Cities in Revolution
Al–Qamishli
The Syrian Kurdish Rebellion

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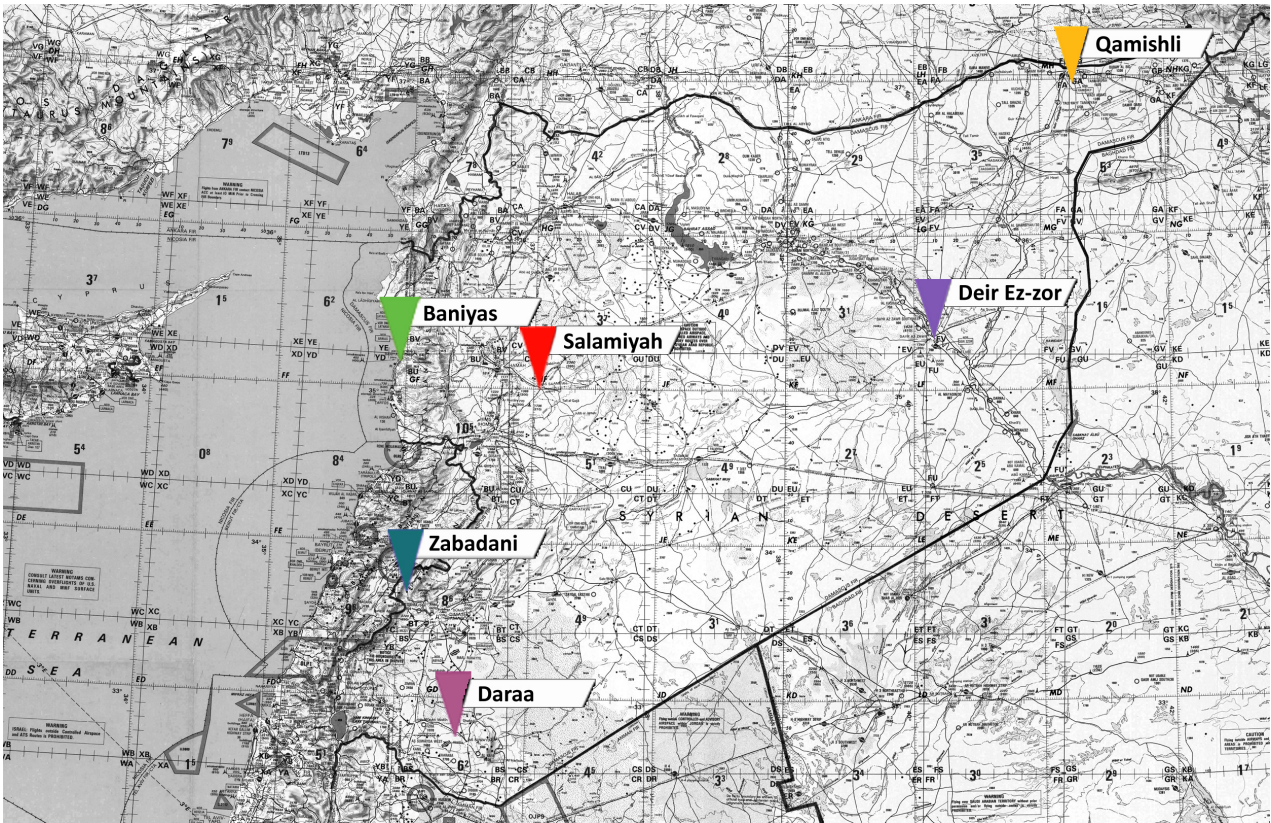# Table of Contents

Introduction

South of the Taurus Mountains, in northeastern Syria, the city of Al-Qamishli, in the Al-Hasakeh province, is spread over an area of 38 square kilometers.

Al-Qamishli
The Syrian Kurdish Rebellion

It is a modern Syrian city, with French forces constructing their military base within the city vicinity in 1921. The French developed architectural plans for the entire city, which has caused many to dub Al-Qamishli "Little Paris." According to Kurdish writer Bedirxan Ali Al-Qamishli is an "ultramodern city," less than a century old and this is reflected within its name, as well. The latest iteration of the name, "Qamişlo" is representative of that; it is a way to make the name of the city reflect its population, since it is not a "real" Kurdish word, which is clear from the way the word is constructed.[1]

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[1] From Mohamed Dibo's interview with Kurdish writer, Bedirxan Ali, 06/04/2015, on SyriaUntold.

As a result, the etymology of Al-Qamishli is debated by historians. Some believe the its origins are from Syriac Beth Salyn, the name of the reeds that grow along the rivers. Others, however, believe that it takes its roots from the Turkish word Kumaş, meaning cloth and reeds.

The city is extremely diverse, with many different religions and ethnicities reflected. There are Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, people who adhere to the different religious doctrines of Islam, Christianity and even Zoroastrianism. According to the 2007 official statistics, the ciity's population, excluding its suburbs, was about 88,000 people.

Though the city's economy relies primarily on agriculture of major crops such as wheat, lentils, and barley, Al-Qamishli is characterized by being a center for Kurdish politics and activism. There exist 12 'traditional' parties, all of which were prohibited by the Assad regime in an effort to crush all opposition.

In 2004, despite the Assad's iron fist, Al-Qamishli bore witness to one of Syria's bloodiest uprisings. The regime dealt with them harshly, and effectively suppressed the Kurdish insurgency. Hundreds of people were killed, and dozens of young activists were arrested and detained. As punishment, the regime levied a harsh tax against the citizens to keep them subdued. As a result, the city remained quiet until March 2011.

With the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, Al-Qamishli's young men rushed to participate in the revolutionary movement. The city responded with anxiety and apprehension, remembering the the wrath they experienced 7 years earlier.

Chapter One: The Uprising

I.   The First Steps of the Uprising

The first demonstration to break out in the city was in April 2011, near the Qasimo Mosque in the city center. Kurdish activist Khoshman Ceddo tells SyriaUntold how there was a group of young men and women, in the streets of the city near Qurmouti, went out chanting for freedom. The activists were tense, according to activist Abu Killi. "We had some concerns, will we go down to the street? How do we get there? We learned from our experiences in 2004, and we raised the Syrian flag near Qasimo Mosque. Many of the young youth who were affiliated with political parties could not pressure their elders to join the protest. As a result, we only had about 100 activists at the first protest."
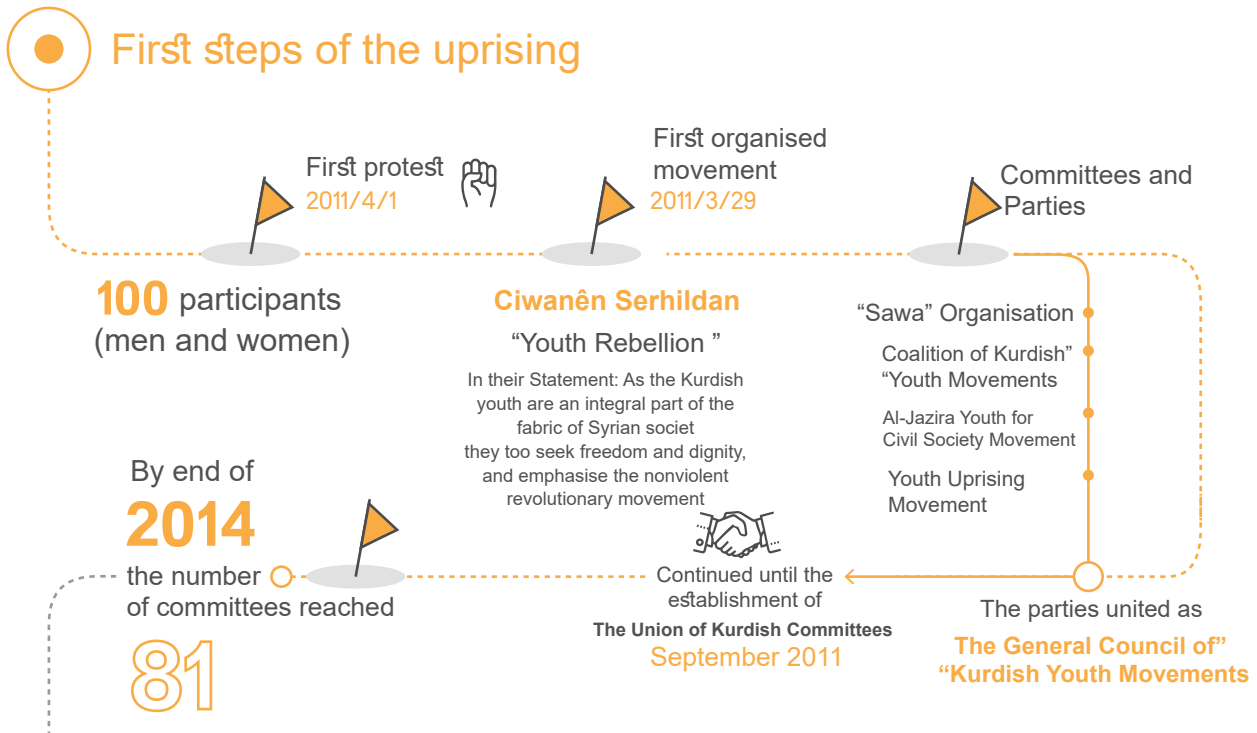
According to activist Karam Yousef, a group of young men from the city met in his house to discuss and analyze the current events in Syria which had accelerated rapidly since the first demonstration on March 15, 2011 in Damascus and Dara'a province. The activists discussed how to motivate their city in the same way to come out in similar protests like other Syrian stories.[2]

