

# SDF'S ARAB MAJORITY RANK TURKEY AS THE BIGGEST THREAT TO NE SYRIA.

Survey Data on America's Partner Forces

Amy Austin Holmes

2  
0  
1  
9



*Arab women from Deir Ezzor who joined the SDF after living under the Islamic State*

Of all the actors in the Syrian conflict, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are perhaps the most misunderstood party. Five years after the United States decided to partner with the SDF, gaping holes remain in our knowledge about the women and men who defeated the Islamic State (IS).

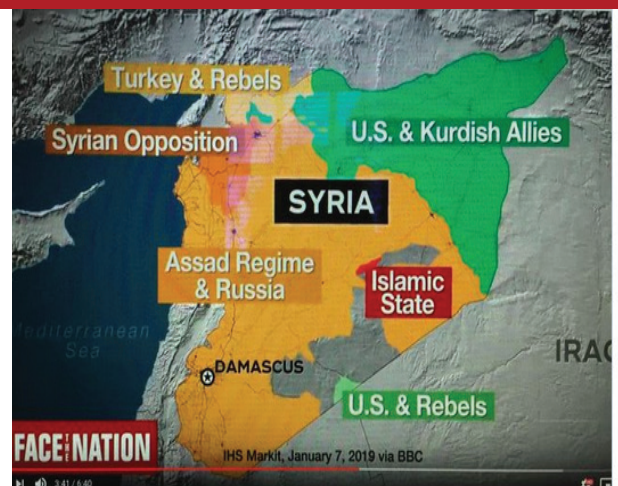
In order to remedy the knowledge gap, I conducted the first field survey of the Syrian Democratic Forces. Through multiple visits to all of the governorates of Northeastern Syria under SDF control, I have generated new and unprecedented data, which can offer policy guidance as the United States must make decisions about how to move forward in the post-caliphate era.

There are a number of reasons for the current lack of substantive information on the SDF. First, the SDF has been in a state of constant expansion ever since it was created, progressively recruiting more people and capturing more territory. And, as a non-state actor, the SDF lacks the bureaucracy of national armies. Defeating the Islamic State was their priority, not collecting statistics.

The SDF's low media profile has also played a role. Perhaps wary of their status as militia leaders, high-ranking commanders have been reticent to give interviews. Recently, General Mazlum Kobani, the Kurdish commander-in-chief of the SDF, has conducted a few interviews.<sup>1</sup> And even less is known about the group's rank-and-file troops.

Finally, commentators have often focused on the Kurdish component of the SDF, even as increasing numbers of Arabs joined the fight. Although Christians are a small minority in Syria, many of them have been part of the SDF from the very beginning, including Kino Gabriel who is currently the group's spokesperson. Other small minorities in Syria, including Yezidis and Turkmen, have also joined the ranks of the SDF. Any comprehensive analysis of the SDF must account for this diversity.

US Media often portrays the SDF as "Kurdish Allies" but in reality the SDF is a multi-ethnic force that consists of Kurds, Arabs, Christians, as well as Yezidis and Turkmen.



The SDF did grow out of the predominantly Kurdish forces known as YPG/YPJ that were based in northern Syria. This is why some observers continue to refer to the SDF as “Kurdish forces.” But this characterization is inaccurate. Arabs are now believed to constitute more than half of all SDF fighters. This is because as the fight against the Islamic State continued and major Arab population centers were liberated such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, more and more Arabs from those regions were incorporated.

Fighters from all of the seven governorates of northern and eastern Syria now belong to the SDF, as well as some who joined from territories controlled by the regime of Bashar Al Assad. More than 20,000 square miles of land – about one-third of Syria – is now under the control of the SDF. This territory is a region about the size of West Virginia or three times the size of Kuwait. In March, the last IS stronghold, Baghouz, was liberated. This led to the official declaration of victory over the territorial caliphate on March 23, though analysts now believe this was premature, as sleeper cells continue to carry out attacks. For the first time since the crisis began in 2011, one-third of Syria is now free of the Islamic State caliphate, and free from the Assad regime. This is due to cooperation between the SDF and the US-led Coalition.





The entity that governs this region is known as the Self Administration of North and East Syria (SANES). It is home to an estimated five million people and is divided into seven provinces. One of these provinces, Afrin, is currently controlled by the Turkish military and Turkish-backed rebel groups. However, the Self Administration views the Turkish occupation of Afrin, a predominantly Kurdish region, as illegitimate and wants to regain control of the area.

The latest Inspector General Report to the US Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve provides information on the overall size of the three partner forces in Syria, but not on the ethnic or gender composition of these forces. According to the report, the three partner forces consist of

the SDF, which includes the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC) and the YPG; the Provincial Internal Security Forces (PRISF); and the Internal Security Forces (InSF). All three partner forces combined total some 100,000 fighters.<sup>2</sup> The goal is to increase the overall partner force size by 10 percent to approximately 110,000.

Although triumphant on the battlefield, the SDF and Self Administration have been excluded from the negotiations over Syria's future in Geneva and Astana. Syria is discussed in the context of the competing interests of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States. But the interests of the SDF are often ignored. That is a grave mistake.

Given the sheer size of the SDF, the amount of territory they control, and the

huge sacrifices they made – over 11,000 SDF members were killed fighting ISIS – it is important that their voices be heard going forward. What is their vision for the future of the region they now control? How do they view their relations with Damascus? Do they feel confident that ISIS is truly defeated? Do they want the US-led Coalition to withdraw from Syria?

**This new survey of individual SDF fighters offers answers to these and many other questions.**

I started this research in June 2015 with the YPG/YPJ, before the SDF was created. At that time I was able to visit Kobani and conduct a survey with a women's unit of the YPJ.<sup>3</sup> I have returned to Syria numerous times since then to continue this research.

In 2016, I conducted a survey with Yezidi militias in Sinjar that were formed after the genocide there in 2014. Just across the border from Syria, Sinjar is a disputed territory in Iraq claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad. I continued gathering answers to the survey in 2018 with the Roj Peshmerga, Syrians who are politically aligned with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and are based near Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

After President Trump made the surprise announcement in December 2018 that U.S. troops would soon be withdrawn from Syria, I included new questions in the survey, which I analyze in this article.

Thus far in 2019, I have spent more than two months in Syria, conducting the survey in February, March, and July. I personally travelled to each of the six provinces of North and East Syria under SDF control, visiting several provinces multiple times, in order to conduct the survey. As discussed above, the northwestern province of Afrin is currently occupied by Turkish forces and Turkish-backed rebel groups, and it was therefore not possible to visit that area. However, several SDF members who took the survey were born in Afrin. Because they were stationed in one of the other six provinces of North and East Syria, they were able to take part in my survey. In this article, I only analyze a subset of the data I collected in Syria in 2019. Data from previous years is not included. The newer questions were not included on the survey in previous years and therefore are not included in this article. Therefore, this article only focuses on a small subset of my overall survey data.

# Methodology

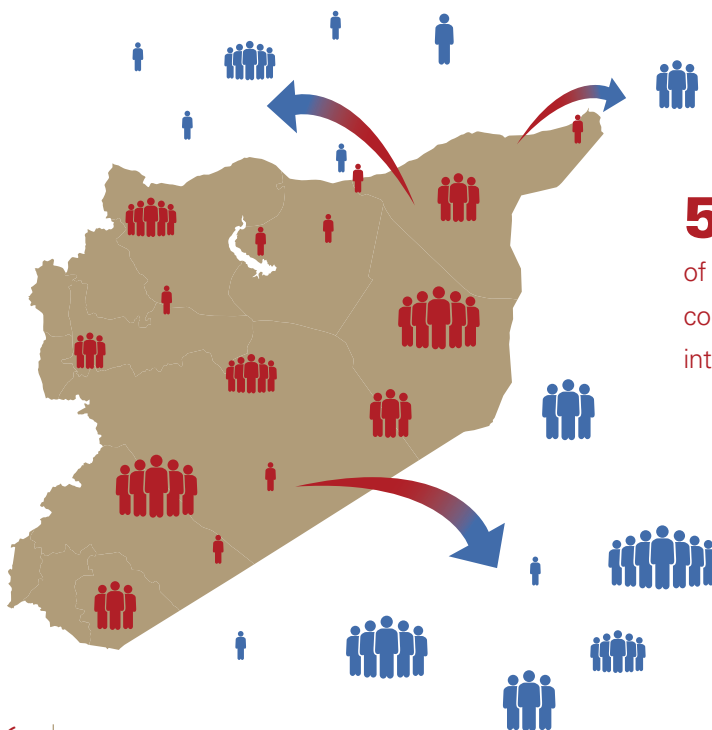
## Conducting this research entailed both methodological and logistical challenges.

Almost nine years of war in Syria has resulted in massive displacement and loss of life. An estimated 500,000 Syrians have been killed since 2011. Half the population of the entire country has been displaced, either internally as IDPs or externally as refugees. The destruction of infrastructure and lack of internet or mobile phone service in many regions of Syria made it impossible to use surveying techniques that are employed outside conflict zones. The lack of survey data on Syria, even prior to the conflict, was also a confounding factor.

The most extensive public opinion surveys in the Middle East have been conducted by

the Arab Barometer. Beginning in 2006 until 2019, the Arab Barometer has conducted multiple waves of public opinion polls in 15 countries across the Middle East and North Africa. According to the Arab Barometer website “our findings give a voice to the needs and concerns of Arab publics.” Unfortunately, Syria has never been included. Even prior to the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, the Arab Barometer never conducted opinion polls in Syria.<sup>4</sup> In a region characterized by closed, authoritarian governments, Syria is perhaps one of the most closed and inaccessible to researchers.

A second hurdle I encountered is that my research is focused on members of an armed group, not civilians. Conducting surveys of members of the armed forces – even in



**50%**

of the population of the entire country has been displaced, either internally as IDPs or externally as refugees.



democratic polities – is usually more difficult than conducting surveys of civilians. Surveying members of a non-state militia is even more challenging. Convincing the SDF to allow me to conduct the survey – not once but on multiple occasions – took a considerable amount of time and energy. The fact that I was able to secure permission, however, attests to the greater openness of the SDF towards foreign researchers than is the case in many other parts of the Middle East. Once I had secured permission to do the survey, I had to then actually find the SDF and travel to their outposts, which are scattered across North and East Syria. The SDF constitutes a hard-to-reach “hidden population” for which random sampling is impractical because accurate information about the overall gender and ethnic composition of the SDF is unavailable. Hence, it is impossible to know whether the subset of the population that I

surveyed is 100 percent representative or not.

Instead, I obtained a purposive sample of the SDF by traveling to each of the six provinces of North and East Syria that are under the control of the SDF: Jazira, Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, Tabqa, Manbij, and Euphrates. Within these governorates I conducted the survey in numerous cities and villages: Qamishli, Raqqa, Manbij, Ain Issa, Al-Shaddadi, Kobani, Tal Alo, Derik, Hasakeh, Hakameya, Rotan, and numerous smaller villages.

In addition to ensuring that each of the provinces was represented in the survey, I also ensured that each of the ethnic and religious groups that are in the SDF were included as respondents and not overlooked: Arabs, Kurds, Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean Christians, as well as Yezidis and Turkmen.

# Who are the SDF?

## Survey Data on Gender, Ethnicity, Region of Origin, and Tribal Affiliation

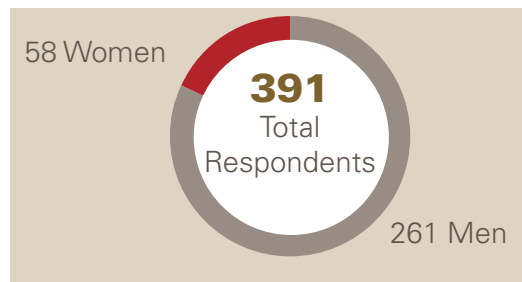
The survey data included in this article was collected in February, March, and July of 2019. At the time of my research, many SDF fighters were engaged in combat operations against the Islamic State, limiting the number of people who could take my survey. Despite these limitations, I believe the data offers unique insights into the SDF. Statistics regarding the exact gender and ethnic composition of the SDF are unavailable. However, I have included in the table below estimates based on interviews with numerous SDF officials and other experts.

### Gender composition of 319 respondents



**18%**  
Women

58 Women



261 Men



**82%**  
men

### Ethnic composition



**219**  
Arabs



**55**  
Kurds



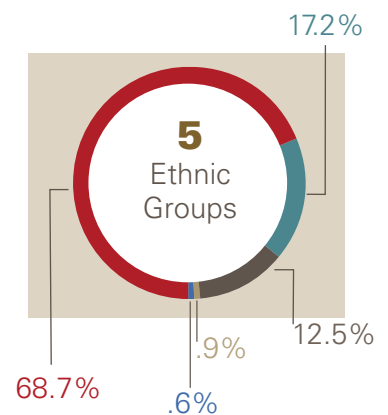
**40**  
Christians



**3**  
Yezidis



**2**  
Turkmen





## Demographics of Survey Respondents Compared to SDF (Estimates)

### Ethnic and Religious Identity

	Estimated in SDF (%)	SDF Survey (%)
Arabs	~50-70%	68.7%
Kurds	~30-50%	17.2%
Christians	~5%	12.5%
Yezidis	~2%	.9%
Turkmen	~2%	.6%

### Gender

	Estimated in SDF (%)	SDF Survey (%)
Men	~60-80%	82%
Women	~20-30%	18%



*With members of the Syriac Military Council near a Christian village about 2 miles from the border to Turkey. If the 'Safe Zone' Turkey has been demanding is extended to the East, it may include this village.*

## Tribal Affiliation of Arab Members of the SDF in 2019

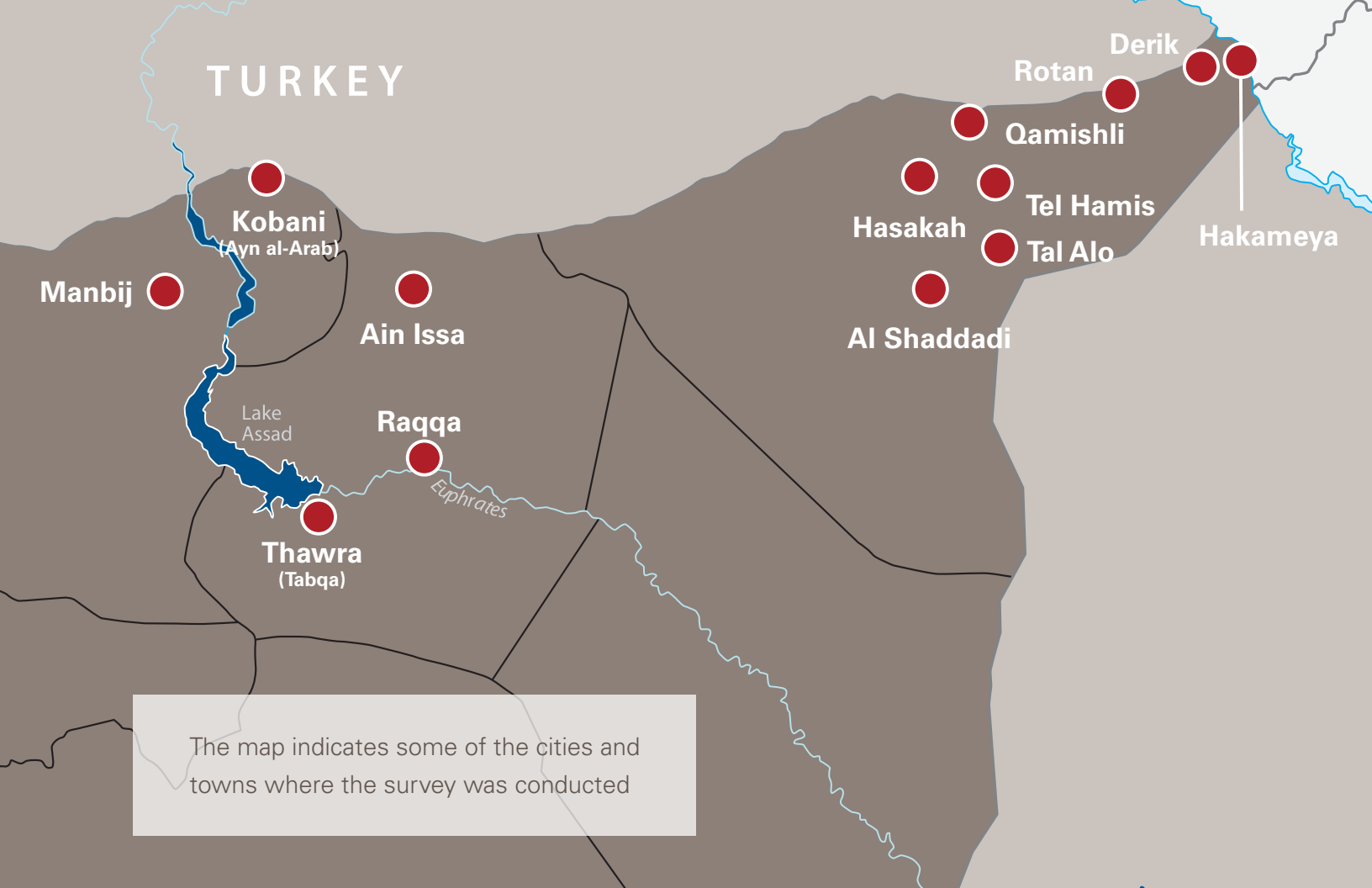
In addition to collecting basic demographic information about the gender, age, and ethnic and religious identity of SDF fighters, the survey also included a question about tribal affiliation. The query was presented as an open-ended question, which allowed maximum freedom for self-identification. Some respondents identified their clan or sub-tribe, while others identified their larger tribe.<sup>5</sup> To give one example, some respondents identified as belonging to the Baggara tribe, which is one of the largest tribal confederations in Syria. Others identified as belonging to Rashid or Alboarhama, which are both clans or sub-tribes within or aligned with the Baggara confederation. However, because the respondents listed Rashid and Alboarhama – and not Baggara – they are included in the list below. The list is intended to reflect as accurately as possible how the individual survey respondents self-identified. It is not intended to reflect the number of respondents who belong

to each tribe or sub-tribe. In other words, if just one person identified with a certain tribe, it is included once in the list. If ten people identified with a certain tribe, it is also included just once.

Arab survey respondents identified themselves as belonging to 46 different tribes or sub-tribes, which are included in the list below. In his book, *State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns*, Haian Dukhan includes a list and description of the 19 largest tribes in Syria.<sup>6</sup> My own list is longer and more comprehensive, reflecting the inclusion of smaller tribes, as well as several distinct clans which belong to a larger tribe. My research is not intended as a way to ascertain the size or significance of the tribes, but simply to illustrate the number or range of tribes and clans who have joined the SDF.<sup>7</sup>



10 | Over 11,000 members of the SDF were killed fighting the Islamic State. On the left is the grave of Amin Mihemed, a Kurd from Amude. On the right is Thaeir Ibrahim, an Arab from Dallawiyah. They were both killed during the liberation of Raqqa in 2017.



My research on tribal affiliation uncovered one highlight worth noting: A number of the Arab respondents belong to tribes who, in the past, took part in the suppression of the Kurdish minority in Syria.

In the 1960s, for example, the al-Walda clan was instrumental in creating the Arab belt along the Syrian-Turkish border. This was part of the Arabization policies of the Baath Party that were intended to dilute and fragment the Kurdish region. Sheikh Shawakh of the al-Walda clan was awarded a permanent membership in the Syrian

parliament for helping the regime establish this Arab belt.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, the al-Jabbur and Tay tribes aided the Syrian regime in crushing the Kurdish uprising in 2004.<sup>9</sup> Despite their past history of aiding the Syrian regime in the suppression of Kurds, members of the al-Walda, al-Jabbur, and Tay tribes have now joined the SDF, and are included as respondents in my survey.

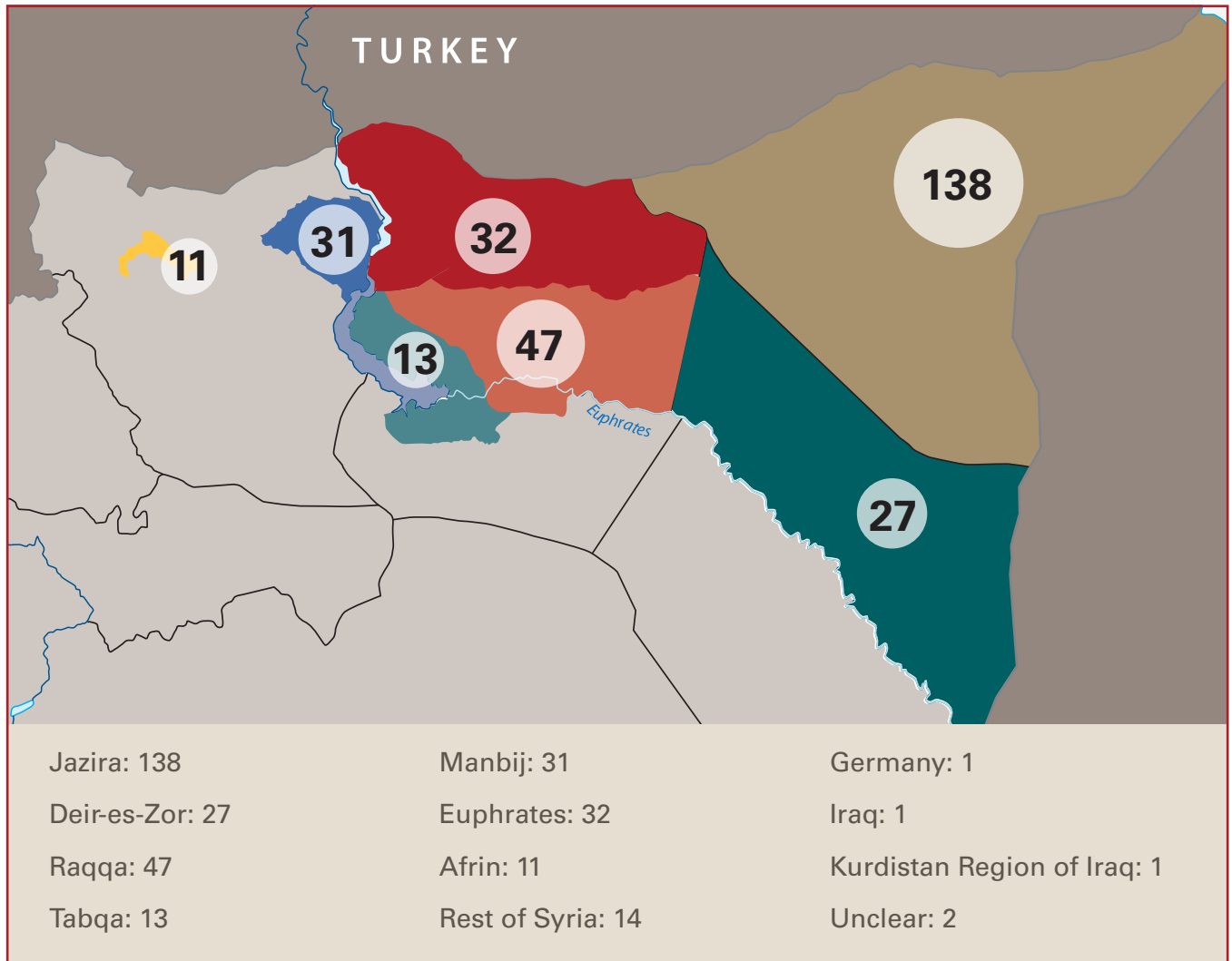
Tribal Identity of Arab Members of the SDF based on Survey Respondents	Names of Tribes in Arabic
Albokhamis	البوخميس
Alnasir	الناصر
Jiheshat	الجيشات
Albojabir	البو جابر
Bani Sab'a	بني سبعة
Shweikhat	الشويخات
Batoosh	البطوش
Nu'eim	النعيم
Bani Qeis	بني قيس
Tay	طي
Albrek	البريك
Al-Jibor	الجبور
Bani Ezz	بني عز
Alsarawi	السراري
Shammar	الشمر
Albobana	البوبنا
Qarawi	قروي
Alfadl	الفضل
Qroot	قروط
Adwan	عدوان
Almoosa	الموسى
Ajeel	عجيل
Aljineedat	الجنيدات
Baggara	البقارة
Aloun	العون
Bani Saeed	بني سعيد
Asee	العاص
Ameerat	أميرات

