinations"; PDKI.org

12.1.2 By Turkey

Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan, Leyla Saylemez (2013, Paris)

- **Who:** 3 Kurdish activists (Sakine = PKK co-founder)
- **When:** January 9, 2013
- **Where:** Kurdistan Information Center, Paris
- **How:** Executed by gunfire
- **Suspect:** Ömer Güney (alleged MIT agent - Turkish intelligence services)
- **Status:** Güney died in prison before trial (2016)
- **Theory:** MIT operation to sabotage PKK-Turkey peace process

Source: The Guardian, BBC, Le Monde

12.2 Diaspora surveillance

12.2.1 MIT (Turkish intelligence) in Europe

Documented operations:

- **Surveillance:** Spying on Kurdish activists in Germany, France, Belgium
- **Infiltration:** Agents infiltrated in Kurdish associations
- **Kidnapping:** Cases of Kurdish activists "disappeared" in Europe then found in Turkey
- **Pressure:** Threats on families remaining in Turkey

Notable case (2021):

- Germany expels Turkish agents for spying on Kurdish diaspora
- Diplomatic scandal

Objective: Prevent funding and political support for PKK from Europe

12.2.2 IRGC (Iran) in Europe

Operations:

- **Surveillance:** PDKI, Komala, PJAK activists
- **Assassination attempts:** Several foiled by European services (2018-2022)
- **Pressure:** On families in Iran

Notable case (2018):

- Foiled plot against PDKI gathering in France
- Iranian diplomat arrested in Germany
- EU-Iran diplomatic crisis

Source: Europol, European intelligence services

12.3 Infiltration and betrayals

12.3.1 Within Kurdish parties

Exploited divisions:

KDP vs PKK: Turkey exploits rivalry

- KDP sometimes shares intelligence with Turkey against PKK
- Accusations of "betrayal" between Kurdish factions

PUK internal divisions:

- Bafel vs Qubad vs Lahur
- Each faction has different links (Iran, United States, Turkey)
- Risk of infiltration by foreign services

Documented cases:

- **Double agents:** Several cases of Kurdish militants working for MIT or IRGC
- **Information leaks:** PKK military operations compromised
- **Targeted assassinations:** PKK leaders killed by Turkish drones thanks to informants

12.4 Secret economic warfare

12.4.1 Financial blockade

Turkey:

- **Account freezing:** Kurdish associations in Turkey
- **Bank pressure:** Blocking transfers to Syrian Kurdistan
- **Sanctions:** Companies doing business with KRI

Iran:

- **Sanctions:** Against KRI companies trading with Iranian Kurds
- **Border blockade:** Sporadic closure of border posts

United States:

- **Dilemma:** Support SDF but PKK on terrorist list
- **Workarounds:** Indirect funding via "humanitarian aid"

12.5 Cyber operations

12.5.1 Attacks on Kurdish media

Targets:

- **Rudaw:** Regular DDoS attacks
- **Kurdistan 24:** Hacking
- **PDKI/Komala sites:** Defacements

Suspected authors:

- Turkey (MIT)
- Iran (IRGC Cyber)
- Pro-Turkish hacktivist groups

12.5.2 Digital surveillance

Tools used:

- **Pegasus** (NSO Group): Used by Turkey against Kurdish activists
- **Spyware**: Infection of Kurdish leaders' smartphones
- **Interception**: Compromised encrypted communications

Revelations:

- **2021**: Pegasus used against Kurdish politicians in Turkey
- **2022**: Massive surveillance of Kurdish diaspora in Europe

Source: Amnesty International, Citizen Lab, The Guardian

12.6 Öcalan's ambiguous role

12.6.1 Theories on 2024-2026 peace process

Official version:

- Bahçeli proposes Öcalan address parliament (October 2024)
- Sincere peace process

Alternative theories:

1. Trap to disarm PKK:

- Turkey wants disarmament WITHOUT political concessions
- Öcalan used as bait
- Once PKK disarmed, increased repression

2. Compromised Öcalan:

- 25 years of isolation = possible manipulation
- Stockholm syndrome?
- Does he still serve Kurdish interests or Turkey's?

