

De Facto Autonomy Under a De Jure Wrapper

The PYD-led polity in North and East Syria after the January 2026 integration agreement

Analytical report · compiled 19 August 2026 · evidence base runs through 19 August 2026 · supersedes the 15 July, 4 August and 13 August working files on the points noted in §10

Executive summary

Constitutional Rojava is dead; functional Rojava persists. The January 2026 agreement transferred symbolic and legal layers to the Syrian Transitional Government while the PYD-led movement retained the substantive ones: armed cadre, ground control, the oil core, the fiscal circuit, personnel and demography. This was the exchange of contested illegitimacy for uncontested-but-hollow legitimacy, with substance retained — an acquisition, not a trade.

The wrapper covers the three files that matter, and the same three the state most needs. In oil, sovereign title sits over an American operator whose workforce, subsurface data and physical security all come from the administration's own apparatus. In military-security, four brigades, roughly nine thousand internal security personnel and the checkpoint network were rebadged with personnel continuity intact. In education, the administration's 2026–27 curriculum was printed before the medium-of-instruction question was settled, and movement cadre are being appointed to run district education complexes while Damascus offers two hours of Kurdish a week.

Mid-August produced the clearest demonstration to date, and the state's own officers produced it. Two Ministry of Defence soldiers killed at Tawil Harb were buried in Qamishlo with no Syrian flag present — certified as such by the principal hostile account — and mourned under YPG, YPJ and TEV-DEM colours. The Deputy Defence Minister for the Eastern Region publicly claimed them as “our fighters” and martyrs, in Kurmancî, and claimed jurisdiction over “our region.” Days later HAT and YPJ paraded in Qamishlo in their own insignia, under the YPJ flag and an Öcalan portrait, to the Kurdish anthem, before a large civilian crowd. Neither Damascus nor Ankara is reported to have responded.

The load-bearing deterrent is a domestic veto, not foreign capital. Earlier drafts held that the operator's exposure constrained Damascus and Ankara — an inference about someone else's cost-benefit, and the same reasoning family that failed in January. The stronger claim requires no one to be persuaded: dispersed cadre with intact FPV capability, trained operators and multiple resupply corridors can make the greater Rmeilan complex and any trans-Jazira right-of-way uneconomic for a decade, unilaterally, and cannot be verified away.

The arrangement holds because displacing it is expensive and al-Sharaa's survival is decided elsewhere. He cannot win the movement's loyalty; he can only negotiate with it. He can hope to absorb Aleppo. So he spends his capital there and manages the northeast at arm's length. The unified Northern Region Corps — cantons plus border belt, Aleppo kept out and paired with Idlib — is the institutional expression of that triage, whoever intended it.

What is not settled. The YPJ's status is contested between the political and armed tracks. Dissolution of the SDF and the administration has been formally demanded and formally conditioned on guarantor states. Civil integration is stalling at the Arab periphery. Political exclusion is structural. And the whole arrangement is a decision by other parties, not a structure — the honest statement of its fragility.

1. The operating thesis

Core claim. The January 2026 agreement moved symbolic and legal layers to the STG and left the substantive layers with the PYD-led movement, which has held de facto authority since 2012 and in January 2026 acquired de jure recognition it never possessed under Assad. The legal wrapper intended as a leash has functioned as armour.

Corollaries that have held.

- Shed the periphery, keep the core.* What Damascus won in January maps closely onto the post-2013 acquisitions that came with the ISIS war — Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, Tabqa, the Arab south. What was retained maps onto the October 2013 canton footprint. Territory reverted; capabilities compounded.
- The state marks places; the movement keeps people.* A flag on a mast, blank velcro on every soldier — and, at a funeral, no flag on the mast at all.
- Minimum-viable symbolism.* Sterile in registers where symbols cost (MoD-facing, Ankara-watched); maximal where they do not (civic, municipal, university, funerary).
- Two books.* A hard-currency oil circuit distinct from the SYP payroll, enabling autonomous spending — resettlement grants in USD — even as Damascus captures nominal payroll and customs.
- Loyalty-selection, not subordination.* Integrated personnel are movement-vetted and movement-led. The tells are appointments, not doctrine.
- Both parties are wrappers.* The STG is itself HTS substance under transitional-republic labels. Two wrappers negotiating, each treating the other as a state.
- Decision, not structure.* The arrangement persists because al-Sharaa and Erdoğan currently calculate that breaking it costs more than tolerating it. There is no guarantor and no legal standing. This is the failure mode, stated plainly.

