

The Kurdish Question: A Left-Wing Vision

written by Rezgar Akrawi | February 13, 2026



In January 2026, Syria witnessed a military escalation between the Syrian army and its allied militias on one side, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the other. The agreement reached in February 2026 between the “Syrian government” and the SDF constitutes — regardless of one’s political stance toward either party, and despite all reservations and differences — a rational, peaceful step in the right direction. It spares the population from destructive military conflict. These developments once again raise the central question of the Kurdish issue and the national question in the Middle East.

This region has endured bloody national conflicts that have left millions of victims and displaced persons in their wake. The Kurdish people today are dispersed across four states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The fundamental question remains: what is the possible solution? Does it lie in building separate nation-states, or in the struggle for a citizenship-based state grounded in equal rights?

A History of Oppression

The Kurds have been and continue to be subjected to severe national oppression. In Iraq, the brutality reached its peak with the Anfal campaigns and the chemical bombing of Halabja, as well as Arabization policies. In Syria, it manifested through the Arab Belt project and the 1962 census, which stripped hundreds of thousands of their citizenship. In Turkey, Kurds were classified as “Mountain Turks” and thousands of villages were destroyed. In Iran, they faced complex repression, executions, and economic marginalization.

Yet these policies were not directed solely at the Kurds, for the dictatorship that crushed Kurdish identity is the same one that oppressed all citizens. The struggle against national oppression is part of the broader fight against tyranny. Confronting genuine oppression does not come through replacing one dominant nationality with another, but through dismantling the very foundations of the exclusionary nation-state and building a democratic state based on equal citizenship.

Experiences of Power and Bets on External Actors

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the once-oppressed nationality transformed into a ruling power, confronted with accusations of repressive practices and organized corruption. The two ruling parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), established hereditary family rule, curtailing democratic rights and the rotation of power. In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces evolved into a centralized structure with limited space for pluralism. Despite some progressive reforms, numerous human rights violations were documented, including

the recruitment of children. This demonstrates that the flaw lies in the very structure of the exclusionary nation-state itself.

Some Kurdish national movements relied on American support for their projects. Yet America has backed reactionary regimes and has never stood on the side of oppressed peoples. Its alliance with Kurdish forces served to fill a vacuum created by the absence of large American ground troops. More recently, this alliance in Syria has tilted toward the central government. Betting on the great capitalist powers is betting on a political mirage.

Marginalizing Class Struggle and the Danger of Civil Wars

National conflicts drive societies toward fanaticism and civil wars, turning the masses into fuel for conflicts that do not serve their interests. The exclusionary nationalist discourse transforms the conflict, diverting the class confrontation between workers and ruling classes into a false identity conflict. It uses national antagonisms as a tool to weaken class struggle and deflect attention from questions of rights, labor, and social justice.

Under the pretext of defending nationality, class struggle is marginalized, exploitation is justified, and the powerful are shielded from accountability. The task of the left is to draw on human and internationalist identity, and to stand in solidarity with the suffering of all civilian victims of violence and war — without ethnic or religious discrimination. Selective solidarity is an inhumane way of thinking that entrenches fanaticism and weakens every emancipatory project.

Is the Nation-State Achievable Today?

The objective conditions do not appear to be in place for a Kurdish nation-state project. Kurdish territories are surrounded by hostile regional powers, and national movements lack genuine international support. American support is transient and tied to immediate interests. And even if a Kurdish entity were to be realized, what would guarantee its survival or prevent its transformation into yet another authoritarian model? The experience in the region, and in Syria in particular, speaks clearly: partisan-tribal governance, autocracy, corruption, and human rights violations.

There is a demographic reality that cannot be ignored: in many areas, no single nationality constitutes a clear majority. How can a national project be built on territories inhabited by citizens of other nationalities? This reality generates sharp tensions and opens the door to accusations of Arabization, Kurdification, or Turkification. It is difficult to erect a nation-state in multinational spaces without producing new national injustices.

The Citizenship State and Rights Grounded in Human Identity

It is necessary to distinguish between demanding cultural, linguistic, and administrative rights and demanding a separate nation-state. These rights are legitimate demands that every left-wing person should support. But the struggle for them is more realistic within the framework of an equal citizenship state — a state founded on the full equality of citizens before the law, without national or religious discrimination, and one that transcends national and sectarian affiliations in its political structure. The viable alternative today is a citizenship state that neutralizes nationality and religion in the exercise of power, and that limits the formation of parties on national or religious grounds.

Far-reaching powers can be granted to regions, which would strip the conflict of its ethnic charge.

This goes hand in hand with a comprehensive constitutionalization of rights, the building of oversight institutions, and an independent judiciary. The citizenship state may appear to be an ideal dream, but the project of a separate nation-state is even more idealistic and further removed from reality. Speaking of an independent, stable Kurdish state surrounded by hostile states, without international support and in multinational spaces, is a distant dream. The citizenship state, by contrast, is a gradual project that begins with concrete steps: the constitutionalization of rights, the construction of democratic institutions, the implementation of decentralization, and the strengthening of the rule of law.

The Right to Self-Determination and Realistic Rationality

While fully supporting the right of the Kurdish people and all peoples to self-determination, including secession, the current conditions are not suited to the proclamation of new nation-states. What is needed is a rejection of forced unity and support for voluntary unity. The foundations of equal citizenship, just as the defense of the right to self-determination, must lead to greater rights, more equality, and a better life.

This position is not hostility toward Kurdish national liberation, but a defense of the very essence of liberation against the distortion inflicted upon it by bourgeois national projects. Under present circumstances, the masses are driven into wars and national conflicts, plunging into ever-deeper crises for the sake of entities threatened with transformation into further authoritarian models. For Marxists and left-wing activists, this means applying scientific rationality, studying conditions, balances of power, and realistic possibilities, and avoiding dragging the masses into lost and destructive wars. Trust must be placed in rationality, not in national heroics or national pride, for such discourses lead to more wars and more destruction.

The Tasks of the Left

The task of a genuine left is to draw its political line apart from all parties to the national conflict, and to fight for a state based on citizenship, equal rights, and social justice — not on national or sectarian foundations. The road is long and arduous, but it is the only path to a genuine and lasting solution. The left can organize itself in practical terms by building organizations that transcend nationalities and sects, that start from the common interests of the working class, and that link the struggle for national rights to the social struggle against exploitation, corruption, and despotism.

The fundamental struggle is the dismantling of the chains of this exploitation and the building of a democratic, socialist, and humanist space. The road to the rights and freedoms of the Kurdish people runs through the rights and freedoms of their Arab, Turkish, Syrian, and Iranian neighbors, in a state that does not question its citizens about their origins, that guarantees them bread and freedom, and that respects their human dignity.