

AVASÎN

newsletter





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Who we are

Peoples Bridge — is an institution dedicated to defending the autonomous region of Northeast Syria and, beyond that, the areas of Kurdistan. The more than decade-long revolution in Rojava, which implements progressive values such as democratic self-determination, climate justice, equality of peoples, and women's liberation, must be carried into Europe. The July 19 Revolution in Rojava has opened a new door on the path to freedom for the Kurdish, Arab, and regional peoples. It broke the colonial chains by implementing democratic and libertarian power and the will of the peoples, without supporting reactionary forces under the conditions of the reactionary civil war. The women led the women's revolution on a gender-liberating line and organized women's self-defense.

Given the increasingly sharp attacks on Rojava's revolution by the fascist Turkish state, we in Europe have a special responsibility. As migrants from the Middle East, workers, students, and progressives, we feel obligated to defend the hope of all the oppressed of this world, as reflected in the new societal form in Rojava. This means not only defending the revolution but also supporting social reconstruction. Organizing solidarity with besieged Rojava/Northeast Syria, conducting activities to strengthen the revolution's infrastructure, and organizing support for problems requiring technical, logistical, and skilled labor are the main tasks of our time.

Peoples Bridge aims to strengthen solidarity with Kurdistan and organize a unity that carries the needs and necessities of the revolution into Europe's working class. We will strengthen the bridge between peoples, we will expand solidarity with Rojava/Northeast Syria.

PREFACE

Over the past weeks, the situation in Syria has once again come to the forefront. The exceptionally successful offensive by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which overthrew the Assad regime in just a few days, has completely altered the power dynamics within the country, with far-reaching consequences for the entire Middle East.

Due to numerous often contradictory reports about the recent events, it is often difficult to stay up to date. With this brochure, we aim to contribute to the wider understanding of the new situation. It can serve as a basis for further discussions and provide an entry point into the topic. In particular, we want to focus on how this will affect self-administration in Northern and Eastern Syria.

Please feel free to contact us with any criticism or questions!

Website: **peoples-bridge.org**

Instagram/X: **@peoples_bridge**

E-Mail: **info@peoples-bridge.com**



SYRIA AS A STAGE FOR IMPERIALIST INTERESTS

The Syrian Civil War, despite its name, is not just a war between Syrians with different political views and other visions for the future of their country. A multitude of imperialist powers have been and still are actively involved in the fighting and have shaped the course of the war. Every significant group within the war has been backed by an imperialist actor. Syria has become a chessboard for regional and world powers and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Even after the victory over the regime, the country is far from being a truly sovereign state. In the following article, we aim to provide an overview of the geopolitical interests of the individual powers.

The main actors here are Iran, Russia, Turkey, the United States, and Israel. While Russia and Iran have supported Assad throughout the entire conflict, the USA has been working for many years to diminish Russian influence in Syria and to destabilize all allies of Iran. Turkey, on the other hand, supports Islamist rebel groups. While the Syrian National Army (SNA) is a pure Turkish proxy force that does not make or even could make independent decisions, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) enjoys a greater degree of independence from Turkey. Nevertheless, even they could not have carried out the recent offensive without Turkey's support and consent.

Russia

The cooperation between Russia and the Assad family has existed since their seizure of power and beyond. For the Soviet Union during the Cold War, states that did not submit to NATO imperialism became allies, including Syria. Through these states, the USSR could consolidate its power in the region, including the Mediterranean, and restrict the freedom of movement of NATO forces. The Red Army of the Soviet Union was instrumental in professionalizing the Syrian armed forces, equipping them with all necessary weapon systems, from pistols to fighter jets. Even after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia remained the closest ally of a politically largely isolated Syria. During the civil war, the Russian army increasingly intervened in the fighting over time and steadily expanded its power position. Currently, there are several strategically valuable Russian bases in the country. The most important base is the Russian port in Tartus, which grants the state access to the Mediterranean. Especially for Russia's ambitions to become the leading imperialist power on the African continent, this port is of irreplaceable significance. Without it, moving resources and troops between Russia and African states would be significantly more challenging.

On the other hand, the airbase in Latakia allows Russia to conduct attacks with its fighter jets throughout the Middle East, thus countering the numerous US airbases in the region. Even after the fall of the regime, Russia holds onto these bases. If Russia manages to secure an agreement with the new Syrian rulers that would allow it to remain operational in the region, it is expected that Russia would quickly come to terms with the new circumstances.

