

Democratic Union Party and the Syrian regime. Partnership or conflict?



Analytical
Report





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Introduction

The relation between the democratic union party PYD, and the Syrian regime had several stages, and almost reached to the stage of break before the revolution, especially after AK party's rule in Turkey, and the improvement in Syrian- Turkish relations.

The Syrian revolution were a beginning for other new phase between the both parties, and it had several advantages for the both parties at local, regional and international levels.

The Syrian regime allowed party and its cadres to return to Syria in the beginning, after it was prohibited organization, and allowed it to take up weapons and declared its armed organization.

Then it turned into the phase of security and military partnership, where the parties did military campaigns jointly.

The party suppressed opponents of Assad in its areas, and confronted the demonstration against the regime.

But the relationship that began in taking care of a small group of homeless in the mountains began to take other forms in the next phase, the regime that began this relationship in 2011 as one of its pressure ways, was no longer able to dominate in most parts of Syria, and turned into a party from two parties which are almost equal in strength and its decision began to depend on for many foreigners' actors. the party that entered into this relationship in 2011, looking for a place, became a feared military power, and became a partner of foreign actors, some of the supporters of the regime itself.

These variables raised the need to reconsider bases of these relations between the two parties, either that the parties go directly to a military confrontation, which will be harmful to the interests of them.

The party is not able to dispense with the economic, political and military care of regime, the regime is not able to dominate the Kurdish areas militarily and not able to bear high political cost of conflict into a high political cost by entering a conflict. This report attempts to examine the reasons that helped both sides to build a relationship, including needs for the study of the relationship between the regime and the Mother party: PKK, the shape of the relationship and its complexity, and tries to extrapolate the possible future of the relationship.

History of relation between PYD and the Syrian regime

The roots of the relationship between the Syrian regime and the Democratic Union Party dating back to the seventies of the last century, specifically in 1979, the year which (Abdullah Ocalan), leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK entered Syria¹, where he was welcomed by the Syrian regime, and settled in Damascus, moving between the PKK camps in Syria² and Lebanon freely and without harassment.

The support of regime for PKK had many ways, the regime allows the party to expand its popular base among the Kurds of Syria, spreading its ideas freely and with protection from the Syrian security forces. The party held its first conference in 1981 on the Syrian territory, as well as its second conference in 1982. After Party Declaration of starting military operations, or what it called the "armed struggle" against Turkey on 15/08/1984, the Syrian regime had a big role in supporting the party logistically and militarily, the party used training camp which followed the Palestinian factions in Lebanon's Bekaa to train its members who were passing easily and without harassment from Syria to Lebanon,

After closing the camp, in 1992, the Syrian regime opened three other camps within Syrian territory, which are the camps of (Sahnaya, Shebaa, and Al-Nashabiyah). where thousands of members of the party have trained, they moved to mountains in Kurdistan region of Iraq or Turkey, and under the supervision of the Syrian intelligence. In addition to wandering the cadres of the PKK is the Syrians, and who do not have permits or passports entitling them entry to Syria freely, and they were recruiting thousands of young people to fight within the party ranks.

Motivates of improving relations between PKK and the regime

¹ PKK was founded on 28/11/1978 by some figures such as (Abdullah Ocalan, Mazloum Dugan and Kamal Beer) in Turkey, Abdullah Ocalan escaped to Syria in 1979, while the others died in the Turkish prisons.

² PYD is still taking advantages from the base of PKK which it was established in the period that the regime allowed to work without problem from 1979 to 1998. most of the popular base of PYD was inherited from PKK.

The strong relations between (1979-1988) between PKK and the Syrian regime has many causes:

1. The Syrian regime wanted to use the party as a pressure on Turkey, which its relations with turkey was deteriorating at that time.
2. Russian support for the PKK, which is mainly due to the differences between Russia and the (NATO) alliance, which Turkey is a major country in it, as well as the old differences from time of (the Ottoman Empire), cadres of PKK had a lot of facilities in Russia, such as traffic and accommodation facilities; and even get the weapons. Russia's rapprochement with the Workers' Party affected the Syrian regime's rapprochement with it, too
- 3-The alawite Kurdish existence within the PKK'S leaders, although the party's refusal to charges of sectarianism, many of the leaders of the PKK are (Alawite Kurds)³, especially from (Dersim), which called Tunceli in Turkey.

