

The Kurdish scene in Syria in 2016





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The Kurdish areas in Syria witnessed qualitative changes in the political, military and humanitarian domains during 2016, some of these changes resulted from interactions within the Kurdish area, or effected by interactions and changes in Syrian and regional scene.

This special report will review these developments on the political and humanitarian, field and public freedom domains.

The political scene

The Kurdish regions are divided into three areas: Al-Jazeera , Kobani and Efren , and the political map changes according to each area , in Efren there is not opponent for the democratic society movement which dominates the political scene there with simple opposition from the Kurdish national council ,especially "the Kurdistan democratic party- Syria) , so the strength of the movement in "Al-Jazeera" is based on the military power which it used to suppress its opponents and control media ,especially those who affiliated with (the Kurdish national council in Syria).

However, the year 2016 was different from the previous years, the Kurdish national council made progress to prove itself as a political power in the Kurdish region by organizing itself, and establishing a lot of national councils in the towns and villages within Aljazeera.

Although these councils do not have the power to work in the service or humanitarian domains, but they still the link between the supporters of the Kurdish national council, and the council also began to organize sit-ins and demonstrations against politics of PYD in 2016, and these demonstrations were stopped in 2013 to return in all cities of Al-Jazeera in 2016 with sit-ins for the Kurdish national council against the self-management and PYD.

In conjunction with the field move, the council intensified its political activities in Europe, especially the meetings with political officials in the European countries.

The activity of council in 2016 can be understood according to the following considerations:

The feeling of the national council of a great risk will threaten it as a political power in the Kurdish region, which was accounted for by the parties of national council politically (which were scattered) before the Syrian revolution.

Yekiti Kurdish party used its strength and power to serve the politics of Kurdish national council, after the presidency of (Ibrahim Berro) for the council, which he was the secretary of the party.

The supporting of Iraqi's Kurdistan politically and financially for the council to become the strongest ally for the region in Syria, and does not make a political decision without reference to the region.

The activity of the Kurdish national council was not without challenges, such as arrests and accusations of treason campaigns by the movement of democratic society and self-management (it will be mentioned in the public freedoms chapter).

Due to activity of the Kurdish national council, the democratic society movement was working to enhance its strength and increase its popularity, the year of 2016 witnessed hundreds of meetings for the movement in Kurdish and Arab towns and cities, especially the areas controlled by democratic forces of Syria, such as Al-Houl, Al-Shadada, Tal Abyadh and Manbej, the movement also established hundreds of Comines (small local councils) which follow it in the regions it dominated, where the number of Comines in Efren was 898, and 47 council to gather them, and all these councils will gather in a general council.

Also in Kobani (450) comine, and more than 1514 organized comine in Aljazeera within 97 council, and linked the councils with general council in each district.

The number of women Comines in Aljazeera was about 714, in Efren 504 and 300 in Kobani.

The declaration of federalism in March 2016 is the most important project for the movement of democratic society.

The project drew attention of external and internal forces while Syrians both the regime and the opposition rejected it, and reached advanced levels in the second meeting for the constituent council in December 2016, and "the social contract of the federal system was signed officially, but the

council changed the name and removed (Rougava) from it to be " the democratic union for northern of Syria) , and this change faced large rejection from the Kurdish forces in the council , but the Arabs and Seryans agreed with it .

The democratic society movement justified the change of name as it is more comprehensive than (Rougava), and to open a way for all who want to join this system.

But the name changed as an attempt by democratic society movement to lure Arabs into its own, especially within the political and military changes in the region after the Russian -Turkish agreement, and its attempts to convince Arabs that its project is not a Kurdish national project, and it will not separate Arabs from their Arab brothers in other syrian areas.

The effective political activity of the democratic society movement during 2016, can be understood as following:

-The Democratic Society Movement has a full-time staff can work for great time without social responsibilities except serving the movement, the number of this staff exceeds 900 persons according to informal statistic, who were formerly members of the Kurdistan workers party (PKK) and they are now in the democratic society movement.