Iran

Iran claims to be a regional power. To substantiate this claim, it maintains a broad network of militias that militarily confront its geopolitical competition: the "Axis of Resistance." The most well-known members of this axis, besides Iran itself, are Ansar Allah (Houthi rebels) in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine. The Assad regime played a central role within this alliance, as it allowed Iran to deliver weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas through its territory. Hezbollah also played a key role in the civil war, participating in numerous battles on Assad's side, primarily to protect the aforementioned essential weapons pipeline.

HTS has repeatedly labeled Iran and Hezbollah as its greatest enemies and has no intention of allowing Iran to continue delivering weapons through the territory it now controls. Thus, Iran can be considered the biggest loser of the war, now having significantly reduced means to strengthen the Axis of Resistance.

Turkey

Turkey's primary goal is to crush the self-administration, viewing it as a threat to its own country's stability. As long as Rojava exists, it serves as an inspiration for rebellion among the approximately 20 million Kurds living within Turkey's borders.

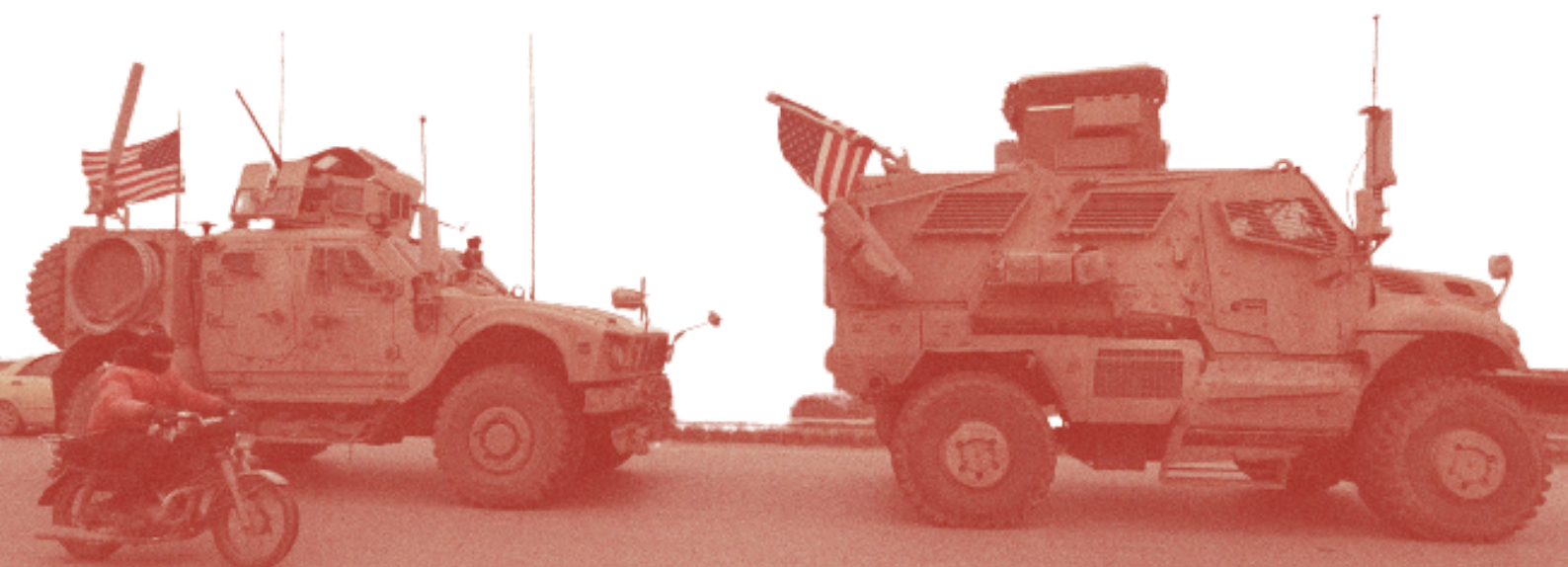
This priority of the Turkish state is evident from the fact that during the recent offensive, its proxy forces, the SNA, did not liberate a single village from the Assad regime but fought exclusively against the forces of the self-administration.

Additionally, Turkey also claims to be a regional power. The dominant ideology within the Turkish state, "Neo-Ottomanism," considers large parts of Syria, like Aleppo, as rightful Turkish territory that was stolen after World War I. By expanding the territory of its proxy army and the power takeover by a militia dependent on it, Turkey could emerge as a significant geopolitical winner from the offensive.