2. Why the cities were not taken

The January outcome is usually explained by American abandonment. That is necessary but not sufficient: it explains a defeat on the Euphrates, not the state's failure to enter Qamishli, Kobani and Hasakah when nothing external stood in the way.

The mechanism is a capability assessment requiring no one to be persuaded of anything. Waiting in those cities were the US-trained YAT/HAT tier, on ground policed for a decade, with prepared positions, drone overwatch on every approach and the population as support base rather than obstacle. HTS's institutional memory is Idlib; it knows what a defended urban pocket costs. The cost was specifically factional: al-Sharaa's cadres are simultaneously his army and his political base, and grinding them down in Qamishli would have cost him the instrument he uses to hold Damascus, Homs, the coast and Suwayda — for ground he already cannot govern in Deir ez-Zor.

A Turkish analyst writing against a Turkish nationalist columnist, rather than for a Kurdish audience, reaches the same conclusion from the Ankara-facing side: the SDF convinced all actors it would not surrender the Kurdish cities without a fight, making thousands of

casualties on both sides a certainty; Washington changed course; groups inside HTS resisted the operation to an unprecedented degree; and Turkey joined the negotiations. He adds — unverified, significant if sourced — that a Gulf state had committed to compensating Damascus for the sanctions an SDF defeat would have triggered. If so, the operation was funded past the point where money was the constraint, and still did not happen.

Discipline. “Convinced all actors” is a claim about belief. What is observable is that no one entered the cities. The inference is strong here but shares its structure with the Turkey-détente inference and inherits the same fragility.

3. Evidence ledger by state function

The most durable form of the argument is a coverage map of state functions, assembled where possible from sources hostile to the administration. The gaps are as informative as the entries.