3. Erdogan's electoral calculation:

- Needs Kurdish votes to stay in power
- Peace process = electoral tactic
- Will be abandoned after elections

Internal Kurdish debate:

- **Optimists**: Historic opportunity to seize
- **Skeptics**: Repeat of 2013-2015 trap
- **Realists**: No trust without international guarantees

Source: Norwich University, January 2025; AP News

12.7 Regional conspiracies

12.7.1 Turkey-Israel-Kurds triangle

Theory:

- Israel uses Kurds to weaken Iran and Turkey
- Turkey sees "Zionist" plot to dismember country
- Erdoğan accuses Kurds of being "servants of Zionists"

Reality:

- Israel does indeed support Kurds (lobbying, intelligence)
- But no coordinated "plot"
- Convergence of strategic interests (anti-Iran)

12.7.2 US role

"Greater Kurdistan" theory:

- American plan to create independent Kurdistan
- Dismemberment of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria
- Control of oil resources

Reality:

- No evidence of such plan
- US supports territorial integrity of its allies (Turkey, Iraq)
- Support for Kurds = anti-IS tactic, not independence strategy

Propaganda:

- Theory popular in Turkey and Iran
- Used to justify repression
- Fuels anti-Western nationalism

13 Economic aspects

13.1 Iraqi Kurdistan (KRI)

- **Resources:** 45 billion barrels of oil reserves, natural gas, agriculture
- **Major problems (2026):** Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline closed since 2023, budget dependence on Baghdad, corruption, economic crisis
- **Recent agreement:** Oil export extension until March 2026 (230,000 b/d minimum)

13.2 Northeast Syria (AANES)

- **Resources:** Deir ez-Zor oil fields, agriculture ("Syria's breadbasket"), Euphrates water
- **War economy:** Turkish blockade, Syrian blockade, informal economy, limited international aid
- **American dependence:** Protection of oil fields, modest oil revenues

13.3 Kurds in Turkey and Iran

- **Turkey:** Poorest regions (southeast), chronic underdevelopment, economic discrimination
- **Iran:** Resource extraction without local redistribution, underdevelopment, high unemployment
- **Link to 2026 protests:** Iranian economic crisis triggered protests with strong Kurdish participation

14 Propaganda and information warfare

14.1 Turkish anti-Kurdish narratives

- **State media (TRT)**: Systematic presentation of Kurds as "terrorists"
- **Key narratives**: "No Kurdish question, only terrorism"; "Syrian Kurds = PKK"; "Servants of Zionists"; "Security zone for refugees"

14.2 Iranian disinformation

- **Regime tactics**: Pressure on families to deny murders on state TV, threats, denial, accusations of "foreign agents"
- **Censorship**: Internet shutdowns in Kurdish provinces, social media blocking, journalist arrests

14.3 Kurdish media and counter-narratives

- **Kurdish TV**: Rudaw (KRI), Kurdistan 24 (KRI), Rojava TV (Syria), ANF (pro-PKK)
- **Social media**: Twitter/X hashtags, verified videos documenting war crimes, diaspora amplification
- **Battle**: International perception as "freedom fighters" vs "terrorists"

15 Covert operations and shadow warfare

15.1 Assassinations of Kurdish leaders

- **By Iran:** Abdul Rahman Ghassemloou (1989, Vienna), Sadegh Sharafkandi (1992, Berlin - Mykonos trial)
- **By Turkey:** Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan, Leyla Saylemez (2013, Paris)

15.2 Diaspora surveillance

- **MIT (Turkey):** Surveillance, infiltration, kidnappings, pressure on families
- **IRGC (Iran):** Surveillance, assassination attempts, pressure on families

