

Map of Political Conflict in NES



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Introduction:

In March 2011, the popular protests started in Syria, calling for political and administrative reforms at the beginning. However, it later turned into a comprehensive conflict between internal and external parties. These conflicts turned into a global political and humanitarian crisis, due to the transformation of peaceful protests and demonstrations into military conflicts. Consequently, Syrian military factions related to external and regional agendas, were formed.

This crisis, which started as a local popular uprising but turned into a comprehensive conflict in which there are many actors on the ground inside and outside the country, has become a complex multi-party conflict. For there are many actors ranging between local and international ones and each party has its own aims and its own role. NES is considered part of this conflict, if not the most important or the most problematic part. It was one of the first geographical areas that participated in the popular protests, particularly the cities of Amouda and Qamishlo and later Raqqa and Deir Ezzor countryside. Dozens of youth groups were established, which later merged into gatherings and blocs. Some of them became members of the Kurdish National Council and some others became members of the Syrian National Council, while some others became members of the National Coalition for the Forces of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition.

Most of the political forces in Syria, whether opposing or loyal to the regime, meet and struggle in the geographical area, which was recently called the "East of Euphrates" and does not exceed %26 of Syria's area.¹ In addition to a clear conflict between most of the outside States, which are active in the Syrian case.

As a geopolitical term, "East of Euphrates," did not exist before the war began against ISIS in 2014. According to Google, this new term first was introduced into the media in 2015.² Practically, it refers to lands located in "East of Euphrates River," however, it does not refer to eastern Syria as some assume or believe. It rather includes several areas in northern, eastern, and northeastern Syria.

The term "northeastern Syria" came into use as a political perspective after the term "east of Euphrates." This term is more expressive of the Self-Administration's vision of the geography that it governs than the vision of the foreign countries' interests. As they are concentrated primarily in oil regions, most of which are distributed in the east of Euphrates. This term appeared as an administrative, geographical and political term; with the announcement of the Self-Administration for northeastern Syria areas, in September 2018. This was the last stage of the Self-Administration projects, so far, which was established in 2014 under the name of the "Democratic Self-Administration," and was followed in 2016 by the project "Rojava Federation - Northern Syria." This latter was changed to the "Federation of Northern

¹ Map of Military Influence in Syria, Jusoor for Studies, 1/6/2020, viewed on 8/15/2020, link: <https://Oi.is/OzMq>

² When searching for the term "East of Euphrates" in Google search engine, no results appear for the use of this term as a geopolitical term before 2015.

Syria." As for most foreign countries, they prefer to use the term "east of Euphrates," particularly USA. The Self-Administration and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) do not prefer to use the term "east of Euphrates", as it does not include Afrin region and Al-Shahba areas, which are under their control.

The area between north and east Syria; which is controlled by the Self-Administration, is approximately 48,146 km².³ It includes parts of the governorates; Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Aleppo, as well as Al-Hasaka governorate entirely. Its population ranges between 2 to 3.5 million; in the absence of accurate statistics and the large number of displacements in the region.⁴

After addressing the concept of the political conflict in NES through monitoring and analysis, it is important for all Syrian local, international and active forces in Syria, in general, and its northeast, in particular, to conclude answers for the following questions in order for any political party to be able to work properly. Politically, where does the conflict take place now? Where are the political inducements with regard to the involved parties in the conflict? What are the strategies and objectives of the followers? Perhaps the most significant factor here, is to acknowledge the strategy and objectives of the followed. What will facilitate understanding the reality of the political forces accurately is; acknowledging the political forces, understanding the nature of the conflict between them, in addition, its causes and consequences. Likewise, working correctly, to meet their interests and push the wheel of the political solution forward. This will help achieving stability in the region that witness conflicts which might develop into ethnic and national ones in case the problem is not solved.

The Political Forces in NES:

The political forces in NES vary between local and Syrian internal forces and international and regional external forces. Each force has its own interests, its own strategy related to its economy, its internal and external policies and its international relations. Also, each force (internal and external) has its allies to help achieve its goals and the most important of these forces:

Internally:

Most of the present forces in the Syrian political arena are in conflict in NES. Despite blocs that combine some of the large political forces in collective frameworks with other small forces; the active forces on the ground are those main parties and powers. Hence, due to the fact that the NES region in Syria is considered a region of multiple components, these main forces have, locally, established groupings and blocs with a number of parties. These parties represent the components of the region, nominally or practically. It also, created political and

³ The area of Syria is 185,180 KM² and %26 of this area equals 48,146 KM². These are rough estimates and their error rate is very small.

⁴ Sinan Hatahet, The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, MEDirections, translated by Maya Sawan, 12/27/2020, viewed on 8/23/2020, link: <https://0i.is/sAgH>

administrative bodies with them (the Self-Administration in NES) to represent all components of NES. However, practically, the political conflict remains confined to major forces, which control the conflict based on their interests and the interests of their allies. Most of the internal forces are linked to regional and international countries that support internal forces to serve their interests in the region and the most essential internal political forces in NES are:

The Democratic Union Party⁵ was founded in 2003, as a Kurdish Syrian party, by cadres of the Syrian Kurds. The party remained banned in Syria and its cadres were pursued until 2011, however, after the Syrian revolution, it gradually began to return to the Kurdish regions after the withdrawal of the Syrian regime forces. On December 2011, the party established "People's Council of Western Kurdistan" which became a local government that manages the Kurdish community and its regions in Syria. The council began establishing service institutions such as "People's House" and "Woman's House," etc.

The establishment of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan coincided with the Democratic Society Movement establishment in 2011. Although some of the movement leaderships do not differentiate between the People's Council of Western Kurdistan establishment and the Democratic Society Movement establishment, the movement had a political feature, as it is an extension of the (Kurdistan Community System - KCK-Rojava) project. For it was established in 2006 as an umbrella for the Democratic Union Party's political, social, youth and women's institutions.⁶

The movement has become a political umbrella for parties and organizations close to the Democratic Union Party. However, the movement, in its third conference held in August 2018, announced its abandonment of the political arena and heading towards the third field. This field is concerned with organizations, associations and professional unions.⁷ It gave the opportunity to the Syrian Democratic Council, which was established in January 2015, to carry out its political and administrative tasks.

The Syrian Democratic Council,⁸ was established in 2015 in conjunction with the first Riyadh conference that was held in January 2015, to which the Democratic Union Party was not invited. In fact, both of the Democratic Union Party and the Self-Administration consider the Syrian Democratic Council a major opposition force. It consists of a group of parties, forces and tribes that are Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac, all of whom are close to the PYD and are involved in the Self-Administration project.

⁵ Official website of the Democratic Union Party: <http://pydrojava.net/arabic/>

⁶ Program and Rules of Procedure of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of PYD's books, Book No. 6, 1st Edition, April 2007, P.63

⁷ Hawar Agency, the closing statement's full text of the third regular conference of the Democratic Society Movement (TEV DEM), 8/27/2018, viewed on August 22, 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2EnYt4H>

⁸ Official website of the Syrian Democratic Council, <https://m-syria-d.com/>

The Syrian Democratic Council supervised the establishment of the Self-Administration of NES in its current final form⁹ after the Democratic Society Movement announced its abandonment of the political field in its third conference. However, many leaders of the Democratic Society Movement are still within the leadership of the Syrian Democratic Council and the Self-Administration, such as; Ilham Ahmed, Amina Omar, Farhad Shibli, Amina Osei, Badran Chiya Kurd. These leaders are within the Democratic Society Movement, the Syrian Democratic Council and the Self-Administration.

Parties of the Kurdish National Movement: On May 19, 2020, the Democratic Union Party established a new grouping with 24 parties called (the Kurdish National Movement Parties).¹⁰ They are; the Kurdistan Democratic Peace Party, the Democratic Union (PYD), the Star Conference, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party (PKKS), Al-Khider Kurdistan Party (P.KESK.K), the Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, the Kurdish Left Party in Syria and the Kurdistan Liberal Union. In addition, the Kurdistan Fraternity Party (PBK), the Kurdish National Party in Syria, the Kurdistan Democratic Change Party, the Kurdistan Renewal Movement - Syria, the Democratic Struggle Party and the Free Kurdistan Azadi Party. The Free Patriotic Union - Rojava, the Kurdistan Republican Party - Syria, the Reform Movement - Syria, the Kurdistan Communist Party (KKP), the Kurdish Democratic Roj Party in Syria, the Kurd Future Movement, the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria and the Kurdistan Workers' Union Party. Likewise, the Kurdistan National Rally Party, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Accord Party, the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria "Al-Parti". Most of these parties are close to the Democratic Union Party and participate in the Syrian Democratic Council and the Self-Administration project. The establishment of this bloc was meant to be a participation in the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations that are taking place under American auspices with Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The Democratic Union Party and its affiliates, is considered the most powerful internal force that influences the political conflict in NES. Since it is the dominant force on the ground and has good publicity, in addition to the military and security power it has.