USA

The USA pursued two objectives in Syria: on one hand, to break the influence of its two major adversaries - Russia and Iran - in the region, and on the other, to establish a strong starting position for its extended arm in the region, Israel, from which it could further expand its hegemonic claims. They were aware of the crucial role Syria played in this power game. Therefore, they wanted to replace the Assad government with an anti-Russian, anti-Iranian but pro-American force. For this goal, America armed virtually every group that stood against the regime. Many militias that are now part of HTS and SNA were originally set up with American support. If the FSA (Free Syrian Army) or another group had succeeded in overthrowing the regime early on, there would have been no military alliance with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); quite the opposite: the United States would have most likely actively helped the new rulers combat the self-administration.

The alliance with the SDF arose from mutual necessity: The USA needed a stable partner in the region to have the opportunity to maintain military bases in the country to limit Russia's room for maneuver. On the other hand, the SDF urgently needed a capable ally in the fight against the Islamic State and as security against their enemies. If the USA ultimately decides that it can better pursue its geopolitical interests with the "Syrian Salvation Government" as a partner rather than with the self-administration, it will promptly drop the SDF.





THE OPPRESSION OF KURDS IN SYRIA

The Kurds, the largest people without a nation-state of their own, are native to historical Kurdistan – the land of the Kurds. In the wake of the First World War and the impending dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the first treaties between imperialists were established, aiming to divide the region among themselves.

In 1916, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was signed for the partitioning of Kurdistan between France and Great Britain. In 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was ratified, granting the Kurds the right to autonomy with prospects of independence. With their victory over Greece, Turkey managed to improve its poor starting position from the Treaty of Sèvres, going into new negotiations with the imperialists with more strength. Finally, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923. This treaty solidified the division of the Middle East among the imperialists – to the disadvantage of the Kurds, who were left empty-handed.

Kurdistan was divided into four and turned into a colony of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. In all four states, a defamatory policy was implemented, and the self-determination of the Kurds was ignored; this is a consensus across state borders among the colonialists of Kurdistan - with differences in the degree of suppression not being significant.

The subject of this article is the **systematic suppression** of the Kurds in Syria. Currently, following Bashar Al Assad's abdication, there are scenes of great celebration throughout the country – including in the areas of the Democratic Self-Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria. Given the fact that the revolution has persisted for more than ten years alongside Syria's central administration, some might wonder why the Kurds are celebrating the end of Assad's rule. This article is intended to serve as an answer to that question.

With over 10 percent, the Kurds represent the largest ethnic minority in Syria. After the French mandate ended in 1946 and Syria declared its political independence, the Kurds hoped for political participation.

In 1957, Nûredîn Zaza and Osman Sabri founded the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Syria. The party's leadership was promptly arrested, and the party never received official recognition, thus never managing to transcend its role as an underground organization.

Immediately after the dissolution of the short-lived union of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt (from 1958 to 1961), the newly formed Syrian state defined itself as an Arab Republic

In 1962, an extraordinary census took place during which 120,000 Kurds were stripped of their citizenship. Overnight, they became stateless.

These people lost the right to own land, to vote, or to marry someone with a Syrian passport. They became prisoners of Syria because they were not issued internationally recognized passports and thus could not leave the country. The state portrayed the Kurds as a threat to the Arabs of Syria and promoted anti-Kurdish sentiments. The stateless Kurds were divided into two groups: 1. the "**Adschanib**" (Arabic for foreigners) and 2. the "**Maktumin**" (Arabic for "hidden"). The Adschanib received identity documents, whereas the Maktumin received no documents and, for example, could not obtain school-leaving certificates or pursue higher education.

In 1965, the plan for an "Arab belt" in Syrian Kurdistan was conceived. The initiator of this plan was Hafiz al-Assad's Ba'ath Party. The oil fields of Rojava were to be guarded through demographic change by Arabs. Repressions increased: Kurdish place names were Arabized, the use of Kurdish was banned in schools, media, and workplaces. In schools, the Kurds and their history were systematically denied. Kurdish names and literature were also subjected to repression. Over 100,000 Kurds were supposed to be resettled and replaced by Arabs. However, the economic backwardness of the Kurdish areas made it difficult to settle Arabs there who only saw disadvantages in the prospectless regions. Despite all adversities and repressions, the Kurds did not leave their homeland and resisted the plan for the Arabization of the region.

Two objectives prompted Syria to implement these measures: To complement the existing political colonization with economic colonization and thereby complete it (to exploit Kurds under particularly harsh conditions, to exclude them from land reforms, and to use Kurdistan only as an agricultural reserve). The stateless were to become cheap labor that could not leave the country – without a passport, legal emigration is not possible. Through demographic change, to disrupt the Kurdish continuum and deprive Kurds of their homeland.

After the PKK took up armed struggle against Turkey in 1984, the Kurds had a glimmer of hope that inspired them to stand up for their identity. When thousands of Kurds participated in the **Newroz festivities in 1986** – wearing Kurdish attire and chanting Kurdish slogans – the Syrian police murdered several Kurds across Rojava. Thousands attended the funerals, leading to repeated clashes with the police. The protests were violently suppressed.