Function	Finding	Character of evidence
Oil — labour	The operator's own recruitment advertisement for the Rmeilan fields required Kurdish and English, with Arabic an additional advantage; withdrawn within hours after objections and replaced by English-only. The revision removed the language criterion rather than adding Arabic.	hostile Single-sourced; original ad text not obtained
Oil — data	The concession is mapped to 2,100+ wells across eight fields. No party other than the administration's operator could have compiled that dataset in the time available.	Company disclosure plus inference
Oil — security	State and operator principals travelled to Rmeilan; close protection in published imagery is local uniformed personnel. The counterparties go to the fields.	Published photography
Military	Four brigades — Hasakah, Qamishli, Dêrik under the 60th Division; Kobani under the 72nd, Aleppo — each ~1,300 plus 500-750 in specialty units operating drones and air-defence systems. Salaries began ~April 2026. Round one returned to home garrisons.	Deputy Defence Minister on record to <i>Foreign Policy</i>
Security — staffing	Checkpoint “handover” was a vehicle rebadge with personnel continuity, confirmed by five independent vectors across the political spectrum, including a named pro-Damascus activist, a Western photographer observing SDF Military Discipline Forces badges still worn at a jointly manned Kobani checkpoint, and (18 Aug) a Washington analyst disposed to credit the transition stating that Kobani's Mol Internal Security is <i>fully staffed by former SDF Asayish</i> .	field + hostile + Western press + pro-transition analyst
Security — disposal	A joint checkpoint on the Tel Brak-Qamishli road was closed and the force relocated to the Rasho position; the site breakdown was conducted by the SDF alone. Both the Syrian tricolor and the Asayîş banner had flown at the position.	hostile Complaint framed as looting; teardown by the builder is the authority claim
Military ritual	Two MoD-integrated soldiers killed at Tawil Harb in the Qamishli countryside were buried in Qamishlo <i>with the Syrian flag absent</i> , under movement flags and banners — the absence stated in the hostile account's own headline. The movement-appointed Director of the Qamishli Region attended the condolence tent.	hostile Complaint-as-certification; source labels YPG/YPJ/TEV-DEM colours as PKK
Command — claim	The Deputy Defence Minister for the Eastern Region publicly described the attack as targeting a Syrian Army position while calling the dead “our fighters” and martyrs, pledging pursuit of the perpetrators so that stability returns to “our region” — in Kurmancî. Both offices held in one paragraph.	movement Serving STG officer, own account
Force display	13 Aug, Qamishlo: several hundred personnel in formation at a funeral procession — line units in mixed MultiCam/tan and a distinct block of black-uniformed HAT — women in both, martyr portraits worn, one prominent YPJ shield amid otherwise sterile insignia, YPJ flag on the stage, large Öcalan portrait, Kurdish anthem played, large civilian crowd.	movement Video and stills; formation identity not officially stated
Education — materiel	The administration's 2026-27 curriculum was printed and in circulation by July, before the medium-of-instruction question was resolved. Fait accompli first, accommodation after.	Administration media and hostile confirmation
Education — personnel	A cadre with movement formation appointed to head the Derbasiyah Educational Complex in August — personnel decisions determining September classrooms made while the curriculum negotiation is still open.	hostile Single-sourced; appointment independently checkable
Property	A diaspora owner with an Assad-era deed petitions the governor and the SDF commander-in-chief over an Amuda plot — addressing the administration as the adjudicating authority.	hostile Petition as recognition
Utilities	The administration sets electricity tariffs in Hasakah and regulates the private generator sector through its Generators Committee — price caps, service-hour mandates, receipts.	hostile Attacked while conceded
Agriculture	Dual wheat procurement survived integration: government and administration ran separate purchasing campaigns at different prices. Two treasuries bidding for one harvest.	Multiple; ~1m tons collected in Hasakah
Returns	Afrin returns completed; the first organised Serê Kaniyê convoy of 600-620 families set for 10 August with a \$1,000 per-family stipend, transport funded by the Autonomous Administration, UNHCR and others.	Rudaw, 7 Aug 2026
Courts / registry	Civil integration is deadlocked over how many administration judges land on state payrolls — a headcount dispute that concedes the principle, and one whose settlement seats judges trained in the administration's own jurisprudence. Magistrate-level registry work continues with the same personnel; the upstream political question was settled by the citizenship decree.	Inference from the deadlock's framing

Gaps worth closing

- **Tax collection.** The strongest untested item — whoever collects is sovereign, and unlike a checkpoint it cannot be explained by inertia. Watch for complaints about administration duties, market fees or municipal levies charged alongside state customs.
- **Border gates.** Highest value, least likely to surface. Damascus has taken Semalka's customs revenue; who decides what passes is a separate and unpublished question.
- **Conflict-of-laws cases.** Where the two legal orders genuinely diverge — women's law and the Mala Jin function, co-chair requirements, property adjudication, family law — interpretive habit becomes a jurisdictional question.

The structural point. For anything routine and local the answer is trivially yes, because the personnel never left; inertia favours whoever is already in the chair. The functions worth tracking are those where the state must actively assert itself to displace the administration — customs, metering, command appointments, curriculum, conflicting jurisdiction. The wrapper holds not because the movement won every file, but because displacing it requires effort the state can only spend in a few places at once, and it is spending it on bread in Damascus.

4. The mid-August cluster

Between 8 and 19 August the thesis moved from inference to demonstration, and most of the demonstrating was done by parties with no interest in demonstrating it.