15.3 Infiltration and betrayals

- **Exploited divisions:** KDP vs PKK rivalry, PUK internal divisions
- **Double agents:** Several cases of Kurdish militants working for MIT or IRGC
- **Cyber operations:** DDoS attacks on Kurdish media, Pegasus spyware against Kurdish politicians

15.4 Öcalan's ambiguous role

- **Official version:** Bahçeli proposes Öcalan address parliament (October 2024), sincere peace process
- **Alternative theories:** Trap to disarm PKK without political concessions; Öcalan compromised after 25 years isolation; Erdoğan's electoral calculation
- **Kurdish debate:** Optimists see historic opportunity; skeptics see repeat of 2013-2015 trap; realists demand international guarantees

16 Future perspectives and possible solutions

16.1 Scenarios for 2026-2030

16.1.1 Scenario 1: Disarmament and integration (optimistic)

- **Conditions:** Successful PKK-Turkey negotiations, SDF integration into Syrian army, cultural autonomy for Turkish Kurds, maintained KRI autonomy
- **Obstacles:** Turkey refuses real political concessions, aims for disarmament WITHOUT Kurdish rights recognition, historical mistrust, no international guarantees

16.1.2 Scenario 2: Turkish invasion of Northeast Syria (pessimistic)

- **Trigger:** US withdrawal (fall 2026)
- **Consequences:** Massive Turkish offensive, ethnic cleansing (like Afrin 2018), millions displaced, IS resurgence, major humanitarian crisis
- **Probability:** 40-50% if US withdraws

16.1.3 Scenario 3: Fragile status quo (realistic)

- **Characteristics:** Minimal US presence maintained, continued Turkey-Kurd tensions, de facto autonomy in Syria (unrecognized), KRI maintains autonomy, continued repression in Turkey and Iran
- **Probability:** 40-45%

16.1.4 Scenario 4: Iranian collapse and new Kurdistan (transformative)

- **Trigger:** Fall of Iranian regime (2026 protests)
- **Consequences:** Emergence of autonomous Kurdish region in Iran, domino effect on Turkey, panic in Ankara, possible major regional conflict
- **Probability:** 15-20%

16.2 Possible solutions

16.2.1 1. Federalization

- **Model:** Regional autonomy within existing states
- **Advantages:** Respects international borders, KRI model in Iraq (relative success), acceptable to international community
- **Obstacles:** Turkey and Iran categorically refuse, post-Assad Syria uncertain, state nationalism

16.2.2 2. Kurdish confederation

- **Model:** Coordination between autonomous Kurdish regions
- **Advantages:** Strengthens Kurds collectively, no formal secession, economic and cultural cooperation
- **Obstacles:** Perceived as first step toward independence, opposition from all concerned states, internal Kurdish divisions (KDP vs PKK)

16.2.3 3. Independent Kurdish state

- **Advantages:** Realizes Kurdish national aspiration, end of discrimination and repression, international recognition
- **Obstacles:** **Unrealistic in short-medium term**, total opposition from Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq, no international support (even US/Israel), would trigger regional wars, 2017 Iraqi referendum failed

16.2.4 4. Democratization of existing states

- **Model:** Minority rights, pluralism, decentralization
- **Advantages:** Peaceful solution, benefits all minorities, potential international support
- **Obstacles:** Authoritarian regimes (Turkey, Iran, Syria), no political will, very long process

17 In-depth strategic analysis by region

17.1 ROJAVA (West Kurdistan - Northeast Syria): Critical strategic choices

17.1.1 Immediate context (January 2026)

- **Existential threat:** Imminent Turkish invasion if US withdrawal
- **Military weakness:** 70,000-100,000 SDF fighters vs 775,000 Turkish soldiers + drones
- **Diplomatic isolation:** No international recognition
- **Unique asset:** 900 US soldiers + indirect Israeli support

17.1.2 Option 1: Negotiation with Damascus

Strategy:

