

The Kurdish Question in 2016: Kurds role in fighting ISIS and promoting democratic federalism

- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919
- Border defined by the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920
- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the first United Nations conference, San Francisco, 1945

- TOWARDS KURDISH SELF-RULE**
- Iraqi Kurdistan
 - Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (1946-1947)
 - "Red Kurdistan" in Azerbaijan (1923-1929)

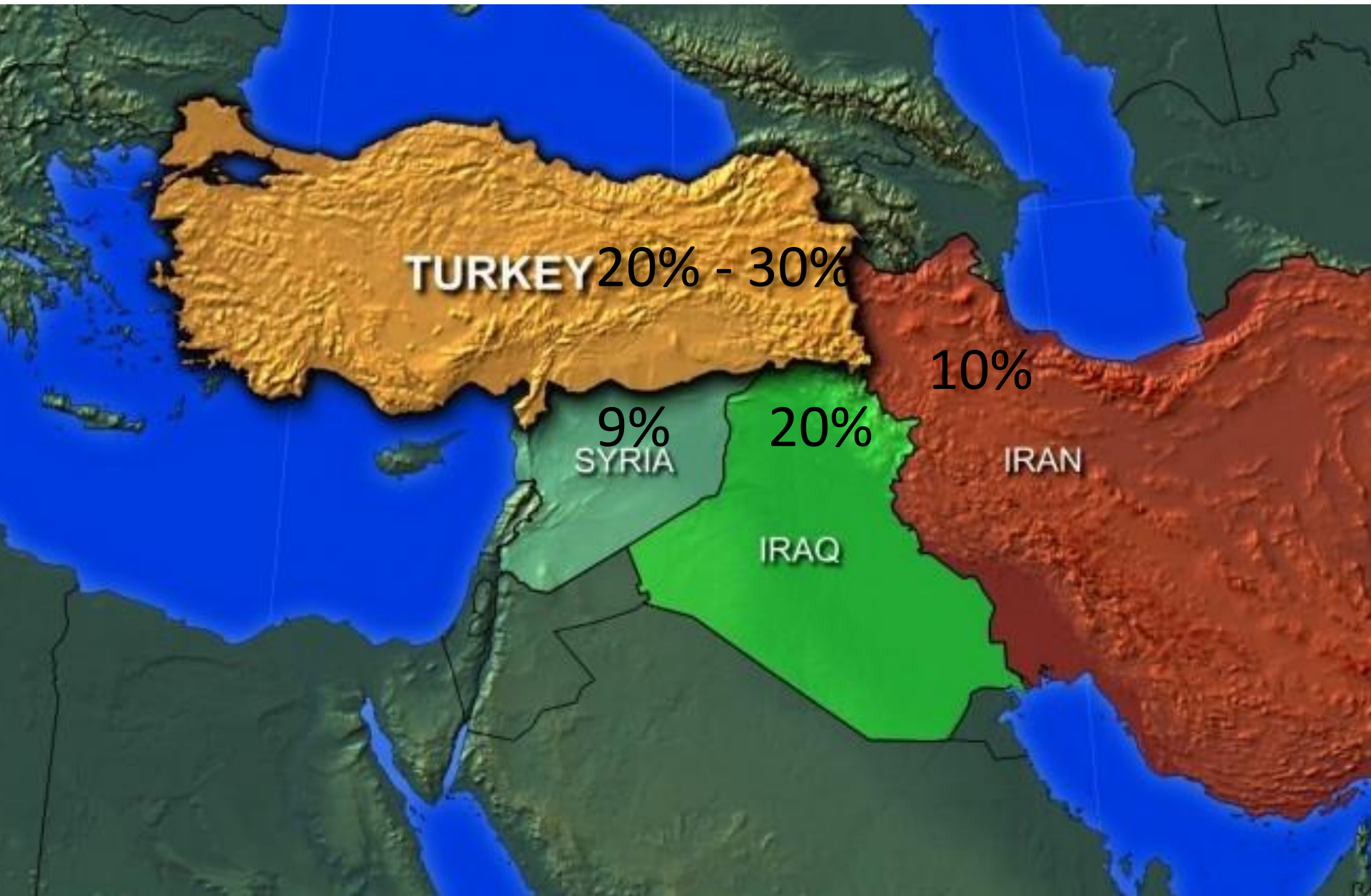
Kurdish-inhabited areas

Sources: Kurdish Institute of Paris; Michael Mehrdad R S C Izady, University of Columbia, New York, 1998