Tawil Harb and the funeral

An attack on an integrated Ministry of Defence position at Tawil Harb, in the Qamishli countryside, killed two and wounded two. The dead were buried in Qamishlo. The principal hostile account's own headline is the finding: two SDF elements integrated into the Ministry of Defence, buried *in the absence of the Syrian flag*, under movement flags and banners, despite being — in that account's words — expected to have become part of the ministry after integration. The state's soldiers, killed on the state's post, buried with no state symbol present.

The Deputy Defence Minister for the Eastern Region then posted in Kurmancî that a Syrian Army point had been targeted, that “our fighters” had been martyred, that the perpetrators would be pursued and brought to justice, and that this would restore security and stability to “our region.” A serving STG flag officer holding both offices in a single paragraph — the state's army named as victim, the dead claimed as the movement's şehîd, jurisdiction claimed as the movement's own.

The 13 August parade

The funeral procession escalated into a public armed formation in a Qamishlo square: several hundred personnel, line units in mixed MultiCam and tan with martyr portraits worn on plate carriers, and a distinct block of black-uniformed, helmeted HAT drawn up in ranks of its own. Women in both elements. Insignia sterile across almost the entire formation — and one prominent YPJ shield on the front rank, which is the point: a discipline broken in exactly one place, on the most visible person present, is a decision rather than an oversight. The YPJ flag flew on the stage beneath a large Öcalan portrait; the Kurdish anthem was played; a large civilian crowd stood pressed against the ranks, filming, children at the front.

Why the composition matters. HAT and the YPJ are precisely the two formations whose status Damascus has been trying to define — the first because it is the elite counter-terror capability that would have to be placed somewhere in the ministry architecture, the second because Damascus has stated there are no women in the ministry. Both paraded in their own uniforms under their own colours, days after a presidential meeting demanded the dissolution of the SDF and the administration. The crowd is the third element and the most underrated: the consent layer that no order of battle captures, and the thing that made the cities uneconomic to take in January.

Kobani internal security

On 18 August a Washington analyst disposed to credit the transition reported that MoI Internal Security in Kobani — *fully staffed by former SDF Asayîsh* — had been issued new vehicles and uniforms, describing this as formalising the branded government assumption of authority and as evidence of huge strides since January. Keep the observation, discount the frame: the operative word is *branded*, and it is used approvingly. This is the third independent confirmation of one mechanism from three political positions — a movement-side account of a flag on an empty gantry with the SDF's checkpoint a hundred metres on; a pro-Damascus activist complaining that only the vehicles had changed; and now a pro-transition analyst confirming the vehicles changing and calling it the achievement.

The Amer checkpoint

A joint checkpoint on the Tel Brak-Qamishli road, staffed by Syrian Internal Security and Asayîş together, was evacuated and the force moved to the Rasho position. The hostile account's complaint is that SDF personnel then entered the vacated site and removed property and equipment. Removing materiel from a position your own force built and manned is teardown, not theft — and the complaint therefore certifies that when a joint position closes, the SDF conducts the site breakdown and the ministry does not. Whoever disposes of the infrastructure owned it. Two flags had flown at the gantry: the Syrian tricolor and the Asayîş banner, itself bilingual — the Internal Security Forces name in Arabic above, ASAYÎŞ in Kurmancî below. The wrapper woven into a single object, and one that predates integration by years.

Distinction worth preserving. Dismantling a security installation the force built is an exercise of ordinary authority and tests nothing but who is in charge. Reallocating a vacant residence is a governance decision with a claimant on the other side — which is why the Amuda case turns on whether the administration *adjudicates*, and the checkpoint does not.

