

# The Kurds in Syria: Old and New Challenges

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### **The Syrian Parliamentary elections**

The Syrian parliamentary elections, were not important at any of its sessions. Since the Baath coup on March 8, 1963, which dissolved parliament and replaced it with the National Council for the Revolutionary Command, and then during former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad coup that reinstated Parliament in the name of the People's Council in 1971, appointed its members without elections, and then the electoral process in Syria was resumed in 1973, the Syrian regime had turned the people's council into a functional tool whose mission is to legalize and legitimize the decisions of the executive power, which fully was under control of Assad. However, the recent Syrian elections, held on the nineteenth of this month, gave two indications that worth to be mentioned. On the one hand, it became clear that the conflict intensified within the wealthy class of war in the surrounding center of power, which made some of its members to win, and excluded others from it. In Aleppo, for example, one of the most prominent economic and industrial symbols in the economic circle that backed the regime was Faris al-Shihabi, head of the Aleppo Chamber of Industry, the largest Syrian industrial and commercial city, he was excluded and did not hide his extreme anger for getting him out of the council, and he publicly attacked the election results, when he considered his defeat as was a result of alliance between "corrupt, warlords and ISIS inside". But Hossam Qatirji, the businessman that been accused of smuggling oil from various Syrian regions won in elections, and he is subject of US sanctions, because he was also accused of trading with Islamic State (ISIS), when ISIS had control over the oil areas in eastern Syria.

During the last years of the Syrian war, and after the depletion of Syrian central bank balances of hard currency, the Syrian government relied on sharing shadow economy symbols and illegal economic activities in their vast resources in order to continue to pay war bills and state employee salaries. In addition has financed the militias that became an army parallel to the regular army. It appears that in the post-implementation phase of the Caesar's law, the Syrian government will increase its dependence on illegal economic activity to circumvent the consequences of the Caesar's law, and it will provide internal immunity to the members of this illegal economic activity.

Another indication that noticed in the recent elections is the exclusion of Kurdish figures from power who have long been outspoken in their loyalty to the regime, and this is an indication of the mentality of Syrian regime towards the Kurds, which has not changed in its denial and exclusionary approach, and there is possibility that Syrian regime involved in regional deals that may target the Kurdish areas.

### **New bargains**

There is information on Turkey's continuing efforts to extract concessions from Russia regarding the areas under the authority of self-administration in which Russia is present militarily. For its part, Russia holds meetings with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and tries to exploit these Turkish ambitions and use them as a pressure card on SDF in order that SDF evacuate some areas not just militarily but also from its civil administration, and fully return them back to Syrian government, without providing any compensation to SDF under threat of Turkey. The pressure mainly focuses on the Ain Issa sub-district of Raqqa, which connects Kobani region and the rest of the autonomous regions. In case if these pressures yield results, whether by handing Ain Issa to the Syrian government or giving Turkey a hand in it, the Kobani area will be surrounded and the door will be opened to expansion in the rest of the Raqqa governorate, where America does not have a military presence.

## Second round of Kurdish talks

Most Kurds believe that speeding up steps of the Kurdish unity in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) will reduce the risks and threats to self-administration areas, or at least will reduce threats on the Kurdish areas. The second phase of intra-Kurdish talks have not started, and more importantly they did not speed up talks that Kurdish parties involved promised to do so. Last Monday (July 20), the two sponsors of the negotiations, the US State Department, represented by its envoy, Zahra Billy, who replaced William Roebuck (US Deputy Special Envoy for the International Coalition), Roebuck's mission in the region ended (unless the State department extends it), And SDF, represented by its General Commander Mazloum Abdi, with the Kurdish National Council to discuss arrangements to start the second phase of talks with the national unity parties in Rojava. This means that this stage has started indirectly, in preparation for the direct talks that are expected to start its first session after Eid Al-Adha.

The biggest challenge for these talks is to make the existing administration in the Kurdish areas a united national Kurdish Syrian administration politically, militarily and economically. It is not easy to overcome this challenge, because it is in the stage of battles with Islamic extremist groups of Syrian opposition and later with ISIS, Non-Syrian Kurdish leaders and fighters played a major role which is difficult to end their role in the post-war period. America requires the removal of these non-Syrian Kurds among SDF from Rojava, but putting real pressure to implement this requirement without many difficulties and warnings, perhaps most dangerous outcome is the possibility of changing the map of alliances and options. As US concerned if lose the Kurds within SDF then is likely the Arab forces within SDF move to make alliances with Assad, Russia and Iran.