Following a football match in **Qamishlo in 2004**, conflicts arose again, this time between Kurdish and Arab fans. These conflicts culminated in a massacre. Accompanied by anti-Kurdish slogans, 9 people were killed by police gunfire. During the funeral ceremony for the deceased, further escalations occurred with deaths among the Kurds. The Kurds responded with several popular uprisings (Serhildans) in various cities of Rojava. There were attacks on government buildings and Ba'ath Party offices. At the commemoration of the Halabja massacre on March 16, the police opened fire on participants at the memorial. Over 30 people died within a few days, and nearly 200 were injured.

More than 2000 Kurds were affected by the subsequent waves of arrests and the use of torture methods.

The Ba'ath Party, which seized power in Syria in 1963, has the blood of many Kurds on its hands. However, neither the political nor the economic oppression of the Kurds managed to extinguish their longing for self-determination.



The Democratic Self-Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria

With the **Arab Spring** came regional uprisings directed against authoritarian Arab regimes. In 2011, these waves of uprisings reached Syria, and the ensuing civil war, as previously outlined, developed into a proxy war of various imperialist and regional states. The Kurds, at a high cost in blood, managed to defend the Kurdish-inhabited areas of Syria against the Islamic State (IS) and fought for de facto autonomy.

This revolution (the break from the central state of Syria) also extended to other Arab cities, integrating them into the system of democratic self-administration. The Rojava system underwent a transformation, thus acquiring a multi-ethnic and multi-religious character.

The **Rojava Revolution**, besides its grassroots democratic nature, is primarily a system of women's liberation. In the fight against IS, the YPJ (Women's Protection Units) played a crucial role, and women had their own militias. Moreover, the social contract of the democratic self-administration expanded and enforced many women's rights. This includes, for example, co-chair positions with gender parity; every leadership position consists of a dual leadership - with at least one woman. This ensures that women can shape the politics of the self-administration as subjects. Furthermore, polygamy for men and child marriage have been banned. There are women's courts that can be approached in cases of patriarchal offenses, women's shelters, and civil society organizations like Kongreya Star, which work to ensure these new rights are upheld - Kongreya Star, for example, has the right to demand accountability from the relevant council if a woman's rights are violated. Kongreya Star is dedicated a separate article in this brochure.

The grassroots democratic structure of the self-administration, with organization at the communal level (as well as at neighborhood, district, city, and cantonal council levels), allows minorities to protect their culture – for instance, education in one's mother tongue is a right for all. For the first time in the Middle East, there is an area where several ethnic and religious groups can shape their lives on equal terms. All these achievements were a thorn in the side of the Ba'ath government (and also for the imperialists and reactionary forces in the region). This pluralistic, women-liberating, and democratic system represents a watershed for the peoples. The divide-and-rule policy of the bourgeoisie is undermined by the existence of Rojava.

A people colonized for over a hundred years, which began to solve the national question in Syria, has every reason to rejoice at Assad's departure. However, it's important not to romanticize the current situation because the next danger is at the door: HTS, SNA, and NATO/Turkey, who all want to have a say in shaping Syria's future.

THE OPPRESSION OF KURDS IN SYRIA

The imperialists are currently trying to whitewash HTS and its leadership to be able to cooperate with them as the self-proclaimed "values-based West", while it is still listed as a terrorist organization – even in Turkey. If HTS adapts to NATO imperialism, ready to function as part of their power bloc, they will promptly be fully whitewashed and recognized.

With the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), the situation is quite different; it is only classified as a terrorist organization by Turkey, but aside from tactical-military alliances, no political relationship with the powers intervening in Syria has developed. The imperialists want to turn the AANES into a degenerate and collaborating force like the KDP to be able to recognize it politically. Because, as stated above, the current grassroots Rojava Revolution represents a system that is contrary to the policies of the ruling powers, which does not seem sustainable to them in this form.

It is crucial to demand recognition for the AANES and to take steps for this in Turkey, Kurdistan, and Europe, to organize actions and solidarity.

The achievements of the AANES are the achievements of the peoples and must be defended by all of us.

For a free Kurdistan - without oppression and assimilation!
For a democratic, free Syria – without Assad, without jihadists, and without imperialists!





WHO FIGHTS IN SYRIA?

Over 50 years of Assad's rule in Syria are over. The civil war, which seemed to be already won by Bashar al-Assad, completely turned around within less than two weeks. The Syrian Arab Army and its allies handed over the country to the advancing armed groups with virtually no resistance.

