

What Kurds Want

Kurds dream of an independent nation called Kurdistan as claimed by the *Khoybun* delegation to the United Nations in 1945. [See map. \(25\)](#). Given that Greater Kurdistan is currently divided between four nation states, and that the Kurds are divided politically and there is a lack of international support for a Greater Kurdistan or even an independent Kurdistan within current nation-state borders, current Kurdish leaders seek independence, autonomy or democratic federalism within the borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

In Iraq, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was recognised in the 2005 federal constitution of Iraq. Although the KRI was allowed to maintain its own security forces, called Peshmerga or 'those who face death', and gained other powers in the constitution, it remained under the fiscal and administrative control of the Government of Iraq (GoI) and its powerful ministries in Baghdad.

Since the breakdown in relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and GoI in January 2014, and ISIS taking control of Mosul and parts of Kirkuk province in June 2014, Peshmerga were left to defend a 1,000 kilometre front line south of Kirkuk and President Masoud Barzani has called for a referendum on independence. This would be conducted in the four governorates of Kurdistan (Dohuk, Erbil, Halabja and Sulaimani) and the disputed territories. These disputed territories are the province of Kirkuk; six districts and three subdistricts in Nineveh (Akra, Shekhan, Shingal/Sinjar, Tal Afar, Tel Keif and Qaradash districts and the subdistricts of Zumar, Bashida and Aski Kalal); two districts in Diyala (Khanakin and Mandali); one district and a subdistrict in Wasit (Badra and Jassan) and one district in Salah al-din (Tooz).

Kurdistan and the disputed territories are multi-ethnic. Whilst the KRG finances public schools in the mother tongue of different ethnic groups, reserves five seats in the 111-member Kurdistan parliament for Assyrians and five seats for Turkmen, and allows different religious groups to determine their own personal status law related to marriage and divorce, outstanding issues are a lack of transparency in government decisions, income and expenditure, a weak judicial system, a Peshmerga force split along party lines, a draft constitution that needs refining and enacting and ethno-religious rights, particularly in the disputed territories, with some Yezidi, Assyrians and Turkmen demanding autonomy or an independent homeland. As areas overlap and are multi-ethnic, ethno-religious rights will have to be negotiated.

The alternative to an independent Kurdistan is to remain part of a loose con/federation of Iraq, in which regions have full political, economic, military and cultural autonomy. However, the Shia Arab dominated GoI and the Shia militias established since 2014 would resist all such reforms.

In Turkey, in 2013, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government promised a peace process to address Kurdish issues, but delayed action until PKK completely disarmed. On its part, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) demanded independent monitors to oversee the process. The AKP government refused. In December 2015, the [Democratic Society Congress](#) announced a 14-point framework for discussion, which was promptly rejected by the AKP government. The 14 points were:

1. Formation of autonomous regions consisting of neighbouring provinces in consideration of cultural, economic and geographic affinities.
2. Self governance of these autonomous regions by elected bodies ...; with representation of autonomous regions at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey ...
3. End of ... tutelage by the centralized administration ... and the ... elimination of its authority to discharge elected officials.
4. The establishment of people's assemblies for each town, neighbourhood and village, and for youth, women and each faith within an autonomous region ...
5. The expansion of democracy and equal representation of women in assemblies and all decision-making mechanisms ...
6. Support for the participation of youths in decision-making and self-rule mechanisms.
7. Self administration of education; Provision of education in all mother tongues ...; Amendment of the curriculum in line with a new democratic constitution, universal values, human rights, local history, cultural and social distinctions; Recognition of official languages other than Turkish.
8. Provision of opportunities for work and studies in the fields of language, history and culture; Places of worship to be organised as autonomous institutions.
9. Provision of healthcare and medical services by autonomous administrations.
10. Re-arrangement of the judicial system and legal services in accordance with the Autonomous Region Model.
 11. Autonomous regional administrations to supervise and operate land, water and energy sources, and production sharing; ... in all areas such as agriculture, husbandry, industry and trade in accordance with the democratic constitution ...
11. Provision and supervision of land, air and sea transport by autonomous administrations;
12. Arrangement of traffic services by local authorities in accordance with the relevant central institutions. Assignment of local budget to autonomous regional administrations for the provision of cited services; Woman-oriented budgeting; Collection of some taxes by self-governing units in accordance with the agreements and principles of equity decided with the central government and other local administrations; the central government to grant local administrations a share of the total tax revenue; Realization of necessary precautions by the central administration to eliminate the differences in the level of development between regions.

13. Establishment of official local security units under the governance of the autonomous regional administrations, [in co-ordination] with local and central units.

In Syria, Kurdish leaders advocate that the Assad regime be replaced by a federal system of government that gives autonomy to different regions. The major disagreements between Kurdish political parties is whether Rojava (western Kurdistan/northern Syria) should become a Kurdish autonomous region, as advocated by parties affiliated to President Masoud Barzani in Bashur (southern Kurdistan/northern Iraq) or whether regions should emphasise the local ethnic mix, as advocated by the [Syrian Democratic Council](#) (SDF), that includes the Democratic Union Party (PYD). In early 2016, a committee within SDF formulated a draft social contract for the Federation of Northern Syria - Rojava, in view of providing a model for the rest of Syria. The contract proposed different regions be given full autonomy to manage their own security forces, judicial system and foreign relations, with above and below ground resources being fairly distributed. Twenty ministries dealing with the economy, agriculture, natural resources, security, foreign affairs etc. would answer to local multi-ethnic people's assemblies and administrations, as have been established in Afrin, Kobani, Tel Abyad (Gire Spi), and Cizere, as well as other towns liberated by the Syrian Democratic Forces. Top priorities in the contract include the protection and political representation of women, youth and all minorities, and the protection of the environment.

In Iran, all Kurdish parties are asking for autonomy within a federated Iran. Some parties are influenced by democratic federalism that is promoted by [PYD](#) and [TEV-DEM](#) in Syria and the [Democratic Society Congress](#), [HDP](#) and [PKK](#) in Turkey.

General References

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