Theoretical Analysis of the U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Kurds in Syria After 2011

Zainaddin Mawlood Khidhir[1]

[1]Department of International Relations Actual Classification, Institute of International, Political and Regional Studies, Corvinus University, Budapest, Hungary.

Abstract:

The United States' new foreign policy, which includes abandoning America's Kurdish friends and a new strategy on how the US should execute military interventions, as well as the "America First" ethos, has triggered a humanitarian and military catastrophe for Syrian Kurds. Despite the prevalence of study on American strategy in Syria and towards Syrian Kurds, there is a noticeable lack of comprehensive research explaining and evaluating the growing connections. This paper argues that deciphering these patterns necessitates a deep understanding of regional politics and a thorough engagement with the vast IR research. In this context, it is essential to look at the nature, limitations, and constraints of the Kurdish-US relationship, which is the Kurds' most powerful ally. For the present study, a theoretical framework is chosen to analyse US foreign policy comprehensively. This is a qualitative research report based on a case study. The case for this paper is the United States' foreign policy toward Syrian Kurds, as seen through several international theories, particularly realism and liberalism. The suggested study aims to explain why the US overlooked Syrian Kurds at the start of the Syrian crisis, why the US worked with and backed Syrian Kurds or SDF till 2019, and why the US abandoned or deserted the Syrian Kurds after a foreign policy shift. To sum up, scholarly reports show mixed results, with some claiming that the US decision to abandon Syrian Kurds was well-informed. In contrast, others suggest that if the decision is made without caution, it will do more harm than good to America's long-term ally, who played a critical role in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Keywords: US Foreign Policy; Syrian Kurds; Middle East; ISIS[i]; Syrian Crisis.

1.0.Introduction:

In the Syrian war, Rojava, a de facto self-governing Kurdish enclave in Syria, has arisen. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed branch, the People's Protection Units (YPG), have played a significant role in permitting Kurdish nationalist growth in Syria since the Syrian military withdrew from Kurdish-populated territory in the north of the country in July 2012. As a result of this development, the YPG's war against the Islamic State organisation has gained more authority and backing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Kurdish power grew despite various hurdles, and determination did not consolidate without the PYD taking significant steps to broaden its Kurdish assistance base and restore relations with non-Kurdish neighbours, particularly Turkey. The Kurds are a Middle Eastern ethnic group united by shared racial, cultural, and linguistic ties who live in Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Kurds are the world's largest non-state country, with a population of about thirty million. Kurdish people in the region have campaigned for equal rights to citizenship and expression of their national culture and identity for the better part of a century (Federici, 2015, p. 81).

The Syrian revolt changed the prerequisites for exchange for Kurdish political groups, causing significant changes in Syrian Kurdish politics. The state withdrew from Kurdish lands during the revolution, allowing Kurdish political parties to form a unified and cohesive society dedicated to obtaining Kurdish rights. At the same time, the Kurds were able to gain self-rule in several places, and the Syrian Kurdish issue received international attention, mainly because of its regional consequences (Harriet, 2015, p.78). The Bush and Clinton administrations have been admonished for over-engaging in Syria, while George W. Bush's detractors believe that the US is not engaged enough. However, the US policy under both Obama and Trump has been to tolerate Assad over the alternative while remaining silent and turning a blind eye (Hirsh, 2019, p.2)

US foreign policy toward Syrian Kurds was a component of US foreign policy in Syria from 2012 until President Donald Trump's order to withdraw the US military from Northern Syria. The multifaceted Syrian scenario will remain unchanged due to Trump's most recent decision, made in October 2018, to keep around 200 US forces in Syria. This could be due to their strong support for Kurdish allies (SDF). This is especially true after Turkey insisted on interfering in the Syrian conflict. More violence in Syria may result from Turkish attacks and the US withdrawal. Meanwhile, Moscow's anti-Kurdish and pro-Turkish policies are primarily motivated by a desire to deprive the US of local allies and drive a wedge between NATO members (Teke, 2020, p. 57).

Kurds have played an essential role in the Syrian conflict since the 2011 crisis, mainly through their strong participation in the fight against ISIS. Their active involvement cleared the path for Syria's alliance with several regional and superpowers. As a result, the US has provided military and logistical support to Syrian Kurds. The United States' participation in Syria has been shaky, and Trump's administration has yet to establish a clear foreign policy in the country. The United States Foreign Policy (USFP) has altered its focus from quietly cooperating with SDF to overt demonstrations of the US force and expanding its footprint to impact the conflict.

Whether the US-Syrian Kurdish connection is a lengthy policy or a tactical charade, the fact remains that US foreign policy toward Syrian Kurds has changed from indifference (2011-2014) to cooperation (2014-2019) to abandonment (2019). (2019).

This research attempts to explain the US foreign policy towards Kurds in Syria after 2011 in light of realism and liberalism theory.

1.1. Significance Of The Study:

In the international relations literature, theoretical tools for examining ethnic opposition's foreign policy are largely insufficient. In this context, it is suggested that Kurdish opposition groups' connections with the international system, local system/order, identity, and power relations shape their non-state foreign policy. As a result, the nature, characteristics, and boundaries of the Kurdish-US relationship, which is the most influential state on the Kurds, must be examined.

Focusing on the role of Kurds as non-state actors in the Middle East as leverage or implementers of US foreign policy in Iraq and Syria, in addition to evaluating the general character and trajectory of US foreign policy towards non-state actors, can help us predict future developments.

1.2. Research Problem:

The Syrian crisis poses regional and global challenges because of the involvement of major nations. The quest for regional influence among these actors added to the conflict's distinctiveness. The Syrian Kurds had to trust the US to allow them some freedom and autonomy as a stateless people trapped between great countries. However, the United States was once again an unreliable ally.

1.3.   Research Hypothesis:

Due to the inadequate American presence in Syria, its "lead from behind" strategy failed, limiting its effect on local politics and regional affairs. The Kurdish-American partnership transformed them from a marginalised minority to prominent temporary actors in Syria. The United States used Syrian Kurds for its benefit.