What exactly a future Syria without Assad will look like is currently not foreseeable. However, looking at the groups that are now coming to the forefront, one commonality can be clearly recognized: an ideology of radical Islamism. The only exception here are the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). It's easy to lose track with so many different groups. Therefore, with this article, we aim to provide some clarity about the organizations that will shape the future of Syria in the foreseeable time.

We must focus on the three most significant groups: the Syrian National Army (SNA), Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and the Islamic State (ISIS).

Syrian National Army (SNA)

The SNA is not a unified organization but rather a collection of numerous Turkmen and Arab militias. They are based in the areas of Rojava occupied by Turkey around Afrin, Girê Spî, and Serêkaniyê, and more recently in Minbic and Şehba. The various militias that make up the SNA each control their own territories within the occupation zone, and it's not uncommon for smaller conflicts to arise between them.

The SNA is not an organization with a cohesive worldview; the spectrum ranges from relatively moderate but still clearly Islamist groups like Faylaq al-Rahman to openly Salafist militias like Al-Jabha al-Shamiya.

The only thing holding these various organizations together is their common (complete) dependence on Turkey. Turkey conquered their areas of retreat in brutal wars against the Democratic Self-Administration, supplies the jihadists with weapons, trains them, acts as their air force, and in return holds command over the SNA. Nothing the SNA does can be done against Turkey's will. The character of the SNA as a proxy militia of Turkish fascism is most evident in the fact that numerous SNA soldiers have been sent to Libya and Armenia to commit war crimes there for Turkey's ambitions.

This was also evident in the recent offensive towards Damascus. While HTS captured city after city, the SNA did not fire a single shot at the Syrian regime and instead focused on conquering the regions of Minbic and Şehba, which were previously controlled by the self-administration.

Numerous videos, often spread by Turkish state media and SNA's own media channels, have also shown that **there are many ISIS fighters within the SNA**. As proved in recent weeks Many militiamen wear ISIS patches. The horrific war crimes already committed by the SNA in Minbic, including the execution of wounded SDF fighters in their hospital beds, strongly resemble ISIS tactics. The Turkish state has never distanced itself from the obvious influences of the Islamic State within the militias it controls, which is not surprising given that Turkey has also collaborated with the original Islamic State.



Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)

Since their surprisingly successful offensive from Idlib to Damascus, HTS and its leader Abu **Muhammad al-Julani** have been on front pages worldwide. They now hold power in Syria. The group was founded in 2017 and is classified as a terrorist organization by the West. There's a \$10 million bounty on al-Julani, primarily due to the history of the HTS founder.

Al-Julani left Syria in 2003 to fight as a militant of Al-Qaeda in Iraq against the US invasion. Al-Qaeda in Iraq split from the rest of the terror network in 2006 and established the Islamic State in the areas it controlled. Al-Julani thus continued his career in Iraq as a high-ranking ISIS official. In 2012, he returned to Syria, on the orders of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, with the task of establishing the Islamic State in Syria as well. That al-Julani was entrusted with such an important task by Baghdadi demonstrates a significant level of trust between the two men. Contrary to his current statements, al-Julani was not just a simple foot soldier unaware of what he was doing; rather, he was a high-ranking official of the most brutal terrorist organization of the 21st century and is highly responsible for its crimes.

Power struggles with Baghdadi led to Al-Julani's Al-Nusra Front not joining ISIS as planned but instead realigning with Al-Qaeda. Consequently, there were repeated smaller skirmishes between Al-Nusra and IS. In 2015, Al-Nusra and other armed groups took control of Idlib, the very city from which the decisive offensive against Assad recently launched. Here, Julani organizationally distanced himself from Al-Qaeda again to ensure his organization's ability to form alliances. This led to the split of Al-Nusra into Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (later Hayat Tahrir al-Sham / HTS) and Hurras al-Din. Hurras al-Din consisted of Al-Qaeda loyalists and became the new official representation of the network in Syria. There were sometimes fierce firefights between the organizations, during which HTS pushed Hurras al-Din to the brink of destruction. Therefore, describing today's HTS as an Al-Qaeda affiliate is incorrect. However, it's important to understand why al-Julani broke away from the network.

This was not due to ideological conviction but simply because he hoped to secure a better power position for himself and his organization, a plan that worked out completely. The biggest ideological difference between HTS and Al-Qaeda lies in the fact that HTS does not want to internationalize the fight. Its ambitions are confined to Syria. Al-Julani said in an interview:

“First and foremost, this region does not represent a threat to the security of Europe and America. This region is not a staging ground for executing foreign jihad.”