The Kurdish National Council,¹¹ which was established in October 2011, is one of the main forces in the Syrian Kurdish arena. This is in terms of having a good popular base and a political and economic support from the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Consequently, this has given opportunities for areas and channels of communication with a number of countries active in the Syrian issue, especially Turkey and the USA. As a matter of fact, about 13 parties belong to the Kurdish National Council. Such as, the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria, the Kurdistan Yakiti Party-Syria, the Kurdish Equality Party -Syria, the Kurdish National Democratic Party- Syria, the Kurdish Reform Movement- Syria and the Kurdistan Democratic Unity Party - Syria. In addition, the Kurdistan Left Party, the Kurdish Vanguard Party, the Kurdish Future

⁹ Kurdistan 24, "Democratic Syria" announces the establishment of the Self-Administration in NES, 6/9/2019, link: <https://Oi.is/ytjiv>

¹⁰ Hawar Agency, the formation of the "Kurdish National Unity Parties", 5/19/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://Oi.is/QOBC>

¹¹ The official website of the Kurdish National Council <https://www.r-enks.net/>

Movement - Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party “Parti” – Syria and the Kurdish Democratic Left Party- Syria. However, practically the two parties (Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria¹² and Kurdistan Yakiti - Syria¹³) are the two most fundamental parties within the council. In 2013, the Kurdish National Council joined the National Coalition for Forces of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition and it is still a member despite the many disputes due to violations of the factions that occupied Afrin, Serekaniye (Ras Al-Ain), and Tell Abyad.

In July 2020, the Kurdish National Council, along with the Assyrian Democratic Organization, the Syrian Tomorrow Movement and the Arab Council in Al-Jazeera and Euphrates, announced the formation of a political bloc under the name "Front for peace and freedom."¹⁴ This bloc is expected to compete with the Syrian Democratic Council, which also brings Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac and tribal forces together.

The influence of the Kurdish National Council in the political conflict in NES is pivotal and efficient to a large extent. It is a political force that has good publicity, relations across the Syrian border and accurate relations with the Syrian opposition. It also, is represented within the National Coalition, the Negotiating Committee and the Constitutional Committee.

The Kurdish National Alliance in Syria,¹⁵ is a Kurdish alliance, founded in February 2016, consisting of 5 Kurdish parties, all of which have become part of the Syrian Democratic Council and the Self-Administration. They include the following; (The Kurdish Democratic Party “Al-Parti” in Syria¹⁶ - department/Nasreddin Ibrahim, The Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria¹⁷, the Kurdish Accord Party in Syria, the Kurdish Reform Movement in Syria - department / Amjad Othman, the Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria – department / Saleh Kdo). All coalition parties are also within the Kurdish National Unity Party, except for the Unity Party. The coalition's activities are currently frozen and it has no influence in the political arena in NES, contrary to what some observers had hoped that the coalition would be the third force in the Kurdish political arena in Syria.

The Future Syria Party:¹⁸ It was founded in March 2018 and is currently headed by Ibrahim Al-Qaftan. It is one of the parties close to the Self-Administration and the Democratic Union Party, however it has not yet enjoyed complete independence.

Freedom and Peace Front: It was founded in July 2020 and includes the Kurdish National Council composed of a number of Kurdish parties. Also, it is a member of the coalition and the Assyrian Democratic Organization,¹⁹ which was founded in 1957. Likewise, it is a member of the coalition and the Syrian Tomorrow Movement; a political Arabic body, most of its

¹² The official platform of the Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria <https://www.pdk-s.com/app/>

¹³ The official website of the Kurdistan Yakiti Party – Syria <https://ara.yekiti-media.org/>

¹⁴ The Kurdish National Council in Syria, the announcement of the “Peace and Freedom Front” establishment in Qamishlo, 7/28/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://www.r-enks.net/?p=25866>

¹⁵ The official platform of the Kurdish National Alliance in Syria <https://www.facebook.com/hevbendi/>

¹⁶ The official website of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (Al-Parti) <http://57nuce.com/>

¹⁷ The official website of the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria <https://www.yek-dem.com/>

¹⁸ The official website of the Future Syria Party: <http://fs-party.com/>

¹⁹ The official platform of the Assyrian Organization Media Office <https://www.facebook.com/ADONews/>

supporters are from the Arab Shammar tribe and the Arab Council in Al-Jazeera and Euphrates. The Syrian Democratic Council applauded the establishment of the front through an official statement on its behalf.²⁰ It is expected that the front will be a strong actor in the political arena in NES.

A group of parties that are not affiliated with any bloc remains in the Kurdish arena, the most important of which is the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party in Syria. It is an old party that considers itself the heir of the first Kurdish party in Syria and was a member of the Kurdish National Council, however it pulled out of the membership in 2015. It has signed with the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria²¹, a document of understanding and a joint action. It is considered a unified political document between the two parties and its influence in the Kurdish political arena is strong, however it classifies itself as neutral in the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict.

As for Arabs, the effective political and influential power on the ground is depicted in the Arabic tribes and their sheikhs. Some Arabic regions, in NES, still maintain the traditional aspect of running their affairs through the tribe and the clan.

Most of the clans are not organized politically and organizationally in terms of bodies, committees, or organizational offices for the tribe and clan. Likewise, few of them have organized themselves into a number of frameworks and blocs, especially those that live outside NES (Turkey or Europe). Part of them joined the Self-Administration under different names, such as; the Arab National Authority and the Democratic Conservative Party. The most important Arabic clans located in NES are; (Al-Bushaabān Al-Zubaidiya, Al-Uqaydat, Al-Bakara, Al-Busaraya, Al-Shammar, Al-Walidah, Al-Sabkha, Al-Jabour, Tayy, Al-Mshahdhah, Al-Maamrah, Al-Sharabeen, Al-Juhaish²² etc).

Despite the denial by some residents of NES of the tribe's influence in managing the affairs of society and directing members of the tribe politically, ground facts proved the opposite. For example, what happened in Deir Ezzor after the assassination of a sheikh from Al-Uqaydat tribe proved that the clan and the tribal protectiveness still exist and control a great number of NES inhabitants. Moreover, that the tribe may play a major role in politics, particularly in the absence of real and organized political bodies in the Arabic regions.

As for the most fundamental Arabic political blocs in NES, they are listed as the following:

The Arab Council in Al-Jazeera and Euphrates²³, established in 2018, has good relations with the Tomorrow Movement and its president is Ahmed Al-Jarba. It opposes the Self-Administration; however, it is not close to the Syrian opposition and Turkey. It is one of the

²⁰ The Levant News, A Bringing of Viewpoints: The Syrian Democratic Council Applauding the Peace and Freedom Front Establishment, 3/8/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3js87T3>

²¹ The Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria, the Unity and Kurdish Progressive Parties in Syria announce a joint work pact between them, 15/5/2019, link: <https://www.yek-dem.com/?p=6552>

²² For more about the Arab tribes, see: Usama Aghi, Clans of Eastern Syria, MENA Research and Studies Center, February 22, 2019, viewed on 8/23/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/31jv15a>

²³ Official platform of the Arab Council in Al-Jazeera and Euphrates, <https://bit.ly/2YMvBdC>

founders of the Freedom and Peace Front announced by both the Kurdish National Council and the Assyrian Organization Democracy and Syria's Tomorrow Movement.

The Arab National Authority, established in 2012, is a member of the Syrian Democratic Council and is represented by the Self-Administration. Its impact on the political conflict is very little.

The Democratic Conservative Party:²⁴ It was founded in 2017 by Daham Al-Hadi, the sheikh of the Arab Shammar tribe and it is within the Syrian Democratic Council. It is represented by the Self-Administration and its influence in the political conflict is little, as it is not as influential as the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Union Party. However, it is not a formal party because it has a good popular base from the Shammar tribe and has a military force named Al-Sanadid Forces within the SDF Forces formations.

Syria's Tomorrow Movement:²⁵ It was founded in 2016 and headed by Ahmed Al-Jarba and has good relations with Saudi Arabia. It has positive positions on the Kurdish issue in Syria and has good relations with most Kurdish parties in Syria, especially with the Kurdish National Council parties.²⁶

The Political Commission for Al-Hasaka governorate²⁷ was established in 2020, after announcing the success of the first phase of the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations. The body is headed by Mudar Al-Asaad and it is close to the coalition and Turkey. Its main headquarter is in Turkey and the commission demands the exit of SDF from NES.

The Political Commission for Deir Ezzor governorate,²⁸ established in July 2020, where its founding conference was held in Kashkiya, within the areas of influence of the SDF.²⁹ It calls for economic and political reforms in Deir Ezzor and has not announced until the moment any clearly hostile positions against the Self-Administration or the SDF.

The Political Commission in Raqqa governorate³⁰ was established in June 2020 and it is a body close to the coalition and Turkey. It opposes the Self-Administration and its work is limited to media work. It does not have any field work currently; however, it claims that it has representatives in Raqqa and for security reasons, it cannot disclose them. Its general coordinator is Jumah Al-Dabis Al-Anzi.

The Arab Democratic Alliance in Al-Jazeera and Euphrates: It was established after announcing the success of the first phase of the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations and is still in

²⁴ The Democratic Conservative Party official platform <https://www.facebook.com/almuhafden.aldemokrate/>

²⁵ The official website of Syria's Tomorrow Movement <https://www.alghadalsoury.com/>

²⁶ See, for example: Yakiti Media, Syria's Tomorrow Movement affirms its support for the Kurdish dialogue ... and praises the historical role of Al-Barzani, 7/19/2020, viewed on 8/20/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hLGns9>

²⁷ The official platform of the political body in Al-Hasaka governorate <https://bit.ly/3baHuPH>

²⁸ The official platform of Deir Ezzor political body: <https://www.facebook.com/Politicalbody/>

²⁹ Euphrates Post (Facebook page), a video of the founding conference of the political body in Deir Ezzor, 8/11/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=279907069887937>

³⁰ The official platform of the political body in Raqqa governorate: <https://www.facebook.com/RaqqaPoliticalBoard/>

process. It stands a hostile position on the Self-Administration and it currently has no influence or power on the ground.³¹

Al-Jazeera Independence Movement: It was also established after announcing the success of the first phase of the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations. It calls for the independence of Al-Jazeera (Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Al-Hasaka and Kobani). It has no real influence on the ground and is still trying to establish itself and mobilize support for its concepts.³²

Despite these political bodies with many names (fronts, bodies, committees ... etc.), that try to represent Arabs in NES, the tribal factor is still the most effective and powerful in the Arabic representation in NES. Perhaps the most important factors behind this, is the tribal social structure in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, which still preserves many of its traditions. In addition to crossing the Syrian borders to reach Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which made the tribal side strong and preserving its traditions and customs.³³ The assassination of the sheikh Mutashhar al-Hamoud al-Jadaan al-Hafl from Al-Uqaydat tribe on 2/8/2020 caused a political crisis between the tribes and the Self-Administration and SDF. Regardless of who was behind the Sheikh's assassination and the clan's demands, the incident made it evident that the clan is able to move its popular bases more than political bodies and committees.