2.0.   Methodology:

This article follows a case study and qualitative investigation. In contrast to quantitative research, which dissects a phenomenon to evaluate components that become the study's variables, qualitative research can reveal how all parts interact together to make a whole. The researcher is the primary instrument for data gathering and analysis. A few points of comparison are emphasised when employing a qualitative design. One of them is the research topic, which is the quality and essence of nature. Understanding, description, meaning, and hypotheses are the goals of this study. As a result, this article offers a comprehensive description and analysis of a single unit or confined system. This method can be used in conjunction with other approaches such as basic qualitative research, phenomenology, or grounded theory. Case studies are a type of research that encompasses a wide range of topics (Merriam, 1998). This research aims to comprehensively understand the issue and its implications for the individuals involved.

The case for this paper is the United States' foreign policy toward Syrian Kurds as seen through several international perspectives, particularly realism and liberalism. The research chose the civil war in Syria because it has been an ongoing conflict since 2011 and has seen a lot of worldwide attention. The interaction of significant components that characterise the phenomenon is identified by focusing on a single occurrence or entity. Qualitative case studies are particularistic in the sense that they focus on a specific scenario, event, programme, or phenomena. The example is significant regarding what it discloses about the phenomenon and what it may signify. The case for this study is more specified in focusing on the Syrian Kurds following the Syrian conflict and US engagement.

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2.1. Data Collection:

The data collecting and analysis procedures used in case studies are not specified. Any data collection methods are acceptable. Different materials and data are analysed in this investigation and will be examined. The process of making meaning of the data is known as data analysis. This time-consuming procedure requires switching back and forth between concrete evidence and abstract notions, inductive and deductive reasoning, and description and interpretation. The study's findings are these meanings of understandings or insights (Pettersson, 2020). Most of the data for the analysis came from secondary sources such as books, monographs, essays, journals, and news.

3.0. Literature Review:

The Syrian crisis is both a setback and a new opportunity; a setback because so much had been invested, first in Assad and then in the opposition, and an opportunity because Turkey, as Syria's most important neighbour, stands to gain a lot from Syria's ashes in terms of future influence and simple reconstruction efforts. The Russians will also provide new bargaining strength and even arms to the Syrian Kurds, who are already bolstered by their tactical partnership with the US. It's hard to imagine the Syrian crisis ending without the Syrian Kurds obtaining more than simply recognition (Barkey, 2016, p.25).

More crucially, opinions of the Syrian crisis are inherently shaped by distance and interests. For the United States, Syria was far away; it was first and foremost a battle about who should control Syria: Assad or a more representative form of government. As the situation progressed, the attention shifted to the humanitarian disaster, with rising pressure on the US, bolstered by worldwide expectations that Washington would find a rapid solution. It then spread to ISIS, which assumed all the features of a global movement capable of posing a threat not only to the region but also to the United States and its Western allies. Of all, the issue for Turkey has always been Assad and Syrian Kurdish empowerment. Because the Turkish-Kurdish war has resurfaced with a vengeance, the latter has taken on an even higher profile. Because the Obama administration has been unable to articulate a consistent policy, it has been forced to operate in the shadows on several topics. Even its most significant achievements, which resulted from collaboration with the PYD, had an opportunistic start, and it had no ulterior objective regarding Syrian Kurds, despite Turkish suspicions. Simply put, it was the only policy that yielded results (Barkey, 2016, p.30).

In contrast to the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey, Syria's Kurds are poorly known in the West, yet they have tense relations with the state that rules them and are subjected to human rights violations as a minority. The Syrian state's mistreatment of its Kurdish people, which has so far refrained from seeking independence, may bolster Kurdish self-determination ambitions in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. It would be a mistake to view the Syrian Kurdish crisis only as an ethnic issue with regional implications; the Syrian Kurds must also be considered in the context of Syria's lack of democratic administration, which affects all Syrians. The denial of basic human rights to Kurds, notably civil, political, and cultural rights, is highly detrimental. However, the issue also provides a strategic direction: the growth of democratic governance in Syria might help alleviate the Kurdish crisis in Syria, reducing calls for independence among other Kurds in the region (Ziadeh, 2009, p.1).

Syrian Kurds are acutely aware that their foreign and regional backers do not share their vision for the region, notably their goal of creating a self-governing Kurdish territory. Syrian Kurds have resorted to hedging to garner international military help while remaining vigilant against the possibility of abandonment. Since 2014, the US has supplied military assistance to the YPG, as the latter's military capabilities and fighting experience have been critical in the US fight against ISIS (Wimmen, 2017).

The United States does not support the formation of a Kurdish state. In reality, though, the US policy is hazy and confusing. Because of its prior involvement in Iraq, where the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was seen as a threat to Iraq's unity, Washington was cautious about engaging Syrian Kurds, notably the PYD/YPG forces, at first. The US officials have even cautioned the PYD against proclaiming autonomy in northern Syria. The PYD has also been implicated in violence against opposition groups in the north of Syria, including a deadly crackdown on Kurdish anti-Assad protesters in Amuda in July 2013, which Washington strongly denounced. Nonetheless, the US considered the Kurdish party and army as vital allies in the fight to drive ISIS out of Syria, which was the mission's primary purpose (Hubbard, 2018). Since 2014, the US has provided arms and military advice to the YPG (Kucukkeles & Mankoff, 2014).

The Obama administration's aversion to dealing with the Kurdish issue arose primarily from its desire to end the Syrian catastrophe. The US was forced to take a stricter stance on Syrian Kurdish aspirations when the civil war erupted. As a result, the United States has never declared a foreign policy toward the Kurds, who are spread over four countries (Gunter, 2015). The US aim was first to support the Kurdish National Council while convincing the PYD to join the anti-Assad fight. Despite these efforts, the PYD retained control of Rojava and was supported by the majority of Kurdish armed forces. In the view of the US, the PYD quickly established itself as a bulwark against Islamist groups such as ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. As a result, the US found itself in a difficult position: partnering with the PYD/YPG, which is crucial for Syria's democratic transition, while also maintaining Turkey as a significant ally against Russia and Iran (Aziz, 2020).

Initially, Saudi Arabia and the Obama administration decided to end Bashar Al Assad's Syrian dictatorship. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia considered that Obama did not go above and beyond to achieve this goal and was hesitant to contribute arms and funding to the opposition. Furthermore, in 2012, Obama drew a line in the sand regarding the deployment of chemical weapons in Syria. When Bashar al-Assad deployed Sarin Gas on civilians in 2013, Obama backed down from a military response and instead agreed to work with Russia to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons. As a result, Obama's actions have heightened tensions between the US and Saudi Arabia. In reality, Saudi Arabia expressed questions about Obama's legitimacy and whether he had any ambition to overthrow Al-Assad (Aziz, 2019).