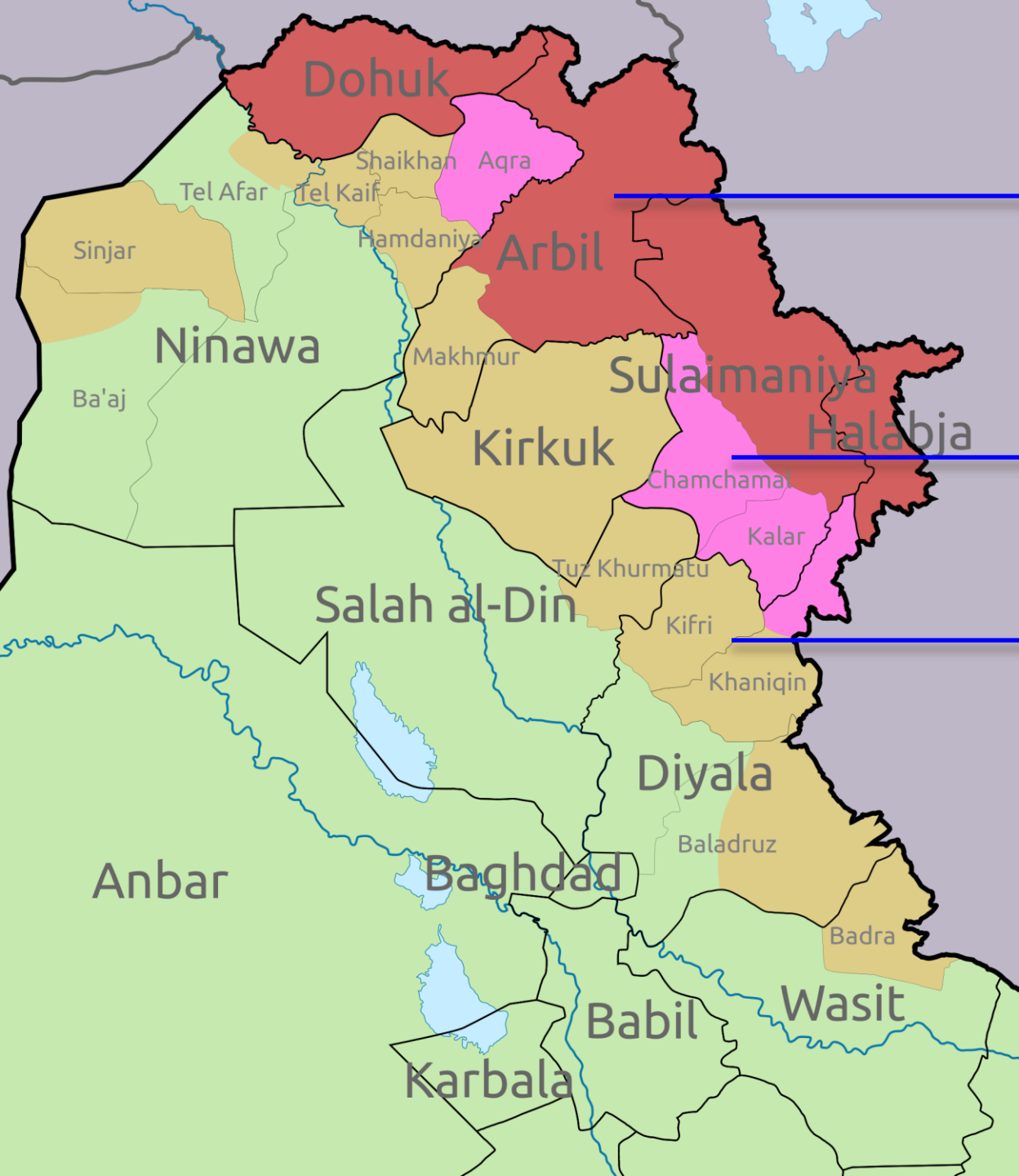




Kurds as a percentage of the total population







The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Disputed territories that have been under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government since 1991.