-The Movement has great financial resources, and it got a financial support from its organizations in Europe, and also from the syrian government in the beginning of the syrian revolution, and later it took control on the oil wells which it sold it as crude oil, and also sold it as after refining it in refineries belonging to the movement.

-The movement has a military power (people's protection units) which got a support from the syrian regime in the beginning, and then from the international alliance since 2015

-This negligence is a mistake that the parties of Kurdish national council did.

the movement's interest of countryside like the interest of cities at the organizational level , the democratic society movement was the first in organizing demonstrations and social activities in the countryside (some demonstrations in the villages of Aljazeera ,Kobani and Efren) and this is what the Kurdish political movement ignored (except the democratic

society movement) since its foundation until now , which focused on cities more than countryside despite the large human and financial resources owned by countryside.

This negligence is a mistake that the parties of Kurdish national council did.

In addition to the above mentioned, the political map of the Kurdish politic witnessed several changes in 2016 , the most notable was he formation of the (Kurdish national alliance) as a new political cluster within the Kurdish political map , and this cluster resulted from former division within the Kurdish national council and the expulsion number of parties due to accused of " dealing and collusion with PYD" which led these parties to form a new entity to gather themselves , these parties are: (Kurdish democratic unity , Kurdish democratic party in Syria , the accord Kurdish party , the reform Kurdish movement , the left Kurdish democratic party) , and the alliance since its formation was close to the self-management and participated the two constituent meetings for federalism project which raised by the democratic society movement.

The scene on the ground

The people's protection units, the only Kurdish military faction, achieved large achievements during 2016, where the areas it dominated with the democratic forces of Syria (that actually led by the people's protection units) have increased for up to 17.5% of the area of Syria at the end of 2016, with an increase about 4000 square km compared with 2015.

This year also witnessed the formation of some brigades and factions by the units with different names , in April 2016, the military council of Manbej was formed , joined the democratic forces of Syria and controlled Manbej in Aleppo countryside on 12.8.2016 with support from the international alliance , and also formed the military council of Al-Bab on 14.8.2016 but the Turkish intervention prevented them to control Al-Bab, they also declared the formation of military council in Jarablus which aimed to dominate Jarablus but also the Turkish intervention prevented it to control the city .

They also recently formed the military council of Deir Ez-Zor, and all these formations are followed the people's protection units which recruited people of these areas within the ranks of its multiple formations.

The greatest achievement of the democratic forces of Syria and people's protection units was the declaration of the campaign (anger of Euphrates to liberate Raqqa) without Turkish participation, where it declared on 5.10.2016 the start of this campaign by itself which was rejected by Turkey and considered as a threat for its security. This achievement does not depend on the power of the people's protection units as much as it depends on the international agreements and understandings which preferred to keep Turkey away from the battle of Raqqa, and choose the appropriate time for this after the battle of Mosel.

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At the end of November, the people's protection units controlled six neighborhoods of eastern Aleppo after withdrawal of the armed opposition armed which are: Bustan Al-Basha, Al-Hullak, Baaden, Al-Haydarya, Sheikh Kheder, and Sheikh Fares, and this operation maybe done within an agreement with the regime and its foreigner allies because there were not any skirmishes between the two parties and the agreement to share these neighborhoods was clear.

People's protection units also graduate several groups from (self-defense forces) or what called popularly "the conscription). The defense commission has graduated 5 groups in Aljazeera district in 2016, their number was about 3170 young man and 4 groups in Efren, and imposed the conscription in Kobani on 4.6.2016.

These achievements done by people's protection units have several reasons, including:

- The military and financial support provided by the international alliance, especially USA.

-The military and logistic support provided by the regime which was clear in Aleppo.

-A large number of youth joined the people's protection units and democracy forces of Syria for financial and security reasons , because the salaries of these units are tempting in the areas that dominated , in addition to the features provided by them to their members and their families through providing them by humanitarian and relief aids.

the hostile of some families for the ISIS due to the death of their sons by the organization which led them to join these units to take revenge of the criminals.