- Accept integration into Syrian state
- Negotiate administrative autonomy (Iraqi KRI model)
- Partial SDF disarmament → integration into Syrian army
- Maintain local structures (councils, YPJ)

Advantages:

- Protection against Turkish invasion (Damascus + Russia)
- International legitimacy
- End of economic isolation
- Access to Syrian resources

Risks:

- **Unreliable Damascus:** History of betrayals (1998, 2012)
- **Loss of real autonomy:** Assad could go back on promises
- **Future repression:** Once disarmed, Kurds are vulnerable
- **Base anger:** Kurdish population could reject compromise
- **Loss of revolutionary project:** End of democratic confederalism

How to minimize risks:

1. **International guarantees:** Involve UN, EU, Russia as guarantors
2. **Progressive disarmament:** Keep local security forces
3. **Constitutional autonomy:** Inscribe rights in new Syrian constitution
4. **Maintain US presence:** Even minimal, as insurance
5. **Coordination with KRI:** Iraqi Kurdistan support in case of problem

17.1.3 Option 2: Armed resistance

Strategy:

- Refuse any negotiation with Damascus
- Count on American/Israeli support
- Guerrilla warfare against Turkey if invasion

Advantages:

- Preserves total autonomy
- Maintains revolutionary project
- Kurdish diaspora support

Risks:

- **Humanitarian catastrophe:** Afrin 2.0 on large scale
- **Ethnic cleansing:** 2-3 million displaced
- **Military defeat:** Impossible to defeat Turkish army
- **IS resurgence:** Chaos benefits jihadists
- **American abandonment:** Trump can withdraw troops overnight

17.1.4 Option 3: Negotiated federalism (ideal but difficult)

Strategy:

- Negotiate federal Syria with Damascus and HTS
- Autonomous Kurdish region with parliament, budget, security forces
- Model: Iraqi Kurdistan or Catalonia (before 2017)

Necessary conditions:

- New Syrian government weak and divided
- Strong international pressure (EU, United States)
- Russian and American guarantees
- HTS acceptance (unlikely)

Advantages:

- Best of both worlds: autonomy + legitimacy
- International protection
- Possible economic development

Obstacles:

- **HTS refuses:** Islamists opposed to Kurdish autonomy
- **Turkey blocks:** Ankara vetoes any Kurdish autonomy
- **No precedent:** Syria historically centralized
- **Kurdish divisions:** KDP could sabotage (jealousy of PKK)

17.1.5 Strategic recommendation for Rojava

Short term (2026):

1. **Negotiate with Damascus** while maintaining SDF
2. **Intense lobbying** with Washington and Tel Aviv
3. **Coordination** with Iranian Kurds (if revolution succeeds)
4. **Preparation** for guerrilla if Turkish invasion

Medium term (2027-2030):

- Accept limited autonomy rather than total destruction
- Preserve social achievements (women's rights, pluralism)
- Build resilient institutions
- Maintain channels with all actors (Damascus, Turkey, United States)

17.2 ROJHELAT (East Kurdistan - Iranian): Historic window of opportunity

17.2.1 Revolutionary context (January 2026)

- **Massive protests:** Weakened Iranian regime
- **7 united Kurdish parties:** Unprecedented coordination
- **International support:** West against regime
- **Risk:** Imminent brutal repression

17.2.2 Option 1: Armed insurrection (decisive moment)

Strategy:

- Take advantage of regime weakening
- Coordinated uprising in Kurdish cities
- Declaration of de facto autonomy
- Appeal to international community

Conditions for success:

- **Regime collapse:** National protests must succeed
- **Army defection:** Kurdish soldiers join insurrection
- **External support:** Weapons, funding (Israel? United States?)
- **Kurdish unity:** PDKI, Komala, PJAK coordinated

Advantages:

- **Unique opportunity:** Regime weakest since 1979
- **Momentum:** National protests create chaos
- **Popular support:** Kurdish population mobilized
- **Domino effect:** Iranian autonomy → pressure on Turkey/Syria