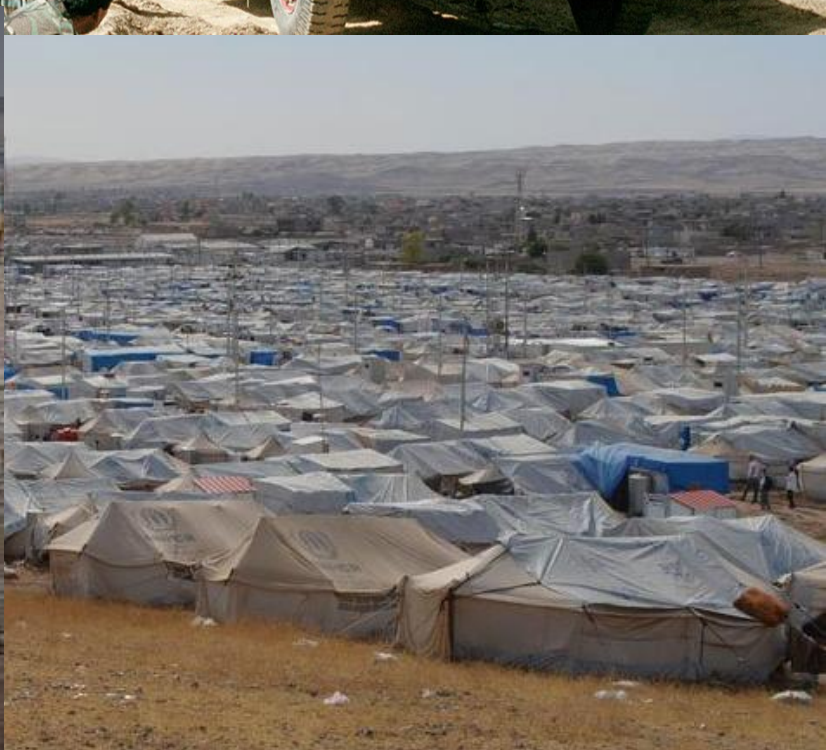
Disputed territories that were under the control of the Iraqi central government until the 2014 Northern Iraq offensive. Now controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government.



