

# SDF'S STEPS TOWARDS PARTITION

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In a letter to the Arab League, the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) accused that the PYD militia's participation would threaten the unity and integrity of Syria and engage in violations that would further entrench the demographic change process and impose a secessionist reality by the force of arms. The accusation comes after the recent decisions issued by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, the civil arm of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which generally follows the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

The SDF was formed in 2015 as a multi-ethnic force to fight ISIS. It includes a Kurdish majority - some of them are the real leaders of these forces - while the rest 30% of the ethnicities constitute of Arabs, Syrians and others.

## Usurpation of Syrian wealth

The Syrian northeastern region is considered as Syria's richest area in terms of its natural resources. It has many oil fields in addition to being the main area for wheat, which cultivates most of Syria's needs. But when this region fell under the SDF, it seized all natural resources in its favor, and deprived the rest of the Syrians – those in Assad regime control and opposition control areas - from it.

On 30 July 2020, the SDF signed an agreement with a US company Delta Crescent Energy LLC to modernize the oil fields wells. The daily production of oil in Syria is now around 40,000 barrels per day, and the total reserves are estimated at 2.5 billion barrels and at least 75% of these reserves are in the fields surrounding Deir Al Zoor.<sup>1</sup> The current revenue from oil sales

goes to the US-backed SDF, which is around \$10 million a month. These revenues are expected to rise, should the US help in modernizing the current fields. The SDF can then sell the oil to Damascus and/or Kurdistan in Iraq, which in turn will be sold to Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

It seems that the US aims to keep the SDF - especially the Syrian Kurds - away from Russia. US-Russia relations turned sour after Russia allowed Turkey to invade Afrin in early 2018. But Russia is trying to mend peace between the SDF and the regime to force the US forces out of Syria. The US is also trying to mend the relations between the SDF and Turkey to gain more political benefits from both parties.

The SDF has its own tool of power. Its forces control many electric power stations and use it to further their agenda. Recently the SDF cut off the electricity in Turkish-controlled Operation Spring Peace areas for more than 15 days, thereby interrupting the power on the Alok water pumping station, which is the only source that supplied Al-Hasakeh governorate with water. Because of that nearly half a million people, including approximately 100,000 Internally Displaced Persons living in three different camps suffered due to the complete water blackout, on top of the severe heat that hit the area. People had to purchase water at high prices, which was beyond their budget.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, instead of ensuring water availability for the people in its controlled areas, began to accuse both Turkey and the opposition for depriving the civilians of water. It also used this incident for its own political gains. However, after two weeks of pressure from Turkey and Russia, the SDF restored electricity in the area, allowing the Alok station to pump water again to Al-Hasakeh.

Recently the SDF has issued act no. 7 which would administer the absentee – expatriate-property. It announced that it would form a committee to manage and invest expatriate

assets.<sup>3</sup> The act defines an “absentee” as any Syrian residing outside Syria permanently, with no first or second-degree relatives in Syria. This committee will have the right to invest and lease all the absentee’s property and deny them access to any benefit from their proceeds until they return to Syria and get the consent from the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria to recover their property.

This law declares a one-year penalty of imprisonment and/or a five million Syrian pounds fine for anyone who conceals, disposes of, or leases the property of an absentee or expatriate.

The Syrian Jurists Commission issued a statement stating that the Absentee Property Protection and Management Act violated the universal declaration of human rights by taking advantage of the Syrian absentees, refugees, missing persons in an illegitimate manner and forcibly displacing property, as well as imposing forced guardianship without allowing the property owner to decide how to administer his property.<sup>4</sup> The statement also said that the periods and procedures for reporting and challenging act no. 7 are similar to the Legislative Decree 66 and its act no. 10 issued by the Assad regime, which was also aimed at seizing the property of displaced persons.

This law provoked huge anger, rejection, and popular accusations to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria of using its de facto power to steal civilian property; which in the end forced the Autonomous Administration to retrogress and suspend the implementation of this act for further consideration and redrafting.

## Intellectual occupation

At the beginning of the current school year, the Autonomous Administration imposed a new Kurdish educational curriculum in all its regions, which prompted many Arab and Kurdish communities to register their children at Syrian private or public schools in order to have

an official recognized curriculum because the Kurdish curriculum has no official recognition yet.<sup>5</sup>

In a meeting with the Syrian education directorate, the board of education in the Autonomous Administration rejected an offer by the Assad government in which the Kurdish language was to be taught five hours weekly at certain school levels in their area while adopting the rest of the school lessons according to the state curriculum.

The curriculum was based on the Democratic Nation book, taken from PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan's vision. The new book describes Ocalan as the "first teacher", glorifying Kurdish personalities and struggle shown by the democratic union and its party. It also shows some children dressed in informal military attire in an attempt to encourage students to take up arms.

The new curriculum was met with much criticism because it neglected to talk about the Arab and Islamic culture and focused on religions and pagan cults that did not exist in the region. Moreover, the geography curriculum focused on "the greater Kurdistan state" which consisted of three areas from neighboring major countries: Turkish Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Iranian Kurdistan.



One of the Democratic Nation book pages showing the vision of Abdullah Ocalan

One of the geography book pages showing the greater Kurdistan borders

## Preface and prepare for separation

Disguised as democratic Syrian forces and their Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria civilian arm, the Kurdish separatist militias are trying to force the region under its control into a psychological, historical, social, and economic separation from the

motherland Syria by exploiting the US support to demographically rearrange the region, which will make its presence long-lasting even if political conditions change.

It is also trying to promote its separation ideas among the population, exploiting the earlier injustices of the Assad regime to the Syrian Kurds, in which they were deprived of their civil rights. It also tries to convince the people that their rights can only be guaranteed by its political administration, which is taking practical steps to realize some of the Kurds dreams.

The SDF sees the current situation in Syria as an opportunity to establish its secessionist project, taking advantage of the lack of international political will to support any political solution in Syria's democracy change. It is also using the Syrian regime's weakness after nine years of war, and the conflicting interests of main actors in Syria such as the US, Russia, Turkey, and Iran to extract more privileges and present itself as one of the main actors at Syria's negotiating table who will have a role in shaping Syria's political future.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> How Much Oil Is Up For Grabs In Syria ,? Oilprice , Oct 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2QXB1ON>
- <sup>2</sup> Previous source
- <sup>3</sup> The general council issues the absentee property protection and management act, 5/8/2020, <https://bit.ly/2Zuhrys>

- <sup>4</sup> After being controversial... "Self-management" stop its "manage absentee property "act, sham net ,12/8/2020, <https://bit.ly/33q7zXl>
- <sup>5</sup> "New Kurdish" curriculum in the northeastern regions of Syria, mmc-news, 16/7/2020 , <https://bit.ly/3bSXdDx>