Here too, al-Julani acts strategically, not out of conviction.

His goal is to normalize relations with the West to give HTS room to consolidate its power in Syria. This context also explains his numerous lip service statements about Syrian pluralism and the necessity of democracy.

However, if we want to know how HTS will truly govern, we don't need to speculate. We just need to look at how they have governed their mini-state in Idlib in recent years. According to various human rights organizations and local activists, a brutal autocratic system was established there, one that makes political opponents disappear into unregistered prisons, systematically tortures (often journalists), and suppresses religious minorities. Just this September, there was a large wave of protests against HTS in Idlib, which was brutally crushed.

Al-Julani is the epitome of an opportunist who will do anything to secure his own position of power. Despite his speeches primarily aimed at a Western audience, his militia still consists largely of hardline jihadists who have committed numerous crimes since gaining power, such as the murder of those of different faiths. So far,

HTS has not conducted attacks against the self-administered areas; even the completely encircled neighborhoods of Aleppo have not been attacked yet. Nevertheless, HTS is highly financially dependent on Turkey. For instance, despite its relatively high level of autonomy, it could not have carried out the Aleppo offensive without Turkey's approval. Therefore, it is almost certain that HTS, due to both political conviction and its dependence on Turkey, will attempt to destroy the self-administration sooner or later



Islamic State (ISIS)

Everyone is familiar with ISIS. In 2019, it was territorially defeated by the revolutionary forces but never completely crushed. It survived as an **extensive network of sleeper cells**. It continuously carried out attacks, extorted protection money, created safe havens in the Syrian desert, and worked continuously on its reconstruction. Thus, its structures were very well prepared for the chaos that followed HTS's offensive.

According to its own statements, it managed to expand the territory under its control in the desert and its sleeper cells conducted numerous attacks, especially in the Deir ez-Zor region. Its main goal remains **the liberation of its former fighters** from prisons. If, in the current situation, they successfully conduct a significant prison break, it is guaranteed that they will soon be able to control larger areas again.

It is also unclear how the numerous former ISIS members within the SNA and HTS would react to a resurgence of the organization. At a parade in the Alawite city of Latakia, some of them already waved the black flag of ISIS.

How the relationship between IS and HTS, led by its former commander, will develop in the future remains to be seen.

The fact is, the risk of a territorial revival of IS is at its highest since 2019.

The future of Syria is therefore deeply uncertain. Whether and to what extent conflicts will break out among the various Islamist factions will be revealed in time. The self-administration is now completely on its own within Syria and is the only force advocating for a democratic, diverse Syria.





THE KONGREYA STAR AND THE NEW ROLE OF WOMEN IN ROJAVA

Kongreya Star is the autonomous women's body of TEV-DEM, the civil society organization in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The political superstructure of the AANES consists of three parts: the self-administration (the communes, city councils, and cantons), the Syrian Democratic Council (which acts somewhat like the foreign ministry of the revolution), and civil society structures like TEV-DEM and Kongreya Star.

Kongreya Star deals with women's issues, initially exclusively in Kurdish areas, but with the spread of the revolution to other cities, ethnic groups, and communities, the character of the movement changed and it became multi-ethnic. One of the most significant achievements of the revolution is that there are additional **autonomous women's organizations** at all levels – whether in communities, unions, or militias. In all these areas, there are specific women's organizations specializing in protecting women's rights.

The co-chair system with gender parity ensures that women can be politically visible not only within women's organizations but become subjects of politics everywhere.

The practice of Kongreya Star includes, for example, organizing demonstrations for women's interests or protecting workers' rights when they are circumvented.

The most important legally enshrined rights of women.

The revolution has improved the role of women in society. The Middle East, where women's democratic rights lag behind those in the imperialist West, has experienced a watershed moment with the Rojava Revolution. Suddenly, women were represented in all political positions and even had their own militias.

Some additional rights that emerged from this include equality in all areas of life, including access to political power, employment, and wages. Women have the same rights as men before the law and within the judiciary. The issue of inheritance has been revisited and reformulated so that women are entirely equal to men in terms of inheritance rights.

The co-chair system, which guarantees a woman in every leadership position, reinforces the role and status of women in society. **The bans on forced marriage, polygamy for men, and child marriage**, mentioned in a previous article, were decided upon and enforced during the revolution. Divorces must be based on mutual consent, meaning a man cannot divorce a woman without her agreement. However, in cases of abuse or violence, a woman can divorce the man without his consent. Human trafficking and prostitution have also been outlawed.

All these are significant democratic achievements for women - particularly for those from Rojava, but generally for all women in the region.