5. The oil file

Structure and numbers, as they now stand

- **Twenty-five-year agreement** signed April 2026; state operations at the northeastern fields announced on 4 August at a joint press conference held at Rmeilan ([The Amargi](#); [North Press](#)).
- **The revenue split is a sliding scale:** the state's share rises from 60% to 70% over the term, the operator's declining to 30%; the state company retains ownership and operational control while the operator manages investment and technical expertise. This reconciles the flat “70/30” given to [Rudaw](#) the same day and supersedes the retired “60/32/8” reading.
- **A regional share was affirmed without a number.** Asked directly whether Kurdish-majority Hasakah would receive a cut, the state company's director answered in the affirmative and gave no figure. Circulating figures — 8% (retired as disinformation), ~10% rising, ~12% via an expanded Local Administration Law No. 107 — remain unreconciled. The spread is the finding: nobody outside the room has the document.
- **Current production stated at >100,000 bpd**, with a target above 250,000 bpd by 2027 and rehabilitation expected to take six to twelve months. Pre-war Rmeilan peaked near 120,000 bpd. The target is promotional; the current-production figure is the more load-bearing disclosure, because understating it would have served the speaker better.
- **Salary increases for oil-field employees are written into the agreement**, alongside environmental services for governorate

residents. The state and the operator are jointly purchasing the workforce's acquiescence — which also answers the day-91 payroll question in the workforce's favour.

The corridor

The pipeline file has moved from memorandum to commercial negotiation: contract talks have begun on restoring the Iraq-Syria line to Baniyas, with an estimate of “three years at most” and a claimed capacity of 1.5-2 million bpd. That capacity is not credible as a restoration — several times the historic line and roughly a third of Iraq's output — and should be treated as an upper bound from the same promotional event. Iraq has meanwhile begun [exporting crude by road](#) through Syria to Baniyas, and Baghdad and Damascus have [signed](#) to revive the pipeline. The strategic driver is external and measurable: with Hormuz contested through 2026 and Red Sea routing degraded, Mediterranean egress carries a premium it did not previously carry, and the corridor is being pursued as an [alternative to Hormuz](#) within a wider US framework, with the same envoy running the Syria integration file and the Iraq energy file ([analysis](#); [Four Seas Initiative](#)).

The dependency inversion

The most consequential August disclosure is not a percentage. The state company's director stated that Damascus is coordinating to supply Hasakah governorate with refined petroleum products from the **Homs and Baniyas refineries**. The oil-producing northeast exports crude and imports product, with the state controlling the return leg. That is a more effective lever than any revenue share, and it is the vulnerability created by the region having no refining capacity of its own — compounded by the closure of the informal refineries in February 2026 and by price liberalisation that has produced [protests across oil-producing regions](#).

On the “the administration's operator was unprofessional” claim. A Damascus-aligned economic advisor attributes the fields' decline to a lack of professionalism. The same article supplies the refutation three paragraphs earlier: the region had no refineries and used makeshift refining to produce low-quality product sold at subsidised prices, and repeated Turkish airstrikes on energy infrastructure from 2022 to 2024 left key equipment irreparably damaged. Add sanctions exposure — no legal banking, no certified equipment imports, no clearable service contractors, buyers who had to accept sanctioned crude — and “new drilling” was never an available choice. The honest comparison is not the operator against a normal firm but against what any firm achieves under embargo and aerial interdiction.

6. The deterrent

Correction to earlier drafts. The claim that the operator's capital is hostage to the movement's cooperation should be retired as the load-bearing item. It requires Damascus or Ankara to weigh someone else's exposure and conclude they cannot act — the inference structure that produced the failed January forecast. It is also weakened by the fact that a pipeline is infrastructure the movement wants built: veto power over something you want is worth less than veto power over something you do not.

The stronger claim. The movement retains a unilateral capability that can make the greater Rmeilan complex and any trans-Jazira right-of-way uneconomic for a decade should it choose. Nobody has to be persuaded. Wells, gathering lines, pump stations and hundreds of kilometres of linear right-of-way are dispersed, soft, and sit in countryside where the men who guarded them since 2012 live.

Why it is durable. Airframes are consumable and cheap; the expensive input is the trained operator, and that cohort is already paid for. Selection for a scarce, high-trust technical specialty means operators were screened for political reliability before they were trained — kadro, with a decade of formation and no civilian equivalent to defect into. Components are commercial, dual-use, and arrive through several corridors, including diaspora fundraising settled in cryptocurrency specifically to evade interdiction. No signature on an integration annex retrains an operator or relocates a stockpile. Nothing was surrendered: no weapons handover, no inventory, no dissolution.