Risks:

- **Massive repression:** IRGC can crush insurrection
- **Isolation:** Kurds alone if national protests fail
- **Civil war:** Iran could sink into chaos (Syria 2.0)
- **Turkish intervention:** Ankara could invade to prevent Kurdish autonomy
- **Lack of weapons:** Iranian Kurds less armed than PKK or SDF

How to maximize chances:

1. **Coordination with national protests:** Do not act alone
2. **Secure borders:** Prevent IRGC intervention from Iraq
3. **International appeal:** Request immediate UN recognition
4. **Control key cities:** Mahabad, Sanandaj, Kermanshah
5. **Avoid provocations:** Do not declare independence (just autonomy)

17.2.3 Option 2: Negotiated autonomy (if new regime)

Strategy:

- If regime falls, negotiate with new Iranian government
- Demand federalization of Iran
- Model: Iraqi Kurdistan post-2003

Conditions:

- Fall of Islamic regime
- New democratic/weak government
- International support (United States, EU)

Advantages:

- Peaceful solution
- International legitimacy
- Economic development (Kermanshah oil)

Obstacles:

- Strong Persian nationalism (even in opposition)
- Fear of Iran's dismemberment
- Precedent for Azeris, Baloch, Arabs

17.2.4 Option 3: Low-intensity resistance (if repression succeeds)

Strategy:

- Maintain guerrilla in mountains
- Wait for next opportunity
- Preserve PDKI/Komala structures

Reality:

- Current status quo
- Continued repression
- No change before next crisis

17.2.5 Strategic recommendation for Rojhelat

Critical window (January-March 2026):

1. **Support national protests:** Do not isolate
2. **Prepare insurrection:** Weapons, coordination, targets
3. **Intensive diplomacy:** Contact US, Israel, EU
4. **Absolute unity:** 7 parties must remain united

If regime falls:

- Declare autonomy immediately
- Secure Kurdish cities
- Negotiate federalism with new government

If repression succeeds:

- Return to guerrilla warfare
- Preserve forces
- Wait for next opportunity (5-10 years)

17.3 BAKUR (North Kurdistan - Turkey): The peace process dilemma

17.3.1 Trapped context (January 2026)

- **Öcalan proposal:** Peace process via Turkish parliament
- **Historical mistrust:** 2013-2015 failure
- **Continued repression:** DEM Party, arrests, bombardments
- **No guarantees:** Turkey offers nothing concrete

17.3.2 Option 1: Accept peace process (risky)

Strategy:

- Öcalan calls for PKK disarmament
- Negotiations with Ankara
- Hope for political concessions

Potential advantages:

- End of war (40,000 deaths since 1984)
- Cultural rights (language, education)
- Release of political prisoners
- Economic development of Southeast

Enormous risks:

- **Trap 2.0:** Repeat of 2013-2015
- **Disarmament without reciprocity:** PKK surrenders arms, Turkey gives nothing
- **Increased repression:** Once disarmed, Kurds vulnerable
- **Öcalan betrayal?:** 25 years isolation, possible manipulation
- **Electoral calculation:** Erdogan abandons process after elections

What Turkey really wants:

- Total PKK disarmament
- End of support for SDF in Syria
- International legitimization of Erdogan
- **WITHOUT** autonomy, federalism or real political rights

What Kurds should demand:

1. **International guarantees:** UN, EU, US as guarantors

2. **Constitutional autonomy:** Federalization of Turkey
3. **Immediate release:** Öcalan, Demirtaş, all prisoners
4. **Linguistic rights:** Kurdish official language in Southeast
5. **Progressive disarmament:** Only after proof of good faith

17.3.3 Option 2: Refuse process (realistic but bloody)

Strategy:

- Reject Turkish offer as trap
- Continue PKK armed struggle
- Political resistance via DEM Party

Advantages:

- No disarmament without guarantees
- Preserves resistance capacity
- Maintains pressure on Ankara