Of course, these democratic achievements need to be complemented and completed with economic ones. Because only when capitalism, of which patriarchy is an integral part, is eliminated can we speak of true freedom where women can create a new world and realize themselves in every respect





When looking at the Middle East, one assumes that Syria is an Arab country. However, even though Syria is predominantly inhabited by Arabs, a closer look reveals a great diversity of peoples and religions.

The following article aims to address the diversity of Syria and offer perspectives on how the various peoples of Syria can live together in peace on equal terms. This includes not only acknowledging the existence of religious and ethnic diversity but also ensuring the **promotion of mother tongues, scripts, culture, and literature.**

In addition to Arabs, there are Kurds in Syria, who, with a population share of 10-12%, form the largest minority. There are also around 1 million Armenians, Arameans, and Assyrians, and less than 1 million Turkmens, Circassians, and Chechens.

Arabs or Assyrians who have fled from Palestine since the Nakba in 1948 up to the present day also have a different status in Syria, as they do not hold official citizenship. There are also former Iraqi refugees living in Syria.

Circassians form the smallest ethnic minority. They are a predominantly Muslim people from the North Caucasus who were expelled from the Caucasus (in the former Tsarist Empire) to the Ottoman Empire after the Russian-Caucasian War in 1864, and thus now live in Syria as well. Chechens, who were long included under the term Circassians, suffered the same fate.

Circassians have been strongly Arabized, leading to the loss of parts of their traditions, culture, and language.

Turkmens are a Turkic people originally from Central Asia, who have been settling in Syria for hundreds of years. Most of them converted to Islam in the 10th century. Assimilation did not spare them either, so over the long period, a large part of the people became estranged from their origins. The government ignored their autonomy, meaning they never had the right to their own media, culture, and education.

Assyrians are a people from ancient Mesopotamia (current area: Southeast Turkey, Northern Iraq, Western Iran, and Northeast Syria). They speak the Semitic language Neo-Aramaic and, like the **Arameans** and **Chaldeans**, have lived in today's Syria for thousands of years. They are, in a way, indigenous to the Syrian land and refer to themselves as Suryoye, the people of the tradition of Syrian Christianity. Their numbers have significantly decreased due to numerous massacres.

Arameans are also originally a people native to Mesopotamia. While Arameans now form a minority in the Middle East, the Aramaic language and script served as the official language for several dynasties and later for the entire Middle East. All languages, from the Roman Empire to modern India, whether Semitic or Persian, were written in Aramaic script. Many parts of the people were displaced and persecuted, whether by followers of other religions, states, or ISIS. A large part now lives in the diaspora.

Armenians are a people from the South Caucasus region, current Armenia, but also from Nagorno-Karabakh, areas occupied by Azerbaijan, and Turkey. They speak their own branch of Indo-European language and have their own script. Armenians, as well as Assyrians and other Christians, were driven out of Turkey after the genocides by the Young Turks in 1915 and fled to what is now Syria.

Syria is also characterized by **religious diversity**. Among the majority Muslims, there are three denominations, while Christians are divided into seven denominations. Furthermore, there are Yazidis, Alawites/Alevis, Druze, and a small number of Jews.

Demographically, various ethnic and religious groups live in their own neighborhoods, villages, and areas, as the Kurds do in Northeast Syria, but they all come together in major cities like Damascus.

This cultural diversity is a great asset to Syria, which has been put to the test by capitalist interests, the Syrian civil war, and the division of the people, and continues to be so today.

Thus, the ideology of **Pan-Arabism**, which was partly embraced by the Assad government, left no room for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The initial Pan-Arabist orientation gradually shifted towards Syrian nationalism as states like Iraq or Egypt moved away from the ideology.

Even though Assad often tried to rally minorities behind him to divide the Syrian society and portray Sunnis as terrorists, it's clear that he only used minorities for his own interests. The Syrian population has been suppressed, fought against, and exploited for power abuse by its own government for years, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

It's obvious that ISIS wages war against minorities, especially religious ones, but also those politically not aligned with the radical interpretation of Sunnism. The aim of ISIS is to establish a Caliphate that unites people based on faith and religious origin, thus nationalism is not recognized, and the self-determination of minorities is not even up for discussion. Under ISIS, Christians, whether Assyrian, Aramaic, or Armenian, were massacred and persecuted. The genocide against the Yazidis in 2014 is exemplary of how Islamists assert themselves against other religions when given the opportunity.