The unabsorbable unit. The SDF's named drone formation, stood up in December 2024 and credited with operations through the January 2026 fighting ([unit record](#); [reporting on former US Green Beret instruction](#), headline only, paywalled) is named for a martyr of the war against forces now inside the state's own security apparatus. It cannot be absorbed under that name and does not need to be hidden; like the co-chair diarchy in Bakur, its legal invisibility is its native condition. Documented operations show women's units and the drone unit striking the same target set on the same night — consistent with an operator cohort that is partly YPJ, placing part of the capability in a track the Ministry of Defence has formally declined to employ, under a mobilisation authority outside both ministries.

The ceremony as inventory. The İmralı disarmament ritual burned Kalashnikovs — obsolete, replaceable, photogenic. Nobody burned a drone. What is destroyed in front of cameras is a public statement of what the movement can afford to lose.

Limit of the method. This is an unobservable-by-design capability, in the same class as the İmralı arsenal. It will not resolve until it is used, and the successful outcome is that it never surfaces. From outside, “retained and expanding” cannot be fully distinguished from “quietly atrophying” — the problem Turkey has with the Zagros caves, now ours. This is the one place the thesis rests on inference about capability rather than observed fact, and hostile readers will find it. It is also a standing pretext: capability retained outside any legal structure is exactly what Ankara can cite as non-compliance whenever it decides differently.

7. Command architecture

The unified north

A Northern Region Corps has been constituted covering the canton core plus Manbij, Azaz, Jarablus and Tel Abyad, alongside a Central Region Corps — implying a southern command and a division of the country into regional corps.

The counterfactual is what makes this significant. Three easier containment designs were available and were not taken: Afrin grouped with Aleppo and Idlib; Kobani with Raqqa or Aleppo; Hasakah with Deir ez-Zor. Each would have attached a canton to a mass where the movement is a minority and a rival power centre already exists. Instead the state drew one command over the map the movement itself thinks in.

Three explanations, not mutually exclusive. (i) Turkish administrative convenience — one address for the border file from Afrin to the Tigris, matching the withdrawal, base and İmralı files. (ii) Inertia — corps boundaries following existing dispositions and the bases designated in January, producing a unified north without anyone choosing it. (iii) Damascus-internal calculation, which is the strongest:

Aleppo is the one city that could challenge Damascus, so it is kept out of the northern command and paired with loyalist Idlib inside a Central bloc anchored on Hama and Homs. Adding Kurdish force structure to the Aleppo file would have contaminated the arrangement that keeps al-Sharaa in power.

Why the object matters more than the intent. A corps is durable: it acquires a headquarters, a personnel system, a logistics chain, a career ladder and an institutional interest in its own area remaining whole. A boundary drawn for reasons unrelated to you is more durable than a concession, because there is no negotiation to reopen and no favour to withdraw. It also makes the Afrin brigade feasible — moving an Afrin-origin formation from the Jazira is a cross-provincial redeployment, hard under province-based corps, routine inside one command.

Composition. Excluding Aleppo, the movement's brigades are the strongest element in the corps by population, expertise and geography — and arguably the only element that behaves like an army. The contrast pair is instructive: in Azaz the state absorbed networks and inherited their feuds; in Hasakah it absorbed an organisation and inherited its discipline. Only one of them has fired on the state.

The two deputies

In the same week, the state relieved a Turkish-backed divisional commander over defiance of ministry orders, moved him to Damascus, and appointed him deputy commander of the Central Region Corps — rank retained, personal following removed, posted where he has no base. Meanwhile the movement's own senior figure sits as Deputy Defence Minister for the eastern region and, days later, publicly claims the state's dead as the movement's martyrs.

Same rank grammar, opposite substance. Damascus can fire one and cannot fire the other, because there is no one to replace him with and the men would not obey the replacement. Integration is producing genuine subordination on one side of the north and a wrapper on the other, in the same army, under the same ministry, in the same month. The variable is not paperwork but whether a formation's cohesion is owed to its commander's patronage or to a movement that predates him.