It is noticed that the Arabic forces participating in the political conflict in NES are divided into internal and external forces. First, internal forces who are represented primarily by Arab tribes and have a clear influence on the ground. Their demands are focused on representing Arabs in the Self-Administration, removing the "Kurdish" national feature from the Self-Administration and granting actual powers to the people of the area. Second, external forces, who are predominantly political and are characterized by their weak influence on the ground. Their demands are characterized by political demands hostile to the Democratic Union Party. As they demand the abolition of the Self-Administration and the withdrawal of the SDF from NES. Most of these forces are close to the coalition and Turkey.³⁴

The Syrian regime, which still considers itself the only legitimate force in the region, practically cannot be considered a political force counted on Arabs or Kurds. The regime can be considered a force that internally represents Al-Baath Party and externally it is the hand of Russia and Iran in the region. However, it no longer possesses any presence except in cities of Qamishli and Al-Hasaka; within squares and limited neighborhoods. Despite that the regime's strength and influence is now greater than the geographical area it controls, it still controls the region by granting hundreds of thousands of employees' monthly salaries to people from

³¹Elaph, A Call for an Arab Coalition in the Syrian Euphrates and Al-Jazeera, 6/28/2020, viewed on 8/18/2020, link: <https://elaph.com/Web/News/2020/06/1297073.html>

³² Al-Quds Al-Arabi, "Al-Jazeera Independence Movement," an idea launched by Syrian activists on social media platforms, 7/2/2020, viewed on 8/18/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hlQtdx>

³³ For the same reason, the tribal character remained strong in Daraa as well, as the tribal expansion in Daraa goes beyond the Syrian borders, to Jordan and Palestine.

³⁴ Cities from Deir Ezzor to Al-Hasaka; An Intense Rivalry between Riyadh and Ankara, 7/14/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hkOsUH>

governorates of Al-Hasaka, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. In addition to its control of Qamishli airport, which is considered a vital point in NES through which all the United Nations humanitarian and development organizations work. This airport represents a small group of Arabs, Kurds and Syrians who still support the regime.

The Syrian regime is considered a major actor in the political conflict in NES as it still possesses international recognition and receives support from Russia and Iran.

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces:³⁵ It was established in 2012 from several political forces, the most important of which is the Syrian National Council. The coalition considers itself, similar to the regime, as a representative of the Syrian people. It serves a number of regions in terms of service through the Syrian Interim Government and its local councils. The coalition receives material and military support from the Turkish government.

The coalition believes that the Self-Administration in NES is illegal and demands the removal of the SDF from the region. The coalition's influence on the political conflict in NES is due to the fact that it represents the largest part of the Syrian opposition and has a greatest percentage in the negotiating committee and the opposition in the committee. It is against the participation of the Democratic Union Party or the Self-Administration, in any international conference or any political body that brings together the Syrian opposition. The coalition does not have any actual presence on the ground or offices or institutions affiliated with the interim government in NES.

In general, the local forces have roles, relations and links with external powers, in which they influence other local powers. Therefore, the political map in NES will not be complete without identifying the external forces that participate in drawing the political conflict in NES.

Externally:

The United States of America is considered one of the most important and influential countries in NES and it is militarily present in different areas of the region.³⁶ Despite the US declaration of the main reason for their presence in NES which is protecting oil wells and preventing the regime from investing them, there are other aims that lie behind its presence. The most important of which is confronting Iranian influence, preventing oil from reaching Russian companies and ensuring effective participation of America in the path of a political solution and a future Syrian political settlement.

The United States considers the SDF as a main ally in NES, however, it is not the only ally. As the Kurdish National Council and the Syrian Tomorrow Movement are also considered allies of America through a network of relations that links them through their allies, whether in the KRI in relation to the Kurdish National Council or the Kingdom Saudi Arabia for Syria's Tomorrow Movement.

³⁵ The official website of the Coalition: <https://www.etilaf.org/>

³⁶ See: Jusoor Center for Studies, a Map of US Forces Distribution in Syria 02-24-2020, February 24, 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hL1I51>

Russia comes second, after USA, in terms of the influential power in NES. This is attributed to the internationally recognized Syrian regime, which is Russia's ally and the Russian military that is stationed in Kobani, Raqqa governorate, Qamishli city and its west (Amouda - Darbasiyah - Tell Tamr) within Al-Hasaka governorate.³⁷ It is an efficient and effective military presence for changing the balance of power, especially since it is the guarantor of the ceasefire between the SDF and Turkey; according to an agreement signed in October 2019 between both presidents; Turkish Erdogan and the Russian Putin.³⁸ Russia attempts to expand its points east of Qamishli to reach the Iraqi-Syrian borders, yet the popular and American rejection, till this day, prevents them from achieving their desire.³⁹

Russian interests in Syria and its northeast, go beyond preserving President Bashar al-Assad in rule, as Moscow wants to stifle Turkey and threaten it by taking advantage of the Kurds as a leverage to gain concessions on the Syrian arena or in other conflict areas. Russia also aims to put pressure on Saudi Arabia Kingdom, through Iran; the largest oil exporter in the world and Russia's competitor in this field.

The Syrian regime is considered Russia's main ally in NES; however, Russia is trying to attract the SDF by mediating between it and the Syrian regime to conclude an agreement between them. Nevertheless, till this day it still fails to achieve this due to the regime's refusal to accept the terms of the SDF and the latter's rejection of the regime's conditions.

Turkey did not have a direct military presence in NES except after the Turkish operation in Afrin in 2018 and Tell Abyad and Serêkaniyê/Ras Al-Ain in 2019. However, its influence is older than these two operations in view of its borders, which amount to more than 400 km along NES regions. As well as, its interference in the region by closing the border crossings, preventing the entry of humanitarian aid and the movement of travelers, supporting the armed factions against the SDF and refusing the Self-Administration participation in any international conferences on Syria ... etc. Turkey can be considered the most foreign country that has interests in NES, due to its links to "the internal situation in Turkey related to the Kurds of Turkey" and its fear of establishing a Kurdish region that may inspire their brothers in Turkey to demand the same. Thus, it made more concessions than others in other Syrian regions in exchange for achieving its interests in NES. Its real goal of military intervention in Syria, starting with Euphrates Shield Operation, was in the first place to stop the control of Syrian Kurds over more lands. If Turkey did not intervene militarily, the SDF would have completed their control towards Jarablus and al-Bab, with the support of the international coalition.

³⁷ Jusoor Center for Studies, a Map of Russian Forces Distribution in Syria 02-21-2020, 2/21/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2YPyI4N>

³⁸ France 24, Russia and Turkey reach a "historic" agreement on northern Syria, 10/23/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2EKwfS2>

Also, see a statement from the Internal Security calling on Russia to play its role as guarantor of the ceasefire process: North Press, Internal Security in NES: Russia must play its role as a guarantor and stop the Turkish attacks, 4/28/2020, link: <https://npasyria.com/?p=21633>

³⁹ North Press, Russian Military Police leave a village in Derik countryside after the protest of its residents, 6/18/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2EsnZ9p>

Iran is also trying to be a party to the conflict in NES, however, its presence is little and ineffective, as it is trying, through some tribes, to increase its influence and establish military militias from its people. Its interests lie in opening a land road linking Tehran and Beirut through Iraq and Syria, in addition to its conflict with the US. Likewise, its desire to create problems for Washington in Syria and Iraq by inciting the local population against the US, which is evident in the Iranian media when reporting NES events.⁴⁰

Iran depends primarily on the Syrian regime in NES, since it has not yet been able to establish military militias or political bodies in the region to rely on in achieving its interests. Therefore, its impact on the political conflict directly is very little and its attempt to incite the Arabic tribes against the US and SDF does not go beyond its media channels.

The intervention of the Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Masoud Barzani and the Kurdistan Workers' Party led by Abdullah Öcalan in the affairs of the Syrian Kurds, is considered a part of the external - regional - interference in NES with a difference in the magnitude of the intervention and its impact on the ground. On the other hand, the influence of the PKK on the Democratic Union Party is large and it is almost the planner and leader, since it provides it with its cadres who oversee most of the party's affairs and its institutions. The intervention of the KDP is limited to political and material support and guidance that is not without pressure sometimes on its ally in the region represented by the National Council Kurdish. As for the military, its support was limited to financing and training (Roj Peshmerga) in the Kurdistan region, however it did not move those forces inside NES.⁴¹

Despite the partisan interests of both Kurdish parties in NES, they are also linked to external parties and interests as well. The KRI is linked to the United States and Turkey and it is an ally of both parties while, the PKK has ties to Russia and Iran through old relations and interests that brought them together.

Both sides rely on local forces to achieve their interests, as the KRI depends on the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) depends on the Democratic Union Party. This was one of the main reasons for creating a Kurdish-Kurdish conflict in NES.