From Turkey's perspective, the military stalemate in Syria, which has resulted in a cemented north-south line of government authority in the western portion of the country, is not a stable equilibrium. The Syrian Kurds are expected to benefit from this, as ISIS's presence will allow them to continue receiving US support. The lack of any armed force to fight them in Syria will solidify their hold in the north. These advances will be difficult to reverse if they do not make mistakes in handling non-Kurdish minorities in their midst. Now that the Syrian Kurdish issue has become a domestic Turkish issue over which the government and Turkish Kurds are at odds, any action taken by Ankara in Syria or even Iraq risks repercussions at home (Barkey, 2016, p.35).

Kurds have played an essential role in the US Middle East foreign policy. The US's primary goals in the region are to control oil supplies, maintain the Middle East's balance of power, restrict Iran, and fight extremist "Islamic" movements while preserving Israel's security. Three factors influence US foreign policy toward the Kurds in Syria: Turkish position in Syria as a NATO member ally, Russia's and Iran's policies in Syria, and radical Islamist terrorist groups. Syria's Kurds have proven to be a beneficial tool for the US in all three areas. The Iraqi and Syrian Kurds have constrained Iran's influence in Syria and Iraq. Following the Arab Spring, they took on the outsourcing duty of inflicting security problems on Turkey due to tensions that arose between this country and the United States due to the Arab Spring. Maintaining the balance of power is one of the most vital interests of the United States in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Kurds had two fundamental expectations from the United States: security and autonomy (Sari, 2019).

The US has good relations with several countries surrounding Iraq's Kurds, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Still, it has little power over Iran or Syria and only a limited influence over Turkey. Support for the Iraqi Kurds and Kurdish nationalism in Iran, Turkey, and Syria appear unlikely to last as long as Britain's support for Zionism (Olson, 2010).

The United States does not have a grand plan for the Kurds because they are divided between four states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria). Each state demands its specific concerns. Furthermore, the Kurdish-majority governments are more significant to the US foreign policy than the Kurds themselves. However, because of its interest in Middle East security and human rights, the US has grown to believe it bears some responsibility toward the Kurds. Nonetheless, the US opposes their independence since it would undoubtedly result in the split of the countries in which they live, causing unwelcome instability in the Middle East (Gunter, 2011, p.102).

The US constructed a military basis for working with the PYD/PKK because it wants to battle ISIS in Syria. Despite this cooperation, the Syrian Kurds' ambition for regional independence did not appear to persuade Washington. The US stopped supporting the Syrian Kurdish Military Operation after failing to make a difference in the fight against ISIS. These acts are comparable, indicating that Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish troops were utilised as a means to an end to the United States' short-term international goals. We and other countries prefer long-term allies or partnerships with other countries above sub-state entities like Syrian Kurds. Kurdish prospects will remain unchanged until the Trump administration decides on a mid-term or long-term Middle East strategy (Sari, 2019).

Unlike the problems faced by Iran and the Arab-Israeli conflict, defeating the Islamic State necessitates deploying more resources in the region, notably a significant US air presence to supplement local partners' forces. To date, the US has attempted, but failed, to arm and train many capable local forces (Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, moderate Syrian opposition forces, and Iraqi tribes) to combat the Islamic State. The US should maintain these efforts while also working to prevent the fires raging in Syria. Part of this entails minimising the Islamic State's conventional and insurgency military threat. It also necessitates cooperating with refugees and bolstering neighbouring states' border security and counterterrorism capacities, such as Lebanon and Jordan (Byman & Moller, 2016, p.272).

4.0.   Theoretical Framework :

The theoretical framework is the framework that holds or supports a research study's theory. The theoretical framework introduces the theory that explains why the research problem under investigation occurs.

4.1.   The US foreign policy towards Syrian Kurds in the light of liberalism and realism:

Considering realism and liberalism theories as the two most essential perspectives on international ideas, they are used in this work. Liberalism and realism are the two schools of thought that dominate the international relations theoretical landscape. Most major philosophical debates in international relations take place either on the other side of the realism-liberalism divide or inside those paradigms (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.8).

4.1.1. Theory of liberalism:

The liberal heritage may be traced back to the Enlightenment, a period in eighteenth-century Europe during which intellectuals and political leaders believed that reason could be used to improve the world. As a result, liberals are optimistic about the potential for making the world a safer and more peaceful place. Most liberals believe that the scourge of war may be significantly reduced while international wealth is increased. As a result, liberal ideologies are frequently referred to as "Utopian" or "idealist" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.8). Neoliberalism theory is being used in this research.

The role of liberalism in Obama's determination of his foreign policy goals needs a more expanded understanding of the role of liberalism in the determination of his foreign policy ideals, despite the majority viewpoints of his advisors and government. During the Obama administration, liberalism influenced US foreign policy, emphasising the importance of diplomacy and cooperation over the use of armed force. Obama backed political and diplomatic dialogue in Syria and other nations, as seen by his foreign policy initiatives (Mazza-Hilway, 2019, p.2).

The Obama administration's choice to ignore Syria's political transition and focus entirely on eliminating ISIS in Raqqa and elsewhere sparked a furious debate in official circles regarding the types and identities of prospective "allies" in the anti-IS fight. In contrast to the situation of Iraq, where the central government collaborated with the US in its attempts to destroy IS in Iraq's west and northwest, this search had to be performed without regard for the Assad regime's opinion. Initially, the US attempted to organise and arm battalions of Syrian army deserters, but the plan failed when they chose to unite around battling IS rather than the regime that started the persecution and conflict in the first place (Zaideh, 2017).

The Obama administration left behind a convoluted and at times irreconcilable, network of Middle East friendships and conflicts that defies easy categorisation. In the fight against ISIS, the US is allied with the Baghdad government, which is linked with Iran. In Syria, on the other hand, the Obama administration adopted a particularly harsh rhetorical stance against Iran's long-time partner, Bashar al-Assad, whom both the Iraqi and Iranian governments have backed militarily. Turkey, a NATO member, had a tumultuous relationship with ISIS in Iraq during the Obama administration. However, it has since adapted to Russia's operations in Syria. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, urged Assad's ouster initially but now accepts Russia's support for him, worrying more about Kurdish aspirations in Syria than the fight against ISIS. Iran's growing regional influence inspires America's Gulf and beyond Arab friends (Al-Istrabadi, 2018).