Through these meetings, the planning intensified and they prepared for more protests. According to activist Mahmoud Kiki, "The first slogan we agreed to chant in the protests was 'Freedom and that's it.' This was suggested by activist Sarbaz Kerman, another activist from Al-Qamishli."[3] According to Abu Kiki, "The number of participants in the rally increased from Qasimo Mosque until we reached Mounir Habib Street, which intersects Qasimo Mosque. In that period of time, there was less fear when people were on the street. Once we reached Mouni Habib Street, the

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[2] The information in this paragraph has been obtained from the testimony of a number of activists from Al-Qamishli.

[3] The information in this and following paragraphs were obtained from activist Mahmoud Kiki, an activist from Al-Qamishli who was arrested by Syrian security forces on May 31, 2011 due to his participation in revolutionary activities.

number of participants reached about 300 people and there were about a few hundred others standing on the sidewalks. Our chants were loud and clear, calling 'Peace, Brotherhood in Syria, We Reject The Regime.' When people heard these slogans, they had less anxiety and fear, and the protest ended without any problems."

First steps of the uprising

First protest
2011/4/1

100 participants
(men and women)

First organised movement
2011/3/29

Ciwanên Serhildan

"Youth Rebellion"

In their Statement: As the Kurdish youth are an integral part of the fabric of Syrian societ they too seek freedom and dignity, and emphasise the nonviolent revolutionary movement

Committees and Parties

"Sawa" Organisation

Coalition of Kurdish" "Youth Movements

Al-Jazira Youth for Civil Society Movement

Youth Uprising Movement

By end of
2014
the number of committees reached
81

Continued until the establishment of
The Union of Kurdish Committees
September 2011

The parties united as
The General Council of" "Kurdish Youth Movements

After the protesters left the Qasimo Mosque area, they chanted until the center of the city and they were not exposed to the security forces and none were arrested. According to numerous testimonies, the result was 'flawless'. After the end of the demonstration, many of the young men who participated became coordinators, including: Abdulmajid Tamir, Ramin Khalaf, Aras Yousef, who was in charge of the Youth Uprising Movement's media, and Sarbaz Kerman. Abdulghafoor Hussein, the artist at whose home they met, had emigrated away from Syria, but they met with his brother Abdulhussein al-Hakim, who was the first detainee of the Kurdish uprising. He was arrested two days after the first protest and released after four days. It was at that first meeting that the activists decided to organize demonstrations and start revolutionary movement in the city.

Ciwanan Serhildana, which means Youth Uprising, played an important role in the organization of the first demonstration of the city. This group was one of the first to be born from the revolution, and they established goals and the members were disciplined.

According to Abdulmajid Tamir, one of the founders of Ciwanan Serhildana, the group was founded on February 20, 2011. "A group of us created a page on Facebook, called Ciwanan Kurdi, and then we changed it to Ciwanan Serhildana. We chose a slogan, which was a deer, and the phrase "Ciwanan Kurd Nin Rojava" above the Kurdish flag.

Ciwanan played an active role in coordinating the start of the revolutionary movement in Al-Qamishli. They were one of the groups to coordinate the first protest that took place in Al-Qamishli[4], on April 1, 2011. They coordinated the events with Amude, and dozens of youth came out to protest together in Al-Qamishli and Amude. Dozens of youth called for freedom and stood in solidarity with Dara'a, which was being subjected to extreme repression at the hands of Assad's forces.

Ciwanan released the first political statement alongside the other groups. It was titled, 'Communiqué No.1 of the Youth Uprising." It was published on March 29, 2011. A number of groups drafted the statement led by Dalil Derki, an activist from the city.

The statement included a series of political statements that reflected the ideologies of the youth activists. The statement said that Kurds are an integral part of the fabric of Syrian society, and like any other "Free Syrian Youth", they seek freedom, dignity, and the elimination of one-party rule and tyranny. They emphasized the non-violent movement, and stood up for their fellow Syrians in Dara'a, Latakia, and the rest of Syria. The statement also stressed the legitimate rights of the Syrian people to dignity, freedom, and the rule of law.

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[4] Video showing first demonstration in Al-Qamishli, April 1, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k9-9M9PNqQ&hd=1

The first demonstration in Al-Qamishli mirrored the rest of the Syrian uprising. It was cautious, and anticipated weakness. However, once the demonstration hit the streets chanting for freedom, it formed a catalyst for many of the social classes in Syria who then began participating actively in protests. Herein lies the importance of the first demonstration: to act as a catalyst for the rest of the city.

II.   Committees and the Parties

After the first demonstration, youth from different political movements and ideologies gathered together. They sought to keep the youth movement independent. However, a number of committees started and the number soon swelled to four, all of which claimed to represent the popular movement and represent them in the media.

According to Kurdish activist Yilmaz Saeed, "Before the revolution, there were no youth movements or committees, only the **Kurdish Youth Movement** which was founded in 2005. It was this movement that ignited the spark of revolution in various Kurdish cities. It was this group that became **Ciwanan Serhildana**," they changed the group's name and structure in order to protect the members who were known the regime and would face prosecution and security pressures.

In the week after the successful protests in Amude and Al-Qamishli, a small youth group called **The Youth of Jazira - Towards A Civil Society**. In the third week, **Coalition of Kurdish Youth Movements** was born as a committee in the city. The week after that, **SAWA** defected from the coalition, creating the four prominent organizations.

The four groups formed a coalition called **The General Council of the Kurdish Youth Movements**. This council worked in its capacity until the **Union of Kurdish Committees** was formed in September 2011. The group disintegrated at the start of 2012, when the Kurdish Youth Movement withdrew. This council was one of the founders of the Kurdish National Council.

Now, there are 10 committees involved with the General Council, none of which have a real presence on the ground.
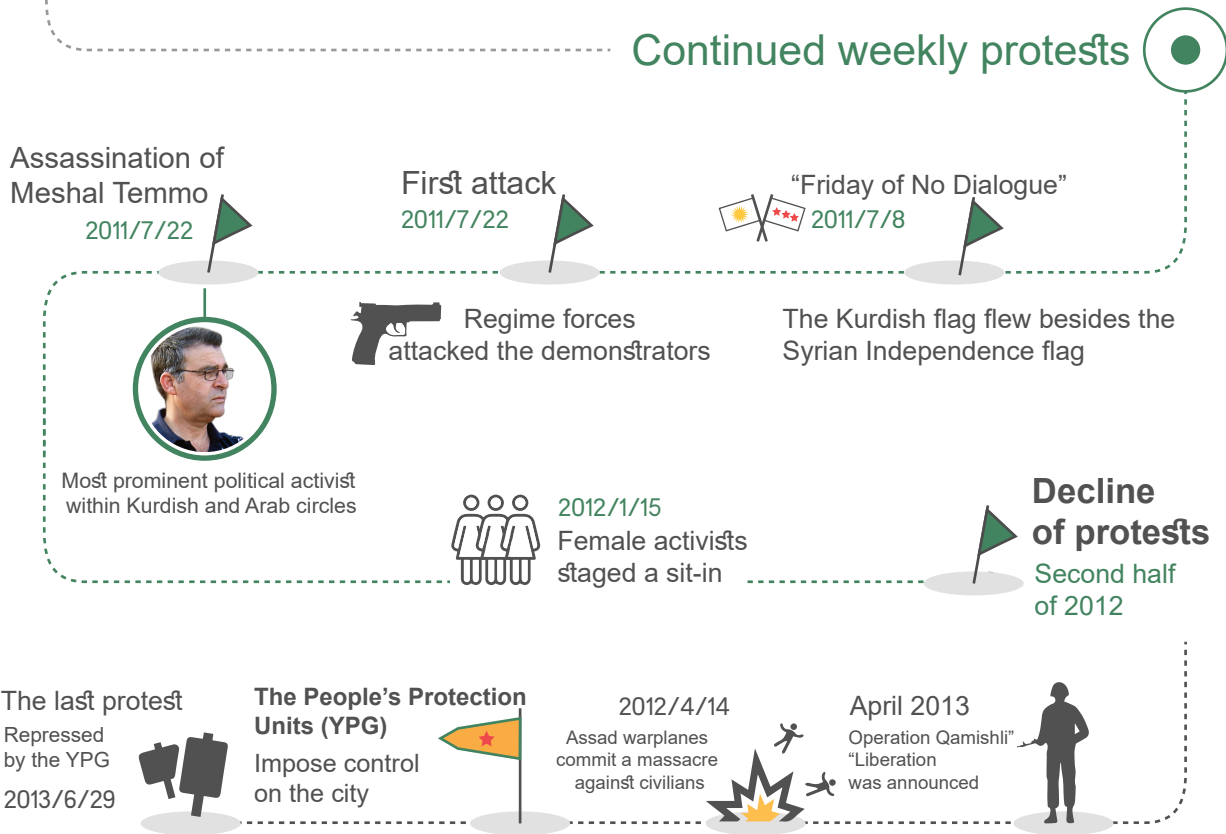
III. Challenging the City's Elders

Despite the negative attitudes of the official Kurdish parties, the young men who called for the protest in March 2011 clung to their convictions and went out to the protests. The elders, who ruled different groups, gave them different warnings about the brutality of the regime and the danger associated with going out to protest.

According to many different testimonies[5], different political forces in the city worked to prevent the youth from participating in the Syrian revolution by paying them off. According to the activist Jihad Darwish, they used many different arguments, such as the need to stay away from both the regime and its opponents. the need to be aware of the consequences of any revolutionary activity. According to Darwish, the Kurdish uprising of 2004 was still very present in the memories of Syria's Kurds, when the Kurdish parties faced the brutality of Assad's regime alone.

Despite the pressures exerted by many of the elders in the Kurdish parties, which will be discussed in detail later, they were unable to prevent the city of Al-Qamishli and the youth to rush to the streets chanting against the Assad regime.

After the first protest, there seemed to be a city-wide endorsement of the popular movement. This resulted in an expansion in the scope of the protests in the city. This proved a challenge for the Kurdish parties in Al-Qamishli, who were unable to reign in the youth. Thus, instead of taking a public stance against the youth movements, they changed their tactics. They rushed to integrate the youth movement and to take advantage of them as much as possible. According to Abu Killi, "The Kurdish political movement wanted to protect the youth. They wanted to be in charge of the

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[5] The information in this paragraph was obtained from activist Jihad Darwish, from Al-Qamishli, November 2015.

Continued weekly protests

Assassination of Meshal Temmo
2011/7/22

Most prominent political activist within Kurdish and Arab circles

First attack
2011/7/22

Regime forces attacked the demonstrators

"Friday of No Dialogue"
2011/7/8

The Kurdish flag flew besides the Syrian Independence flag

2012/1/15
Female activists staged a sit-in

Decline of protests
Second half of 2012

The last protest
Repressed by the YPG
2013/6/29

The People's Protection Units (YPG)
Impose control on the city

2012/4/14
Assad warplanes commit a massacre against civilians

April 2013
Operation Qamishli"
"Liberation was announced

decision of when the people would take to the streets. The youth did not want to surrender to these parties, because they were not confident in their political movement." Overall, the Kurdish parties played a major role in dispersing the street movement. Abu Killi continued, "In that period, we were preparing for the foundation of the Kurdish National Council in Syria. These groups founded a few committees to gain legitimacy, to earn voices within the Council. Every party had its own social base, which was quick to form a committee, give it a name and go out protesting but they eventually realized that they cannot control the youth movement. The regime tried to also distract the youth movement by inciting violence, beatings, and detention under the pretext of vandalism. In the 9th week of the revolution, the youth took to the streets and collided with the National Council.

The political forces in Al-Qamishli worked to penetrate the popular movement in order to influence its young activists. They pushed for the establishment of more committees and youth group. In addition to the group that was leading the movement in March 2011, four other groups

were also born that year. By the end of 2014, the number of committees in Al-Qamishli had reached 81 according to Mahmoud Kiki.[6]

IV.   The Weekly Demonstrations

On the Friday April 8, 2011, the Friday of Steadfastness, Al-Qamishli had its second protest against the regime.[7] It was during this protest that the Kurdish Youth Movement released their first statement, leading them to butt heads with the pre-existing political forces in the city. In the statement, they described their dissatisfaction with the many Kurdish political parties. According to Abu Killi, the political forces in the city did not accept the youth's demands that everyone protest and join the uprising. "When they tried to suppress the revolt, the youth pushed back against them and became more active and insisted on going out into the streets in larger, stronger numbers." [8]

During the protest, the participants only raised the Syrian flag, as did most other protests. Some protesters carried banners in Arabic, while others held signs that had Kurdish phrases on them. The protesters chanted similarly as others across the country did, calling for unity and freedom. The protests grew, with many new participants from the city, including several political figures.

The youth of the uprising proved their ability to move the Kurdish street, especially after the success of the first protest in the city. Following that first protest in April, many more protests erupted. According to activist Jandi, the political forces initially sought to pressure the activists by all means[9] but in the first weeks of the revolution they were not able to. The activists did not want to participate in the demonstrations and raise partisan flags. After

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[6] The information in this paragraph was obtained by the working group of Mahmoud Kiki, Kurdish activist in Al-Qamishli, November 2015.

[7] Video of the April 8 2011 protest in Al Qamishli https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXY_snOKHi8

[8] Testimonies in this paragraph were obtained by Abu Killi's working group. November 2015.

[9] Testimony from Ghandi as heard by the working group, October 2015.

much debate, however, it was determined that the Kurdish flag was to be raised alongside the Syrian one in order to show that the Syrian Kurds were to participate in this revolution and make it their own as well.

The Kurdish protesters continued to raise the Syrian flag and chanting the same slogans as the rest of the country until July 2011, when the two-starred red flag, which was adopted in 1958 during the unification of Syria and Egypt as the United Arab Republic, was replaced by the protestors with the tri-starred green Independence flag on July 8, 2011 Friday of No to Dialogue.[10] At that protest, the demonstrators raised the Kurdish flag alongside the Syrian one. After that date, the Kurdish flag was raised at all the demonstrations.

According to most testimonies, the protestors in Al-Qamishli were not harassed by the security forces until mid-July 2011. There were also no confrontations between the rebels and the Assad regime on the other hand. On July 22, 2011, the friday of "Khaled's Grandchildren"[11], a demonstration that came out in Al-Qamishli was attacked by Assad's forces. Protestors were shot at for the first time; many protesters were attacked with batons, injuring dozens of activists, many of whom were also exposed to cases of suffocation due to tear gas.

Despite all this, Al-Qamishli continued to go out every Friday like the other Syrian cities. Its protests increased in intensity and occurrence, with protests happening daily during Ramadan 2011, in August.[12] On the 7th of October 2011, Al-Qamishli was shocked by the assassination of Meshal

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[10] Clips posted on YouTube showing the different flags of the Syrian revolution:
July 22, 2011: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUJlbA8iN0Y
August 7, 2011: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Mg7csiHWZk

[11] YouTube video showing Assad forces firing on demonstrators in the city
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCAe68iayfA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqf9FD2c-_k

[12] Evening demonstrations in Al-Qamishli, Ramadan 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkYe9x3ugts

Temmo, a prominent political activist in the Kurdish and Arab communities.[13]

Following Temmo's assasination, thousands of protesters took to the streets to express their anger, chanting to topple the regime and its supporters. They vowed to avenge the assassination of a figure well known and loved for his courage and boldness.[14] According to activist Karam Youssef, "The day of Temmo's funeral, the regime fired tear gas at us. We were not expecting them to shoot at us. We were by Al-Qamishli's garden, and I saw myself amongst 10,000 people who were trying to pass through the Seven Seas Square to get to the neighborhood cemetery when all of a sudden, it seemed as though everyone had dispersed. Only a few of us remained, those of us who weren't able to flee on the side streets. People had fled because the regime opened fire on us and it was a strange spectacle, I saw snipers targeting us, and I was able to finally run into a side street. I ran until a Christian neighbor opened his house for me. I was able to take pictures of people running away and I photographed their injuries. This is a scene that remains in my mind to this day."