8. The negotiation

Al-Sharaa received the SDF commander-in-chief and the administration's leading civil figure in Damascus on 4–5 August, with the Deputy Defence Minister present. Reported outcomes — from a readout circulated within hours, not an official communiqué — include:

- **Dissolution demanded and conditioned.** Al-Sharaa asked for the dissolution of both the SDF and the Autonomous Administration; the response fused dissolution to guarantees from guarantor states. Independent reporting from a Kurdish outlet describes Western actors undertaking guarantorship and working a political formula, discussed during the commander-in-chief's European contacts. Two sources, two languages, one structure — the first corroboration that the guarantee question has substance behind it.
- **Integration completion.** The stated principle is that no employee or soldier remains outside state service — addressing the ~50,000 unplaced against a force the Deputy Defence Minister put at roughly 60,000. Fiscally enormous, and the clearing price identified earlier: expand the structure rather than atomise the people.
- **Annexes for specialty units.** Heavy weapons, reconnaissance and similar elements attached to the integrated brigades on the ministry establishment. No drone formation is named.
- **An Afrin brigade.** Afrin-origin youth still in the Jazira to be prepared for return to Afrin as a formation — subsequently described on a regional broadcaster as a brigade expected to go “in the coming days” as the Afrin force, framed as a Kurdish structure protecting itself in Kurdish areas. The state's role is grammatically absent in that formulation.
- **Repatriation, not expulsion.** Turkish-national cadres to return home on an agreed İmralı outcome — the foreign-cadre demand satisfied in the theatrical-but-satisfiable form.
- **Deferred to the next phase:** education and language, their constitutional enshrinement, guaranteed Kurdish posts, and activation of Local Administration Law No. 107 — the decentralisation demand now arriving independently from Arab Deir ez-Zor voices in Syrian-nationalist-safe vocabulary.
- **Martyrs and wounded.** SDF casualties to be registered with the state's general administration for wounded and martyrs — the state assuming pension liability for the dead of a war it fought against. Note the mid-August funerals suggest the commemorative substance is not travelling with the fiscal liability.

The YPJ file is not resolved

Within a single week: the administration's representative in Damascus described the YPJ accepting Interior Ministry integration as a bloc anti-terror force; the circulated readout described a dedicated YPJ entity inside the Interior Ministry under a counter-terrorism designation; a YPJ figure said publicly that they had not been informed of any decision; and the Deputy Defence Minister had said in July that they should not budge, that the Interior track is a step down, and that the government would not accept women into the army. A battalion commander framed constitutional recognition as an army in existential terms. Then, on 13 August, YPJ paraded in Qamishlo in its own insignia under its own flag.

The pattern is consistent: the political track announces, the armed track declines to confirm, and the street shows something neither has described. This entry remains open.

9. Strategic environment

American depth

US ground presence in the northeast ended in April 2026. In August, coalition assets were pulled from Erbil over roughly 72 hours ahead of a 30 September deadline for US forces to leave Iraq: Britain withdrew entirely, France and Germany retained small contingents, and the surveillance aerostats came down permanently ([Rudaw](#)). Reports that Patriot batteries relocated to Jordan are [contested](#): local political sources say the batteries moved from Harir toward the consulate rather than leaving.

Handle the two claims differently. Battery locations inside a US installation are a closed-circle fact reported by people who cannot see inside it. A tethered aerostat is mass-observable — thousands of residents look up at it — and its removal is self-checking. It is also a

different capability: persistent wide-area early warning, the thing that cues everything else. Point-defence of a diplomatic compound is consistent with retaining C-RAM; it is not consistent with maintaining regional situational awareness. The defensible statement is a drawdown from theatre posture to embassy posture, on uncontested facts: Ain al-Asad closed, Harir emptying, advisers out, deadline standing.