The liberalism and realism theories of foreign policy are insufficient to explain why the US has failed to remove the Assad regime despite the goal of regime change in Syria. Due to his identification as a liberal non-interventionist and his subscription to liberalism, it is apparent that many of President Obama's actions coincided with the core points of liberalism. This commitment may be seen in his emphasis on diplomatic talks with the Assad administration and the absence of military operations in Syria. Liberalism can also explain his reluctance to help Syria's government transition because of the need to employ power politics and rely on military might, both of which are parts of realist theory. While the impact of liberalism theory can be blamed for the lack of military engagement in Syria under Obama's presidency, it cannot be blamed for the Trump administration's inaction. As a result, liberalism is rejected as the main factor and response to the United States' failure to remove Assad from power in Syria (Mayer, 2014, p 821).

4.1.2. Theory of realism:

When it comes to foreign politics, realists are pessimists. Realists agree that a peaceful world is desirable, but o simple path out of the harsh world of security rivalry and violence. Creating a peaceful planet is an appealing concept, but it is not feasible. "Realism tends to highlight the irresistible strength of existing

forces and the inevitable quality of existing trends," as Carr puts it (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.9). Classical realism better explains this research perspective.

In world politics, realism is a view of international relations that stresses national interests, the role of the state, and military strength. This thesis describes President Trump's emphasis on states as major actors in the international order, his disdain for international organisations his focus on the hard force. Despite Trump's commitment to realism and focus on power politics, the US has abandoned its promise to depose Assad. In reaction to the Assad administration's repeated chemical weapons attacks, Trump has not hesitated to use military force against them. Trump has also condemned Assad's conduct and stated that he wants to punish and restructure the regime. Despite Trump's focus on power and military action, the Assad government is still in the same state as it was throughout Obama's presidency. President Trump's foreign strategy in Syria is divided into two primary goals. The initial objective is to combat and eliminate ISIS's presence in the region, as well as to cripple the organisation as a whole. ISIS, which Trump called his major foreign policy priority, was one of the few foreign policy problems Trump addressed during his presidential campaign. The administration's second purpose is to end the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons (Krieg, 2017, p.139).

Consider Trump's decision to keep the US military in charge of the country's oil to protect the US against ISIS. However, his primary motivation is most likely to grow resources and exploit oil to reduce reliance on Middle Eastern natural resources. Other reasons possible to explain the choice include power balance, building a strong independent state, and maintaining the US as the world's leading power (Pettersson, 2020).

With Donald Trump's victory as president, US backing for the YPG has grown. Trump handed American generals the discretion to decide what is best on the battlefield in northern Syria, avoiding direct engagement in military operations. Simultaneously, they planned to increase the frequency of aerial bombing flights against IS in Raqqa, resulting in a significant spike in civilian casualties. The Trump administration prioritised a speedy military victory over ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. At the same time, Turkey, which had branded the YPG a terrorist group and tried to persuade the US to depend more heavily on Syrian opposition troops in capturing Raqqa, became embroiled in a public spat (Zaideh, 2017).

The Trump administration, for its part, has aided an open schism in the Gulf States' delicate alliance system. A significant diplomatic crisis has arisen between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain on the one hand, Qatar on the other, with Kuwait and Oman remaining neutral between the rival powers. Even concerning ISIS and any future reincarnation, there is no single US strategy in the region that unifies the numerous parties (Al-Istrabadi, 2018).

"Where is an agreement that says we have to stay in the Middle East for the rest of humanity, for the rest of civilisation, to safeguard the Kurds?" "We never agreed to protect the Kurds for the rest of their lives [...] where's an agreement that says we have to stay in the Middle East for the rest of humanity, for the rest of civilisation, to protect the Kurds?" President Trump defended his decision, saying, "We never agreed to protect the Kurds for the rest of their lives [...] where's an agreement that says we have to stay in the Middle East for the rest of humanity, for the rest of civilisation, to protect the Kurds?" "The handshake with the Kurds, particularly with the SDF, was a guarantee that we will defeat ISIS," Defense Secretary Esper continued. Yes, we would aid you in establishing an independent Kurdish state, not simply a handshake. "Yes, we'll fight Turkey for you," they didn't say with a handshake. At the same time, US military officials have underlined the

need for "allies and partners, including nation-states and indigenous partners like the SDF, in attaining our national security objectives "(Humud et al., 2016).

Several Biden administration officials pointed to three distinct Syria policy objectives. They are maintaining a US military presence as part of the ongoing fight to counter and prevent ISIS from resurrecting, sustaining local ceasefires, contributing to violence reduction, and improving humanitarian conditions. While these goals may appear pragmatic or achievable, they do not form a policy to change the course of the Syrian crisis. Instead, they indicate a bare-bones threat-management strategy, implying a reactionary US response to future events in Syria. President Biden has addressed Syria without a defined direction and objective since taking office in January 2021, owing to several domestic, international, and conflict-specific constraints. His presidency coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Syrian crisis, and he inherited a policy on Syria that is severely illogical and definingly inconsistent. As a result, it's unlikely that the Biden administration ever thought it could create a cost-benefit analysis that would change on-the-ground reality, especially where rivals—such as Russia and Iran—see their interests in the battle as considerably more important than Washington's. As a result, the Biden administration followed the same restricted policy as Donald Trump's predecessor (Al-Masri & Salahi, 2022).

Of course, Biden may continue the Trump administration's agenda. However, doing so would result in the waste of billions of dollars, as well as the exacerbation of intercommoned tensions and the failure to contain ISIS. The US has limited objectives in Syria that should cost significantly less; whatever money it has left over should be used to address the massive refugee crisis. It is preferable to allow Russia and Turkey to protect their national interests by shouldering the anti-ISIS burden. In the end, working on specific difficulties, even with unsavoury partners, to achieve restricted but agreed goals are the core of diplomacy (Ford, 2021).