⁴⁰ The Iranian media is clearly inciting the local population and Arabic tribes against the SDF and America. It uses obvious inflammatory headlines and terms, in addition to exploiting the ethnic issue to incite them.

See, for example: AlAlam News, Judgment Day: The American forces will pay for their crimes in Syria, 8/21/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://www.alalamtv.net/news/5114611>

See also: AlAlam TV, Syrian clans supporting the popular resistance against the occupier in Deir Ezzor, 8/20/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://www.alalamtv.net/news/5113126>

⁴¹ Kurdish National Council, Rojava Peshmerga training, 23/7/2013, link: <https://www.r-enks.net/?p=5607>

The political conflict in NES:

Most of the aforementioned political forces are struggling for influence and control in NES for political and economic reasons that differ from one power to another. This is due to the different objectives and interests of those countries or the power between geographical control, economic benefit, or playing a role in NES that affects Syria in general. Moreover, they preserve their interests and interests of their allies affected by the situation in Syria. The political conflict is divided into a struggle between internal forces and a struggle between external forces. Despite links between the two conflicts through the interconnection of the internal and external forces with relationships, alliances and interests that serve each other, internal powers differ in their interests and aims from external powers. As they have interests that may go beyond the issue of controlling geography or economic benefit to interests that go beyond the Syrian borders. They are related to gaining concessions from countries in Syria in exchange for granting concessions in another region or vice versa.

Internally:

Kurdish-Kurdish Conflict:

The Kurdish-Kurdish conflict is one of the main axes for the political conflicts that threaten the future of NES. As the future of this conflict will largely determine the future of the Kurdish region in Syria. It is a conflict confined to the two main political poles of the Syrian Kurds, namely the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its branches⁴² and the Kurdish National Council (ENKS) in Syria.

The reasons for the conflict between both parties lie in the Kurdish National Council's desire to truly participate in the management of the Kurdish region (administratively, economically, politically and militarily). While the PYD wants to solely manage the region, particularly the economic and military fields. Also, due to the association of both parties with Kurdistan entities. The Kurdish National Council is linked to the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Democratic Union Party is linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, thus the differences between the two Kurdish parties are historical and still continue till this day.

Many initiatives and agreements between both parties between 2011 and 2019 failed, including (Hawler Agreement 1) in 6/11/2012, (Hawler Agreement 2) in 12/23/2013 and (Duhok Agreement 1) in 10/22/2014. Likewise, (the French initiative)⁴³ in 2019, the initiative of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) at the end of 2018⁴⁴ and the initiative of the Syrian

⁴² The writer refers to the Democratic Union Party branches (the Democratic Society Movement and youth and women's organizations affiliated with the Democratic Union Party, such as the Star Conference and the Youth Union ... etc.).

practically, it is not possible to differentiate between the Democratic Union Party, the Democratic Society Movement and the Syrian Democratic Council. The three revolve around the same axes and most of the leaderships are the same and are altered and shifted between these three forces.

⁴³ For more on the French initiative see: Asharq Al-Awsat, the failure of the French initiative to resolve Kurdish-Syrian disputes, 8/19/2019, link: <https://bit.ly/2ELBuRt>

⁴⁴ Hawar Agency, Formation of a Committee to Discuss All Kurdish Parties Without Exception to Unite their Ranks, 1/1/2019, link: <https://bit.ly/34OVlo3>

Kurdistan Writers Union in June 2017. Although reasons for the failure of these initiatives are many, the PYD insistence on solely managing the region in all respects was one of the most fundamental reasons for the failure of those negotiations. In addition to the lack of trust between the two parties, especially after the failure of the first agreements and the absence of a guarantor capable of sponsoring these agreements and monitoring their implementation by both parties.

Mazloum Abdi's initiative is considered the most important initiative to bring both parties closer and unify the Kurdish ranks in Syria. It is still ongoing and has made essential and successful strides to this day and the two parties announced reaching a common political vision.⁴⁵ Likewise, the start of the second round, which will discuss significant subjects, including the military, economic and educational issue. According to officials from the Kurdish National Council, the second stage is also going well so far.⁴⁶

Mazloum Abdi's initiative holds great chances of success due to Abdi's ability to influence the decision-making centers of the PYD, his good popularity among the party's supporters and leaders and the American side's sponsorship of the negotiations and the initiative. Moreover, his pledge to be a guarantor of any agreement between the two parties increased the level of confidence in the Kurdish National Council, which had lost confidence in the other party. In addition to the Kurdistan Region's desire for the success of the agreement, which prompted the Kurdish National Council not to cling to the preconditions it had set before the start of negotiations. This included the condition (disclosing the fate of the missing and kidnapped persons and holding the perpetrators accountable) that the council postponed. This suggests the parties' seriousness in the success of the initiative and reaching an agreement.⁴⁷

The United States also desires and encourages the conclusion of a Kurdish-Kurdish agreement and resolving outstanding problems between the two main parties. Since it wants the region of its presence to be politically and security stable. It also, wants to satisfy Turkey by involving forces other than the Democratic Union Party in managing the NES. The Kurdish-Kurdish agreement, if accomplished, will achieve this goal too, especially after the establishment of the Freedom and Peace Front. As it will become a rival or a counterpart to the Syrian Democratic Council, which supervises the Self-Administration.

Ending the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict will contribute to strengthening stability in NES and eliminate the danger of a new Turkish military operation against the region. Or at least it will eliminate the direct and media causes that Turkey uses for its war against NES. Also, the agreement will contribute to enhancing economic stability by increasing coordination between the KRI and the Self-Administration in NES to open the door to the exit of oil and

⁴⁵ The Kurdish National Council, a joint statement to the media and public opinion, 6/17/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://www.r-enks.net/?p=24904>

⁴⁶ The New Arab, the formation of one leadership body at the core of the second round of the Kurdish dialogue, 3/8/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/34JISl3>

⁴⁷ During a meeting with an official from the Kurdish National Council, he stated that Mazloum Abdi asked for this issue to be postponed and promised that it would be resolved later.

agricultural products from NES to foreign markets. It has political benefits, as well, the most important of which is the participation of Kurds in international forums with an independent delegation, thus increasing their ability to pressure the Syrian opposition or the Syrian regime and Russia to achieve major Kurdish demands.

The influence of the regime in the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict has become limited, despite its attempt to penetrate into this conflict and co-opt the Kurdish forces in its favor. However, what made the regime's influence in the conflict weak is the political and military frailty of the regime and the knowledge of most of the Kurdish parties that any alliance with it is futile, in addition to the entry of the USA as a guarantor of the Kurdish-Kurdish agreement.

Russia is trying to influence the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict by pushing to activate the Self-Administration negotiations with the regime, which were suspended for undeclared reasons on both sides.⁴⁸ The agreement is not expected to succeed due to the insistence of both parties on the demands that are considered not acceptable to the other party. Particularly, the military ones; as the SDF want to have a private status within the Syrian army and in their areas, while the regime does not accept anything but the dissolution of the SDF within its army.

Turkey rejects any Kurdish-Kurdish agreement that would allow the PYD to participate in the political solution in Syria. Consequently, it pushed the Syrian opposition towards not accepting any internal Kurdish agreement that would contribute to breaking the isolation from the PYD.⁴⁹

Kurdish-Arabic Conflict:

Signs of an Arabic-Kurdish conflict began to appear in NES along PYD's control over the Kurdish areas and the expansion of control to other areas after the support provided by the International Coalition for the SDF in their war against ISIS. This was due to the fear of the Arabic component there of the absence of its role in managing its regions after the Democratic Union Party took control of the administration, granting formal powers only to local officials. The Self-Administration educational curricula caused Arabs to fear of imposing a cultural identity that does not correspond to their customs and traditions. In addition to the great role that Turkey played in intimidation of the PYD projects by stigmatizing them with separatist projects and financing political bodies that oppose the Self-Administration. The Kurds in Syria, on their part, refuse to repeat the experience of Al-Baath party rule. Therefore, they reject any form of centralization or ambiguity and obscurity in proposing solutions to the Kurdish issue in Syria.

⁴⁸ Vedeng News, the Russian Center for Reconciliation, Damascus and Moscow are ready to resume the national dialogue in the East of Euphrates, 7/8/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2EsNLKH>

⁴⁹ Anadolu Agency, American and French pressure on the "Kurdish National Council" to leave the Syrian "coalition", 5/10/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3jrPSx9>

See also: Al-Mudun, Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations: Turkey intervenes to disrupt, 11/5/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hK02sA>

This conflict is led internally, in the first place, by the Arabic tribes that reiterate their demands to abolish the Kurdish character and the control of Kurdish cadres over the Self-Administration. In addition to their rejection of the educational curricula proposed by the Self-Administration instead of the regime's curricula. What distinguishes this conflict is that most of the tribes do not demand to abolish the Self-Administration, but rather to reform it, abolish its national character and grant real powers to local leaders.⁵⁰

On the other hand, this conflict is externally led by some tribal and political groupings supported by Turkey. They demand the abolition of the Self-Administration and the removal of the Democratic Union Party from the region. These forces do not have an apparent popularity on the ground; however, they have supporters. Therefore, it is difficult to guess the extent of these blocs' strength in NES due to the secrecy in their work.

Politically, the Syrian Tomorrow Movement leads part of the Arabic-Kurdish conflict, however it is a quiet conflict. Jarba attempts to achieve political gains in NES by negotiating with the Self-Administration and other Kurdish forces and not by relying on the national disparity between Kurds and Arabs. The Tomorrow Movement does not use any terms in its speech that indicate its refusal to grant Kurds in Syria national and political rights.