Now Assad has fled Syria, and the dictatorship has ended. Freedom for Syria was celebrated across the country. But what does the future hold for Syria? What does the current situation mean for ethnic and religious minorities? When HTS took Aleppo a few weeks ago, discussions arose about whether the militia would leave Christians in peace or drive them out. Propaganda videos show happy Christians in HTS-controlled areas. However, it's clear that under Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, there will not be equality for all religions in Syria. How violently or in what form HTS's Islamist ideology will manifest is still unclear. However, we can learn from how ISIS treated minorities and clearly see that under this militia, represented by a former ISIS member, no democratic and pluralistic government can emerge.

On the other hand, in Northeast Syria (Afrin, Minbic, and Serêkaniyê), the SNA (Syrian National Army) operates, implementing the interests of the Turkish state. The aim is to destroy the Autonomous Region of Northeast Syria, which emerged from the will of the peoples of Syria, and to expand Turkish territory. As the last 101 years of the Turkish Republic have shown, the national identity of the Turkish people is the supreme commandment, denying the existence of any other peoples and religions within its state territory. This policy is also pursued by Erdoğan in the occupied parts of Syria, which he claims as part of a neo-Ottoman empire.

The autonomous administration in Northeast Syria: A beacon of hope for the peaceful and democratic coexistence of all ethnic groups and religions.

In 2012, the Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria was established. What was initially a liberated area referred to by Kurds as Western Kurdistan (Kurdish: Rojava) has now become a diverse region where various peoples live. From what was once a small strip of land, a territory has emerged that extends beyond Kurdish borders to include regions like Raqqa or Deir ez-Zor. In the common struggle against the threats of ISIS, the Turkish state, and the SNA, the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) was formed, composed of militias from women, different peoples, religions, and tribes.

Together, they defend Northeast Syria and protect its population. The legal foundation of the autonomous administration is based on the values of democracy, pluralism, ecology, and women's liberation. Simply put, it can be described as an administration born out of a democratic revolution.



In the 2024 renewed Social Contract, the coexistence of peoples is legally established to exclude any form of preferential treatment or discrimination:

Art. 41

The Yazidi religion is an independent religion, and its adherents have the right to preserve their religious, social and cultural characteristics, and protect it from all types of assimilation and extermination through their institutions and the relevant institutions of the Democratic Autonomous Administration

Art. 46

Oppression, assimilation, cultural genocide, demographic change, occupation and rape are all crimes against humanity, and peoples and groups have the legitimate right to resist them.

Art. 60

Cultural, ethnic and religious groups and communities have the right to name and form their democratic organizations and institutions and to preserve their cultures. No person or entity has the right to impose its belief, thought, or culture on others through coercion.

Art. 92

2. The Democratic Council of Peoples consists of representatives of the peoples: Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmens, Circassians, and Chechens. The proportion of women is 50%. It also represents ideological and cultural groups such as Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, and others who fall under the jurisdiction of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

3. The Council considers the historical, demographic, geographical, religious, ideological, ethnic, and cultural structures and characteristics of all peoples and groups in its decisions and activities.

4. The Democratic Council of Peoples guarantees the right of peoples and groups to establish democratic, autonomous administrations. Its characteristics and ideological, ethnic, and cultural freedoms are legally guaranteed within the framework of the Social Contract.

Art. 107

Council of Religions and Beliefs:

It consists of representatives of religious institutions in North and East Syria, and representatives of the College of Religious Sciences. It works to facilitate the practice of all religious groups and beliefs in their worship and rituals in social life freely and according to their characteristics. It develops religious institutions that are consistent with the mentality of the democratic nation. It opposes fanatical and extremist concepts of the nation-state and non-democracy that differentiate between religions and sects and works to develop the ethics of freedom and the concept of tolerance between religions and beliefs.

The listed articles demonstrate that peaceful coexistence and the political freedom of peoples and religions are sought, while any form of division and discrimination is prohibited. The democratic revolution offers both in Northeast Syria and as a general model the possibility of uniting against chauvinism, assimilation, persecution, and war to build a communal life. Moments of resistance against the government, in which workers and all people in society come together, represent the opportunity to fight with their own will for free territories and peace among peoples. Uprisings, such as the Arab Spring in 2011, create moments in which democratic revolutions are a solution to implement the will of the people.

For it is clear, whether in the Balkans, Palestine, or Syria: occupation, assimilation, genocide, and wars between peoples are ultimately strategies of imperialist states and bourgeois governments to instrumentalize people, draw them to one side, and profit from the conflict.

For us, it is essential to recognize who our true enemy is. It is not the Arab, Kurd, or Christian next door, but capitalism, which forces us to hate one another and profits from it.

Long live the unity of the peoples!





Find us here:

Website: peoples-bridge.org

Instagram/X: [@peoples_bridge](https://www.instagram.com/peoples_bridge)

E-Mail: info@peoples-bridge.com

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