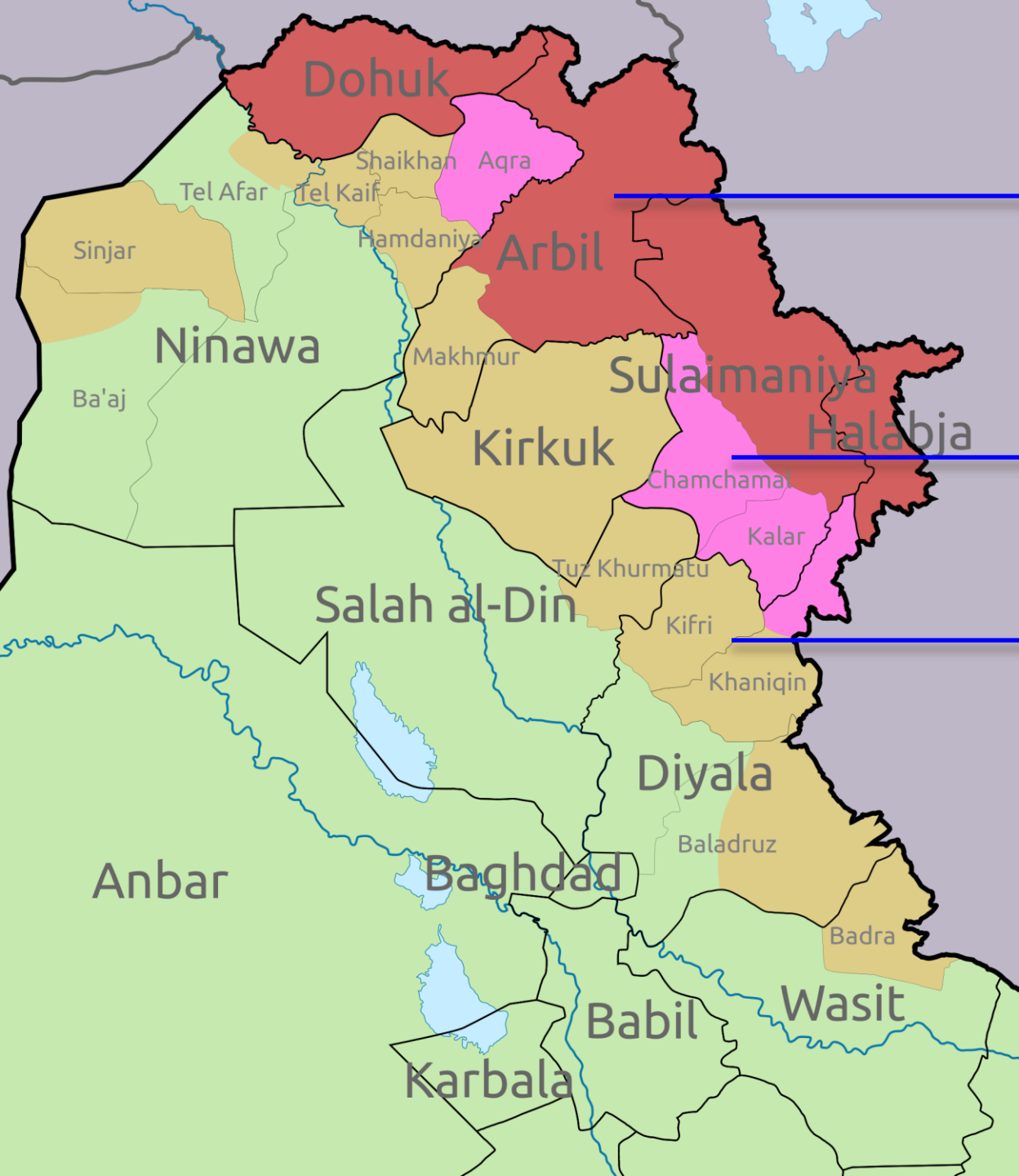
Kurdish frontline against ISIS











The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Disputed territories that have been under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government since 1991.

Disputed territories that were under the control of the Iraqi central government until the 2014 Northern Iraq offensive. Now controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The Islamic State in 2015