Risks:

- Continued war (deaths, destruction)
- Increased repression
- International isolation (PKK = terrorist)
- Kurdish population fatigue

Reality:

- Current status quo
- Permanent low-intensity conflict
- No short-term solution

17.3.4 Option 3: Conditional process (smart)

Strategy:

- Agree to negotiate BUT with strict conditions
- Progressive and reversible disarmament
- Each step = concrete reciprocity
- Withdrawal if Turkey doesn't comply

Proposed phases:

Phase 1 (3 months):

- Turkey: Releases Öcalan, Demirtaş, 1,000 prisoners
- PKK: Unilateral ceasefire
- Verification: International observers

Phase 2 (6 months):

- Turkey: Linguistic rights, end of bombardments
- PKK: Withdrawal of fighters to Qandil
- Verification: UN

Phase 3 (1 year):

- Turkey: Cultural autonomy, free elections
- PKK: Disarmament of 50% of forces
- Verification: EU

Phase 4 (2 years):

- Turkey: Constitutional federalization
- PKK: Complete disarmament
- Verification: International

If Turkey betrays at any stage:

- PKK resumes arms immediately
- International proof of Turkish bad faith

17.3.5 Strategic recommendation for Bakur

Negotiating position:

1. **Demand guarantees:** Never disarm without reciprocity
2. **Progressive process:** Each step verifiable
3. **Reversibility:** Ability to resume arms if betrayal
4. **International support:** Involve EU, US, UN

If Turkey refuses:

- Continue resistance
- Strengthen DEM Party

- Wait for regime change in Ankara (post-Erdoğan)

Regional coordination:

- Link process to SDF autonomy in Syria
- If Rojhelat obtains autonomy (Iran), pressure on Turkey
- Unity of 4 Kurdistans = negotiating strength

17.4 Inter-regional coordination: Key to success

17.4.1 Why unity is crucial

Positive domino effect:

- Autonomy in Iran → Pressure on Turkey
- Autonomy in Syria → Model for Turkey
- Success in KRI → Inspiration for all

Negative domino effect:

- Defeat in Syria → Weakened morale everywhere
- Repression in Iran → Turkey encouraged
- KDP-PKK division → All weakened

17.4.2 Proposed coordinated strategy

2026 (critical year):

1. **Rojhelat:** Take advantage of protests, aim for autonomy
2. **Rojava:** Negotiate with Damascus, maintain SDF
3. **Bakur:** Conditional negotiations, no naive disarmament
4. **Bashur (KRI):** Diplomatic and economic support

Necessary coordination:

- Meeting of leaders (Mazloum, PDKI, Öcalan via lawyers, Barzani)
- Common strategy facing Turkey
- Resource sharing (KRI helps Rojava/Rojhelat)
- Unified diplomacy (diaspora, lobbying)

Obstacles to unity:

- KDP-PKK rivalry (historical)
- Different ideologies (Marxist vs tribal vs moderate Islamist)
- External manipulation (Turkey supports KDP against PKK)
- Divergent interests (KRI wants stability, PKK wants revolution)

How to overcome divisions:

1. **Common threat:** Turkey threatens all Kurds
2. **Pragmatism:** Set ideology aside temporarily
3. **Mediation:** Respected figures (intellectuals, diaspora)
4. **Common goal:** Autonomy in 4 regions

17.5 Inter-regional coordination: Key to success

Why unity is crucial:

- **Positive domino effect:** Autonomy in Iran → Pressure on Turkey; Autonomy in Syria → Model for Turkey
- **Negative domino effect:** Defeat in Syria → Weakened morale everywhere; Repression in Iran → Turkey encouraged

2026 (critical year):

1. **Rojhelat:** Take advantage of protests, aim for autonomy
2. **Rojava:** Negotiate with Damascus, maintain SDF
3. **Bakur:** Conditional negotiations, no naive disarmament
4. **Bashur (KRI):** Diplomatic and economic support