On the security domain , the number of security centers which follow them was about 100 centers in the areas they dominated , and a new security faction was formed under the name of (society's protection forces) on 23.3.2016 , which consists of volunteers from Comines members who Trained to use the weapons , and they are responsible for security within their neighborhoods or at checkpoints of their towns and villages , and they also help in protect the gatherings and celebrations of self-management or its close parties.

The number of those who joined the (society's protection units) in Aljazeera was about 7400 (male and female members) distributors at 110 brigades, the number of them in Efren was about 12000 (male and female members) distributors at 51 brigades, and in Kobani, the number was about 10000 members distributors at 43 brigades.

The humanitarian scene

The humanitarian scene in the Kurdish areas is associated with the field scene, the military campaigns are carried out by the people's protection units and the democratic forces of Syria led to increase numbers of displaced people to the Kurdish areas to escape from fighting , and the battle of Mousel also led to displaced of thousands from Iraq to the Kurdish areas in Syria.

7 camps are distributed in the Kurdish areas, 4 of them are in **Aljazeera**, which are:

1- **Al-Houl camp**: it located in the city of Al-Houl near the Iraqi borders , opened on 3.9..2016 to host the Iraqi refugees and some displaced from Deir Ez-Zor , but the number of refugees to the camp have increased due to the battle of Mousel .

The number of people in this camp is about 13000, where it was not exceed 2000 persons before the battle of Mousel.

The UN and some humanitarian organizations provide some supplies for the refugees, but they are still in need for the basic necessities of life such as water sanitation and health centers according to the self-management.

2-**Mabrouka camp**: It located in the city of Mabrouka, on the road of Hasaka- Raqqa, opened in January 2016 to host the syrian refugees who escaped from ISIS in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa.

The self-management opened the camp after increasing the numbers of refugees due to the military clashes between ISIS and the democratic forces of Syria in the northwest countryside of Hasaka, countryside of Tal Abyadh, and the countryside of Raqqa.

About 4000 refugees are living in the camp now.

3-**Roug camp**: it located in the countryside of Dereck / Al-Malekya, which opened on 4.6.2016 and hosted 460 Iraqi families who entered the camp since more than a year. this camp was not affected by the battle of Mousel as the camp of Al-Houl

4-**Newroz camp**: it also located in the countryside of Dereck / Al-Malekya, opened in May 2016 and hosted more than 100000 Iraqi refugees, many of them are Yazidis from Chankal, but the number of its people now does not exceed 500 persons, most of them are Syrians after the return of Yazidis to Iraq.

This camp also was not affected by the battle of Mousel as the camp of Al-Houl

The camps of Mabrouka and Al-Houl were the most affected camps in 2016 due to the battle of Mousel, and the location of the camp near the Iraqi borders, but Mabrouka camp witnessed increasing in numbers of

refugees due to the clashes between ISIS and democratic forces of Syria in the west north countryside of Hasaka and Raqqa countryside.

There are two camps in **Efren, which** are:

1-**Roubar camp**: it opened on 27.10.2016 and hosted about 2600 refugees from the areas of Aleppo countryside in 2016 due to the clashes between the armed factions there . the total number of people in this camp is about 5000 refugees.

2-**Al-Shahbaa camp**: it opened in 14.8.2016 to host the refugees from Al-Shahbaa, Aleppo countryside and Al-Bab. the number of people in this camp is not much due to the lack in the necessary supplies.

It should be noted that Efren was a passage for thousands of refugees from Aleppo countryside, areas in Raqqa countryside and Deir Ez-Zor to Idleb through the cross point of Atmah, between Efren and Izaz, and according to the administration to of the cross point, hundreds of refugees crossing daily toward Efren, and the large number of them towards Idleb.

