

Syria's Democracy Is The Last Defense Against Federalization

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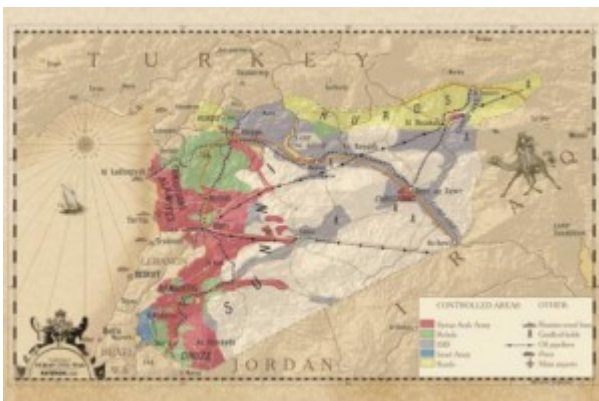
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The Syrian Kurds dropped a [bombshell](#) this week when they [unilaterally announced](#) the tentatively titled "Federation Of Northern Syria" between themselves, Turks, Arabs, and the other ethnicities of the region, or in other words, what they envision will one day become a 'federation within a federation'. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina inside the absolutely dysfunctional country of the same name is an apt comparison, although the "Federation of Northern Syria" and the rest of the country might horribly break up into a kaleidoscope of separate identity-based groups if the federalization virus isn't snipped in the bud soon enough.

Regardless of how far it might eventually go or not, the fact remains that the Kurds' self-interested declaration flies in the face of everything that the Syrian Arab Army and its people have been doing over the past five years to preserve the unitary nature of their state, and it's sure to lead to a lot of tension at the ongoing Geneva III talks. What the Kurds have done in one move is dramatically change the nature of the intra-Syrian reconciliation conversation and formally introduce the idea of Identity Federalism, the pitfalls of which the author earlier analyzed in a research report for Russia's [National Institute for Research of Global Security](#).



As destabilizing as the Kurds' announcement was and might eventually turn out to be, it's still far from certain that they'll achieve their stated objective by the time everything is said and done, and it's much more likely that they took the steps that they did as part of a calculated political gambit in securing a seat at Geneva. Regardless of their motivations, however, it's undeniable that the genie of federalization has been released from the [think tank](#) bottle and is now oozing into the mainstream, but the doom and gloom pertaining to this scenario doesn't mean that it's irreversibly inevitable and that there isn't time left to stop it.

Here's a strong possibility that the Syrian people, as they have historically done and especially in the context of the past five years, will make their voices heard in voting against

federalization and in favor of pro-unitary candidates during the [upcoming UNSC-recognized elections on 13 April](#), which would send the most powerful signal yet that the people totally oppose this foreign-concocted idea. Nevertheless, the West has a final trick up its sleeve in that the EU-member states might recognize Syria's legitimate government prior to the vote so that pro-federalization Syrians there can skew the elections and advance the unipolar agenda.

Smoke And Mirrors

While it initially appears as though the Kurds are dead-set on establishing a quasi-independent self-rule federal statelet in northern Syria – and many of them might very well hold these intentions – it's also likely that the timing of the announcement was meant to give them bargaining leverage at gaining a seat in Geneva. Both Russia and the US are in favor of this, but the organizational framework of the talks is such that all sides need to agree on the inclusion of another participant, and it's here where Turkey stands as the only visible obstacle to that.

To be more specific, it's not necessarily Turkey that's the problem, but President Erdogan, and it's quite telling in fact that he's resisting the joint will of both Russia and the US, which have [unprecedentedly come together](#) in the New Cold War to support the Syrian Kurds. Seeing how much political and military capital the US has invested in the Kurds up until this point, it's reasonable to ponder whether they're considering [turning on Erdogan](#) in the near future and tacitly siding with the anti-government and/or military forces against him, which in any case would implicitly put them once more on the same strategic side as the Russians.

In any case, the Kurds have played their ultimate card by announcing a federal state because there's no realistic way that they'll transgress [UNSC Res. 2254](#) by declaring independence and experiencing the dual wrath of Russia and the US, the two most significant guarantors of that agreement. Therefore, the logical circle once more returns to the point of emphasizing that this is all part of a larger geopolitical game that's playing out in Syria right now, one in which the Kurds are trying to maximize their political, military, and territorial gains of the past five years as much as possible concurrent with the legitimate Syrian authorities doing whatever they can to restore the unitary nature of the state that almost every single family has sacrificed to defend.

In connection with the latter's motivations, the news that Syria wants to include the [Israeli-occupied Golan Heights](#) into the reconciliation format can be seen in a pragmatic and relevant light. While it's extremely unlikely that this historic territory will be returned anytime soon (let alone as a result of Geneva III, no matter how proudly commendable it is that the issue was once more raised to global attention), it's much more probable that bringing it up at this specific time is one of Damascus' chief negotiating ploys. There's a high chance that Syria will tactically walk back from this later in exchange for the US convincing the Kurds to concede their federalization ambitions and accept a much more mild form of simple autonomy.

The Voice Of The People

What just about all commentators are forgetting to speak about is that the current [Syrian Constitution](#) does not allow for federalization or autonomy, so any such declarations are technically illegal under the country's present law and can only be implemented after

amending the constitution or writing a new one. As it would be, the aforementioned UNSC Res. 2254 specifically mandates that the document be reviewed and that a new one take its place, implying the possibility of the required changes being made in order to legalize federalization or autonomy.

There's no clear deadline for how long this should take other than vaguely stipulating that it occur sometime within 18 months (meaning by June 2017), so it's entirely possible that agreeing to the details of any federalization and/or autonomy clause could require protracted negotiations that go on for months. In that case, the forthcoming 13 April elections in Syria would take place before any formal decision is made pertaining to the country's internal (re)division and the new constitution, but that doesn't mean that they're inconsequential to the overall process.