In the founding conference of the Party, half the audience was almost of Kurds, Alawites, and from the top Kurdish leaders, for example: (Mazloun Dugan), one of the founders of the party, and (Jameel Bayek) the military leader in the party now, and the female Alawite members dominates the women's wing of the party completely (see table No. 1)⁴.

4- The regime's attempts to use PKK in creating problems in Iraqis Kurdistan region, especially after 1991, and imposing no-fly zone in north and south of Iraq by USA, and declaration of autonomy in the (Iraqi Kurdistan) . which actually happened, the relation between the Kurdistan democratic party and PKK became very bad, and fighting each other's until 1998, the year which Abdullah Ocalan left Syria .

The fighting between the two Kurdish parties led to kill hundreds, and the result still appear until now in the poor relations between the region and PYD.

³ history of the party , its reality and alliances confirmed the sectarianism within its Alawites members , information was leaked about problems between camp of Jameel Bayeek , the alawite who supports the Syrian regime and the wing of Mourad Qara Yelan (Sunni Kurdish) who wants to stop this cooperation

⁴ Some observers attributed the good relations between the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria and the PYD, and between the unity party and the regime, to the sect of Unity Party's secretary (Muhiedden Sheikh Allay),who is an Alawites Kurdish from Efrin .

The relation was not still good , in 1998, Turkey has threatened to intervene militarily in Syria if Syria did not hand (Abdullah Ocalan) for it, and the Syrian regime has already expelled (Abdullah Ocalan) from Syria, he came out on 10/10/1998 , he settled in the Kenyan capital ,Nairobi after several attempts in capitals of the world and they did not accept to receive him, he was arrested "kidnapped" from Nairobi on 15.2.1999 in a joint operation between the Turkish and US intelligence, it was said with participation of the Israeli Mossad, which was on a good terms with Turkey.

Relation of Kurdistan workers party and Democratic Union party with the Syrian regime