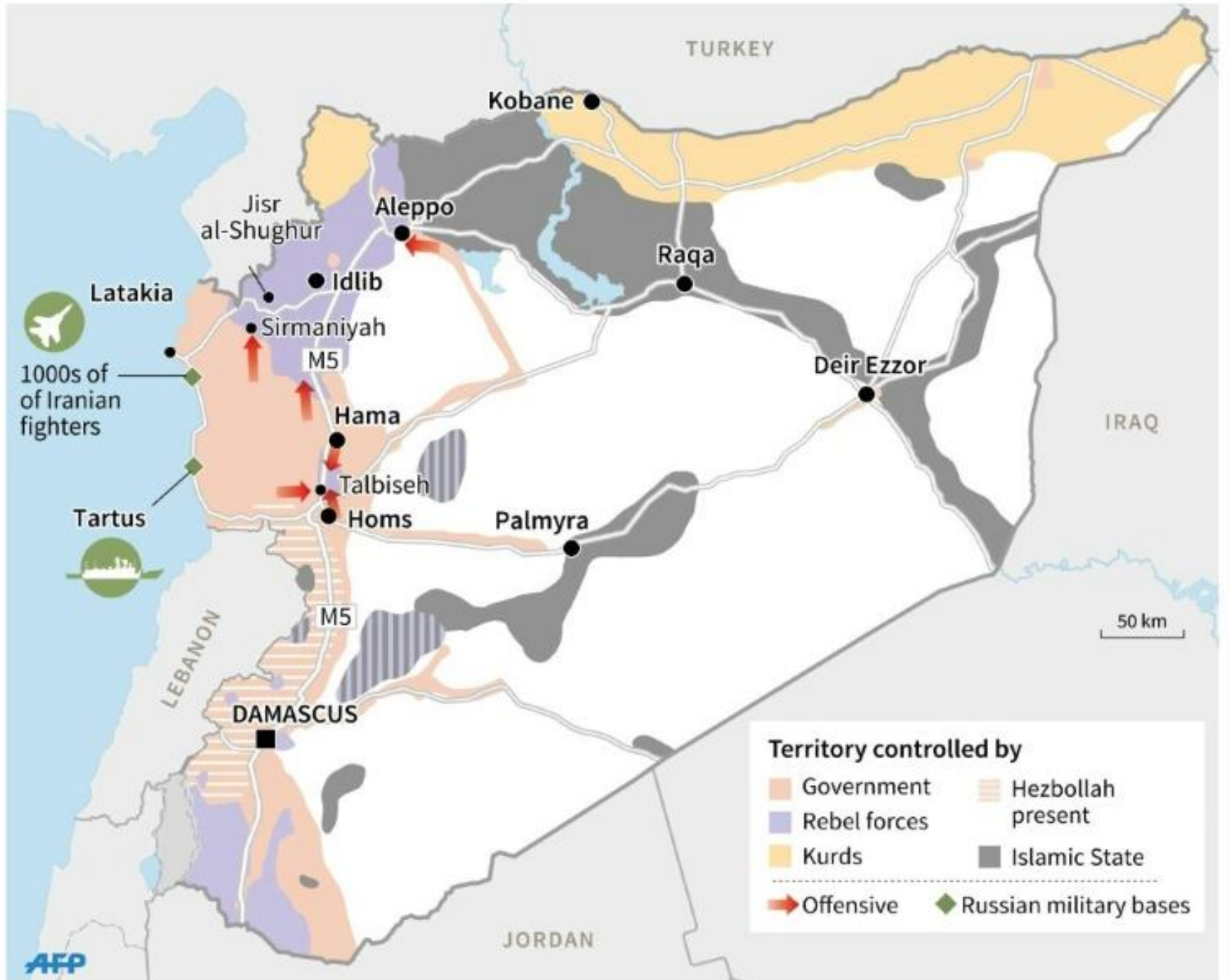
● Islamic State controlled (no change) ● Territory lost ● Territory gained





Kobani





TURKEY

Kobane

Jisr al-Shughur
Aleppo

Raqa

Latakia

Idlib

Sirmaniyah

1000s of Iranian fighters

Hama

Deir Ezzor

IRAQ

Tartus

Talbiseh

Palmyra

Homs

50 km

LEBANON

DAMASCUS

JORDAN

AFP



Distribution of Kurds in Turkey

Kurdish population estimate: 22.5 million
 Estimated population in Turkey: 78 million