Because the upcoming vote is recognized by the UNSC and will certainly generate global media coverage, patriotic Syrians have the unique opportunity to make their voices heard in resolutely coming out against federalization by voting for pro-unitary candidates that make the issue an explicit part of their electoral platform. In this manner, Syrians can reverse the Western information momentum against them by capitalizing off of the worldwide attention that they receive to show the international community just how strongly they oppose federalization and the determination with which they want to retain their country's unitary identity.

The patriotic population came out in droves in 2014 when they [reelected President Assad](#) by the huge margin of 88.7%, and with their history of civic partition as a precedent, there's no reason to doubt that they won't do something similar in saving their country from the latest foreign plot that's being actively directed against it. The reader should bear in mind that regime change against President Assad is a lot less important to the US and its allies right now at this critical juncture than 'legally' reengineering the Syrian state to their long-term and sustainable geostrategic advantage via the enshrinement of Identity Federalism into a new constitution, and keeping with this imperative, it's crucial to explain the grandmaster trick that the West might try to play in actualizing this sought-after objective.

Playing Dirty

Predicting that the Syrian people will treat the upcoming elections as a de-facto referendum on federalization and that they'll overwhelmingly vote against such a scheme, the US might order its European allies to play the ultimate card in their deck so as to offset this process in a desperate last-bid attempt at derailing Syria's sovereignty. As is known, most of the major European countries do not recognize the legitimate and democratically elected leadership of President Bashar Assad, and as such, they don't have any formal diplomatic interactions with Damascus or any bilateral ambassadorial presence with Syria.

This creates a major complication for them in trying to disrupt the electoral process by having anti-government and pro-federalization Syrians that have immigrated to the EU (many of which satisfy this criteria) go to their embassies and vote for likeminded candidates. Without the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Syria, preconditioned of course on the EU recognizing President Assad, there's no way that these people can vote and they'll thus remain disenfranchised like they were in the 2014 election.

Therefore, it's quite possible that the US will command its European proxies to take the bold move in recognizing President Assad's legitimacy prior to 13 April so that the anti-

government and pro-federalization Syrians can partake in the upcoming election at their host country's newly reopened embassy and throw off the results of the vote.

Even if they don't succeed in having a majority of the parliamentary figures be anti-government and pro-federalization individuals, if they can command at least a convincing plurality of around 20-33%, then they can proceed with their argument that some sort of federalist clause must be included in the constitution to satisfy the will of the substantial political minority. A possible workaround that Damascus could proactively enact in this instance would be to decree that only Syrians with legitimate documents can vote in their embassies, and that all others must return to the country to receive their documents and/or vote there. This could cleverly weed out the patriots from the opportunists, the latter of which would likely remain in their cherry-picked EU welfare resort of choice instead of relocate back to their native homeland.

It's integral that the Syrian people see through the charade that the EU might try to pull on them. While it would be normatively and emotionally significant if the Europeans reestablish ties with Syria after once more recognizing President Assad, it needs to be remembered that this is just a psychological ploy designed to lower the defensive guard of every Syrian as the war on their country transitions into a fifth generational form. The US and its allies want to transform the hitherto non-weaponized process of internal administrative reorganization into a unipolar bludgeon that can knock out Syria's multipolar resistance by dividing the entire country into a checkerboard of separate identity-feuding states.

From there, the formerly unified country would be easy picking for the vultures to divide and rule between themselves, with it eventually being likely that only the security crescent between Damascus, Homs, and the littoral governorates would essentially remain under the Syrian Arab Army's protection, if that. All the other areas would probably receive their own federalized status and accompanying 'regional army' (constitutionally legitimized armed "opposition"), thus making them totally susceptible to being 'traded' between Syria's many enemies as they jockey to boost their geopolitical position in the strategic Levant region.

Concluding Thoughts

Generally speaking, while the Kurds' unilateral declaration of the "Federation of Northern Syria" is definitely worrying, it appears to be a premeditated move timed to coincide with the resumption of the Geneva III talks and designed to ensure them a seat at the negotiating table. Whether they'll stubbornly insist on this administrative entity or pragmatically temper their ambitions by conceding to a much more realistic autonomous status, it's ultimately up to the Syrian people themselves to decide if they'll even grant their government the right or not to bestow such constitutionally unprecedented privileges.

This opens up the foreseeable possibility that the forthcoming elections on 13 April can essentially become a referendum on the federalization question, and if patriotic Syrians overwhelmingly vote for pro-unity candidates in the same enthusiastic manner as they reelected President Assad in 2014, they'd be able to convincingly show the world just how strongly they reject the pressured imposition of this external plot on their country. In parallel with this, the US might direct its EU subordinates to recognize the Syrian government and President Assad in the run-up to this event so that the anti-government and pro-federalization Syrians that they host could be bribed or pressured to vote for corresponding candidates in order to offset the patriotically unifying results that are otherwise to be expected.

Syrians shouldn't allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the US and its allies' recognition ploy, no matter how overdue and morally ethical the action itself would be, because they're actually only doing it for morally repulsive reasons in order to achieve what they feel is their long overdue right to subjugate the country in full. Instead of a diplomatic victory for Syria, it would really be a pyrrhic one that just ends up causing much more harm than good in the long run. The Syrian people must therefore ask themselves whether it's better to have a Western-recognized President Assad symbolically preside over a watered-down presidency in a fractured federation or to have a multipolar-recognized President Assad proudly stand as the strong president of a still-unitary state, albeit one which might tactically have to concede mild Kurdish autonomy in order to stave off the destructive chain reaction of federalization.

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