There is a camp in **Kobani, which** is:

Meshta Nour camp: about 79 refugee families are living in the camp , and getting aids from international or local organizations . after the campaign of (anger of Euphrates) the number of refugees increased in Tal Abyadh and Manbej due to the displacement of people towards these areas for safety, some of them lived with their relatives, or stayed without housing due to the lack of camps, their number was about 18000 refugees distributed in the villages of (Awsajli, Al-Kawekli, Al-Sayada, and Ain Essa).

The civil council of Manbej tried to open a camp in the village of "Qaraa" which located 10 km north of Manbej on 11.11.2016 but the attempt did not success due to the lack of supplies and the humanitarian aids form the organizations.

In addition, the international organizations which follow the UN are working in cooperation with the institutions of the regime to provide humanitarian aids for refugees and displaced people.

The world health organization during 2016 opened several clinics in Hasaka , and the united nations development program supported some

development projects through licensed associations by the syrian regime such as the factory of shoes in Qamishli in cooperation with the association of Wasel , lighting the streets of Hasaka using the solar energy , and the united nations high commission of refugees provided thousands of food baskets for refugees in camps or out of camps directly or indirectly or through charity associations.

In addition to the UN, there are 8 international organizations which are working within the Kurdish areas, especially in Aljazeera, they are:

IRC, IRD, NRC, ACTED, Save the children, Handicap, Mercy corps, People in need.

The public freedoms

The scene of the public freedom changed from one area to another according to the political forces on the ground and the political conflict between them , Kobani did not witness a lot of arrested cases due to the humanitarian situation in the area , and a lot of forces want to back again after the destruction of the city due to the clashes between ISIS and people's protection units after the attempt of ISIS to control the city in 2014 , but the districts of Aljazeera and Efren witnessed a lot of arrests due to political reasons especially in Aljazeera , where the internal Kurdish security forces arrested a lot of the supporters of the Kurdish national council on charges of " sedition) , " the unauthorized demonstration" ,and " smuggling the young men outside the boarders".

The arrested people were not judged, and some of them have not investigated yet.

about 40 people were still detained in the prisons of the internal Kurdish security forces, most of them from the supporters of the Kurdish national council.

The internal Kurdish security forces excluded the head of the Kurdish national council (Ibrahim Berro) by force to Iraqi's Kurdistan and prevented him to enter the areas they dominated on 18.8.2016

The negligence and depriving the detainee (Salah Younes) from the necessary medical care in prison led to his death of cancer after released him nearly three months, he was arrested on 18.6.2016, was released in 6.9.2016 and died in 5.12.2016.

also, the citizenship (Khalesa Rasoul) lost her unborn baby as a result of being beaten by supporters of the self-management during the sit-in for the Kurdish national council in Qamishli, December 2016.

In addition, the internal Kurdish security forces, and the units of military police arrested hundreds of young men and obliged them to conscription in Aljazeera, Kubani and Efren.

In terms of media freedom, a number of journalists were beaten and assaulted by the internal Kurdish security forces during 2016, and the channels of orient and Roudaw are forbidden within the areas of self-management.

Also, the correspondent of Yekiti media website (Alan Saleem Ahmed) is still detained since 15.8.2016, when he was working within the media coverage of the funeral of the Peshmerga (Habib Qadri)

Regarding the areas of Al-Shadadi and Al-Houl, the violations were various represented in the attack of the citizens property in these areas, destroy them or steal them on charges of dealing with ISIS, for example, the democratic forces of Syria stole a lot of commercial shops, and destroyed number of farms under the pretext of that they belong to the people are fighting with ISIS.

In Al-Houl, the people were prevented from entering their city for several months, the internal Kurdish security forces killed two persons during a demonstration demanding to allow people entering their homes on 2.4.2016

In addition to the previous violations, the year of 2016 witnessed practices by self-management such as blackmail and forcing people to accept the new power / government, controlling the (fuels, bread and food) and did not distribute it fairly to the people of the areas they dominated, but based on the principle of political favoritism and preference their supporters on the other citizens.



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