What the region prices is presence, not intent — the correct level of analysis, and the one the January forecast failed at, having read infrastructure as commitment. The pattern is now twice-observed with the same signature: no advance notice to the partner, infrastructure abandoned rather than transferred, execution faster than the partner can reposture. That is a base rate, and it applies to the Turkey inference as well.

The Iran war and the premium on Mediterranean egress

US and Israeli strikes opened on 28 February 2026 during ongoing nuclear negotiations and killed the Supreme Leader; the joint campaign ran to 5 May; a mediated ceasefire in April collapsed; a naval blockade was imposed, lifted in late May, and resumed in July after a June memorandum failed and commercial vessels were attacked. Hormuz transit remains contested. The consequence here is structural rather than political: with both southern routes degraded simultaneously, a westbound corridor across the Jazira acquires a value it did not previously have — raising the cost to every party of destabilising the region it crosses, and correspondingly raising the worth of the veto in \$6.

Rojhelat. The relocation thesis — cadre and materiel redirecting to the Iranian front — now faces maximum opportunity and minimum shelter simultaneously: a disrupted Iranian command structure, and Iranian Kurdish opposition camps in the Kurdistan Region newly without coalition air defence amid sustained strike tempo. Attribution is the second problem: use in Rojhelat would not remain a Rojhelat story, since Ankara has never accepted the movement's compartmentalisation between fronts.

Turkey

Turkey remains the only actor with the capability, will and access to threaten the arrangement, and it is currently choosing trade. The détente rests on an interest calculation — corridor and refining profit against incursion cost — more durable than goodwill but a decision, not a structure. With American depth reduced from Dumayr to Erbil, the residual assumption that Washington constrains Turkish options should be stated and examined rather than left as background: if it no longer holds, the İmralı process and the transit economics are the entire load-bearing structure.

An open question. The Syrian National Army is being dissolved into state structures and Turkish forces are evacuating Afrin-theatre positions. Two explanations produce the same observables: a grand bargain in which Ankara sheds proxies as part of a settlement with the movement, or a sovereign disarming an armed rival while a patron sheds liabilities it no longer needs. They diverge on whether anything is being given *to* the movement in exchange or merely not taken from it. The tell is Serê Kaniyê: a base-file negotiation opening is a bargain becoming real; convoys entering while the bases stay is toleration.

The August silence. Neither Damascus nor Ankara is reported to have responded to the Qamishlo parade, the missing flag at a military funeral, or the Deputy Defence Minister's claim on the state's dead. If that silence holds, it is the loudest available statement of the arrangement's actual terms — and the cheapest possible confirmation that neither party currently intends to test it.

10. The honest column

- The gender-service layer leaks even where the armed layer wraps.** Capability survives as an Interior Ministry counter-terror function; the women's-protection service infrastructure does not automatically survive with it. A woman turned away by a new garrison and missing the Mala Jin is the concrete form.
- Co-chair architecture is eroding in civil administration.** Single directors are replacing co-chairs on the state's gazette; women nominated for local roles have been passed over. Mitigating: the system's legal invisibility is its native condition, not its death. The Kobani mayoral appointment — selected by the Aleppo governor from six names submitted by the administration — cuts the other way.
- Subsidy cuts on the base.** The administration controls the oil, watches tankers roll out, and has still had to raise fuel prices on its own population. The subsidy-legitimacy engine is the thing it can least afford to lose.
- Under-building.** A decade of oil revenue and coalition support produced few technical schools and little durable industrial base. Mitigations are real — total embargo, no legal banking, no recognition, over \$1bn in infrastructure destruction in October 2023 alone. The forward test stands and is now testable: with blockade lifted and capital flowing, can the administration build the boring institutions it did not build under siege? Early data points exist, including a children's hospital and cancer centre announced for Hasakah and a petroleum engineering cohort graduating from the region's own university — whose employment by the operator would be de facto accreditation worth more than any decree.
- Political exclusion is structural.** Cadre inside the apparatus, movement outside the chamber. