

# 'No friends but the mountains': Washington seeks to ensnare Kurds

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The targeting of Kurdish civilians in Syria by US-supported armed thugs is part of a deliberate attempt to galvanize the Kurds and pit them in a resurgent struggle against the non-Kurd regions.

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party and other sources are now reporting that Kurdish men, women, and children are systematically being tortured, raped, and executed. Fighting has broken out between Syrian Kurds and the insurgent forces supported by the US, UK, France, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Iranian Parliament have condemned the targeting of Syrian Kurds while the Obama Administration and its cohorts have remained mostly silent. Lavrov's insistence that the United Nations Security Council condemns the violence has also been to no avail.

One of the reasons that the Obama Administration has been silent is because they are supporting the butchers behind the massacre and are trying to avoid more embarrassment. The US and its allies, however, will make supportive noise for the Kurds once they get the result they are seeking.

## Caught in the crossfire of geopolitical games

The geopolitical importance of the Kurds lies in their geography. Kurdistan sits at the heart of the contemporary Middle East. The mountainous region intersects the boundaries of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia. Its position makes it the main point of convergence in the Middle East. This has distinguished Kurdistan as a place where regional rivalries and intrigues are played out. It also means that Kurdistan can be used to create upheaval and instability in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.

The contemporary states of the Middle East have all used the Kurds in their rivalries against one another. Time and time again, however, the Kurds have been manipulated in the geopolitical calculi of the Middle East. They have regularly found themselves to be expendable and effectively dropped as partners by those players that their leaders made ill-conceived alliances with. In the past this took place during the centuries-long conflict between the Ottoman and Iranian Empires. Kurdish chieftains proved to be especially decisive in ensuring an Ottoman victory in the Battle of Chaldiran against the Safavids in 1514. Centuries later, Kurdish militias would be recruited by the Ottoman government in its hostilities with the Armenians of Anatolia in the 1890s, only for Kurdish leaders to mistakenly side with the British and face the wrath of the newborn Republic of Turkey. They would incidentally be betrayed by the British in Iraq a few decades later. The Kurds have

been oppressed in Turkey ever since.



Relatives visit a Syrian Kurdish man who was injured during an airstrike on the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsud district of the northern city of Aleppo (AFP Photo / Dimitar Dilkoff)

Mohammed-Reza Shah supported the Iraqi Kurds against the Iraqi government until 1975. When he received the concessions he wanted over control of the Shatt Al-Arab from Baghdad, he ended his support of the Iraqi Kurds, leaving them to face the Iraqi military. The alliance between Tehran and the Iraqi Kurds would only be rekindled during the Iran-Iraq War and after the Shah was ousted.

The Israelis, on the other hand, became interested in the Kurds as part of their policy of forming alliances with ethnic groups, such as the Berbers, who live in the sea of Arabs stretching from Morocco to Iraq. Tel Aviv has used Iraqi Kurdistan as a regional base against friends, such as Turkey, and foes, such as Iran and Syria. Yet, Israel has never hesitated to drop the Kurds either.

Using their contacts with the Kurds, it was Tel Aviv that helped the Turkish government capture the Kurdish guerilla leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Turkey in the last decade has slowly loosened its repressive policies against the Kurds as part of its neo-Ottoman bid to expand its economic and political influence in the Middle East. Ankara's government has even instigated the Iraqi Kurds to clash with the Iraqi federal government, whereas it has been unsuccessful in its attempts to entice the Syrian Kurds into its orbit. It is even alleged that Prime Minister Erdogan had devised a Turkish-Kurdish federation of some sort that would eventually incorporate Iraqi Kurdistan and Syrian Kurdistan with Turkey.

The US government has constantly changed its position on the Kurds. In coordination with the Shah of Iran, Washington actually armed the Iraqi Kurds and led them on. The moment that the Shah got his concessions, the US dropped the Iraqi Kurds by ending its support. The US then started to support Saddam Hussein against the Iraqi Kurds and, under the guise of giving agricultural credits, effectively armed him with the chemical weapons that he used against them and Iran. After America turned its back on Saddam Hussein, the US pushed the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad, only to abandon them once more by leaving them during their hour of need in a position of deadlock. The US and UK would go on to use the Kurds as a convenient excuse for establishing their illegal no-fly zones over Iraq and later to support their invasion in 2003.

Ironically, while Washington condemned Saddam Hussein for mistreating the Kurds, it actually supported and helped the Turkish government against the Kurds in both Turkey and Iraq. Now the Obama Administration is mutely trying to manipulate the Kurds, in Syria and elsewhere, into destabilizing Syria and the Middle East.



A Syrian Kurdish refugee from the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsud district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, holds her baby in a school used as a refugee camp in the northern city of Afrin (AFP Photo / Dimitar Dilkoff)

## **Militarizing the Kurds to Fragment Syria**

When the troubles in Syria began in 2011, there was an attempt to recruit the Syrian Kurds. The Syrian Kurds were cautious and the recruitment attempts failed. Despite the best attempts of the Syrian National Council and the other puppet opposition groups outside of Syria, the Syrian Kurds were not drawn into the ranks of the insurgency. Instead the Syrian government gave the Kurds a new level of autonomy.

The systematic massacres of Syrian Kurds mark the start of a new strategy to entangle the Kurds in the fighting inside Syria. The targeting of the Syrian Kurds by insurgent groups like Al-Nusra is premeditated and strategically executed precisely with the intention of galvanizing the Kurds in Syria and elsewhere into forming more armed groups and segregating themselves from non-Kurds. In what looks like the momentum towards a broader regional conflagration, the leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan have also threatened to intervene.

There is actually an old and saturnine proverb which is linked to what is happening and, at the same time, speaks to the memory of the Kurdish people about their perception of a tragic history.

The proverb avers that the Kurds have no friends except for the mountains. The most important thing about this proverb is that it is the axiom for what has been a mentality of besiegement among the Kurds: they have no one to rely on but themselves. This is exactly what the mandarins and strategists conducting the operations against Syria want to exploit the Kurds to feel; they want the Kurds to “have no friends except for the mountains” and to “fight the rest.” The Arabs, the Turks, and the mixture of ethnic groups that comprise the population of Iran are “the rest.”

While Israeli and US analysts and experts keep parroting the same propaganda talking points that Syria will be divided into sectarian mini-states based on faith and ethnicity, the Syrians themselves are refuting this. What these experts are saying will happen is a goal that Washington and Tel Aviv are in fact struggling to achieve in Syria. In this context, the ultimate aim of dragging the Kurds into fighting is to divide Syria and fragment the Middle East via resurgent and militant Kurdish ethno-nationalism that shouts that the Kurds have no friends. The Kurds should not be fooled into becoming the cannon fodder of those who seek to divide the Middle East.

They have more friends than just the mountains. Kurdish history, like the history of the world’s other peoples, is one filled with both tragedy and exultation. The long story of the Kurds has not been one of exclusion and discrimination alone. It has been one of inclusion and regional leadership too. It says something when the great eagle that is on Egypt’s flag and used as a pan-Arab symbol and coat of arms by a number of different Arab states is the emblem of the great Kurdish leader Saladin and that many of the Middle East’s leaders have been Kurds.

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