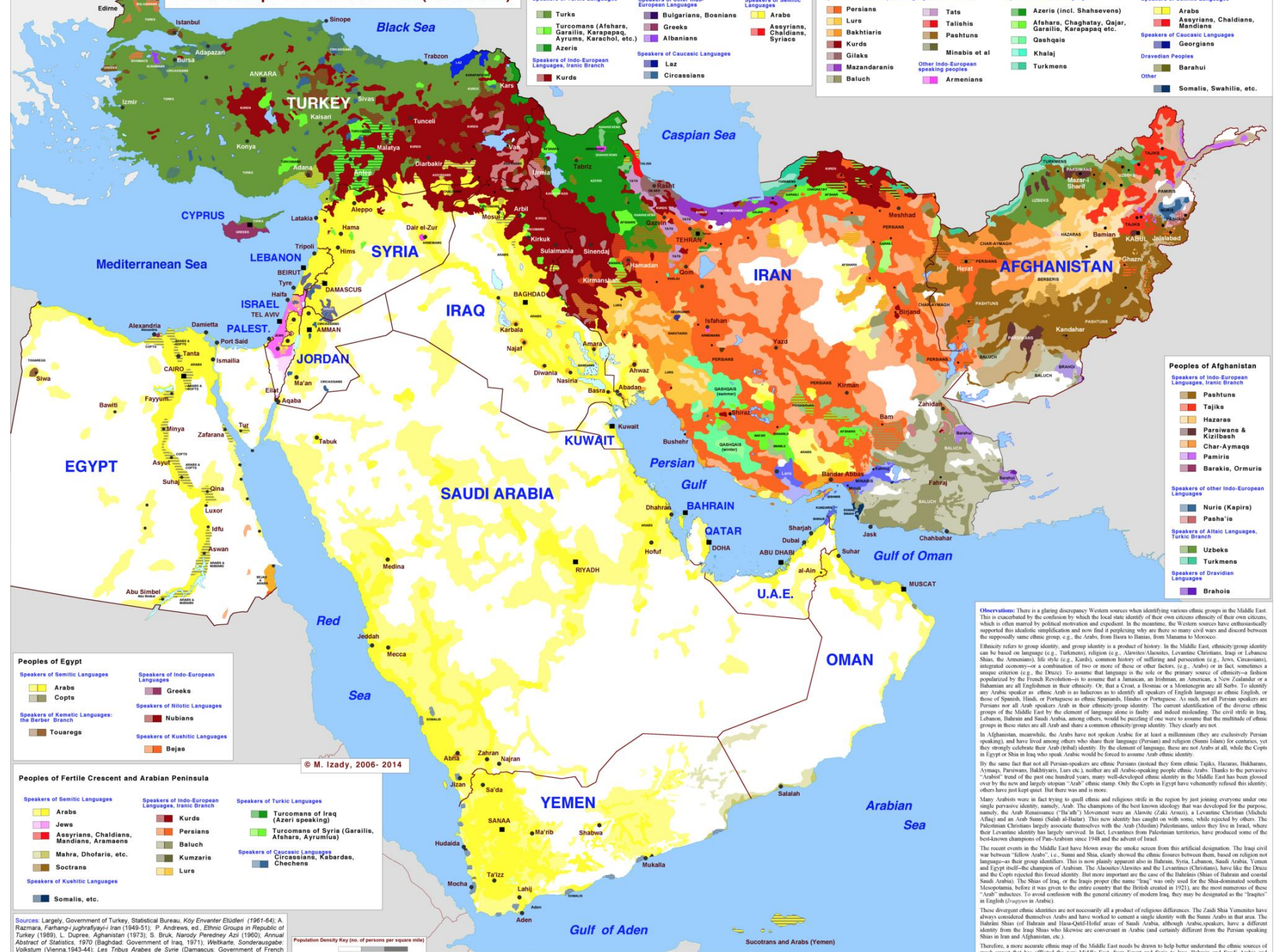






People protesting the sieges and curfews in Sur (Amed/Diyarbakir), Silopi and Cizre, December 2015. Security forces use water cannon and tear gas to disperse crowds. Since 24 July 2015, civilian death toll from security forces 500+

Ethnic Groups of the Middle East (Traditional)



Peoples of Turkey

Speakers of Turkic Languages

- Turks
- Turcomans (Afahars, Garalis, Karapapaq, Ayruks, Karachol, etc.)
- Azeris

Speakers of Indo-European Languages, Italic Branch

- Kurds

Speakers of other Indo-European Languages

- Bulgarians, Bosnians
- Greeks
- Albanians

Speakers of Semitic Languages

- Arabs
- Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrians

Speakers of Caucasic Languages

- Laz
- Circassians

Peoples of Iran

Speakers of Indo-European Languages, Italic Branch

- Parlans
- Lurs
- Bakhtiaris
- Kurds
- Gilaks
- Mazandarans
- Baluch

Speakers of Turkic Languages

- Tata
- Talishis
- Pashluns
- Minabis et al
- Turkemens

Speakers of Semitic Languages

- Azeris (incl. Shahsevens)
- Afahars, Chaghatay, Gajar, Garalis, Karapapaq, etc.
- Qashqais
- Khalaj

Other Indo-European speaking peoples

- Armenians

Speakers of Semitic Languages

- Arabs
- Assyrians, Chaldeans, Mandians
- Speakers of Caucasic Languages
- Georgians
- Dravidian Peoples
- Barahui
- Somalis, Swahilis, etc.

Peoples of Egypt

Speakers of Semitic Languages

- Arabs
- Copts

Speakers of Indo-European Languages, Italic Branch

- Greeks

Speakers of Nilotic Languages

- Nubians

Speakers of Kushitic Languages

- Bejas
- Touaregs

Peoples of Fertile Crescent and Arabian Peninsula

Speakers of Semitic Languages

- Arabs
- Jews
- Assyrians, Chaldeans, Mandians, Armenians
- Mahra, Dhofaris, etc.
- Soctrans

Speakers of Indo-European Languages, Italic Branch

- Kurds
- Persians
- Baluch
- Kumzaris
- Lurs

Speakers of Turkic Languages

- Turcomans of Iraq (Azeri speaking)
- Turcomans of Iraq (Garalis, Afahars, Ayruks)

Speakers of Caucasic Languages

- Circassians, Kabardas, Chechens

Speakers of Kushitic Languages

- Somalis, etc.

Peoples of Afghanistan

Speakers of Indo-European Languages, Italic Branch

- Pashluns
- Tajiks
- Hazaras
- Parlwanis & Kizilbashes
- Char-Aymaq
- Pamiris
- Barakis, Ormuris

Speakers of other Indo-European Languages

- Nuris (Kapira)
- Pashalis

Speakers of Attic Languages, Turcic Branch

- Uzbeks
- Turkemens

Speakers of Dravidian Languages

- Brahuis

Observations: There is a glaring discrepancy between sources when identifying various ethnic groups in the Middle East. This is exacerbated by the confusion by which the local state identity of their own citizens ethnicity of their own citizens, which is often marred by political motivations and expedient. In the meantime, the Western sources have enthusiastically supported this idealistic simplification and now find it perplexing why are there so many civil wars and discord between the supposedly same ethnic group, e.g., the Arabs, from Heera to Kuwait, from Maimana to Morocco.

Ethnicity refers to group identity, and group identity is a product of history. In the Middle East, ethnicity/group identity can be based on language (e.g., Turkic), religion (e.g., Alawites/Alawites, Levantine Christians, Iraq or Lebanese Shia, the Ammanis), life style (e.g., Kurds), common history of suffering and persecution (e.g., Jews, Circassians), integrated economy or a combination of two or more of these or other factors, (e.g., Arabs) or in fact, sometimes a unique criterion (e.g., the Druse). To assume that language is the sole or primary source of ethnicity—a fashion popularized by the French Revolution—is to assume that a Lebanese, an Indonesian, an American, a New Zealander or a Bahaman are all Englishmen in their ethnicity. Or, that a Croat, a Bosnian, or a Montenegrin are all Serbs. To identify any Arabic speaker as ethnic Arab is as ludicrous as to identify all speakers of English language as ethnic English, or those of Spanish, Hindi, or Portuguese as ethnic Spaniards, Hindus or Portuguese. As such, not all Persian speakers are Persians nor all Arab speakers Arab in their ethnicity/group identity. The current identification of the diverse ethnic groups of the Middle East by the element of language alone is faulty and indeed misleading. The civil strife in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, among others, would be puzzling if one were to assume that the multitude of ethnic groups in these states are all Arab and share a common ethnicity/group identity. They clearly are not.

In Afghanistan, meanwhile, the Arabs have not spoken Arabic for at least a millennium (they are exclusively Persian speaking), and have lived among others who share their language (Persian) and religion (Sunni Islam) for centuries, yet they strongly celebrate their Arab (tribal) identity. By the element of language, these are not Arabs at all, while the Kurds in Egypt or Shia in Iraq who speak Arabic would be forced to assume Arab ethnicity.

By the same fact that not all Persian-speakers are ethnic Persians (instead they form ethnic Tajiks, Hazaras, Baluchans, Aymaq, Parlwanis, Bakhtiaris, Lurs etc.) neither are all Arabic-speaking people ethnic Arabs. Thanks to the pervasive "Arabist" trend of the past one hundred years, many well-developed ethnic identity in the Middle East has been glossed over by the new and largely adopted "Arab" ethnic stamp. Only the Copts in Egypt have vehemently refused this identity; others have just kept quiet. But there was and is more.

Many Arabists were in fact trying to quell ethnic and religious strife in the region by just joining everyone under one single pervasive identity, namely, Arab. The champions of the best known ideology that was developed for the purpose, namely, the Arab Renaissance ("the Arab") Movement were an Alawite (Zaki Aransi), a Levantine Christian (Michel Aflaq) and an Arab Sunni (Salah al-Bitar). This new identity has caught on with some, while rejected by others. The Palestinian Christians largely associate themselves with the Arab (Muslim) Palestinians, while they live in Israel, where their Levantine identity has largely survived. In fact, Levantines from Palestinian territories have produced some of the best-known champions of Pan-Arabism since 1948 and the advent of Israel.

The recent events in the Middle East have blown away the smoke screen from this artificial designation. The Iraqi civil war between "Yellow Arabs", i.e., Sunnis and Shias, clearly showed the ethnic fissures between them, based on religion not language—and their group identities. This is now plainly apparent also in Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt itself—the champions of Arabism: The Alawites/Christians, the Levantines/Christians, have like the Druse and the Copts rejected this forced identity. But more important are the case of the Bahrainis (Shias of Bahrain and coastal Saudi Arabia), the Shias of Iraq, or the Iraqi proper (the name "Iraq" was only used for the Shia-dominated southern Mesopotamia, before it was given to the entire country that the British created in 1931), are the most numerous of these "Arab" Indians. To avoid confusion with the general citizenry of modern Iraq, they may be designated as the "Iraqis" in English (*Iraqiyun* in Arabic).

These divergent ethnic identities are not necessarily all a product of religious differences. The Zaidi Shia Yemenites have always considered themselves Arabs and have worked to cement a single identity with the Sunni Arabs in that area. The Bahraini Shias (of Bahrain) Shias-Ismaili-Qatili-Hawaris of Saudi Arabia, Shias, although Arabic-speakers, have a different identity from the Iraqi Shias who likewise are conversant in Arabic (and certainly different from the Persian speaking Shias in Iran and Afghanistan, etc.).

Therefore, a more accurate ethnic map of the Middle East needs to be drawn to help better understand the ethnic sources of much unrest that has afflicted the new Middle East, from Egypt and Syria to Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. This map, meanwhile, represent the traditional ethnic subdivisions of the Middle East.

Sources: Largely, Government of Turkey, Statistical Bureau, *Koy Evvanter Etidleri* (1961-64); A. Razmara, *Fahang-i Jughralayiy-i Iran* (1949-51); P. Andrews, ed., *Ethnic Groups in Republic of Turkey* (1989); L. Dupree, *Afghanistan* (1973); S. Bruk, *Narodny Perepisy Arab* (1960); *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1970* (Baghdad: Government of Iraq, 1971); *Weltkarte, Sonderausgabe Volkstum* (Vienna 1943-44); *Les Tribus Arabes de Syrie* (Damascus: Government of French Mandate of Syria, Section d'Étude du service des renseignements du Levant, 1930).

Population Density Key (no. of persons per square mile)

Scale: 0 100 200 Miles / 0 100 200 Kilometers



- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919
- Border defined by the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920
- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the first United Nations conference, San Francisco, 1945

- TOWARDS KURDISH SELF-RULE**
- Iraqi Kurdistan
 - Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (1946-1947)
 - "Red Kurdistan" in Azerbaijan (1923-1929)

Kurdish-inhabited areas

Sources: Kurdish Institute of Paris; Michael Mehrdad R S C Izady, University of Columbia, New York, 1998





The international community needs to support:

- Multi ethnic multi religious democratic federal systems of government in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran;
- A Marshall plan linked to political milestones to reconstruct war damaged areas in Syria and Iraq;
- Kurdish representation in all military, political and humanitarian negotiations.
- A definition that clearly distinguishes between terrorism and an armed resistance movement with legitimate grievances and democratic aspirations;



For particular countries we ask the international community to support:

- A multilateral ceasefire and political negotiations in Turkey;
- Local multi-ethnic multi religious democratic administrations in Syria to build alternatives to the Assad Regime and Salafi-Islamist ideology;
- The enactment of the federal constitution of Iraq;
- Human rights and democratic transformations in Iran, and
- A federal independent Kurdistan ...

if this is the will of the people.



Close & Return to Home page

Close & Return to KLA Activities