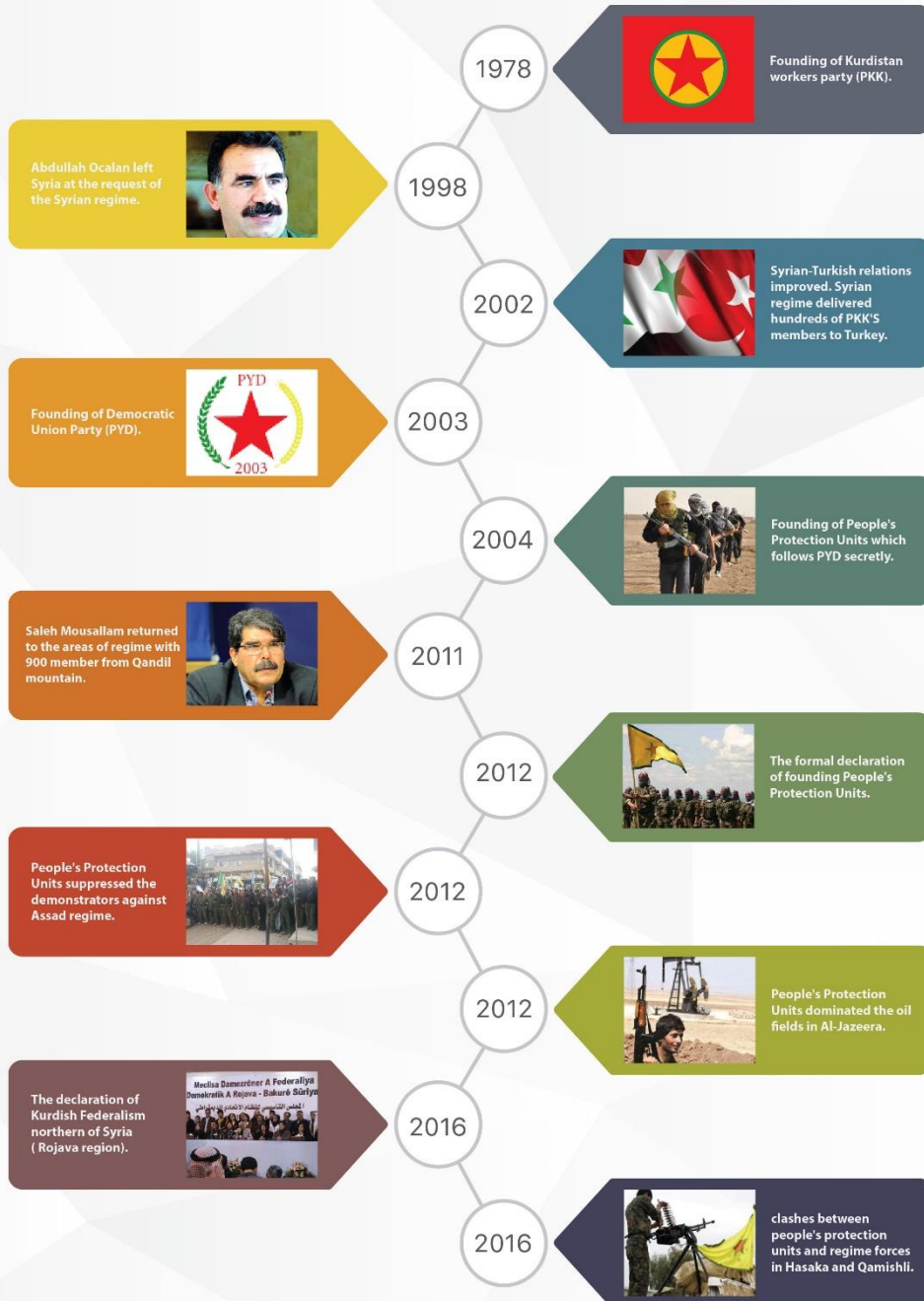


Table 1 - Some Alawite leaders in PKK

position	name
One of the first founders of the party, he was died in Diyar Baker's prison.	Mazloum Dugan
One of founders of the party, she attended the constituent conference , she was former-wife of Abdullah Ocalan , left party in 1986.	Kasera Yildirim
One of the founders, attended the constituent conference , and she was assassination in Paris 2013	Sakena Jansiez
Member of the governing commission of the Kurdistan society organizatio . One of the party's founders and attended the constituent conference	Ali Haydar Qattan
Ali Haydar Qattan's wife, and one of party's leaders	Jamila margeet
Leader in the first ranks, attended the constituent conference and was killed in Qandil mountain	Mehmet qara soungo
One of the first founders of the party, he was died in Diyar Baker's prison.	Mehmet Khaeri Kouromoush
Leader in PKK , he was head of Europe organization of the party, and was assassination in Sweden 1984	Chetin Gongour
One of the founders, attended the constituent conference, he was killed in Istanbul 1990	Shahin Donmaz
One of the founders, attended the constituent conference	Reza Altoun
One of the founders , attended the constituent conference	Hamili Yildirim
One of the founders , attended the constituent conference	Shahin Donmaz
Member of the central commission of PKK since 1990	Mustafa Qara Su

The agreement of Adana⁵ was signed between Turkish and Syrian governments in October 1998, which requires in its items to arrest non-Syrians cadres of PKK by the Syrian regime and hand them to turkey.

the regime handed since 1998 until 2012 about 100 members of PKK'S cadres in Syria , including senior figures such as (Khabat Amed) the official of party in Syria , who spent the sentence of life in Turkey.

The party has been prohibited in Syria.

This cascading actions pushed the party to withdraw thousands of its cadres to the Qandil Mountains, and the members of the Syrians were mostly stopped activity due to prosecutions security services for them and prevent them from exercising any political action. Although this scene from the poor relationship between the parties; the party leaders maintained a good relationship with the regime, (jameel baeyek), a member of the executive commission of the party and the second man in PKK has visited Damascus several times after 1998.

This relation was reflected in the continuation dealing of the party's literature until today with Hafez al-Assad phase. For example, what said by(Murat Kara Whelan) member of the executive commission of the party, and the first man of the party after the arrest of Ocalan, in one of the media meetings about the good relation between the Syrian regime and PKK during the period of (Hafez Assad) and the justification for Assad expulsion of (Ocalan) outside Syria and caused his arrest, and his desire he relation to return normal, Kara Yelan said: "..from our part, we are still at the moment, appreciate and value highly the positions of President Hafez al-Assad. We want that heat back to those relations, based on the previous same foundations.⁶

⁵ Syria Al-Waad: in the 14th anniversary of singing: Al-Haqeqa published the contents of Adana agreement between Syria and turkey with its secret supplements : <https://goo.gl/sJLLjv>.

⁶ Head of the executive committee of PKK accused AKP by deceiving the Kurds, Al-Hayat newspaper, 31/7/2007 . <https://goo.gl/NcWPZN>

Relation after founding of Democratic Union Party

In 1997 the emergence of project to establish a Syrian Kurdish party called (Syrian Kurdish Democratic gathering), and the project was launched in cooperation between the Syrian intelligence and cadres of PKK; to be a Syrian part of PKK, and to justify the existence of the party as a Syrian party without external relations, and it was announced in 12/10/1998, after the departure of Ocalan from Syria nearly two months, (Marwan zarki) was head of the party, who is a Kurdish figure close to the Syrian intelligence, and (Omar Aosei) member of the Syrian parliament currently and (Saleh Muslim) co-president of the Democratic Union Party currently, were members of the political office of the party at that time, but Adana agreement, and improvement of Turkish-Syrian relations, led to the failure of the party project.

In 2003, the Democratic Union Party was founded in Qandil mountains as a part from the Kurdistan Workers Party, the founding of the Democratic Union Party, was a part of a reform movement within PKK. the reform movement included founding parties in each part of the four parts of Kurdistan. In 2002, the party solution Kurdistan was established (PÇDK), which is the Iraqis wing of PKK.

In 2003, the Democratic Union Party was Founded (PYD), which is a wing of the Kurdistan Workers party in Syria, and in 2004 party of free life was founded (PJAK), a wing of the Kurdistan workers in Iran, and all the constituent conference of the parties were held in Qandil Mountains.

All leaders of these parties are former leaders of PKK.

Thus, the Democratic Union Party forms a natural extension of the thought and policies of PKK, and inherited the local and regional relations. Syrian regime's dealing with the Democratic Union Party was not different from dealing with PKK, it still prohibited, and its leaders still prosecuted. The system pressure on the party after Bashar al-Assad's rule increased, and improvement of Syrian-Turkish relations, especially after receipt of (AKP) to power in Turkey in 2002, and the number of detainees from the party in Syrian prisons was nearly 1,400 prisoners.

The number of members handed by Syria to Turkey reached about 100 cadres. However, there is still a hidden relation between the party and the Syrian leadership, especially the private security leadership.

Jameel Bayek has visited Damascus several times. But what was clear before the Syrian revolution is the relation between the two parties were in constant chill because of the continuing Turkish Syrian rapprochement at all levels, but due to the Syrian revolution, the two parties' relation returned strong.

The relation after 2011

The relation became clear between the Democratic Union Party and the Syrian regime dramatically after 2011, this relation can be seen at all levels and areas.

We will try to explain each theme separately:

The Military theme

People's Protection Units was Founded in 2012 in the Syrian Kurdish areas at a time when the regime had all the security branches in those areas, and the security branches provided many facilities on the one hand a blind eye to training camps, and recruits have been doing in the Kurdish areas, and even dominated those areas despite the presence of the security and service institutions of the regime.

In contrast, the units provided security and military services for the regime including suppressed demonstrations and even hit the demonstrators more than once to reach killing them, as happened in a Amouda on 27/06/2013, addressing the opposition fighters, as happened on 08/11/2012 when some armed opposition factions entered Ras al-Ain city, and the people's Protection units entered in battles against those factions to stand by the regime.

The military relation between the two parties Developed so much, in addition to the two parties cooperate in fighting ISIS in countryside of Hasaka during the years 2013-2015, until the establishment of democracy Syrian forces and the start of the alliance supporting by the People's Protection Units in fighting against ISIS, the regime and units have relations which affected the course of many battles between the regime and the free army, especially in Aleppo and its countryside, the regime used sites of people's protection units for bombing the free army positions sites,

and also the protection units often shelled free army factions and stand by the regime.

protect people's units had a big role in breaking "Castelo" road and imposed siege to Aleppo neighborhoods controlled by the FSA factions⁷.

This relation led to integration and partnership between the two parties, where we can watch close barriers of the regime and units of protect people or (Asayish) which is the security department followed the self-management, the security square in Qamishli, in which regime security sites concentrated is only a few meters away from self-management positions, and the same in Hasaka .

Checkpoints of two parties are close, and can be passed comfortably without problems and harassment, as well as the movement of the regime members (security, military and political) between Qamishli and Hasaka without problems⁸.

The Political theme

The regime after 2011 , allowed the party to publish his thoughts and rebuild its popular base, it has entered nearly 900 cadres of the party, which came from Qandil mountains to work in the Kurdish areas in Syria, and began to communicate with the old popular bases (which they inherited from the Kurdistan workers' Party) and (Saleh Muslim) who was wanted by the Syrian security forces returned to the Kurdish areas in May 2011, coming from the Qandil mountains without being subjected to any annoyances by the security services. And it came back in conjunction with the first clear emergence of the party and its cadres on the ground, and the beginning of their suppressing the demonstrators in the Kurdish areas.

The large powers which granted to the party were not limited on the Kurds civilians but surpassed to the regime security itself,

⁷ Washington institute: Fabrice Balouch , Kurdish forces support Assad in Aleppo , 29/7/2016.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/kurdish-forces-bolster-assad-in-aleppo>

⁸ Road between Qamishli and Hasaka is controlled by Asayish, and people's protection units , members of the regime and its security leaders including the governor an some senior officers are passing these checkpoints easily

police and security of state branch often avoided getting into trouble with the party cadres, and in case a problem occurs, the commands come about the need for withdrawal of security branches and commitment to silence and calm⁹.

The regime did not deny this relation, and his media means are always commending (trophies of people's protection units, and describing them as the honorable and national Kurds.

The denial confined to the second party which is PYD. it has always denied the relation with the Syrian regime. However, many of statements made by officials used to say other things, including what the former governor of Hasaka (Mouhammed Zaal Al-Ali) said during a television interview on Syria TV that the Syrian government has made a lot of services for self-management

They also provided a lot of services, the governor described the leader of the PYD and the Movement for Democratic Society (Aldar Khalil) as a national figure.¹⁰

Also, the co-ruler of Al-Jazeera province (HAMIDI Daham Al-Hadi) During the (Syrian Democratic Forum for Dialogue) which was held in the city of Al-Raamelan in Hasaka, October 2016 addressed Bashar al-Assad in front of self-management officials, as Mr. President.¹¹

In addition to all what mentioned above, the service institutions of the regime are still working in areas of the party continues to carry out their routine daily work in coordination with the self-management institutions, each party separately granting salaries to its employees, and the (courts) of the regime continues working in most of the Kurdish cities, except Kobani, judges are still practice working in legal business matters for many Syrians transactions in those areas.

9 The mentioned number is according to unofficial statistics , but according to some of cadres during meetings and gathering

10 A lot of officials in police and security admitted these information after their defections

11 YouTube, Hasaka governor talks about the relations of PYD and the regime :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsnCG4TY1jU>

full interview , YouTube channel of Syrian channel , special interview with governor of Hasaka:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzqi2y0g38>

The Economic theme

PYD and its , military and service institutions often benefited from the regime support economically directly or indirectly, the beginning was in handing the task of supervising distribution of "fuels and bread," where the party increased the price , and then he was handed the oil fields in the area of the Al-Jazeera -Al-Ramelan - as well as domestic gas plant in (Swedieah) to the Democratic Union Party and units to protect people since 2012, they are producing oil and sell it , although there are no accurate numbers about the amount of oil that were sold daily by them but the revenue from the sale of oil, according to some estimates, at least 10 million \$ per month.¹²

Also, number of gas cylinders, which are produced by the Swedieah gas plant ranges on average between (7000-15000) gas cylinder a day, and the different number will be according to the gas that is extracted along with oil extraction amount.

The gas cylinder's price about (2000) SP, so, gas revenues ranging between (14-30) million Syrian pounds a day.

Although the party control and its military and institution on those fields, but the regime's employees are still attending and supervising production of gas and oil from those fields and get paid by the Syrian regime¹³. In addition to the oil fields, the regime handed to the party many areas of state farms in Derek / malikeah region, the party is farming these lands and taking advantage of its production, party also it was handed a number of stores (silos) of grain in Hasaka.

12 Zaman Al-Wasel , governor of Al-Jazeera in self-management called Bashar Al-Assad as Mr. president , 2/10/2016 , <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/73980.html>
YouTube, orient news, Ramelan conference, Hamidi Daham Al-Hadi called Bashar Al-Assad as Mr. President. , 2/10/2016 .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD2QrOHOqow>

¹³ Souar magazine, fared Edwar , Al-Ramelan fields is managing by Kurdish expertise , oil fields are still under supervision of foreign companies
<https://goo.gl/4rc7l4>

Motives of improving relation between the two parties

Return of the relation between the two parties after the Syrian revolution due to many reasons, including:

- Need of the regime for a strong Kurdish organization to be an ally for it to help in the Kurdish areas, as an alternative for the regime militias established in other areas. the party is the best choice due to the historical relation between them, and there was relation between the two parties at the level of the security leaders.
- Syrian regime's desire to neutralize the Kurdish areas of the Syrian revolution to show the revolution as a sectarian like only reflects the aspirations of the (Sunni Arabs) without other Syrian society components, so it used the party to suppress the demonstrations in the Kurdish areas.
- PKK wanted the relations with Syrian regime to be as was in the past, and to take advantages from the Syrian situation to achieve some of its interests in the Kurdish Syrian areas , and restore its popular base.
- The desire of PKK to achieve economic gains through controlling the Kurdish Syrian areas to finance its military camp in Qandil.

The desire of PKK to decrease the siege which was imposed on it in Qandil mountain before 2011 due to the improvement of the Syrian Turkish Iranian relations, and the relations of Iraqis Kurdistan region with turkey , so the Syrian revolution is the chance to provide service by the party to reduce the siege on it.

The future of the relation

The relation between the regime and the party is no longer as was before in 2011 and 2012, where the party had international supporters, and build relations with USA and Russia, and the regime itself is not as long as it was in 2011.

The changes in these situations led to appearance of differences signs between the parties, the end of 2016, several clashes between the regime and the people 's protection and Asayish in Hasaka and Qamishli,¹⁴ the

14 Besides the regime's employees, a lot of self-management's employees get paid by the regime

parties changed the quality of the political discourse about each other. at the end of 2016, regime described people's protection units and Asayish as the military wing of terrorist PKK " for the first time.¹⁵

But it is believed that the relation between the two parties in the short and medium term will not reach the total confrontation, there are still a lot of common interests between them, especially because Syria is going to political settlement sooner or later, and each party wants to keep its allies, they needed each other, both within Hasaka or outside it.

Self-management needs the regime to pay salaries of thousands of employees who still get paid the salaries from the Syrian regime,

And self-management cannot pay these employees' salaries if regime stopped paying their monthly salaries, in addition to the fact that salaries have good economic role in the province.

As well as the regime still needs security and political powers of party, particularly in Aleppo and its countryside, where those forces are acting the pro-regime forces in Aleppo countryside, and the regime cannot compensate for these forces. The party is still an ally and a political part in the Russian Iranian alliance which the regime is still within it.

The relation between the two parties in the medium term may change in the purposes and interests, PKK is seeking through its relation with the Syrian regime to get logistical support for its forces which are fighting Turkey, but now it seeks to get geographical and political gains in Syria.

the regime which was supporting PKK to be use it as a pressure on Turkey, and recently on the Syrian opposition has become aware of the size of the force reached by the party after years of its managing of the Kurdish region

15 Reuters, Syrian aircrafts bombed areas controlled by Kurds for the first time , 18/8/2016

<http://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARAKCN10T11H?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

16 SANA, the general command of the army: the provocations of the military wing of the PKK in Hasaka took a more seriousness which need summoned fit reply of the Syrian Arab Army, 19.8.2016 :

<http://www.sana.sy/?p=419560>

and the exploitation of its resources, as well as Russian and US support for the faction of the military party, so the two parties are probably heading to build a new alliance, based on a relation between two equal parties.