Aljees	الجيس
Atwalda	الولدة
Busha'ban	البوشعبان
Aqeedat	العقيدات
Enzze	العززة
Sharabi	شرابي
Seyad	السادة
Albo Sheikh	البوشيوخ
Albo Hamad	البوحماد
Albo Assaf	البو عساف
Hiles	حليس
Alshibil	الشبل
Almohahda	المشاهدة
Alhussein	الحسين
Rashid	راشد
Moamara	معامره
Alboarhama	البو رحمة
Klezi	كليزي
Zobeid	الزبيد

As explained previously, the Self Administration currently governs six provinces of North and East Syria. Incorporating newly-liberated areas into the Self Administration and then unifying the various laws across all of these regions has been challenging. One law that is not uniformly implemented is the law on conscription, which is known as the Law on Mandatory Self De-

fense Duty. The Self Administration claims that conscripts do not join the SDF, and that recruitment into the Syrian Democratic Forces is entirely voluntary. Those who are conscripted join another group known in English as the Self-Duty Forces, in Kurdish Hêzên Xweparastinê, and in Arabic Quwwāt al-ḥimāyati aḍ-ḍāṭiyyati.

## Region of Origin



The law on conscription was first implemented in the Jazira canton in November 2014. It was not implemented in the Kobani or Euphrates canton until June 2016. The Self Administration had initially delayed implementing the conscription law in Kobani because of the suffering and destruction caused by ISIS. It was not until the Manbij cam-

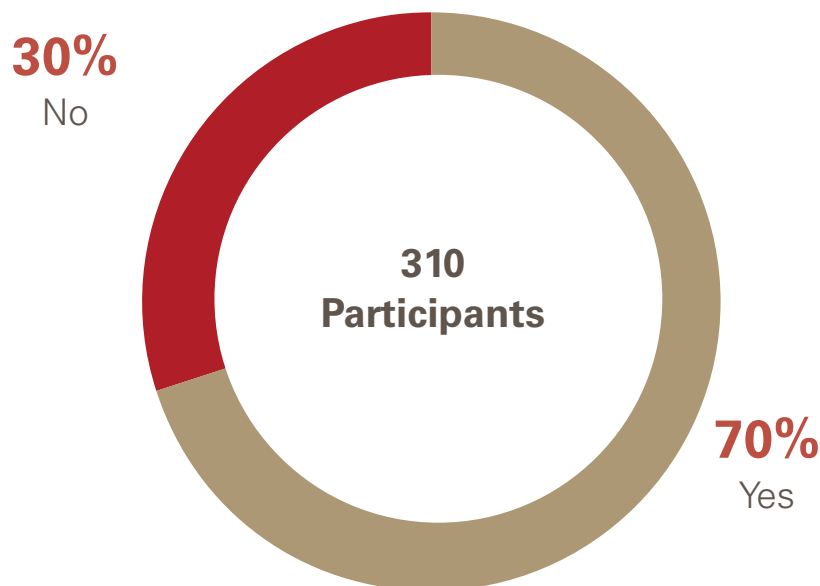
paign that the decision was taken to implement conscription.<sup>10</sup> In Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, the law on conscription has not yet been implemented. However, locals from Raqqa and Deir Ezzor are allowed to join voluntarily.

The disproportionately high number of SDF members who are from Jazira canton is in part due to the fact that this is the largest of all the governorates in North and East Syria. In terms of physical size, Jazira is approximately 3 times as large as the governorate of Raqqa.

Jazira is also relatively stable, compared to some of the other regions surveyed. I was able to travel to Deir Ezzor in March of 2019, and conducted interviews there. However, I was not able to carry out my survey in Deir Ezzor because the SDF fighters who were stationed there were in (or near) the frontlines of Baghouz, where the final battle was fought against the Islamic State. Instead, I traveled to Al-Shaddadi in Jazira in July because many Arabs from Deir Ezzor were stationed there and able to take my survey.

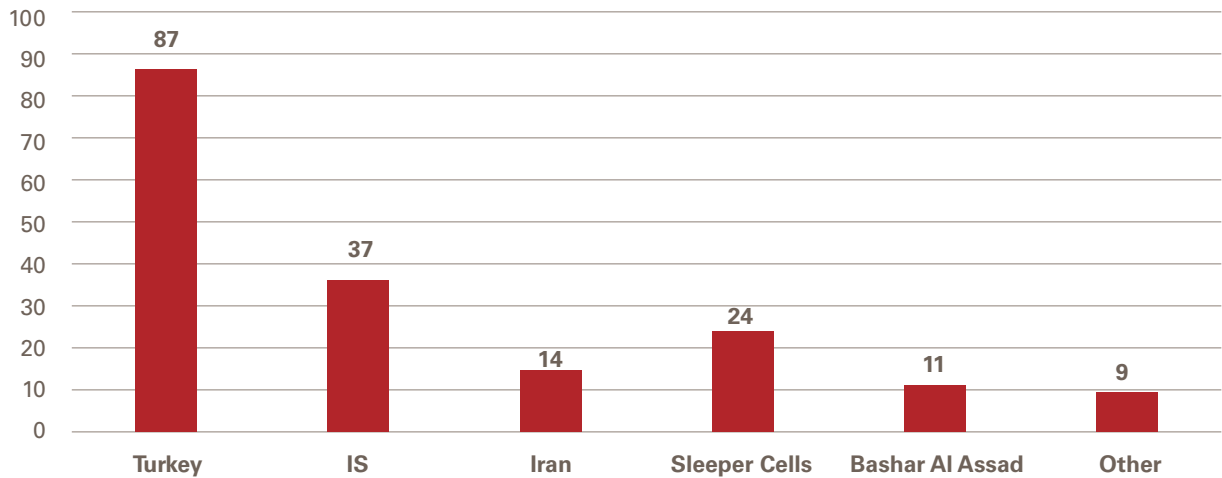
On March 23, 2019, the territorial caliphate was officially defeated. However, many residents of North and East Syria told me that while they believe that the caliphate is defeated, the ideology is not. Furthermore, ISIS continues to exist in the form of sleeper cells who carry out regular attacks. Because of the uncertainty over the status of the Islamic State in Syria despite the official announcement of its defeat, a question on the survey asked respondents whether they believed ISIS was defeated. Thirty percent of respondents believed ISIS was not yet defeated; while seventy percent believed ISIS was defeated.

### Do You Believe ISIS is Defeated?



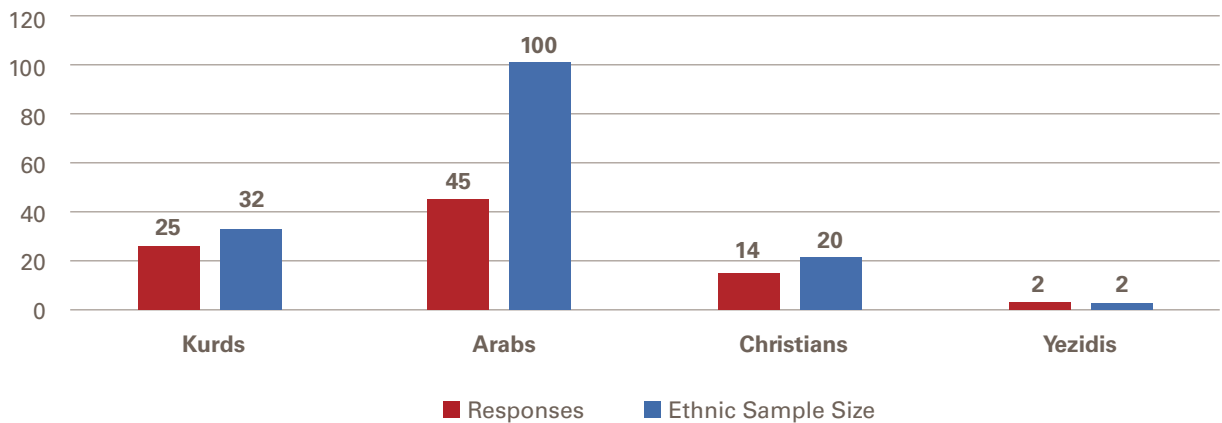
## Perceptions as to what Constitutes the Biggest Threat to Northeast Syria

N-182



## Ethnic Breakdown of Perceptions toward Turkey as the Biggest Threat

N-154



While the United States remains focused on the Defeat ISIS campaign, Syrians in the North and East are concerned about multiple threats to their region. For this reason I included a question on the survey to understand what Syrians believe is the biggest threat to the region. It was an open-ended question so as not to lead the respondents, or limit them to providing certain answers.

As the graph makes clear, Turkey was perceived to be the biggest threat to the region, followed by the Islamic State, Iran, and sleeper cells. Here again it is important to highlight that the majority of respondents (68.7 percent) were Arabs. This may be one of the most surprising findings of this part of the survey, given that the conflict is often portrayed as one between Turkey and the Kurds of Syria. Clearly not only Kurds see Turkey as a threat to Northeastern Syria, but also Arabs and Christians. The ethnic breakdown of the respondents to this question is as follows:

- **78%** of Kurdish respondents believed that Turkey is the biggest threat to the region
- **75%** of Christian respondents believed that Turkey is the biggest threat to the region
- **45%** of Arab respondents believed that Turkey is the biggest threat to the region

Several questions on the survey were included to understand the SDF's perceptions of the US-led Coalition, and whether they wanted the US-led Coalition to remain in Syria or to leave.

As is clear in the graph, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (92.5 percent) want the US-led Coalition to stay in Syria.

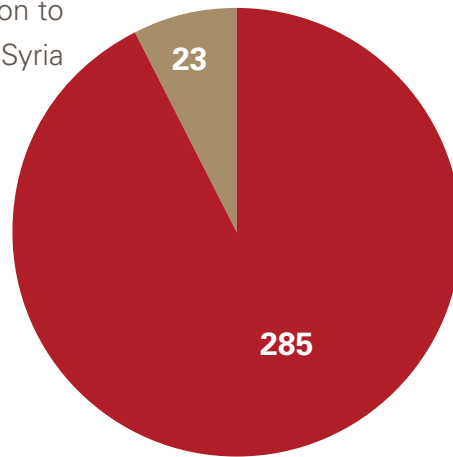
These threat perceptions can in part be explained by the fact that Turkey launched military operations in Syria in 2016, 2017, and 2018. According to one count, since February 2017, Turkish officials have threatened to invade NE Syria more than 23 times.<sup>11</sup>



## Should the U.S.-Led Coalition Stay or Withdraw from Syria?

N-308

7.5% want the Coalition to withdraw from Syria



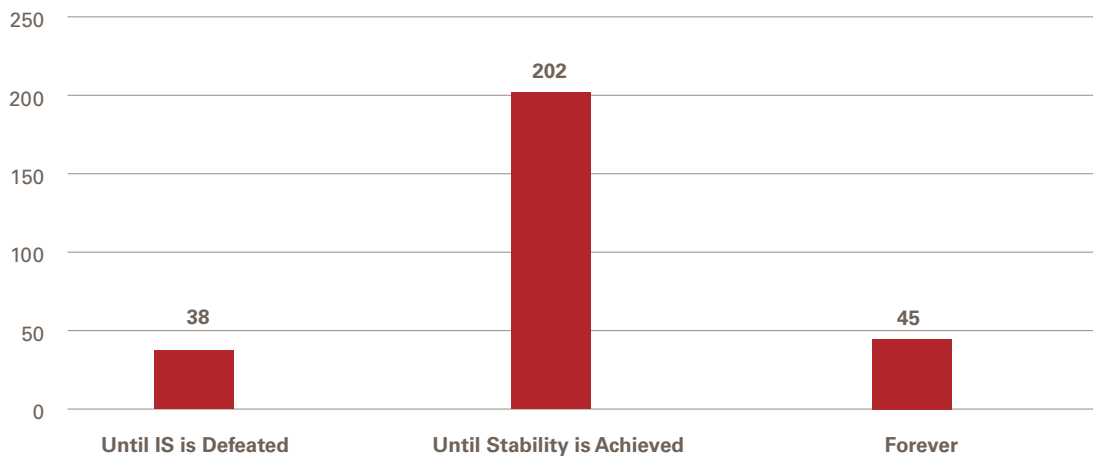
92.5% want the Coalition to stay

Stay Leave

In order to understand how long the SDF wanted the Coalition to remain in Syria, I included a question to try and ascertain this. The question was formulated as follows: "If you want the US-led Coalition to stay in Syria, how long should they stay?"

## How Long Should US-Led Coalition Stay in Syria

N-285

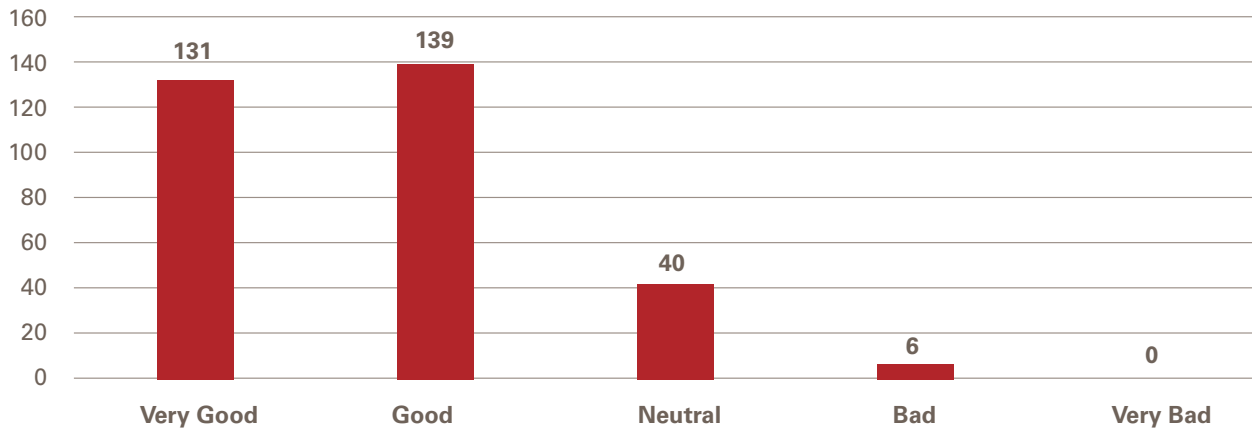


The majority of respondents (70.3 percent) want the U.S.-led Coalition to remain in Syria until stability is achieved, while 15.7 percent want the Coalition to stay in Syria forever.

Another question asked respondents how they would evaluate the cooperation between the U.S.-led Coalition and the SDF:

### How do you evaluate the Cooperation between the SDF and the U.S.-Led Coalition?

N-316

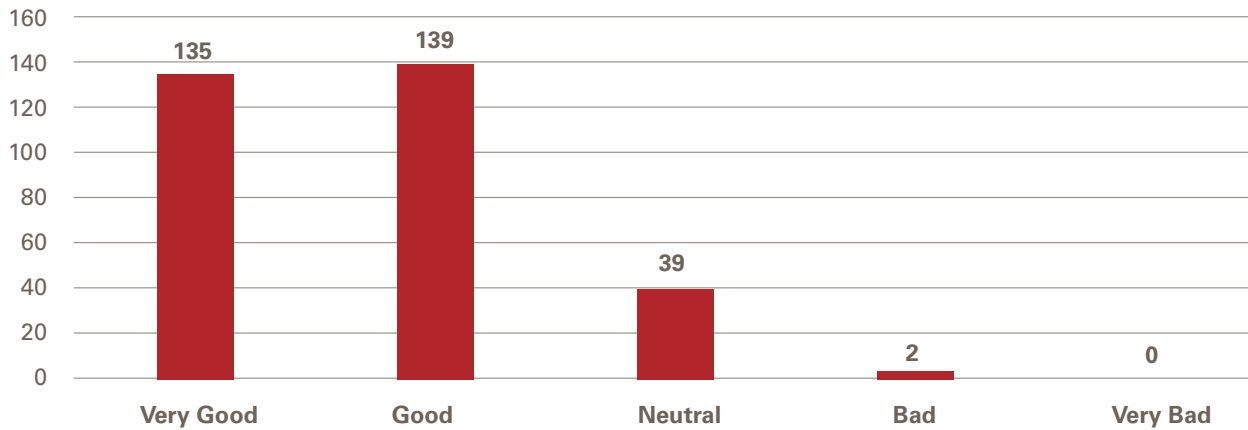


As is clear in the graph, 270 out of 316 respondents (85.4 percent) rated the cooperation as either “good” or “very good.” The sudden withdrawal announcement that Trump made in December led to uncertainty about the US commitment to the SDF. The uncertainty does appear to have caused some tensions to U.S.-SDF relations. However, given the overwhelmingly positive responses to this question it would seem that confidence has at least for the time being been restored.

A second question attempted to ascertain how the SDF evaluated the impact of the US-led Coalition on the stability of the region. Here too respondents believed the impact on the stability of the region was overwhelmingly positive.

## How do you evaluate the Impact of the U.S.-led Coalition on the Stability of the Region?

N-315

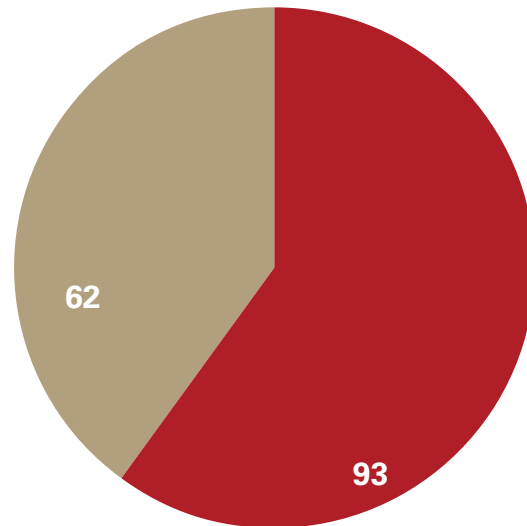


Some analysts prematurely announced that the damage caused by Trump’s withdrawal announcement was irreparable, and that the SDF was looking elsewhere for partners. It is true that the SDF have also engaged in negotiations with Russia, as they seek help in their negotiations with Damascus. However, keeping open multiple channels of communications is necessary, especially as the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations with Damascus.

Finally, engaging in negotiations with the regime in Damascus does not necessarily entail support for the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. One question on the survey asked whether respondents believed that a solution to the Syrian crisis could be found while Assad was in power. Here the responses were more mixed: 60 percent believed it was not possible to find a solution to the Syrian crisis while Assad is in power, while 40 percent believed a solution could be found even if Assad remains in power.

Do you believe a solution to the Syrian crisis can be found while Bashar Al-Assad is in power?

N-315



■ No ■ Yes



*“As an Arab woman from Hassakah and as a member of the Women’s Protection Force, we ask the American Coalition to stay in Syria and provide support for the SDF in the form of heavy weaponry.”*

– Arab female member of the SDF

What can we learn from this unique window into the SDF? I see ten major takeaways from my research in Northeastern Syria and the current state of the SDF.

### Ten major takeaways:

- 1.** Arabs now constitute a majority of SDF fighters. Although some analysts continue to refer to the SDF as a “Kurdish force,” this is inaccurate. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious force. However, the increased diversity and inclusionary nature of the SDF has not resulted in NE Syria being included in the talks over the future of Syria.
- 2.** Arab survey respondents identified as belonging to 46 different tribes or clans. The SDF has incorporated Arabs from all of the major tribes in Syria, as well as from many smaller tribes. This includes tribes who in the past took part in the suppression of Kurds, such as the Al-Jabbur and Tay tribes who aided the Syrian regime in crushing the Kurdish uprising in 2004, and the Al-Walda tribe who aided the regime in creating the Arab belt that fragmented the Kurdish region in northern Syria.
- 3.** The vast majority of respondents (92.5 percent) want the U.S.-led Coalition to stay in Syria, even though ISIS is defeated as a caliphate.
- 4.** The SDF has an overwhelmingly positive view of the U.S.-led Coalition: 87 percent of respondents rated the impact of the Coalition on the stability of the region as “good” or “very good.” Similarly, 85.4 percent of respondents rated the cooperation between the SDF and the U.S.-led Coalition as “good” or “very good.”
- 5.** The SDF believes the biggest single threat to the region is Turkey – not ISIS or Iran or the regime of Bashar Al Assad. This perception is shared among Arabs, Kurds, and Christians.
- 6.** Kurds and Christians have very similar threat perceptions, with 75 to 78 percent seeing Turkey as the biggest threat, and 45 percent of Arabs identifying Turkey as the biggest threat. It is not just Kurds who perceive Turkey as a threat, but Arabs and Christians as well. However, if a durable solution for border security can be found and a Turkish intervention can be prevented, these threat perceptions may change.

7. The SDF has recruited men and women from all regions of NE Syria. Some members have even joined who live in areas under the control of the regime in southern Syria, such as Homs and Damascus.
8. The majority of respondents (60 percent) believe it is not possible to find a solution to the Syrian crisis while Bashar Al-Assad is in power, while 40 percent believe a solution could be found to the crisis while he remains in power. The fact that the SDF negotiates with Damascus should not necessarily be interpreted as support for the regime in Damascus.
9. In order for the Self Administration to be able to effectively govern a region that is as large and diverse as North and East Syria, it will be necessary to incorporate members of the diverse population into the local government structures. Similarly, in order for the SDF to effectively combat sleeper cells and prevent the resurgence of ISIS, it will be necessary to continue to incorporate the diverse population into its ranks, especially in Arab regions such as Deir Ezzor and Raqqa. My survey data indicates how successful the SDF has been in this regard and how it has transformed from a predominantly Kurdish to a multi-ethnic force.
10. The SDF is a diverse multi-ethnic and multi-religious force that consists of both male and female fighters. Unified by a common enemy, they defeated the Islamic State, which once controlled a territory the size of Great Britain. Now, in the post-caliphate era, what appears to unify the SDF is a common desire for the US-led Coalition to remain in Syria until stability is achieved, and a common perception that Turkey constitutes the number one threat to the region.



**Amy Austin Holmes** is currently a Fellow at the Wilson Center and a Visiting Scholar at the Middle East Initiative of Harvard University. Professor Holmes is the author of “Coups and Revolutions: Mass Mobilization, the Egyptian Military, and the United States from Mubarak to Sisi” published by Oxford University Press and “Social Unrest and American Military Bases in Turkey and Germany since 1945” published by Cambridge University Press. This report is based on research she began in Northeast Syria in 2015.

## Endnotes

- 1 Two recent articles based on interviews with General Mazlum Kobane include: "How Trump betrayed the General who defeated ISIS"; Robin Wright, *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/how-trump-betrayed-the-general-who-defeated-isis> and "Turkish intervention could trigger Syria's 'second great war'"; Amberin Zaman, *Al Monitor*, March 20, 2019
- 2 "Operation Inherent Resolve," Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, April 1 2019-June 30, 2019, [https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/06/2002167167/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019\\_LEADIG\\_OIR\\_REPORT.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/06/2002167167/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019_LEADIG_OIR_REPORT.PDF)
- 3 "What are the Kurdish Women's Units Fighting For?" Amy Austin Holmes, *Washington Post*, December 23, 2015 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/23/what-are-the-kurdish-womens-units-fighting-for-in-syria/>
- 4 For more information on the Arab Barometer, see their website: <https://www.arabbarometer.org>
- 5 Some Kurds also identified as belonging to tribes. However, this data has not been included in this article. All of the tribes and sub-tribes included in my list are from survey respondents who identified as Arabs. In other words, it is a list of Arab tribes, not Kurdish tribes.
- 6 *State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns*, Haian Dukhan, Routledge, New York 2019
- 7 For more background on the tribes in the region of Deir Ezzor, see: "Deir Azzour Tribal Mapping Project," Nicholas Heras, Bassam Barabandi, Nidal Betare, Center for a New American Security, October 2, 2017 <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/deir-azzour-tribal-mapping-project>
- 8 See Dukhan 2019
- 9 Ibid
- 10 *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts*, Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, I.B. Tauris, London 2019
- 11 <https://sethfrantzman.com/2019/09/21/a-list-of-most-of-the-times-turkey-has-threatened-to-launch-a-military-operation-in-northeast-syria/>



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20004-3027

 [www.wilsoncenter.org/middleeast](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/middleeast)

 [mep@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:mep@wilsoncenter.org)

 [facebook.com/WilsonCenterMEP](https://www.facebook.com/WilsonCenterMEP)

 [@WilsonCenterMEP](https://twitter.com/WilsonCenterMEP)

 202.691.4000