

"Unveiling the Syria-SDF Deal: What's Really Happening behind the Scenes"

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Authors

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Summary : The 8-point agreement between Syria and the SDF marks an important historical turning point for the future of Syria. Hypothetically speaking, the gains that Kurds might achieve through this agreement could be less than what happened since 2011. However, given the current circumstances, it represents a significant win, especially considering that this is the first time in recent history that a Syrian authority has acknowledged Kurdish identity and their political and military participation. For Interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, this agreement is also a victory. It allows him to approach future challenges with a calmer mindset, especially since the deal affirms the supremacy of Syria's interim government in the main pillars of SDF-controlled areas, which had previously been a potential source of conflict. Given the events of the past few days in Syria's coastal areas, where hundreds were killed, and the growing threat of extremist Islamic groups, many countries are reluctant to see the authority of al-Sharaa's Syria become centralized. At the same time, for SDF commander Mazloum Abdi, considering Öcalan's message, the evolving situation in Syria, and pressure from the United States and the international coalition, this agreement is the best available option.

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The first and seventh points of the agreement are general in nature, with phrases and sentences that are commonly found in many similar agreements. The second point, however, which refers to Kurds as an indigenous community of the Syrian state, marks two significant turning points. First, it challenges the previous regime's stance, which viewed many Kurds as migrants and even denied them citizenship. The agreement, in contrast, recognizes them as indigenous people who are entitled to citizenship rights. Additionally, referring to Kurds as a community may serve as an acknowledgment and provide a foundation for future discussions between the two parties regarding the collective rights of Kurds, extending beyond their individual rights as citizens. Second, in this same article and throughout the entire agreement—except for al-Sharaa's handwritten notes—the term "Syrian State" is used, rather than the "Syrian Arab Republic."

Although the United States and the international coalition, which need to maintain an armed force to combat terrorism, appear to be the architects of the agreement, the third and fifth points of the agreement reveal that Turkey has also played a significant role. Ahmed al-Sharaa himself knows well that without Turkey's consent, it would be difficult to guarantee a halt to the ongoing battles around Tishrin Dam and Qaraqozak, which have been fought between the SDF and pro-Turkish groups since December 2024. Additionally, the repatriation of displaced people to areas like Afrin and Sari Kani, which Turkey captured in 2018 and 2019, would also require Ankara's approval. According to unofficial sources, some of these negotiations were conducted directly between Turkey and the SDF, even though the parties deny this. According to the agreement, thousands of Kurds are expected to return to their homes within one month. However, it remains unclear how feasible this will be, especially given numerous reports of human rights violations by groups such as Abu Amsa and Hamzat. It is uncertain whether these groups will continue to dominate locally when displaced people return, or if a new force will be established.

One of the key points of the agreement is Article 4, which addresses the integration of the civil and military institutions of northeastern Syria into the state administration. This is not about dissolution, but rather institutional integration. This means that the SDF and the Autonomous Administration will remain in place, but their powers will be reduced as they come under the authority of the state administration. If the agreement aimed for complete state control and the dissolution of the Autonomous Administration, there would be no need to specifically mention border crossings, airports, and oil and gas wells. As for the SDF, it seems its name will be changed to a division or multiple divisions of the Syrian army, similar to what has been done with other groups. It wouldn't be surprising if some SDF commanders were appointed to positions within the Syrian Ministry of Defense. There is also speculation about the creation of a deputy minister of defense position, although no official announcement has been made so far.

Perhaps the sixth point is al-Sharaa's main motivation for expediting the agreement, which has been in preparation since last December, with mediation from the United States, France, and the international coalition, as well as support from the Kurdistan Region. The events of the past few days in Syria's coastal areas have, on one hand, called into question the narrative the international community wants to believe about the transformation of a former jihadist group like Hay'at

Tahrir al-Sham. The killing of over a thousand people has reignited fears of extremism in the new Syrian state, and al-Sharaa aims to send a message through this agreement with the SDF that he is willing and capable of compromise and agreement. This is a strategic matter for al-Sharaa, who seeks international recognition, the lifting of sanctions, and \$250-400 billion to rebuild Syria. Additionally, there is concern that Alawite discontent could lead to another long-term internal conflict, a scenario that would be a nightmare for the Syrian president. This comes at a time when the extension of his authority over all Sunni armed groups—who are supposed to be his allies—is a matter that warrants much discussion.

The eighth point of the agreement is the core of the discussion. That is working to implement this agreement by the end of this year. Certainly, here in the Middle East, agreements on paper are one thing and how they are implemented in practice is something else! Most likely during the next 8+ months, not only both parties, but several other regional and international actors, will wrestle with each other to implement the agreement according to their own desires. In the end, it is the relative strength of the parties on the ground and the international balance that will determine what its fate will be!