5.0.   Analysis – Reappraising The Us-Kurdish Alliance:

The following paragraphs explain the future developments in the US-Kurdish relationship after 2011 and how Kurds have emerged as a potential game-changer in the region.

5.1.   Developments in the US-Kurdish relationship after Arab Spring

The PYD's relationship with the Syrian government and other Kurdish organisations in Syria changed radically when the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. However, the regime and the former dissident group formed an implicit alliance due to the battle. Soon after the revolt began in 2011, the government released several PYD political detainees and announced plans to grant citizenship to thousands of Kurds who had previously been denied citizenship. Other Kurdish factions were targeted by the PYD, including the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, an offshoot of the Iraq Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the largest party in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region.[ii]

After government forces evacuated northeastern Syria to focus on fighting the opposition in the west, PYD and YPG components seamlessly took up governance and security roles. The PYD then launched an onslaught against other Kurdish parties, detaining activists and accusing prominent opponents of murder. Several Turkish and US-backed opposition figures have accused the PYD of collaborating with the government. There were clashes between opposition parties and YPG units in PYD-controlled mixed Arab-Kurdish regions. In particular, the PYD suppressed anti-government protests among Kurds and Arabs in regions under its control while simultaneously channelling energy into pro-PYD counter-demonstrations (Maguire, 2020).

The PYD announced the formation of the Self-Administration of North and East Syria (SANES), popularly known as Rojava, in 2013. Afrin, Kobani, and Qamishli were the three noncontiguous enclaves along the northern border that made up SANES. The YPG attempted to seize and unite these disparate cantons on several occasions. The PYD made a series of unilateral constitutional steps in founding Rojava. It requested that Kurdish presence be recognised in a decentralised and democratic Syria. At the same time, the PYD continued to get services and backing from the Syrian government. It also envisaged the PYD's militia having a special status in securing Kurdish areas (Schmidinger, 2018, p.298).

ISIS launched an attack on the border city of Ain al-Arab in 2014, which sparked a war. The YPG successfully defended the city with the support of an international coalition led by the United States, lifting the ISIS siege. Even though Kobane was a military win, it became the source of a rift between the US, which backed the Kurds, and Turkey, which was hesitant to support Kurdish military troops attempting to form their canton on the Syrian-Turkish border. From the United States' perspective, the YPG was a valuable ally. Taking advantage of the situation on the ground and the Syrian regime's failure to meet its aims, the YPG saw a strategic opportunity to expand Kurdish rule in northern Syria beyond the three cantons—Hasaka, Afrin, and Kobane—that they had taken control of with the Syrian regime's support. The US had persuaded the YPG to join the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which also included minor contingents of Arab tribal fighters, by that time. This showed that Syria's US friends were not limited to the Kurds (Zaideh, 2017).

Following ISIS's spectacular capture of Mosul in the summer of 2014, international attention was drawn to the plight of the Yezidi sect on Iraq's Syrian border. Iraqi Kurdish militiamen, backed by YPG soldiers and US airstrikes, rushed into the breach. This was the first time US forces and a PKK-affiliated militia collaborated. In 2015, the SDF was founded. Under US supervision, the People's Defense Corps (YPG), a Kurdish force, and several local Arab militias formed an alliance (Hawramy, 2014).

Northern Syria, thanks to the PYD/YPG, which was armed by the US military, became a cause of concern for Washington and Ankara relations in 2014. Following the start of the Syrian Civil War, the PYD/PKK gained independence and requested US help in battling Turkey and the Assad administration. The Assad regime is attempting to recover control of northern Syria, while Turkey aims to eradicate terrorist groups with clear ties to the PKK. Local opponents may exist for the PYD/PKK, but overcoming the Turkish Armed Forces will be impossible. Following any form of political transition in Washington, the PYD/PKK aims to build relationships with other actors in the region, for example, with Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Libya. However, it has no bearing on their relations with the United States. Because of Washington's short-term successes after WWII, the US developed significant ties with Kurds and other non-state players. For the United States, long-term relations or alliances with foreign countries were more valuable. Cooperation between Washington and the Kurds is frequently fleeting and shallow. Kurds can be considered allies if they are needed, but they are not required. Throughout the history of the US-Kurdish relationship, there have been several examples. For example, the Kurds supported US-led airstrikes to help remove the threat of ISIS in 2014. But President Trump denounced Assad's actions and reiterated his interest in punishing and reforming the Assad regime (Sari, 2019).

When Assad was on the verge of falling apart in 2015, Russia and Iran intervened to save him. Even if the costs of a continuing US engagement were small, Trump abandoned the Kurds after they vanquished ISIS and were well-positioned to resist Iran's regional domination. The Syrian Kurds' future is in the current circumstances' hands. Despite restoring the Syrian army and official institutions to the northeast, Damascus lacks the proper military and other means to rule the region. Even if the Syrian flag is placed on their shoulder patches, the SDF remains a powerful Kurdish-led military force with 70,000 men and women under arms.

And, at least in the medium term, it is unclear whether the Syrian government can—or wants to—dismantle the political structures established by the NES. Of course, neither the Putin-Erdogan nor the Pence-Erdogan accords included the SDF. While it has little choice but to accept Russian and Syrian government protection, that does not imply it would forsake the areas near the border where almost all Syrian Kurds live. If Erdogan continues his fight, ethnic cleansing might be massive (Galbraith, 2019).

As one US official put it, "We are equally clear that we do not envision the future of Syria as an autonomous Kurdish sector or territory"(quoted in Öğür and Baykal, 2018: 66). The PYD relied on other allies since it was apprehensive about the US's sustained assistance for the Kurds in Syria. They were able to maintain conflict-free relations with Russia while also securing its military and political support. Russia is also hesitant to back a self-governing Kurdish region in Syria, and its relations with Turkey have been a source of tension and concern for the Kurds (Darwich, 2021).

The US urged the SDF to fight ISIS in places other than Kurdish-majority areas, such as the Euphrates River valley and the Iraqi border. One American official stated as the SDF prepared to enter the ISIS capital of Raqqa that an operation would generally require "tens of thousands of American personnel" and the resulting losses. On the other hand, the SDF suffered 400 deaths and 700 injured in the battle, with no American casualties. In early 2019, Donald J. Trump, the president of the United States, pronounced ISIS defeated. According to some military officers and SDF officials, ISIS constituted a formidable, albeit diminished, threat. Extending SDF control over ISIS-free territory, on the other hand, became a red line for Turkey, sparking a new battle line (Rogers et al., 2019).

Kurdish groups had also established logistical networks to replenish fighters with food, water, fuel, light weapons, and ammunition. During the siege of Kobane, ISIS troops cut off the militias' access to these supply lines. Similarly, Turkey had curtailed the capacity of the Kurdish militia to replenish its fighters across the border. The successful relationship between the Kurdish militias and the US military was made possible by revitalising the Syrian Kurds' logistics system which allowed the US military to airdrop necessary supplies, which were then dispersed efficiently (Sherlock et al. 2014; Benoist 2014; Collard, 2014).

President Donald Trump has stated that US troops will be leaving Syria by the end of March 2018, but it is likely that they could stay longer. In the short and medium term, the United States' participation in Syria will be sustained in order to bring the Syrian crisis to a close. Iran's growing influence in Syria and Iraq has become a significant policy concern because it has the potential to become a regional hegemon and because it provides leverage in diplomatic efforts to oppose Russian and Iranian influence in the area. Such a scenario would tip the regional power balance, and Israel and Saudi Arabia, two strong US allies in the area, would regard it as a grave threat (O'Leary, 2018).

The US military supplemented local militias ' existing capabilities in and around Kobane, Sirte, and Raqqa. The obstacles of teaching an irregular, poorly armed, and less skilled militia to follow more conventional tactics, techniques, and procedures were eliminated with this basic concept – augmentation. It also enabled the US military to win tactical wins in a short amount of time (four to five months). Nonetheless, the Syrian Kurds were far more capable than the Misratan forces on their own. The Syrian Kurds, for example, demonstrated a command-and-control (C2) structure and a logistics infrastructure among their forces.[iii] This shows that, at least in using irregular forces to engage non-state opponents, will-to-fight may be more crucial than skill. It also shows that the US military's mindset has shifted from creating capacity to augmenting capabilities, particularly when they consider the possibility of collaborating with irregular militias (Cragin, 2020, p.318).

The current position in 2019 demonstrates the success of the Mediterranean politics hedging strategy. The Trump administration approved Operation Peace Spring, a Turkish operation requiring Kurdish forces to give over their weapons and evacuate, which Syrian Kurds saw as desertion (Borger, 2019). As a result, the YPG forged deeper ties with Russia and the Assad administration, striking a deal to prevent their long-time foe, Turkey (Ayton, 2020).

It is unclear whether or how changes in the US posture in Syria in 2019 will affect the US-Syrian Kurd relationship in the long run. According to military authorities, joint US-SDF operations against the Islamic State began in late 2019, and Congress has approved funds for ongoing training and equipping of partner forces in Syria, including the SDF. Due to perceived ambiguity regarding US policy in Syria and the future of US military involvement, US partner forces, particularly Kurdish forces, may seek support from other countries, even US adversaries (Humud et al., 2016).

5.2. The Emergence of Kurds as a potential game-changer:

The once-marginalized Syrian Kurds have emerged as a local factor, attempting to become a more dominant participant in the country's increasingly complex military and political battlefield. Syrian Kurds formally seized control of their historical regions in 2012 and established local councils to manage local matters. They have also recommended a federated structure to replace the country's current centralised governance system, which is dominated by Arabs. Kurds have been positioned to strive for broader legitimacy in terms of local government and self-rule as one of Syria's most organised groups. . The Syrian Kurds' ultimate goal, though, is to serve as a model for the rest of the country. In their federalism manifesto, they contend that self-rule guarantees peace and democracy in post-war Syria (Kajjo, 2020, p.268).

In the first half of 2014, ISIS, a new jihadist organisation that sees the Kurds as ideological foes as well as competitors for land and resources, launched a major assault on Syrian Kurds. For the first time, the PYD's military branch, the YPG, began resolutely defending Kurdish towns and villages, and it appeared to be a more effective player on the ground than its Iraqi Kurdish counterparts, the Peshmergas (Gunes & Lowe, 2015, p.4).

As a result of the Syrian war, the militarisation of the Syrian Kurdish movement has clearly shaped a new dynamic in the region. On September 13, 2014, ISIS invaded Kobani for the second time; this assault indicated the end of the Jihadists' Kurdish presence in the region. The YPG was instantly put in a difficult situation after losing a dozen villages in the early days of the battle (Desoli, 2015, p.273).

The development of ISIS was one of the key forces altering the Middle East political map, but the Kurds swiftly benefited from the Siege of Kobani owing to an international coalition. Indeed, for the first time, the United States committed air strikes against Jihadists, resulting in widespread media coverage of the Kobani conflict and the Kurdish cause in general. It also demonstrated to the rest of the world the US's fruitful cooperation with the PYD/YPG, which persisted despite Turkey's resistance. Thanks to US aid, the Kurds were able to destroy not only ISIS but also take control of most of Syria's border with Turkey. In Kobani, the US, the PYD/YPG, the Peshmergas, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) collaborated to demonstrate global support for the Kurdish cause. The PYD's standing as an official US partner has been elevated due to its achievements over ISIS on the battlefield, enhancing the YPG's legitimacy. The PYD was now seen as a good ally by the international alliance (Plakoudas, 2017, p.99).

Early in 2016, the Syrian Kurds appeared to have a bright future: they had destroyed ISIS, secured US support, and formed a political vision in Rojava. Before the Syrian uprising, the idea of Kurdish autonomy

was inconceivable, but since 2013, local self-governance by Syrian Kurds has become a reality. Due to a weak state and a fractured Kurdish opposition, the PYD was given the opportunity to administer powers in northeastern Syria (Federici, 2015, p.81). The PYD declared the foundation of Rojava, a 1.5 million-person territory, after capturing control of Kurd (Desoli, 2015, p.285).

The party's rise to power is explained by its structure, discipline, and ability to capitalise on the Syrian crisis dynamics. The PYD's influence and strength are bolstered by the fact that it is the only political party with its own militia, the YPG, which has 65 000 fighters (Thornton, 2015, p.865). The close relations between the PYD and the PKK have allowed vital training, well-trained militants, and weapon supplies. Because of the PYD's success, Syrian Kurds have decided to support the political organisation, which provides security, services, and jobs (Plakoudas, 2017, p.116).

The People's Protection Units (PYG) – the armed wing of the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat/Democratic Union Party) – maintained a successful foreign policy with other non-state actors, for example, with PKK in Syria (especially after 2011) and managed to secure assistance from regional and international powers, namely Russia, the United States, and European States (Darwich, 2021, p.656).

The Arab Spring has brought about significant changes in the Middle East, as well as instability and conflict. The Kurds have several opportunities in this situation. These opportunities, however, have also highlighted more significant hazards. With the Assad regime's withdrawal from Syria's north in 2012, the Kurds obtained de facto autonomy as the civil conflict raged. The PYD/PKK, the most organised structure among Syrian Kurds, took control of this territory with the help of the US. Following the retreat of Assad's administration from northern Syria on July 19, 2012, the Syrian Kurds, who had never been involved in the Syrian civil war before, emerged as a potential game-changer. The PYD/PKK, the most organised structure, gained control of the region, putting Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government in a difficult situation. Indeed, the Kurds' quick ascent in Syria and the undeniable reality of the Kurdish conflict's cross-border nature have made them a viable choice for other Syrian factions (the United States, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia).

6.0.   Conclusion:

The Syrian crisis poses both regional and global challenges due to the involvement of key states. The conflict's uniqueness was enhanced by the various parties' drive for regional power. As stateless people stuck between two big countries, the Syrian Kurds had to trust the US to give them some freedom and sovereignty. However, it appeared that the US was an untrustworthy ally.

This research finds out that the Syrian crisis has upended much of the Middle East in ways few could have predicted in 2011. The ensuing civil conflict has attracted regional and global powers, including the United States. Syrian Kurds have played an essential role in the Syrian conflict since the 2011 crisis, mainly through their strong participation in the fight against ISIS. Their active participation cleared the path for Syria's alliance with the US. As a result, the US has provided military and logistical support to Syrian Kurds.

ISIS, a new jihadist organisation that regards Syrian Kurds as ideological opponents as well as enemies for control of land and resources, harassed Syrian Kurds heavily in the first six months of 2014. The PYD's military wing, the YPG, began militarily defending Kurdish towns and villages for the first time. The collaboration between the US and the PYD paid off handsomely, as the PYD not only held on to Kobani but also allowed the American air force to inflict massive damage on ISIS. The Syrian Kurds established that they

were not only ready and capable of fighting ISIS but also the only ones capable of defeating the jihadist group on multiple occasions.

For this research study, the set of assumptions and approaches of liberalism and realism uniquely explained the Syrian crisis. Realism, with its focus on states as the sole actors in the international arena, ignores forces like ISIS or Kurds and sees war as an unavoidable act of survival; liberalism considers non-state actors and holds national governments accountable for failing to use global tools like the UN to prevent such a disaster.

The Obama administration has been unable to establish a consistent approach; it remains in the shadows on several topics. Due to his identification as a liberal non-interventionist and his subscription to liberalism, it is apparent that many of President Obama's actions coincided with the core points of liberalism. Even its most significant achievements, which resulted from collaboration with the PYD, had an opportunistic start, and it had no ulterior objective regarding Syrian Kurds, despite Turkish suspicions. Simply put, it was the only policy that worked.

President Trump planned to withdraw US soldiers from Syria in October 2019. Despite Trump's commitment to realism and focus on power politics, the US has abandoned its promise to depose Assad. The Syrian Kurds realised their crucial role in the war against ISIS may not have ensured Washington's assistance in their fight against other opponents. The Kurds were dealt a blow with this pronouncement. President Trump continually contradicted his advisers and himself regarding US foreign policy. Discord and disagreement persisted because the American President didn't know what he wanted. The lack of a defined American strategy has resulted in a period of turmoil and uncertainty for the Syrian Kurds, as well as allowing Russia to become the dominating player in the region.

Distance and personal interests inevitably influence how people view the Syrian issue. Syria was a faraway place for the US; the conflict mainly was over who should control Syria: Assad or a more representative form of government. As the situation progressed, the attention shifted to the humanitarian disaster, with rising pressure on the US, bolstered by worldwide expectations that Washington would find a rapid solution. It subsequently spread to ISIS, which assumed all the features of a global movement capable of attacking not only the region but also the United States and its Western allies.

Based on the findings of this paper, it was possible to discover the fact that the United States does not support the establishment of a Kurdish state. In actuality, the US strategy is uncertain and ambiguous. Because of its previous participation in Iraq, where the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was viewed as a threat to Iraq's unity, Washington was initially hesitant to engage the Syrian Kurds, particularly the PYD/YPG forces. Officials from the United States have even advised the PYD against declaring autonomy in northern Syria. Initially, the US strategy was to bolster the Kurdish National Council while persuading the PYD to join the anti-Assad resistance. Despite these efforts, the PYD maintained control of Rojava and had the bulk of Kurdish armed forces on its side. The US quickly viewed the PYD as a bulwark against Islamist groups such as ISIS. As a result, the US found itself in a difficult situation: collaborating with the PYD/YPG, which is critical for Syria's political transition.

With the Assad regime's withdrawal in 2012, the Syrian Kurds, who had never been involved in the Syrian civil war before, emerged as a potential game-changer. The Kurds obtained de facto autonomy as the civil conflict raged. The PYD/PKK gained control of the region, putting Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government in a difficult situation. Indeed, the Kurds' quick ascent in Syria and the undeniable reality of the Kurdish conflict's cross-border nature have made them a viable choice for other allies. Due to perceived

ambiguity regarding US policy in Syria and the future of US military involvement, US partner forces, particularly Kurdish forces, may seek support from other countries, even US adversaries.

This research is helpful for future researchers in viewing Syria's Kurdish difficulties as a part of a larger picture of regional strife and instability. Addressing these far more significant issues will assist in improving Syria's condition; caution must be exercised to ensure that such initiatives comply with international standards for minority rights, human rights, and humanitarian law. Different research routes on the US foreign policy for Syrian Kurds after the Arab Spring are still left; discovering them will open much more avenues for future researchers.

7.0.   Recommendations:

To the U.S. Government and European Union:

- Make human rights concerns about Syrian Kurds explicit, and include them in future talks or negotiations with Syria.

- Increase support for Syrian political opposition activists by lobbying Syrian authorities on their behalf and providing logistical help through capacity-building programmes.

- Before finishing the association agreement with Syria (which began in October 2004), the European Union should study the instances of people who have lost their citizenship as well as the social and political consequences of denationalisation measures in Syria and the wider area.

- Encourage the Kurdish issue to be resolved within a larger democratic framework that encompasses all Syrian ethnic communities.

- Reject the separation idea, which Kurdish groups frequently promote outside Syria. Such a solution jeopardises domestic stability and relations with neighbouring governments with large Kurdish minorities. However, the governments of these bordering states must respect the rights of all minorities, including Kurds, to achieve this.

شیکردنەوەی تیۆری بۆ سیاسەتی دەرەوەی ویلایەتە یەکگرتووەکانی ئەمەریکا بەرامبەر بە کورد لە سوریا دوای ٢٠١١

زێندین مەولود خضر¹

¹بەشی پۆلێنکردنی ڕاستەقینەی پەیوەندییە نێودەوڵەتییەکان، پەیمانگای تویژینەوەی نێودەوڵەتی و سیاسی و ناوچەیی، زانکۆی کۆرڤینۆس، بوداپێست، هەنگاریا.

پوختە:

لەکاتی هێرشەکانی دژ بە ڕێکخراوی داعش، هەردوو سەرۆکی ئەمریکا دۆناڵد ترەمپ و باراک ئۆباما سەرکەوتنێکی بەرچاویان بەدەست هێنا، بەڵام هیچ کامیان هەوڵییاننەدا بۆ دانانی سیاسەتێکی درێژخایەن بۆ سوریا، بەتایبەتی بۆ کوردانی سوریا. سیاسەتی نوێی ولایەتە یەکگرتووەکانی ئەمریکا بریتییە لە پشتگوێ خستنی کوردەکان کە دۆستی ئەمریکان،ستراتیژیەتێکی نوێ بۆ چۆنیەتی جێبەجێکردنی دەستێوەردانی سەربازی هەروەها هەڵوێستی "ئەمریکا لەپێشدا"، بەیەکەوە بوونە هۆی وروژاندنی کارەساتی سەربازی و مرۆیی بۆ کوردانی سوریا. سەرەڕای بڵاوبوونەوەی لێکۆڵینەوەی لەسەر ستراتیژیەتی ئەمریکا لە سوریا هەروەها بەرامبەر کوردانی سوریا، بەڵام کەموکوڕییەکی بەرچاو هەیە لە بەردەستبوونی لێکۆڵینەوەی گشتگیر بۆ ڕوونکردنەوەو هەڵسەنگاندنی پەیوەندییە گەشەسەندووەکان. ئەم تویژینەوەیە مشتومڕی ئەوە دەکات کە لێکدانەوەی ئەم شێوازەی سیاسەت پێویستی بە تێگەیشتنێکی قووڵ هەیە بۆ سیاسەتی هەرێمی هەروەها تێکەڵبوونێکی بەرفراوان بە تویژینەوەی سیاسەتی نێودەوڵەتی. لەم سیاقەدا، زۆر گرنگە کە سەیری سروشت و سنوورو بەستەلەکان بکەین لە پەیوەندی نێوان ئەمریکاو کورد، ئەمریکا بەهێزترین هاوپەیمانی کوردە. بۆ ئەم تویژینەوەیە، چوارچێوەیەکی تیۆری لێکۆڵینەوە هەڵبژێردراوە بۆ شیکردنەوەی گشتگیری سیاسەتی دەرەوەی ئەمریکا. ئەمە تویژینەوەیەکی جۆرییە لەسەر بنەمای دیراسەتکردنی حاڵەت (case study). حاڵەتی ئەم تویژینەوەیە بریتییە لە سیاسەتی دەرەوەی ئەمریکا بەرامبەر کوردانی سوریا لەمیانەی کۆمەڵێک تیۆری نێودەوڵەتی بینراوە بە تایبەتی ڕیالیزمی و لیبڕالیزم. ئەم تویژینەوەیە هەوڵی شیکردنەوەی ئەوە دەدات کە بۆچی ئەمریکا کوردانی سوریای پشتگوێ خست لە سەرەتای سەرهەڵدانی قەیرانی سوریا، بۆچی دواتر ئەمریکا لەگەڵ کوردەکانی سوریا یان هەسەدە کاریکردوو پاڵپشتی کردن تاوەکو ٢٠١٩ هەروەها بۆچی ئەمریکا پشتی لە کوردانی سوریا کردو بەجێهێشتن دوای گۆڕان لە سیاسەتی دەرەوە. لە پوختەی قسەکاندا، راپۆرتە ئەکادیمییەکان دەرەئەنجامی جیاواز دەخەڕوو، هەندێک بانگەشەی ئەوە دەکەن کە بڕیاری ئەمریکا بۆ پێشگوێ خستنی کوردی سوریا بڕیارێکی زیرەکانە بوو، لە کاتێکدا ئەوانەی دیکە پیان وایە ئەگەر ئەم بڕیارە بەبێ ئاگاداری دراوە، ئەوە زیانێکی زۆرتر بە هاوپەیمانی درێژخایەنی ئەمریکا دەگەیەنێت، ئەو هاوپەیمانەی کە ڕۆلێکی گرنگ و بەرچاوی هەبوو لە شەڕی دژی داعش.

کلیله وشەکان: سیاسەتی دەرەوەی ئەمریکا، کوردانی سوریا، ڕۆژهەڵاتی ناوەڕاست، داعش، قەیرانی سوریا.

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Footnotes:

[I] International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle*, 7–8

[ii] For example, Firas Kharaba, a battalion commander in the Kurdish forces, requested assistance from his commanding officer. The commanding officer informed the US military, and as a result, close air support was provided. Because this form of C2 existed within the Kurdish militias, the US military was able to help them with coordinated bombings.

[i] ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), is a Sunni jihadist organization that claims religious authority over all Muslims and declares itself a caliphate. Al Qaida inspired it, but it was later publicly expelled from the organization.

[ii] International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle*, 7–8

[iii] For example, Firas Kharaba, a battalion commander in the Kurdish forces, requested assistance from his commanding officer. The commanding officer informed the US military, and as a result, close air support was provided. Because this form of C2 existed within the Kurdish militias, the US military was able to help them with coordinated bombings.