The participating Arabic forces in the Self-Administration, whether tribal or political, such as; the Conservative Party, the Arab National Authority and the Future Syria Party, are not involved in the conflict due to their association and subordination to the Self-Administration. Thus, they often support the Self-Administration in its political and administrative projects. The Arabic representation cannot be evaluated accordingly, due to the difficulty of carrying out such statistics at the present time. However, it represents a significant percentage in view of the magnitude of its participation in the Self-Administration civil and military institutions. Although there are also materialistic aims behind the participation of many of them in the administration institutions, quite a few of them also still believe that the Self-Administration project is better than the return of the Syrian regime.

The Kurdish-Arabic conflict is more complicated than the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict due to the interference of foreign countries in this conflict and their investment of this conflict for their services and agendas, especially Turkey, which supports a number of bodies and groups. As well as, Iran who is trying to incite tribes to initiate what it calls "popular resistance" and provoke them against the Self-Administration. In addition to the regime's interference and its attempt to pit the tribes supporting it or those under its control against the Self-Administration and the SDF.⁵¹ The other reason is that a large segment of Arabs do not accept the Kurds' demands for political decentralization and granting Kurds in Syria national,

⁵⁰ Enab Baladi, "Al-Uqaydat" tribe calls for the "coalition" to investigate the assassinations in Deir Ezzor, 8/11/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/407221>

See also: Euphrates Post, in the presence of the International Coalition, a new statement by Al-Uqaydat tribe at a meeting today, 8/13/2020, viewed on 8/25/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/34yuUZg>

⁵¹ The Syrian Observatory, the regime forces meet with Al-Uqaydat tribe elders at Qamishli airport to mobilize a popular and military uprising against the SDF, 8/12/2020, viewed on 8/15/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3hKj1TV>

economic, political and cultural rights as they consider this a threat to "the unity of Syria and its people."

There were fears that some parties might try to take advantage of the assassination of the Uqaydat Sheikh to turn the political conflict into a military one. "Jisr" newspaper published an investigation stating that the Syrian regime is trying to establish a military force with funding from the Al-Qaterjis and through tribal sheikhs from the Al-Bakara and Uqayadat tribes which are close to the regime,⁵² taking advantage of assassinations of some tribal sheikhs. The hazardous paradox comes with regard to the assassination of the Uqayadat sheikh, which may negatively affect the issue of civil peace, as it brought the regime and the Syrian opposition into one trench against the Self-Administration and the SDF. Therefore, the regime and the opposition, have started holding meetings and the issuing statements in which the SDF was accused of being responsible for the Sheikh assassination. The tribes demanded a revolt against the Self-Administration and it was no longer of great importance to these parties who assassinated the Sheikh, but rather who can take advantage of this situation to achieve their goals in the region. Not to mention that this may negatively affect civil peace and coexistence in NES. The difference between both parties is that the opposition media avoided pitting tribes against America and only pitted them against the SDF, while the regime and the Iranian media incited the tribes against both parties.

Externally:

The struggle of external forces in NES is more influential than the struggle of internal powers. This is due to the fact that most of the internal conflicts are linked to those who support them externally. As well as, provide them with funds and weapons to serve their political and economic interests and fights instead of their soldiers on the ground. Some of the political conflicts that come in the forefront are:

The American-Russian Conflict:

Despite that Russia remained militarily behind in coming to NES, it has always tried to intervene in the region through its ally; the Syrian regime or by using Turkey as a leverage on the Self-Administration. However, the American-Russian conflict in NES increased when Russia entered militarily to the east of Euphrates after the US withdrew from Tabqa, Raqqa, Kobani and SereKaniye/Ras al-Ain countryside. As they were replaced by Russian forces that wanted to expand their control points towards eastern Qamishli, where the oil wells and the Iraqi borders are located.

The most cardinal reasons for this conflict are due to contradictory goals and interests for both Russia and America. Russia wants to benefit economically from the wealth of the east of Euphrates while America refuses to do so. Russia also wants that region to return to the control of the Syrian regime and this is what the United States rejects. Russia does not regard any Iranian expansion in the east of Euphrates as an intimidation, but rather it may be a

⁵² Jisr, Qatirji, a leader of the "resistance" in the east of Euphrates. What is planned and what is the possibility of success, 8/12/2020, viewed on 8/18/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/34Mu4rT>

cause of further expansion due to the good relations between Iran and Russia. On the other hand, the US considers it a threat to its allies in the region like Israel and the Gulf states, in addition to particular interests and aims for each party. Russia wants to use eastern Euphrates region as a leverage on Turkey to gain more concessions in other areas in Syria or in conflict zones outside Syria. As well as gain economic advantages and conclude arms sales deals to Turkey, while the US wants to have an active role in any political settlement in Syria in the future. This will not be acquired unless the US has an effective military presence in Syria and in a vital and strategic region.

Practically, Russia does not seem to win its struggle with the US in NES, as the US still controls most of the resourceful areas on the one hand and has more popular acceptance than Russia on the other hand. In addition to the fact that some political forces reject the Russian presence in the region, the most important of which is the Kurdish National Council; a member of the coalition and an ally of the KRI.⁵³ A researcher conducted a questionnaire for a specific segment of NES people and it turns out that %91.8 of them prefer American forces over other forces (Russian, Turkish and Iranian), and consider them a factor of stability more than the aforementioned other forces.

Russian-Turkish Conflict:

The Turkish-Russian conflict in NES lies in Russia's desire to take advantage of Turkey's fear of elements close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its fear of establishing a "Kurdish autonomy" in Syria. Russia wants to use this fear as a leverage on Turkey to gain concessions on their behalf in other regions of Syria; as previously happened in Afrin. However, the American presence has so far prevented Russia from achieving this aim.

Russia had previously succeeded in taking advantage of Turkey on the Kurdish issue. For example, when Turkey persuaded Russia to withdraw from Afrin in exchange for Russia's concession of areas inside Syria that were under the control of the Syrian opposition. Russia has become a guarantor of the ceasefire after signing an agreement with Turkey in October 2019, during the Turkish occupation of Afrin and Tell Abyad. The two parties agreed to conduct joint patrols at a depth of 10 km, along the Syrian-Turkish border from Kobani to Derik.

Iranian-American Conflict:

Preventing Iran from expanding is one of the most essential reasons for the US to remain in NES. The US wants to prevent it from opening a crossing that connects it by land to Lebanon via Iraq and Syria. Moreover, it wants to stay near the deployment posts of the Iranian militias supporting Assad; in west of Euphrates (Al-Mayadin, Al-Bukamal, and other areas of Deir Ezzor countryside). The US believes that the Iranian expansion will pose a threat to its allies in the region (Israel and the Gulf), thus, endanger its interests. On the other hand, Iran

⁵³ North Press, the Kurdish National Council in Derik: We reject the establishment of any possible Russian posts in the region, 7/19/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://npasyria.com/?p=33497>

wants to expand in NES for many reasons, the most important of which are; opening a land crossing that connects it to Lebanon, and benefiting from the underground wealth in NES. Iran was among the fiercest opponents of the oil agreement signed between (Delta Crescent Energy) and the SDF. It even accused the SDF of stealing oil in cooperation with the US. In addition to Iran's desire for sectarian expansion and Shiism spread and its desire to expand also in Syria. This was in order to create its own influence in the Middle East, in a manner that enable it to change the course of events.

Iran attempts to pit the Arabic tribes in NES against the US and the SDF and to activate what it calls "popular resistance" as it did previously in Iraq. However, the sectarian difference hinders these attempts, as the vast majority of the NES population is of the Sunni sect, while in Iraq the majority were Shiites who were close to Iran. In addition, the power controlling the NES is not cooperating with Iran to achieve its gains and Iran's allies in the region (the regime - some clans) are too weak to initiate political or military resistance against the SDF or the US.

Kurdish-Turkish Conflict:

The Kurdish-Turkish conflict is old, as it is not one of the outcomes of the Syrian revolution. However, we do not refer here to the Turkish conflict with the Kurds of Syria, but rather the conflict between Turkey and the PKK in the Syrian arena, which actually began in 2011.

NES areas have become an arena for settling scores between Turkey and the PKK, as the latter started sending cadres from the beginning of the Syrian revolution. Likewise, providing support to the Democratic Union Party to establish political and geographical projects like the Self-Administration and Federalism. Also, it would mobilize its masses and media against Turkey and the Justice and Development Party. Thus, no political or military event in Turkey would pass without the PYD reacting against it, whether through a statement or demonstrations and protests. For example, the PYD held demonstrations rejecting the referendum of the Turkish constitution, organized a campaign in the name (No to the referendum)⁵⁴ and held dozens of activities in solidarity with Leyla Guven, a parliamentarian who went on hunger strike in solidarity with Ocalan. Likewise, the party celebrates the birth of the PKK and the birth of Ocalan, August 15th,⁵⁵ and other occasions that suggest close ties with the PKK.

The PKK tried to take advantage of the Syrian arena to settle scores with the Turkish state and Turkey's position was not different from the PKK's position. As it also used the situation in Syria to settle its accounts with the party and it took advantage of its relations and support for the Syrian opposition to besiege the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Self-Administration politically. As well as, to prevent it from participating in any international

⁵⁴ Kurdi Post, Kobani supports Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) by saying "No" to the referendum, 4/14/2017, viewed on 8/26/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3aZytss>

⁵⁵ August 15th is the day when PKK announced their military operations against Turkey.

conference in response to the interventions of Kurdish workers. It also, imposed a siege on NES by closing all 4 border crossings.

The Kurdish-Turkish conflict transcended the political arena and became a military conflict. Thus, in January 2018 Turkey launched a military operation to occupy Afrin and in September 2019 it launched a military operation to occupy Ras Al-Ain/Serekaniye and Tell Abyad.

The PKK has become a pretext for Turkey to intervene politically and militarily in NES, to prevent the Kurds from obtaining any political or geographical share similar to KRI. Consequently, there would be two successful Kurdish experiments that may be emulated by Kurds of Turkey in the future. Turkey did not only commit to fighting the PKK, but went beyond intervening to prevent the Syrian Kurds from achieving any political success in the Syrian political arena. As Turkey had a major role in reducing the Kurds percentage in the committee Constitutionalism and the negotiating body. Therefore, turning a blind eye to the demographic change processes taking place in Afrin and Serekaniye/Ras al-Ain.

The Kurdistan Conflict (Kurdistan Democratic Party - Kurdistan Workers Party):

The conflict between the PKK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party is an old conflict that dates back to the 90s of the last century. It has turned into a military conflict that lasted for more than 4 years and the Syrian Kurdish arena has not been far from this conflict since its beginnings until today. As the PKK was activating among the Kurds of Syria and recruiting them into its ranks. On the other hand, the Kurdistan Democratic Party is older than Kurdish workers Party among the Kurds of Syria. It goes back to the early 1960s when it intervened to resolve internal disputes within ranks of the first Syrian Kurdish party. Also, the successive Kurdish revolutions in Iraq were the reason for the increasing affinity of the Syrian Kurds with the Iraqi Kurds which later developed into a political link. The dispute between the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the Syrian Ba'ath Party was a reason for the Syrian regime to open the way to the Iraqi opposition, including the Kurdish parties in Iraq, as well as the differences with Turkey that opened the way for the PKK. Thus, these parties opened their headquarters and were able to communicate with their popular bases, which increased the organizational link of the Syrian Kurds with Kurdish parties outside the borders of Syrian Kurdistan based on the principle of "Unity of Kurdistan."

The conflict became more apparent after the withdrawal of the regime from the Kurdish areas in Syria and the control of the Democratic Union Party and the People's Protection Units over the region. Thus, each party supported and defended its ally/branch, as what was happening in Qandil and the KRI had clear results in NES. In March 2017, the Self-Administration arrested a large number of leaders of the Kurdish National Council⁵⁶ and closed the party's headquarters due to disagreements between the KDP and the PKK on

⁵⁶ Arta FM, the Asayish arrests leaders and members of the Kurdish National Council, 15/9/2017, link: <http://www.artafm.com/news/6824>

March 3, 2017 in the "Khansur" area of Shangal.⁵⁷ As a result, the Kurdistan Democratic Party closed the Semalka crossing more than once due to harassments of the Kurdish National Council in Syria, since the KRI demanded its participation in the administration. Thus, the impact of the conflict between the two Kurdish parties became clear on the course of political and economic events in NES.

The Impact of Political Conflicts on the Society in NES:

The political conflicts in Syria have significantly affected the societal cohesion in Syria generally and in NES region particularly, especially since this conflict has a national character. A number of foreign countries have played a role in increasing ethnocentrism and playing on the national and sectarian chords, especially Turkey, which has repeatedly accused the Democratic Union Party of practicing ethnic cleansing against Arabs.⁵⁸ In addition to Iran which is attempting to play a large and influential role in inciting Arabic tribes against the SDF. From a national perspective, and despite the attempts to show this incitement as if it is against the SDF rather than the Kurds, this incitement's results include all the Kurds because the incitement includes the oppression of Arabs by a Kurdish force.

According to a questionnaire prepared by the researcher, which targeted 182 people of NES, %86.3 of them agreed that Turkey participates in spreading hate speech in NES, while %60.4 agreed that Iran also incites hate speech. (This was a multiple options question and the questionnaire can be fully reviewed in the appendix of the file) .

The instigating countries have greatly adopted media to exploit the political conflict aiming at spreading hate speech, especially through social media, which is inadequately monitored. As a great range of social media users cannot differentiate between false and documented information due to the lack of technical and media expertise of many readers. Social media has made many people a source of information without acquiring professionalism or impartiality. As well as, publications are often shared without making sure if the content is correct or not, on one hand, and without considering their negative effects, on the other hand.

In the questionnaire, it was also found that %84.6 of target people, had read a post or news that incites hatred in NES, on social media, while %81.9 of them found that political conflicts are among the causes of the hate speech spread .

Political consensus in NES will contribute to decreasing hate speech and will encourage coexistence and civil peace, not only in NES, but also in most of Syria. The failure to reach a political consensus in any stage of the conflict stages, will negatively affect the state of civil peace and encourage the spread of hate speech.

⁵⁷ Rudaw, the Self-Administration closes 45 headquarters for political parties in Syrian Kurdistan, 3/17/2017, viewed on 8/26/2020, link: <https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/kurdistan/170320174>

⁵⁸ Anadolu Agency, Ankara: We will not allow the "Democratic Union" to practice ethnic cleansing in Syria, 1/16/2016, link: <https://bit.ly/2EQk5qu>

According to the questionnaire, %92.3 of those targeted agreed that political stability in NES will positively affect community cohesion and reduce hate speech.

Future of the Political Conflicts in NES:

The political conflicts in NES are complex, as they are between several foreign states with different interests and between several internal forces with different interests on the one hand. Also, are linked to influential external parties capable of controlling them on the other hand. Therefore, the internal conflict and its outcomes are closely related to the external power struggle and their understandings. Thus, the future of these conflicts faces several scenarios with different chances of achieving them.

On the Kurdish level, Mazloun Abdi's initiative is expected to solve many of the differences between the two main Kurdish parties. However, it is not expected to put an end to the political conflict between them, since the two parties are not expected to merge in a unified political body. This is due to the ideological differences firstly and the links between the two parties, secondly. As the political conflict between both parties is linked to a large extent with the struggle of the two Kurdistan parties (democracy and workers). Nevertheless, it will put an end to a long period of disagreements between the two parties that almost became a semi-permanent rupture. It may succeed in putting an end to the influence of the Kurdish conflict on the internal situation in NES.

The Kurdish National Council and the Freedom and Peace Front, which it established with its partners, will remain a counterweight to the Syrian Democratic Council, which was established by the Democratic Union Party with its partners. The Kurdish region may witness a sound political situation, such as holding fair elections, or forming an administration represented by both parties, in addition to other political and tribal parties.

The form of the administration in NES will change in a manner consistent to the new agreement between the conflicting parties, especially the Kurdish parties. The Kurdish National Council and its partners will have a major role in the administration, which will reduce the control of the PKK cadres in the administration and its institutions. Consequently, this will reduce the Turkish danger to NES areas. As well as, they will have no pretexts left to carry out a military operation in the region.

As for the Kurdish-Arabic conflict, it is expected that it will enter a delicate phase in the near future. A phase that may impose on the Self-Administration to grant wide powers to the Arabic tribes in their areas or to even grant them decentralization with expanded powers. As well as, the departure of PKK cadres from managing those areas, especially after the provocation that Deir Ezzor countryside is witnessing. Elham Ahmed, Chair of the Executive Council of the Syrian Democratic Council, stated that they are about to hold a meeting that brings together all the social and political components in the east of Euphrates. This included those loyal to the regime; in reference to some political and tribal forces and those loyal to the coalition; in reference to the Kurdish National Council and the Assyrian Organization for

their representation in the Self-Administration.⁵⁹This is considered a prominent development in the statements of the Self-Administration officials by expressing their desire to represent forces loyal to the coalition. As it indicates a serious desire to try to eliminate any excuses for any Turkish military operation in NES. However, this will not be the end of the Kurdish-Arabic conflict, as many of forces supported by Turkey will not accept the PYD remaining in power in NES. They will try to trigger their supporters to stand against the party, consequently, the conflict will continue. Not to mention, the Syrian regime and Iran, as they will play a role in inciting their supporters from the Arabic tribes and some political forces against the Self-Administration. They will try to trigger the national and ethnic tendencies, as Turkey will do as well. This tendency is the most provoking to the NES people, which is the most capable of mobilizing the popular base for any faction or political force

The SDF and the Self-Administration prefer its alliance with the US over its alliance with Russia or the regime. Therefore, the SDF agreed to sign an agreement with the US company (Delta Crescent Energy) that includes maintenance of wells, oil extraction, sale and refinement,⁶⁰which is what the regime, Iran,⁶¹Russia,⁶²and Turkey have refused.⁶³

The Self-Administration is currently trying to satisfy Russia by granting it economic advantages in areas other than oil. This was stated by Abdul Hamid Al-Mehbash, the co-head of the Executive Council of the Self-Administration,⁶⁴ however, it is not expected that these advantages will be in the oil areas. As all oil fields are under US control and may be what prompted Russia to reject the oil agreement signed between the SDF and an American company.

The success of the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations will lead to the participation of the Democratic Union Party and the Syrian Democratic Council, directly or indirectly, in the Syrian political negotiations and the Constitutional Committee. Therefore, they will be obligated to implement any agreement that may be made in the future, which they previously rejected since they were not participating in the meetings. This would contribute to removing one of the main obstacles that were a barrier to implementing any Syrian political settlement in the NES areas.

As for the Syrian regime, its political and administrative influence is not expected to increase in NES. Likewise, the Self-Administration and the SDF will not attempt to end the regime's

⁵⁹ Hawar Agency, Ilham Ahmed: Details revealed of a conference held for objectives of Al-Jazeera and Euphrates People, 8/20/2020, viewed on 8/20/2020, link: <https://Oi.is/bwm8>

⁶⁰ CNN Arabia, sources reveal to CNN the details of the secret contract for an American oil company in NES and Trump's administration role, 8/8/2020, viewed on 8/22/2020, link: <https://Oi.is/PsuF>

⁶¹ AlAlam TV, Iran condemns the Syrian oil theft deal between America and the SDF, 4/8/2020, viewed on 8/26/2020, link: <https://www.alalamtv.net/news/5082966>

⁶² The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release on oil resources of NES, 8/7/2020, accessed on 8/20/2020, link: <https://Oi.is/SmVg>

⁶³ Anadolu Agency, Ankara condemns an agreement between an American company and the "SDF" on Syrian oil, 3/8/2020, viewed on 8/26/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2YArJfK>

⁶⁴ North Press, a senior official in the Self-Administration: We are studying the requests of Russian and American investment companies, 2/8/2020, viewed on 8/20/2020, link: <https://bit.ly/32rDJBp>

presence in the region for several reasons. The most important reason is, the presence of the United Nations organizations is linked to the regime on the one hand and agreements between the SDF and Russia on the other hand. The unwillingness of any political party, in NES, to show the region as a separate region from Syria (the regime and the opposition).

The regime's attempt to pit tribes against the SDF and America will not succeed. This is due to the fact that most of the Arabic tribes in Deir Ezzor and Raqqa are opposed to Assad and do not want him to return to their areas. This is for security reasons related to the brutality of the regime and the compulsory recruitment that extends for several years in the regime's army. In addition to economic reasons related to the advantages that exist in areas outside the regime's control compared to areas under its control. In terms of organizations' work, border crossings trade, real estate, freedom of movement and mobility. In addition to the American presence that reassures the tribes in Deir Ezzor that the region will be far from the Russian and Iranian influence.

Regardless of the final deployment areas of the US troops, they are variable and currently unclear. The time period for the American presence has become clear that it will be long and there will be no imminent withdrawal of American forces from NES. Especially after signing oil contracts for American companies that may extend for decades, which requires security protection for these companies. In addition to the Iranian regime danger that is not finished, since it is still trying to expand through many of its proxies and partners in the region (the regime, militias, and some tribal sheikhs). America is trying to deprive Russia, Iran and the regime from oil revenues of the region. This is not due to its importance or its material value, but rather to stifle the regime and its economic allies. Moreover, as an implementation of the US sanctions; the Caesar law on the regime, which will oblige all parties affected by being deprived from oil, to accelerate the start of the political process which is restricted to American conditions. Whether that is in changing the behavior of the Syrian regime towards its opponents, or in accepting a political settlement; which ultimately creates a new system.

Russia will try to obtain a strong role in NES, whether through the Syrian regime or the SDF, and satisfy the latter by granting it advantages that the regime approves of. Russia recently tried, after signing the oil contract between the American company and the SDF, to return to negotiations between the regime and the Self-Administration. However, the American presence and the American rejection of any advantages of Russia in the oil regions remain an obstacle to Russia's achievement of any success in NES. As well as an obstacle to the implementation of any agreement that might happen between the regime and the Self-Administration.

Geographically, it is not expected that a federal Kurdish region will be established in the near future (10-20 years). This is due to the fact that most internal forces (the opposition and the regime) and external (Turkey and Iran) reject any federal project, or political decentralization within the Kurdish regions. Thus, most of the Kurdish regions will be part from the NES areas or the eastern Euphrates region. Consequently, obtaining a good percentage of representation in the political and administrative bodies in their regions. As in terms of the

Syrian regime, the Kurdish situation is related to the general Syrian settlement, which will not be near due to the complexity of Idlib issue and Tahrir al-Sham commission (HTS). In addition to other extremist organizations which are still working in those areas and their termination is considered one of the main conditions for finding a final settlement of the situation in Syria.

In case a political settlement is reached within the next few years, it is expected that Kurds will obtain in the Syrian constitution cultural rights that include recognition of the Kurdish language, Kurdish culture as an original culture in Syria, and political rights that guarantee their representation in political bodies. Success is not expected for a scenario that includes recognition of the future Syrian constitution, accompanied with a national differentiation in Syria or a plurality of nationalism, or the creation of federal regions by adopting the national distribution. This is due to factors we previously mentioned, which lie in the rejection of the internal opposition, Turkey and Iran, in addition to the regime. The main reasons for the opposition and the regime's rejection of any geographic or political advantages in the east of Euphrates or the Kurdish regions despite the size of the great contradictions between the two parties (the opposition and the regime) is that there are special accounts and precautions that bring the two parties together. As they view the Kurdish regions an economic, political and security force, possessing all the tools and components of power that is impossible to control in the future if it obtains political and constitutional recognition in the future Syrian constitution.

Conclusion:

It has become evident that the political conflict in NES is more complicated than any political conflict in other regions of Syria. This is due to interests of all local and foreign political forces in the region, inner and natural resources that make it the most fundamental economic region of Syria. Moreover, the Kurdish issue that is considered the main reason for Turkey's intervention in the region and pending issues that need to be settled between the opposition and the regime.

External powers seek to win the conflict and achieve political, economic and military gains by relying on local forces that also have political and economic interests that they want to achieve by relying on foreign countries. This is why it becomes difficult for internal forces to try to reconcile their interests, the general Syrian interest and the interest of the external ally.

The conflict parties, especially the local, must give precedence to the Syrian public interest over the personal interest, or over the interests of foreign countries, in order for the conflict not to create political, economic, societal and military crises that may affect Syria in the long run. We will present a set of recommendations that commensurate with the interests of each party, in line with the public interest and its importance for societal cohesion in the region:

- The PYD should distance itself from the influence of the PKK in its policies. It is the most significant element for the success of the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations, thus creating and increasing stability in NES.
- The Self-Administration must refrain from modifying educational curricula in line with the Democratic Union Party ideology and by relying on the Democratic Nation principles. This is due to the fact that these curricula are inconsistent with the customs and traditions of the region's residents. Especially the Arabic region and will cause an increase in national and ethnic tension. For example, the subjects of "Jineology and Ethics" include many concepts that NES societies reject, especially ideas related to women and marriage.
- Giving local officials in the Self-Administration actual and not only formal powers. Despite the discourse based on "brotherhood of peoples" that the Self-Administration adopts or what it calls "the democratic nation" that works to promote coexistence and mutual recognition between various people of the region, at the same time it has expressed its refusal to relinquish any effective decision-making authority. Moreover, hand it over or share it with the Kurdish parties or to the nominal political and military leadership of the Arabic participants in the Self-Administration and the SDF. Communes and other units of local administration are only a means of distributing services, gathering information, controlling the population and formally suggesting popular participation. Decision-making is still limited to cadres, thus it is extremely essential that the Self-Administration and those in charge of it, to stop trying to delude the people and the population that it is a pluralistic administration by granting formal powers that no longer bring clear and real conclusions. As the more powerful systems than the Self-Administration have not succeeded in this. Empowering local communities will enhance the people of these societies' satisfaction and encourage Arabs and Kurds to participate in rebuilding their societies. As well as, it will contribute to limiting the return of ISIS, which is also taking advantage of the tension that exists in some areas in Syria.
- Arabic tribes should realize that they have a major role in stabilizing NES areas. Therefore, they should play their political role to commensurate with the region's interests and not the external forces interest that try to play on the emotional and national chord. As they incite tribes against the SDF, under the pretext that they are a Kurdish force trying to "Kurdify" the region. The interest of Arabs lies in preserving the region away from sectarian and nationalist strife, as it threatens the future of the Kurdish-Arabic relationship in Al-Jazeera region and the Euphrates Basin in general. As it may have a common fate in the future based on the fact that it is an area of American influence.
- The SDF should provide protection for the large community and tribal leaders, since security control in the area is difficult; as evidenced by recent events. As well as, in order to prevent the regime and Iran from exploiting the security situation to create sectarian and national conflicts in NES areas.
- USA is one of the most important countries that have interests in NES, of which lie in preserving its allies that it relied on in the still ongoing war against ISIS. Especially since ISIS cells pose a new threat to the region and the world in general, in addition to detention

centers containing thousands of extremist elements in ISIS and Al-Houl camp, which contains thousands of families who are still raising their children on ISIS ideology. All this makes it imperative for the United States to cling to its presence and its allies to eliminate ISIS extremist organization. Moreover, there is a clear Iranian threat; which is evident in Iran's desire to incite Arabic tribes in Al-Jazeera and the Euphrates against the US and the SDF.

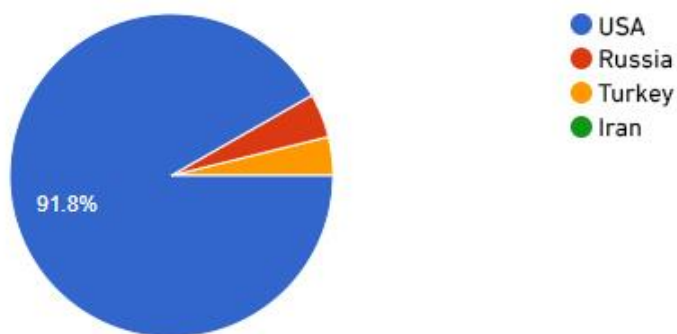
- The Kurdish parties should take into consideration the Syrian Kurdish privacy and not involve the Syrian Kurds in their partisan disputes, as they have been affected by them for decades.
- The Syrian opposition should be aware of what it has in common with NES and its administration, especially the future one after the success of Mazloum Abdi's initiative. As their relationship will be more interrelated than its relationship with the regime. Particularly, since both parties oppose Assad and they have no interest in his return with his regime to power again.

Appendix:

A “questionnaire” targeting a population of 182 persons on the political conflict in NES and its impact on civil peace and society.

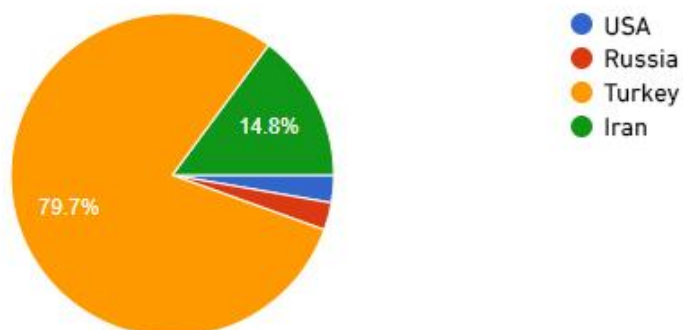
Which of the following countries do you believe contribute in stability enhancement in NES?

182 responses



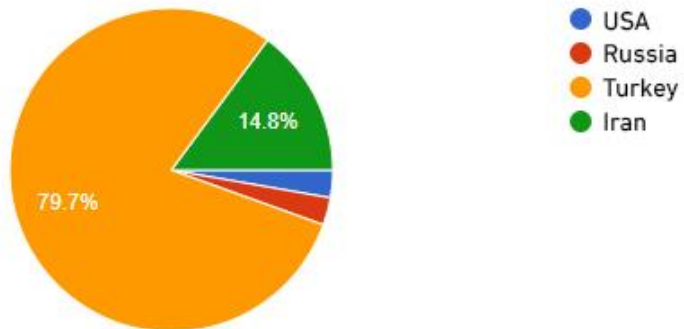
Which of the following countries do you believe pose a threat to the stability in NES?

182 responses



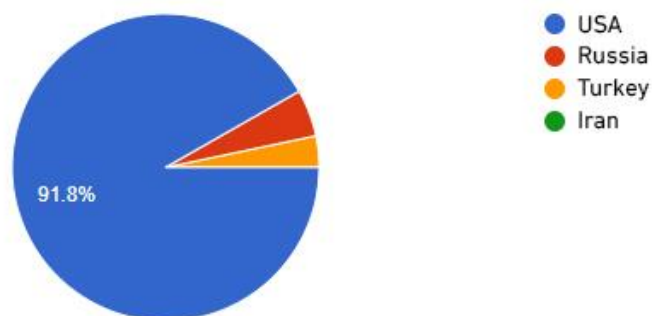
Which of the following countries do you believe pose a threat to the stability in NES?

182 responses



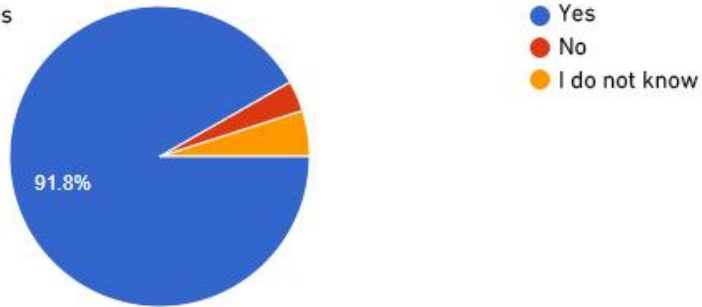
Which of the following countries do you prefer to stay in NES?

182 responses



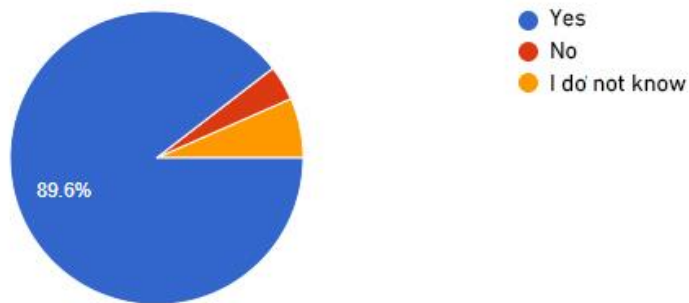
Do you believe that the Kurdish-Kurdish rapprochement/agreement will contribute in stability enhancement in NES?

182 responses



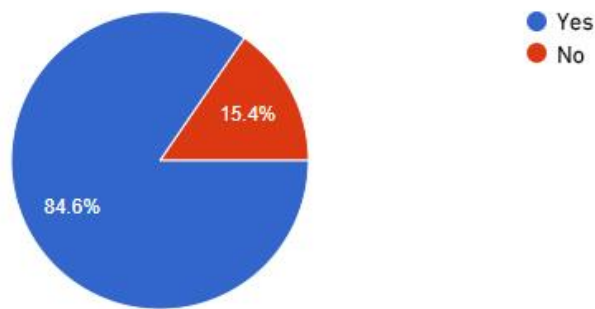
Do you believe that the Kurdish-Arabic rapprochement will politically contribute in stability enhancement in NES?

182 responses



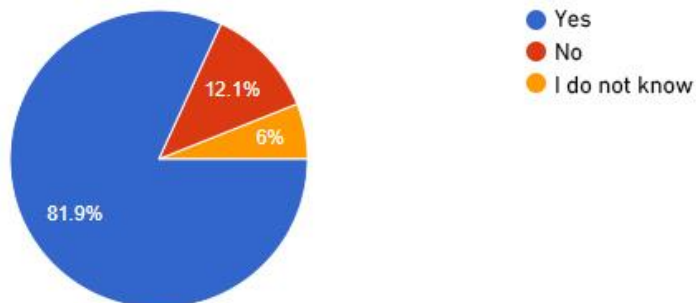
Have you ever read or seen any post on Facebook, article or a report that promotes hate speech or incites one component against the other in NES region (National/Ethnic - Sectarian -Religious incitement)?

182 responses



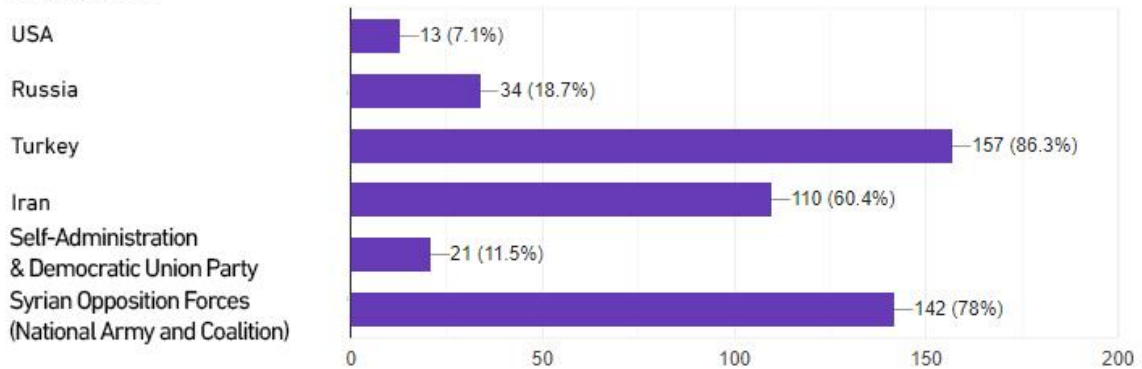
Do you believe that political conflicts in NES contribute in spreading the hate culture in NES?

182 responses



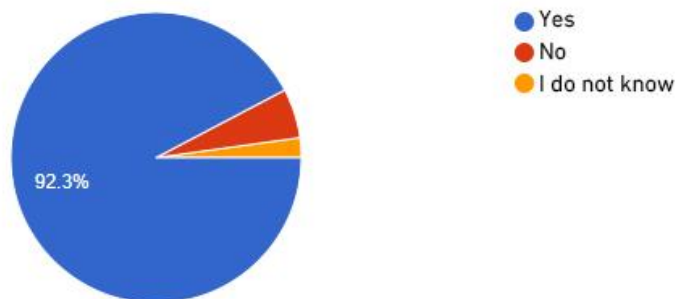
Do you believe that spreading the hate culture is promoted by:
(Multiple options can be selected)

182 responses



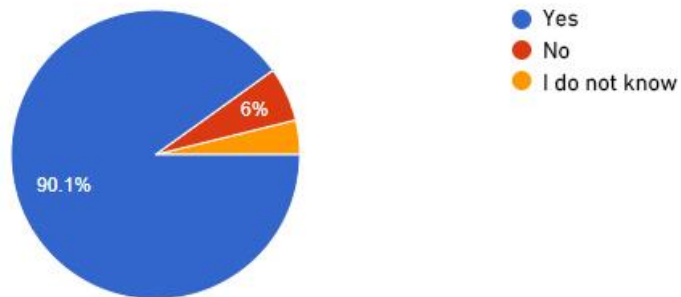
Do you believe that the political stability in NES will contribute in mitigating the hate speech?

182 responses



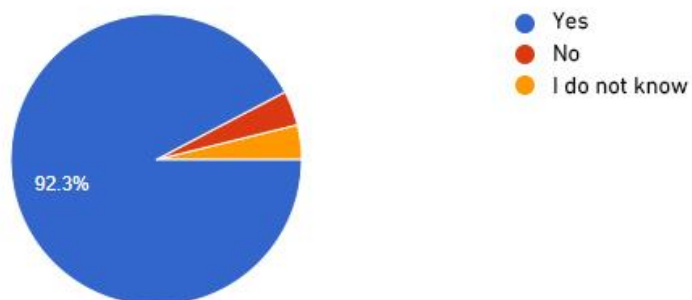
Do you believe that the Kurdish-Kurdish rapprochement will positively contribute in limiting the hate speech and encourage civil peace in NES?

182 responses



Do you believe that the Arabic-Kurdish rapprochement will politically contribute in limiting the hate speech and encourage civil peace in NES?

182 responses





Map of Political Conflict in NES



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