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SCPSS and Syrian Expert House Organized a Conference on the Role of Kurds in Transition in Syria

On June 13-14 2015, the [Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#) and the [Syrian Expert House \(SHE\)](#) organized a conference entitled: “**Kurds and Transition in Syria**”. The conference aimed to establish a new document to analyze and study the role of the Kurds in the transitional process in Syria. This new work will complement [Syria Transition Roadmap](#). The document which will result from this conference comes four years after the start of the Syrian Revolution, and two years after the publication of the original [Syria Transition Roadmap](#) plan, and will draw on the events and changes seen over the past two years.

Syria is undergoing a state of collapse that is very similar to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the local actors on the ground changed from Assad versus armed opposition to include other forces such as: ISIS, Al-Nusra Front, Kurdish militias, and other fighting factions. These forces dominate different areas of the Syrian lands, and as the war develops, these territories change periodically. Additionally, the dominating forces enforce their own government in the areas which they occupy. Syria had reached a state of chaos that will be the greatest and the most challenging obstacle in transition after the conflict.

The Kurdish forces achieved stability and administrative performance on the ground. Furthermore, Kurdish forces were able to defeat ISIS and they began practicing a self-government by one dominating party. Subsequently, the dominance of one party poses a series of challenges and obstacles facing the Kurdish dilemma in one hand, and the national democratic Syrian project in the other hand. These were the key points discussed during the two-day conference.

First, the local administration in the three cantons.

After two years of observation, the Kurdish nationalists concluded that the three cantons system is a strong indicator on forming the entity of west Kurdistan province, or the Rojava region. Today, the Kurdish forces control vast areas of Qamishli, Afrin, Kubani, and their surroundings. The military control is accompanied with administrative political local councils, which filled the absence of the state and prevented the chaos from spreading. Not to mention the support provided by Kurdistan, Iraq, Turkey, and other allies, which improved the local council’s performance and helped the People’s Protection Units (or People’s Defense Units) YPG to withstand huge military challenges.

Strangely today, the case of the three cantons, which was seen as a temporary and exceptional, became very popular to reach different parts of Syria such as: Idlib, Aleppo, Daraa, Damascus suburbs, and Al-Suwayda. Moreover, each area is subject to military control by local armed factions, while native civilians govern these local council due to the absence of state institutions. As a result, the canton system is believed to be the most common in the Syrian conflict.

These local councils had proven sustainability in the absence of a united national state that combines different areas together. The foundation of one state collapsed because the communities lost faith on the relationship between the state and the citizen. In addition to the lack of strong pillars, such as the security services and other political institutions, which form the state.

Despite the great danger imposed against the entity of the state, it's temporary, exceptional, and the possibility of its continuation is weak due to the following reasons:

- 1- Political administration is going to be enforced by the fighting factions who control opposition zones. Furthermore, these factions will treat the local councils as a temporary entity that neither declares its independence nor considers its self-rule. Actually, these councils should impose control and cooperation with other areas because of the level of destruction and the resulting displacement. As a result, this is an indicator on the lack of stability in Syria due to contradictions in military visions.
- 2- The rise of ISIS and its continuous expansion. Although ISIS is being struck by the U.S led international coalition, they maintained their territories and spread even more. Therefore, many other factions find it difficult to retrieve lands that were taking by ISIS. As a result, it would very challenging to defeat ISIS if the factions didn't unite. Also, the civilian residents in ISIS held territories shall be given a priority and an opportunity of representation in order revolt against it. These two conditions cannot be achieved unless there is a national political collaboration that leads to the formation of a Syrian state even in a decentralized manner.
- 3- The enormous sacrifices and losses that effected a large segments of the Syrian society. In order to achieve real peace, coexistence, and reconciliation, a national sentiment should be reflected via unity and cooperation between the various areas and different segments of Syrian society.

There are two additional obstacles that withstand against the idea of a Western Kurdistan entity specifically on a national basis, and they are as follows:

1. The three cantons model will not work in the so-called Western Kurdistan. There is a huge distance between the following Syrian provinces: Qamishli, Kobani, and Afrin. that vast distance contains many villages and towns that are inhabited by Arabs.

2. The borders of the three cantons will line with southern Turkey, which contains large number of Kurdish-Turkish population. Due to the relationship between Kurds in Syria and Turkey, it would be difficult to establish a Kurdish entity that borders the Kurds in Turkey, especially that Kurds in Turkey had entered a new phase affiliating with the Turkish state. Moreover, they appeared to have a great representation in the Turkish Parliament and they might be able to contribute in a partnership to form the government.

The new Kurdish-Turkish model might be the path to resolving the Kurdish-Syrian conflict by giving them their exclusive rights within the Syrian State.

Participants concluded number of recommendations.

The political system model in the Syrian state can no longer continue, and this change might impact the geographic, political, and administrative divisions. Subsequently these changes should not hinder the vision to maintain a Syrian entity, which brings together all the Syrian people under one roof. A national democratic state that respects national and religious identity, human rights, and protects its civilians' dignity.

These expected changes that weakened the Syrian sovereignty is a consequence of a revolution followed by a brutal reaction from the Syrian regime, which led to mistrust between the people and the state. The sacrifices of the Syrian people in the past four years, in addition to their suffering for decades prior to that with oppression and tyranny by the Syrian Regime shall result in a solution that commensurate the amount of these sacrifices. The Kurds suffered the most among the Syrian people and received nothing but collective injustice.

To ensure the above changes, the following recommendations were also summarized by the participant:

1. The emphasis on the unity of the Syrian land and the rejection of any division in its territory.
2. The establishment of a clear constitutional guarantees to ensure the rights of all Syrians on the basis of full citizenship to everyone without discrimination of any religion, sect, nationality, race, or color in any article of the constitution.
3. Developing of guarantees on human rights and individual freedoms to include all citizens without any discrimination. Particularly freedom of expressions, formation of political parties, ownership, acquisitions, mobility and others.
4. The development of special constitutional guarantees on Kurdish rights, such as:

- The recognition of the Kurdish language as an official language in the Syria.
- The recognition of cultural and national identity of the Kurdish citizens such as holidays, special events, traditional art, and other aspects of Kurdish heritage.
- Granting Kurdish citizens the right to join the army with military access to higher ranks. As well as positions in the government.
- The prevention of withdrawing any nationality to any citizen; Kurdish or non-Kurdish.
- The prevention of land nationalization and private property misuse without compensation by law, as well as returning lands to its rightful owners.
- The application of administrative decentralization, and granting the local administrations internal political powers.
- The implementation of assessing the administrative division by developing the provinces, the districts, and the regions, in order to ensure civil peace, coexistence, and harmony between all segments of society.
- The adoption of a parliamentary political system, increasing the seats in parliament, and establishing a new electoral system that depends on proportion and open electoral lists which allow all political parties and community members to participate as recommended *Syria Transition Roadmap*.

The [Syrian Expert Hous \(SHE\)](#) is an initiative launched by the [Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#) to analyze and study the transitional period in Syria. The Syrian Expert House is a combined group of approximately three hundred human rights activists, academics, judges, lawyers, doctors, opposition politicians, defected government officials, defected military officers, members of local revolutionary councils, and commanders of the armed opposition who are committed to holding periodic meetings to build a final vision of the transitional period and produce considered, deliberate recommendations for the political, social, economic, military, and security aspects of the future of Syria.

[Syria Transition Roadmap](#), an opposition vision of the democratic political transition in Syria, covers the topics of constitutional reform, political and administrative reform, electoral reform, economic reform, transitional justice, and security sector reform and has been endorsed by the Syrian National Coalition and the Syrian Interim Government.

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