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19 Conclusion: The Kurdish Question in the 21st Century

In January 2026, the Kurdish question remains one of the **most complex and explosive** in the Middle East. This document has demonstrated that:

19.1 Immutable realities:

1. **40 million Kurds** remain the world's largest stateless nation
2. **4 states** (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria) oppose Kurdish independence
3. **No major power** fully supports Kurdish independence
4. **Internal Kurdish divisions** (KDP vs PKK, Bafel vs Qubad) weaken the movement

19.2 Changing dynamics (2026):

1. **Assad's fall:** Historic opportunity in Syria, but increased Turkish threat
2. **Protests in Iran:** Possibility of a 4th autonomous Kurdistan
3. **Israeli support:** New crucial factor maintaining American engagement
4. **Turkish drones:** Technological change making Kurds more vulnerable
5. **Öcalan peace process:** Potential trap or real opportunity?

19.3 Rarely stated truths:

19.3.1 Why Kurds cannot win alone:

- Turkey = 2nd largest NATO army (775,000 soldiers, drones, F-16s)
- Iran = IRGC, systematic repression, missiles
- Iraq = Budgetary control, Iranian influence
- Kurds = 70,000-100,000 SDF fighters, 5,000-10,000 PKK, light armament

19.3.2 Why Kurds survive despite everything:

- **Geography:** Mountains, strategic position
- **Demography:** 40 million, youth, birth rate
- **Tactical alliances:** United States (Syria), Israel (lobbying)
- **Diaspora:** 2 million in Europe, political influence
- **Collective memory:** Century-old resistance, strong identity
- **Geopolitical utility:** Proxy against Iran, anti-IS fight

19.4 The impossible equation:

KURDS WANT: Autonomy/Independence

STATES REFUSE: Fear of dismemberment

WEST HESITATES: Turkey = NATO > Kurds

RESULT: Bloody status quo

19.5 The 2026 window:

19.5.1 Opportunities:

- Potential collapse of Iran
- Weakness of new Syrian government
- Growing Israeli support
- Iranian Kurdish coordination (7 united parties)

19.5.2 Threats:

- Possible US withdrawal (fall 2026)
- Turkish invasion of Northeast Syria
- Increased repression in Iran and Turkey
- KRI oil crisis (agreement expires March 2026)

19.6 2026-2030 prediction:

Most likely: Fragile status quo (40-45% probability)

- De facto autonomy in Syria and Iraq
- Continued repression in Turkey and Iran
- Permanent low-intensity conflicts
- Maintained dependence on United States

Worst scenario: Turkish invasion (40-50% if US withdrawal)

- Ethnic cleansing in Syria
- Millions displaced
- Islamic State resurgence

Best scenario: Federalization (15-20%)

- Recognized autonomy in 4 states
- Guaranteed cultural rights
- End of armed conflicts

19.7 Final message:

The Kurdish question will **never be resolved by force**. Neither can Turkey eliminate 40 million Kurds, nor can Kurds defeat 4 national armies.

The only sustainable solution: Recognition of Kurdish rights, regional autonomy, federalism, and end of repression. But in 2026, this solution remains **politically impossible** for Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus.

Thus, the **cycle of violence continues**: Repression → Resistance → Repression → Resistance...

The Kurds will survive. They survived the Ottoman Empire, Saddam Hussein, the Islamic State. They will survive Erdogan, Khamenei and Assad.

But at what cost? **40,000 deaths since 1984. How many thousands more before peace?**

Document created January 13, 2026

Warning: This document reflects the situation as of January 13, 2026. The situation evolves extremely rapidly in the Middle East. Developments can significantly modify the described dynamics in just a few days.

To go further:

- Follow ISW (Institute for the Study of War) for daily updates
- Consult Rudaw and Kurdistan 24 for Kurdish perspective
- Read Norwich University and Washington Institute for in-depth analyses
- Monitor Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International for human rights violations