After that, the number of protestors increased steadily with thousands joining the protests calling for freedom. Al-Qamishli became similar to Hama and Salamiyeh, which were able to channel the forces of the revolution to reduce the control of the regime's security apparatus from gaining control over the two cities.

In 2012, nearly a year after the start of the Syrian revolution, demonstrations in Al-Qamishli turned into what looked like carnivals,[15] with large numbers of participants in the demonstrations, singing hymns and folk songs, writing sophisticated banners and creating expressive paintings. These events

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[13] Mass demonstrations during the funeral of Meshal Temmo, on August 8, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKVfMPWyE78

[14] Promo for the hero Mehsal Temmo, October 2, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2_1Fhbslos

[15] Demonstrations in Al-Qamishli on May 1, 2012 showing the popular participation in protests. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AAk1e-IQ0A January 13, 2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcA5E4bEdUc

took place in addition to the demonstrations. The women of Al-Qamishli formed a movement, where they encouraged and supported activists in the street to support the revolution. They echoed the claims asking for the departure of Assad, calling for the release of detainees and others. On January 15, 2012 the women's group staged a sit-in in the middle of the city, which started a truly feminist movement.[16]

This also led to different movements manifesting in the city, with many students holding their own demonstrations, chanting anti-Assad slogans and calling for freedom. They would encourage others to rise up for their own people who initially rose up in March 2011.[17]

Mass demonstrations continued in Al-Qamishli, and they reached their peak in mid-2012. Activists then removed most of the pictures of Assad, spray painted over the images and systems of the government institutions. In June 22, 2012 a demonstration began in the Qaddour Bek neighborhood, near Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah mosque, the youth rose and spray painted over the image of Bashar al-Assad, near the entrance of the police department.[18]

V.   The Popular Movement's Setbacks

At the start of the second-half of 2012, demonstrations in Al-Qamishli began to decrease, with the number of participants declining steadily as well. The demonstrations which months earlier would include thousands of protesters now barely attracted dozens. On August 3, 2012[19] the Friday of Deir Ezzor, only a few activists took part in the protest, which prompted the security

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[16] Women's sit-in in Al-Qamishli, January 15, 2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvVU4dku6j4

[17] A student demonstration in Al-Qamishli, January 25, 2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMyA-mdZyUM

[18] Graffiting pictures of Assad and the symbols of the Ba'ath regime, January 22, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMQMPrUZ-yw

[19] Video showing Assad security forces' assault on protesters in Al-Qamishli on August 3, 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pZ4ueTNBiU

forces and thugs belonging to the Assad regime to assault them and disperse them by force.

Due to the weakness of the popular movement, this became a regular occurrence after mid-2012. Surprisingly, the decline in protesters was also accompanied by a relative change in the nature of the slogans and chants. They took on an Islamic character, with chants such as "Labayyk Ya Allah" and banners reading "Nobody But God's Prophets", "With Our Blood, With Our Souls, We Will Redeem You, Our Prophet" with some more serious sectarian chants that had infiltrated the ranks of the protesters. On September 14, 2012, Friday of "Idlib is The Graveyard of Aircrafts" a protest began near Ibrahim Khalil Mosque chanting, "we want to remove the Alawites" referring to the president's sect. Prior to this, it was hard to pinpoint any demonstrations in Al-Qamishli that had said similar slogans.[20] According to Khoshman Qado, a Kurdish activist, "these slogans were never used by Kurdish activists but they were isolated cases and appeared in select demonstrations that were separate from the main demonstrations by Qasimo mosque in downtown Al-Qamishli." Qado attributed these slogans to vulnerable people who were representing views that were unrelated to the general revolutionary movement in the city, proven by the fact that the primary demonstrations in the city's center never featured these slogans.[21]

In general, demonstrations continued to decline in frequency until the end of 2012. In Kheir Bek neighborhood, however, weekly protests still occurred near the Ibrahim mosque, with participants numbering no more than a dozen. It was a paradox, because at the time Assad's forces also withdrew from most of the city's neighborhoods. Al-Qamishli had not been subject to the violent revolution similar to other Syrian cities. It should have been an opportunity for the revolutionary movement to sink its roots. Instead, the

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[20] A protest in Al-Qamishli on September 14, 2013 where Islamic and Sectarian slogans were shouted
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdBdiyYw2Fw

[21] Testimony obtained from activist Khoshman Qado, winter 2015.

opposite happened at the start of 2013 with the sound of the activists, the popular carnivals, and the collaborations disappearing from the town squares. According to activist Jihad Darwish, "the decline of the popular movement can be attributed to a variety of reasons, such as the infiltration of 'political capital' amongst the community activists, who began to be influenced by external forces, which played a role in the corruption of the popular movement." Others, still, argued that the PYD practiced repressive methods and the taking away the rights of the activists led to the decline in the popular movement.

The situation continued as such in Al-Qamishli until April 2013, when various brigades belonging to the armed opposition, with Al-Nusra Front at the forefront, declared the start of the "Liberation of Al-Qamishli."[22] For the first time since the start of the revolution, the town was subject to bombardment by Assad's forces. Different parts of the city were targeted and the opposition retaliated by bombing the airport and Assad's military forces.[23] The spectre of war hung over the city, and activists that were involved in peaceful organizing objected to the formation of armed groups.

The Kurds in Al-Qamishli were then split between those who believed in the need to expel Assadist forces from their last stronghold in the city, the military airport, to those who remembered their previous failures which lead to the mass destruction and displacement of people.[24]

On April 14, 2013, a massacre was carried out by the government air force[25] targeting civilian homes, and claiming the lives of many children and

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[22] Armed opposition brigades declaring the start of the Liberation of Al-Qamishli, April 12, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roCc0VkUKzI

[23] Armed opposition fighters advance on Al-Qamishli, April 12, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=De6HSZXe4pM

[24] TV report called "The Delay of the Strategic Al-Qamishli Battle" by April 13, 2013 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDJSD7jFaIc

[25] MiG massacre in Al-Qamishli's countryside. Apri 14, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWNNu-DU31XQ

women, plunging the city into fighting and warfare.[26] The population of Al-Qamishli fell into mourning, accompanied by some joy at the perception of the success of the rebels. The songs they sing became painful and full of bitterness, which was reflected in the rest of the Syrian revolution. The protests that came out in Al-Qamishli on April 19, 2013 were full of young men singing about martyrs whose lives were taken by the regime's warplanes.[27]

The fighting in the city stopped once the PYD's YPG imposed their rule on the city, following long disagreements and debates between them and the other Syrian opposition forces. The demonstrations continued in the city of Al-Qamishli in this period, with small numbers of activists. In June 2013, there were a number of bloody clashes between the YPG and the activists in the vicinity of Amude.[28]

The clashes started when activists in Amude staged a sit-in in front of the PYD offices, demanding the release of detainees, mostly activists and journalists. The YPG, as a result, opened fire on the demonstrators, killing and wounding several. As a result, protests broke out in Al-Qamishli, with activists coming out en masse to denounce the practices of the PYD.[29] As a result, activists were repressed by the YPG, resulting in an escalation of events in Al-Qamishli, condemning the practices of the PYD and their military wing.[30]

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[26] Video showing various instances of massacres against civilians by Assad forces, April 14, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWNNuDU31XQ

[27] Video showing the protests on April 19, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_KqCz3wMqU

[28] Video showing a sit-in for prisoners in Amude on June 17, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5fn6QUy5UI

[29] A silent protest in solidarity with Amude, in Western Al-Qamishli, June 29, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7WpNmTOKdY

[30]Al-Jazeera report about the events in Al-Qamishli, July 28, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yen9TpLwhvY

The YPG continued to suppress the protestors and the demonstrations, halting them completely. The last protests were on the 28th and 29th of June, 2013, which was extremely suppressed by the group.[31]

The YPG succeeded where the Assad regime had failed: taking the street back from the demonstrators. The YPG broke one of the most important revolutionary activities in the city, stopping demonstrations and preventing activists from expressing their political positions freely. The YPG succeeded by force and as a result was accused by its opponents of arresting many young Kurdish activists who played a large role in ushering in the revolutionary movement in the city.

Chapter Three will discuss the evolution of political events in Al-Qamishli, including the establishment of autonomy in the 'liberated' city.

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[31] The last protest in Al-Qamishli on June 28, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSQLxIF2-uo

Chapter Two: Recovery of Civil Society Organizations

At the end of 2013, with the complete halt of the protest movement, the civil society movement rebounded. Dozens of civil society organizations were reborn from the ashes of the peaceful movement in the city.

The civil society organizing in the city took the form of varied activities, and catered to different needs of the population. Organizations that were started to provide psychological support, disabled person's rights, environmental rights, feminist rights, women's issues, and other organizations. They worked towards empowering the community and making them aware of their rights and their role in rebuilding society.

I. Birati: Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights

The Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights[32] is a non-governmental organization, and an independent institution. It was established under the auspices of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). It has offices in Al-Qamishli and Al-Hasakah as well as Sere Kaniye (Ras al-Ayn). It was founded on January 1, 2013 by a group of Syrian activists of varying different nationalities, religions, and ethnicities. On September 1, 2014 they opened their first new office in Kobani and an office in Al-Qahtaniyah in October.

According to those in charge of the center, the Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights is an organization that works to spread the ideas of human rights, to monitor violations, and advocate for human rights defenders and peaceful national and religious coexistence. They promote women's rights and children's rights. The Center also works towards establishing the rule of law via the judiciary.

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[32] Birati Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights website http://www.fraternity-sy.org/ara

The Center embraced the principles of those fighting for a democratic civil society based on rule of law and social justice according to various human rights conventions. They aim to raise awareness regarding the culture of human rights across the different spectrums of society to contribute to the establishment of a culture of tolerance. They also contribute to the legislative environment and establishment of international human rights laws.

The Center's activities include: raising legal awareness amongst the local communities, monitoring and documenting human rights violations, the peace program, the empowerment of women, a program to protect children's rights, a program to support human rights defenders, and the media center. They also review laws and legislation, issuing proposals to amend existing laws to be up to date with the standard human rights conventions.

II.   Shar for Development

Shar for Development was founded in 2014. It is an independent non profit organization, that works to develop civil society, administrative capacity, and development. They hold training workshops, and respond to the issues of youth, women, and children by creating targeted programs that raise awareness.

The organization is active in many different areas, according to Rujain Habbo, the Women's Program Director. "Shar publishes a monthly magazine. We have just released our 6th edition. We also host workshops to educate women in the program, Mutsharkeen. We have organized a campaign called "Justice Not Arbitrary Arrest" and a campaign called "Rights and Duties" which include lectures, posters, and murals. The organization has issued a booklet in Arabic and English dealing with these issues and frequently organizes panel discussions about the elections. Most recently, we are evaluating our peace-building projects and conflict management.

The organization was founded as an endeavour to reach a "peaceful and stable society, that is culturally and economically developed through the establishment of interactive and in-depth programs that support the training of women and youth through the establishment of programs and workshops. They aim to create a culture of volunteerism and civic education" according to Kader Sheikhmous, the organization's Director of Public Relations.

The idea was born after long discussions took place on how to support civil society and development in the Jazira region, which has been suffering from multiple sieges given the lack of access in its environment, in spite of the large number of activities and initiatives. "Our activities focus on linking and supporting various civic organizations. Our work as founding members of the organization was to support the entirety of Syria but then we decided that small victories will drive the success of the work of any organization, and that widening our reach and working in different regions with differing conditions is hard. Working in our area of focus and being more accurate has a greater impact, which is why we founded Shar," said Sheikhmous.

The organization established short- and long-term goals. They wanted to channel the energies and expertise of the youth that was lying dormant since the start of the conflict. They mobilized collective action to pursue their development goals and to deepen their knowledge of civil and democratic mechanisms and foundations, such as elections, transparency, and the political process. They wanted to activate the political and social participation of women through the creation of a new society. In particular, they called on men to advocate for women's issues and to encourage a culture of volunteerism and the development of skills and entrepreneurship amongst the younger generations. Using direct support from the international community the organization began to sponsor the development of civil society's urgent needs. They conducted in-depth studies to determine their priorities.

According to Zohrab Qado, head of the Al-Qamishli office, "we have an ongoing activity that focuses on strengthening local organizations as well as developing new ones. We also supplement existing civic activities through any form of support and advocacy, as we do with the support of 'Mutsharkeen' which pushes for the political and social participation of women, which focuses mainly on democracy awareness campaigns and civil society markers associated with economic and social transformations." Regarding the organization's relationship with the local community, Qado added, "Our relationship with the local community, within our means and the scope of our work, is excellent. We enjoy credibility with them, and we are able to work with them to push forward ideas and concepts that we are trying to establish within our society. However, the weakness is the lack of possibilities in the region. We need greater efforts and more possibilities to harmonize our programs, projects, and ideas and adapt them to the needs of the people. This is what will make us accepted in the society where we live and work. In general, our civic activities in the Kurdish region are about acceptance and understanding, as there should be no ideological or communal barriers to prevent this kind of work. "

III. Other organizations

In addition to the aforementioned organizations that began alongside the Syrian revolution in 2011, there exist other organizations that are just as instrumental in the city's activities including:

- Komela Helin/Helin Children's Association (2013)

- Assyrian Women's Union in Syria (2014)

- SMART Center for Mental Health and and Human Development (2012)

- Association of Free Women in Rojava (2014)

- Rewsan Bedirxan Center for Culture and Art (2012)

- Kurdish Association for Relief and Development (2012)

- Syrian Kurdish Journalists Union (2012)

- Kurdish Student's Union in Syria (2013)

- Yekitiya Ragihandina Azad/Free Media Union (2012)

- Kurdish Red Crescent (2012)

- Women's Kurdish Union of Syria (2012)

- Zelal Kurdish Center for Culture and Art (2012)

- Women's Center in Qamishli (2013)

- Rights Center in Western Kurdistan (2013)

- Asti Center for Peace (2013)

Sara Organization
to Combat Violence Against Women

Founded: July 2013

Activities

Issuing reports on violence against women in the Cizîrê canton

01

02

The National Kurdish Youth Organisation (SOZ)

Founded: October 22, 2013

Activities

Building a democratic system and framing the activities of the youth in order to play an active role of the social and political life

Eridu Civic Social and Democratic Center

Founded: May 1, 2013

Activities

Launched a campaign of "Childhood Dreams" aimed to support children who were exposed to psychological trauma, as well as leading a campaign to document human rights violations

03

04

Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria

Founded: December 1, 2011

Activities

Launched a campaign called "from Nowruz to Akitu" to raise awareness and acceptance between the cultures and values of different groups in society

Mandela House

Founded: December 16, 2013

Activities

Capacity building amongst the youths and preparing studies and projects aimed towards promoting peaceful dialogue and encouraging civic initiatives

05

06

Coalition of Youth Sawa

Founded: April 23, 2011

Activities

Renunciation of violence; working for the Syrian Kurdish national issue

Sawiska Women's Organization

Founded: July 18, 2012

Activities

Defending women's rights and raising awareness on women's issues, and acting as a social, cultural, and intellectual resource; in addition to providing employment opportunities via training workshops and professional development

07

08

Assyrian Network for Human Rights

Founded: May 20, 2011

Activities

Dissemination of information about human rights violations against the Assyrian community in Syria

Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights

Founded: January 1, 2013

Activities

Raising awareness about the culture and principles of human rights between the different sectors of society in order to establish civic peace

09

10

Shar for Development

Founded: 2014

Activities

Civil, administrative and development work linked to training women and youth in order to respond adequately to the issues at hand

Chapter Three: Autonomy in Al-Qamishli

I.   Introduction

Historically in Al-Qamishli, there is a large number of Kurdish and non-Kurdish parties which played an active role in the uprising of 2004, in which the Kurds fought against the Assad regime. At the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, many of the Kurdish parties had restructured their ranks. They beca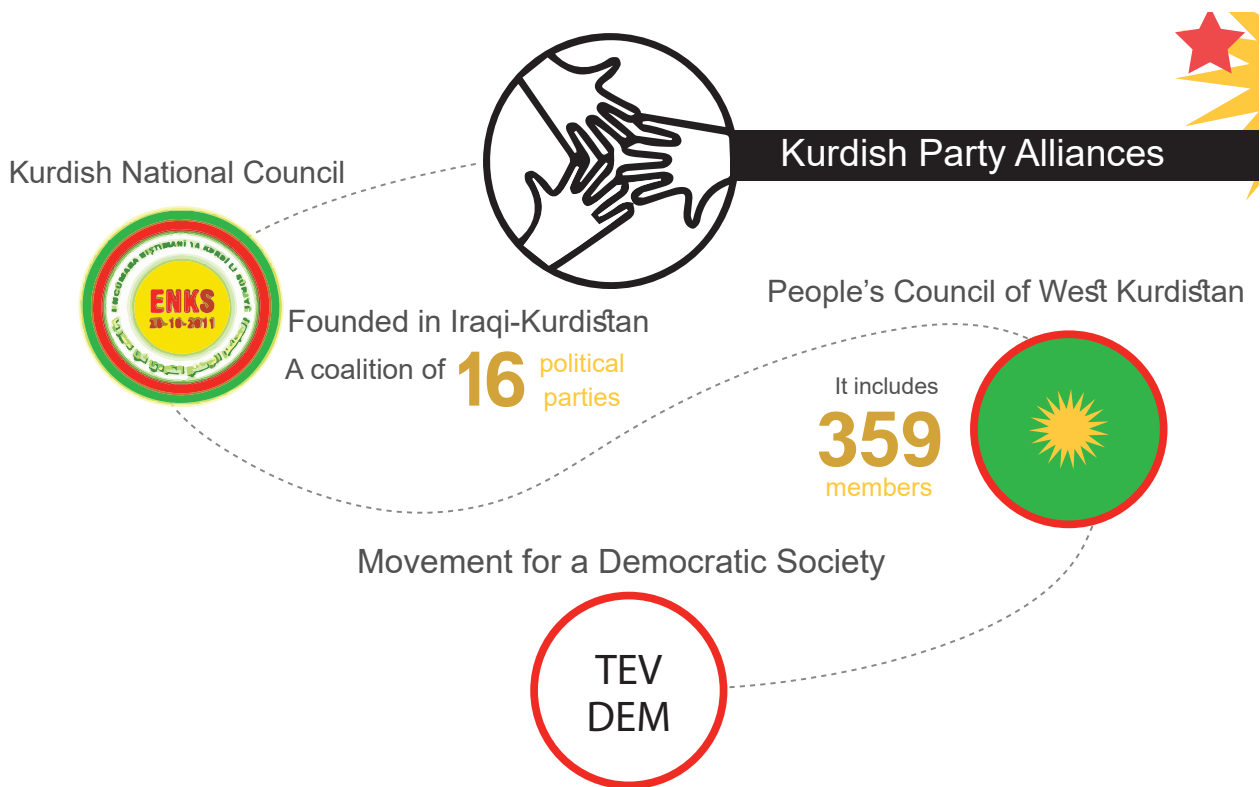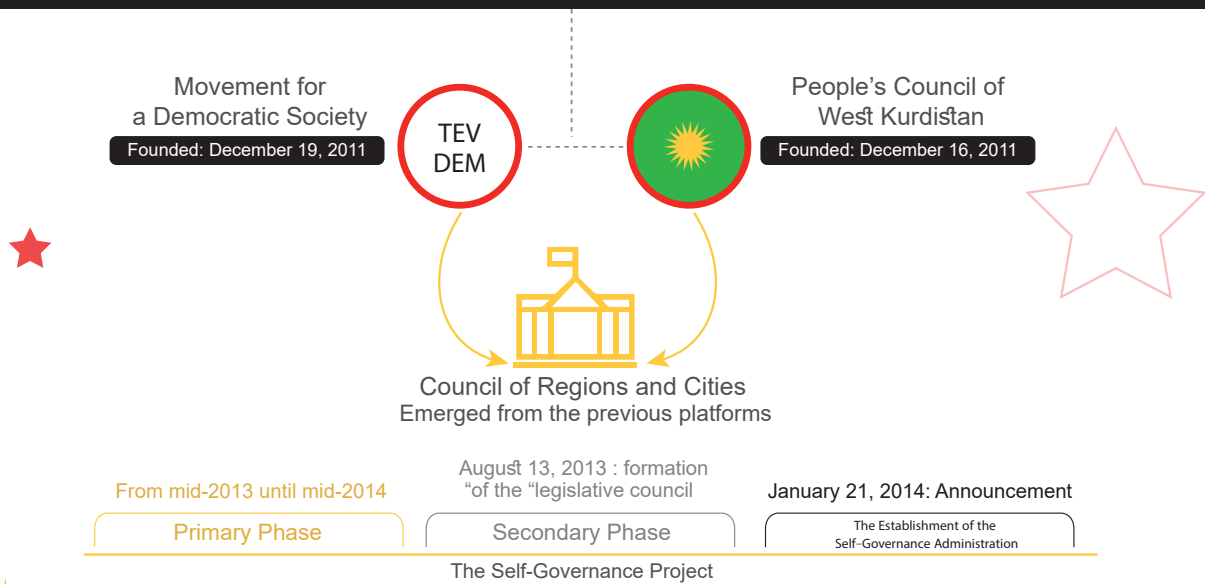me engaged in the revolutionary movement and they had the upper hand in regulating the affairs of Al-Qamishli, imposing their control especially after the withdrawal of Assad's forces from the Kurdish areas.

Kurdish Party Alliances

Kurdish National Council

Founded in Iraqi-Kurdistan
A coalition of **16** political parties

People's Council of West Kurdistan

It includes
359 members

Movement for a Democratic Society

TEV DEM

On July 19th, 2012, the various Kurdish forces in the city were able to exert their control over large parts of the city, which were populated densely by Kurdish Syrians as is the nature of most cities in Northeastern Syria. The withdrawal of the Assad military presence also meant that the regime pulled out its governmental institutions. This allowed these groups to fill the political and civil vacuum left by the gap, allowing for self-regulation.

Self-Governance
in Qamishli

Movement for
a Democratic Society
Founded: December 19, 2011

TEV DEM

People's Council of
West Kurdistan
Founded: December 16, 2011

Council of Regions and Cities
Emerged from the previous platforms

From mid-2013 until mid-2014

August 13, 2013 : formation
"of the "legislative council

January 21, 2014: Announcement

Primary Phase

Secondary Phase

The Establishment of the
Self-Governance Administration

The Self-Governance Project

From mid-2012 until beginning of 2014, self-governance in these areas was not complete though there were various serious attempts to build autonomous institutions to manage civilians' affairs. In the meantime, a group of political and civic bodies were established to fill the institutional vacuum, beginning with the **Movement for a Democratic Society** which was established December 16th, 2011 and the **People's Council of Western Kurdistan** established December 19th, 2011. From these two entities, a regional board was established, called the **Regional Council** which managed those living in the towns and villages that were under the control of Kurdish forces.

In all cases, there was wide participation in the self-rule project by various Kurdish parties, independent activists, female representatives, etc. The political and civil forces sought to provide a democratic society through their nascent autonomous institutions. Some of these bodies have been successful in establishing a fledgling democratic practice, while others have stalled. In most cases, the historical political differences between the different Kurdish parties were behind this delay; their political differences were reflected within the newly established institutions.

Two years later, it was clear that these projects would be a successful democratic experiment if they were able to provide role model management of the liberated cities. This gave birth to the phrase, "**Democratic Self-Rule Project**" which announced its establishment on January 21st, 2014 with a number of political and civil forces joining together in Rojava, chiefly the PYD.

II. Democratic Self-Rule Project

The PYD established this initiative in order to move to the second phase of the management of Rojava. They submitted a resolution draft, called the "Democratic Self-Rule", to the administrative body. This move was based on the **Social Contract Charter**[33] which was formed in agreement between the different groups located in Rojava. The self-rule project included 52 parties and institutions, organizations, and youth and women's organizations.[34]
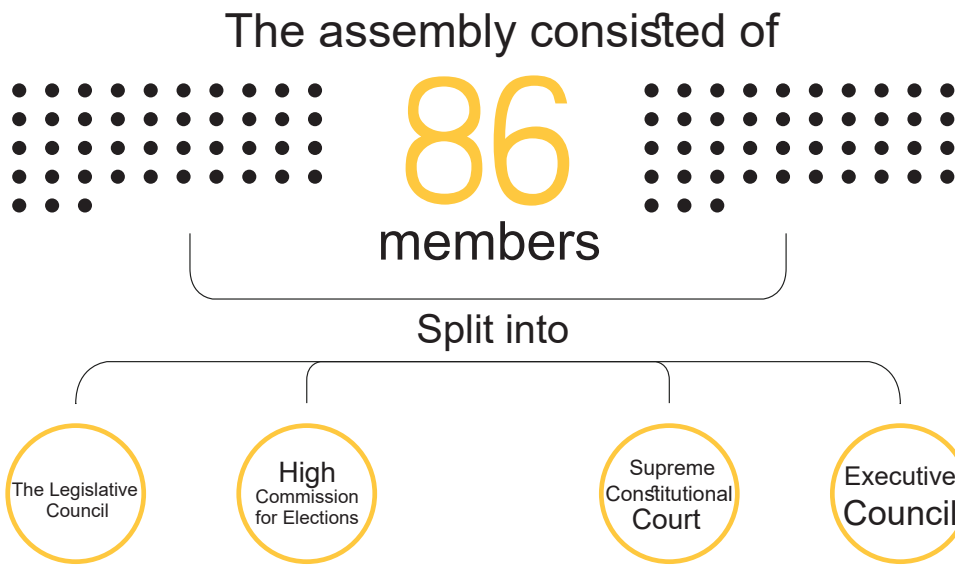
On August 13, 2013, Asia Abdullah, announced at a press conference in Al-Qamishli the initiation of the second phase of the Self-Rule Project and the formation of a legislative body charged with the creation of a transitional administrative body for the region.[35]

The People's Council of Rojava and the Kurdish National Council in Syria approved of this plan and were directly involved in its implementation. On September 8th, 2013 the two bodies signed an agreement on a range of items of which they approved: the formation of a committee to draft a temporary constitution agreed upon by all partisans after 40 days, the formation of an interim authority composed of a representative coalition,

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[33] See the text of the Charter of The Social Contract In Areas of Democratic Self-Rule on the network's website, dated January 10, 2014. http://cutt.us/oQdG

[34] See the meeting between broadcaster Mr. Akram Hasso, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Jazira Canton in the Self-Rule project on Sout Raya on July 5th, 2014.

[35] To learn more about the Democratic Self-Rule project, see: "Democratic Self-Rule Systems for Optimal Success" by Hassan Remo, dated January 21, 2015 at Hawar News Agency. http://cutt.us/MVPs

**General Constituent Assembly
of the Self-Governance Regime**

First Institution of
the Self-Governance Regime
Founded: November 2013

The assembly consisted of

86
members

Split into

The Legislative Council

High Commission for Elections

Supreme Constitutional Court

Executive Council

which entailed the formation of an interim administrative body following the completion of the interim constitution.[36]

Despite the support given to the Self-Rule project by many parties in the region, it faced some backlash from various Kurdish parties that were part of the Kurdish National Council. As the project nears the last steps of the second stage, leaving the official declaration of an autonomous region, some of the KNC members withdrew, without explaining their position. Others, however, stepped in to administrate, including the Kurdish Leftist Party in Syria (Muhammad Musa) and the Democratic Left Party in Syria (Saleh Kidu). The project, however, continued to work and was not severely affected by these withdrawals.

III. Fledgling Democratic Institutions

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[36] Ibid.

November 12th, 2013 saw the announcement of the first self-rule institution, "**The General Constituent Assembly**" which included 86 members.[37] This was followed up with the "**Follow-up Committee for the Completion of the Self-Rule Project**" which was composed of 60 members. The first meeting was held on November 15, 2013 and a committee composed of 19 figures was elected to represent the political and social spectrum in the region. According to a statement, it's mission was to draft the Joint Interim Administration Project, prepare the social contract, and to prepare the electoral system.[38] The body in the final statement stressed that the project "does not have any agenda to divide Syria; on the contrary, this project is part of the solution to establish a participatory and pluralistic democratic model."

The Self-Rule Project was adopted in three cantons, namely: Al-Jazira, Afrin, and Kobani. At the second meeting of the Council, which was held on February 12, 2013, it was decided that each canton would administer itself independently without a joint management of the three provinces. The city of Al-Qamishli was the capital of the Al-Jazira province, and they recognized Syriac, Kurdish, and Arabic as the canton's official languages.

These steps, which lasted from mid-2012 until the end of 2013, culminated in a meeting of the Legislative Council[39] to announce the birth of the "Democratic Self-Rule" which was structurally divided into five sections: the Legislative Council, the Electoral Authority, the Supreme Constitutional

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[37] For a list of the parties and organizations that were part of the declaration of the interim administration in Al-Qamishli, see the following PYD link: http://pydrojava.com/arsiv/index.php/tamazight/969-p-y-d

[38] The first statement issued by the Authority following the completion of the Self-Rule Project see, the statement dated November 15, 2013 by the PYD on their website.

[39] The Rules of Procedure and the Decrees issued by the Council, see the website http://cutt.us/dc8Dc

Court, the Local Councils, and the Executive Board which consisted of 22 staff members.[40]

During this Legislative Council session, the Permanent Office of the Council was elected, composed of five persons, namely: Akram Mahshoush, Abdulkarim Saku, Barwin Mohamad, Hakem Khilu, and Nadhriyeh Kouriyeh; Akram Kamal Hissou was made president of the Executive Council and the formation of the Council bodies, in coordination with the parties and political forces who were participating in the Democratic Self-Rule Project.[41]

During the Legislative Council's second session, which was held in March 2014, the Council approved the nominees for the senior members of the Supreme Electoral Authority, members of the Constitutional Court which was formed during the Council meeting. 13 members of the General Committees of the Legislative Council were appointed in order to follow the work of the Executive Board. In late March 2014, the Coordinating Body was formed as a joint endeavor between the Executive Self-Rule Board in the three cantons through a statement issued by the Executive Board of Al-Jazira.

IV. Self-Rule and the Lack of Democracy

The Self-Rule Administration which was formed in Northeast Syria was formed in a time of war as an attempt by the opposition forces to manage the towns and cities from which the Syrian Regime had withdrawn.

This was not the first attempt at self-rule by the Syrian opposition forces; this has happened in many parts of Syria and succeeded. However, the

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[40] The bodies that were formed were: " Foreign Affairs Council, The Defense and Self-Protection Body, The Internal Body, The Local Governing Body, The Municipalities, The Securities Authority, The Labor and So-cial Affairs Authority, The Education Authority, The Agricultural Authority, The Health Authority, The Trade and Economic Body, The Family of the Martyrs Authority, The Culture Authority, The Communications and Transportation Committee, the Youth and Sports Authority, the Environmental Agency, the Tourism and An-tiquities Authority, The Religious Authority, the Authority for Women and Family Affairs, The Human Rights Authority, The Supply Authority, The Communications Authority, and the Justice Authority, and the Energy Authority.

[41] The information in this paragraph was taken from an article called "Optimizing Democratic Self-Rule" by Hassan Remo on January 21, 2015, published by Hawar News Agency.

difference lies in how these autonomous regions emerged.[42] However the difference between the Kurdish Self-Rule project and that of the other liberated cities in Syria is in the fact that the Kurdish regions declared explicitly the foundational mechanisms of democracy and the organizational structure that characterized this project.

Despite this, and despite the fact that the autonomous project is still in its infancy, it has been subject to a lot of criticism especially from Kurdish political circles. The declaration of the Self-Rule Project, which took place in early 2016, resulted in the withdrawal of various Kurdish National Council parties to withdraw from the project.

According to the Kurdish activist Zana Omar, there are three primary currents in Syrian Kurdish political parties: the historical Kurdish parties, which were included in the political framework of the Kurdish National Council[43]; the PYD and its allied parties; and independent and revolutionary youth groups and organizations that emerged following the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011.[44] In light of the diversity of political forces in Al-Qamishli, activist Jihad Darwish believes that the Self-Rule project emerged from a political consensus between the Kurdish forces.[45]

The Kurdish National Council has ties to and receives support from General Masoud Barzani in the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq, a semi-autonomous region. The PYD receives support, politically and ideologically, from Abdullah Ocalan and the PKK in Turkey. These two currents are currently fighting to win over the loyalty of the revolutionary independent youth current.

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[42] See, "تجربة المدن المحررة،" published by Dar Al Rayes in 2015.

[43] Ibid.

[44] The information in this and following paragraph were obtained by the researcher from the activist Zana Omar's testimony, obtained by the working group in Fall 2015.

[45] Testimony obtained by the working group from Jihad Darwish.

In this complex political structure, alliances are forged and broken on the ground constantly in Al-Qamishli and the rest of the Kurdish areas in Syria. There is a split, of course, between the supporters of the PYD and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, according to Kurdish activist Abu Killi.

Various human rights and media outlets have highlighted the violations committed by the YPG units against civilians of all social, ethnic and religious backgrounds in the northeast region of Syria. This threatens the legitimacy of the Self-Rule, and creates a contradiction between the charter which emerged to administer the project and the actual practice of the forces enforcing this charter. The Asayish, the paramilitary police force of the autonomous region, has been implicated in a number of human rights violations against civilians; they have been accused of ethnic cleansing.

These claims are based on a report issued by Amnesty International[46], dated August 10, 2015. The report features dozens of testimonies, photos, and videos which all point to the scale of the size of violations that have occurred at the hands of the YPG units against civilians.

The 'organization' received prior permission from the official Self-Rule bodies to roam throughout the province of Al-Hasakah, interviewing people and obtaining testimonies to determine what happened, where "the organization has carried out research in the areas under the administration of the Self-Rule project in Northern Syria and visited the delegates of six towns and villages in the provinces of Al-Hasakah and Raqqa, conducting interviews with 37 people who were the victims of violations at the hands of the Asayish or had witnessed violations. The organization's researchers conducted interviews with 11 people in Iraq's KRG in July 2015, including members of the Kurdish political parties in Syria who are not represented in the Self-Rule project, journalists and workers in NGOs. Additionally, they conducted interviews with 25 refugees from the Kurdish Self-Rule cantons who currently live in Southern Turkey during a visit of the organization's'

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[46] "Syria: We Did Not Have Any Other Place To Go: Forced Displacement and Destructions in Northern Syria" August 10, 2015. https://www.amnesty.org/ar/documents/mde24/2503/2015/ar/

delegates in August 2015." (5) Accordingly, the organization released the most serious report dealing with the YPG's abuses in Al-Hasakah, which included 'forced displacement, house demolitions, the confiscation and destruction of property. In some cases, these occurred to entire villages in retaliation to Arab or Turkmen residents supposedly pledging allegiance to ISIS and other armed actors."

On October 27, 2015 a comprehensive report[47]was released by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, where they presented a series of violations carried out against the civilians by the YPG in different parts of northeastern Syria. The report corroborated much of what was in Amnesty International and the Republican Center for Democratic Studies reports.

In the meantime, YPG units issued a statement[48], which responded to the Amnesty International report which sought to refute the charges and question the arguments put forth by the report. The statement strongly criticized the AI report, accusing the organization of not "providing sufficient evidence, relying solely on the testimonies of faulty eyewitnesses who have questionable sincerity." The statement also said that a number of the witnesses actually belonged to various "terrorist organizations and are involved in crimes related to the conflict, therefore questioning the credibility of the information provided by the AI team."

The statement also strongly criticized AI's use of the term "forced removal" in the report, stating that the villages in question in the report had been home to fierce battles between several conflicting parties, most of which were fierce enough to cause substantial damage to the houses, which are built mostly of mud. This was confirmed by Kurdish writer Badirxan Ali, "I would like to remind all that the inhabitants of Kobani and its outskirts are all

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[47] See the report issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, "There Is No Alternative to Return: Self-Rule Violations by Kurdish Forces in Al-Hasakah." October 27, 2015.

[48] See: ""بيان صادر عن القيادة العامة لوحدات حماية الشعب" published October 16, 2015

displaced in Turkey, and the area is entirely in ruins and that the largest proportion of displaced people from Al-Hasakah are Kurdish."[49]

The statement also stated that the "forced removal" of the residents occurred as a result of the aforementioned battles specifically, as most of these neighborhoods were on the front lines. The intensity of the battles prompted dozens of families to leave, as has happened in many different parts of Syria.

After the long refutation of the report by the YPG statement, they conclude by saying that this area was subject to fierce battles with ISIS, which had imposed its control over most of these villages and towns and ISIS forced the residents to leave by planting mines in many of the civilian houses. The YPG claims that 16,000 mines were planted and only about a quarter have been dismantled.

Bedirxan rejects the claims of ethnic cleansing against Arabs in the region, and stresses the fact that the narrative of Kurdish ethnic cleansing against Arabs in Tal Abyad and other areas is incorrect, as people fled due to the fierce fighting, which always amplifies violations.

She also raised many legitimate questions, or course, regarding the charges levied against the Kurdish Self-Rule Project. She said, "It is not clear why the Kurdish forces and the YPG would embark on an ethnic-cleansing project in these areas because there is a small Kurdish presence in those areas anyway compared to areas with a larger Kurdish presence. And why is there no mention of the fact that these Arabs who are claiming to be victims of this attack are not from this area, but rather they were brought in by a decision made by governmental agencies to live on land stolen from Kurdish landowners and farmers to create an Arab region in Al-Jazira?"

V.   Silencing Voices, Suppressing the Peaceful Movement

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[49] See article written by Mohammad Deebo entitled "دولة كردية في سوريا ...بلا سكان أكراد" in July 2015.

Away from the areas classified as active fronts, and in cities and regions that have seen relative stability far from the spectre of war, like Al-Qamishli and Amude, you also see a lot of self-critique from Kurdish and Arab activists regarding the YPG and other military wings.

Most of the criticism surrounding the self-rule project is related to the repression that many peaceful activists have faced, such as death under torture, kidnapping and detention as well as the suppression of peaceful demonstrations with violence and attempts to prevent the activists from expressing their opinion.[50]

According to the aforementioned report issued by the Republican Center, the YPG broke up demonstrations against the Syrian regime by force on June 27, 2013 which led to the death of 6 protesters and many others injured. (58) The report continued to list the many abuses carried out by the YPG against peaceful activists, politicians, and media. In late June 2013, "elements of the PYD attacked a demonstration and assaulted protesters who were beaten, shots were fired in the air to disperse protesters." (58) The Self-Rule Forces also banned demonstrations in the city of Afrin, one of the major Syrian Kurdish cities, and conducted mass arrests of Kurdish activists.

While often accused of 'shameful' treatment of detainees, the treatment has been justified by saying the detainees are drug-dealers or terrorist collaborators, charges that call to mind the charges the Assad regime has levied against its own prisoners of conscience.

Though the YPG has denied these charges, the reality is that there has been a noticeable decline in the revolutionary activities within the areas of the Self-Rule Project Administration and the near-complete disappearance of popular protests, an observation corroborated by many of the testimonies gathered for this report.

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[50] See: "القامشلي: العاصمة الشبح لإقليم كردستان سوريا" published by Le Monde, translated by Alan Caval, on June 16, 2015.

VI. Conclusion

The Syrian revolution has birthed a number of events and experiences for the self-rule of cities controlled by the opposition. Different areas, reflecting the diversity of the actors and their political and ideological orientations, have all faced great difficulty in their projects starting with the sieges, to shelling, and the lack of support from different factions who view each project as biased.

The Self-Rule Project in Al-Qamishli and other areas in Rojava are part of an attempt to stitch back together Syrian society and reduce the chaos that was born with the violence of the uprising. This experiment has received much acclaim, but has also been criticized for the way the PYD has channeled the Ba'ath party in its mannerism.

Despite all this, the Self-Rule experience is a complex one and subject to harsh critique as the entire concept of democratic governance is at stake. This poses many challenges to the forces of the revolution and their abilities to establish a democratic society, which is the antithesis of the Ba'ath Party's ruling methods.

Team

SABR DARWISH

Syrian researcher and journalist. Darwish co-edited two books: *The Experience of Liberated Cities*, Dar al-Rayyes 2015, and *The Tragedies of Besieged Aleppo and the Messages of the Besieged*, with Lebanese journalist Mohammad Abu Samra, Dar al-Mutawasset 2016.

MPHAMMAD DIBO

Current editor-in-chief of SyriaUntold (Arabic), and an editor at al-Arabi al-Jadid. Dibo is a Syrian poet, writer and researcher interested in Syrian culture and economy. Dibo's latest work is an autobiographical book, "Like He Who Witnesses His Own Death", about his experience in prison during the early days of the Syrian uprising. He is a regular contributor in many Arab and international newspapers.

Cities in Revolution

The complexity of the situation in Syria, the regime's efforts in dividing the opposition as well as the growing militarization of the conflict has led to very various forms of revolutions depending on the geographical areas or cities where the uprising took place. In this multifaceted context, the narrative on the Syrian events often tends to simplify what actually is a complex and varied reality on the ground. Moreover, the overabundance of information on Syria and the fast pace of news production make it difficult to ensure the validity of facts and figures and to establish a chronological, as objective as possible account of the events since March 2011.

Through the use of innovative forms of storytelling mixing research-based written content, infographics and documentary videos, the *Cities in Revolution* project's objective is to fill this gap by documenting a comprehensive, chronological account of the events as they happened in six different cities, in all their complexity and diversity, with a focus on civil movements and creative disobedience. Each multimedia documentary file will rely on content already available, but also on research and information collected by activists on the ground for this specific purpose.

حكاية ما انحكت SyriaUntold

SyriaUntold is an independent digital media project exploring the storytelling of the Syrian struggle and the diverse forms of resistance. We are a team of Syrian writers, journalists, programmers and designers living in the country and abroad trying to highlight the narrative of the Syrian revolution, which Syrian men and women are writing day by day. Through grassroots campaigns, emerging forms of self-management and self-government and endless manifestations of citizen creativity, a new outspoken Syria has emerged, after decades of repression and paralysis. With mainstream media focusing increasingly on geostrategic and military aspects and less on internal dynamics developing on the ground, we believe there are many aspects of the Syrian struggle that remain uncovered, many stories that we would not like to see forgotten.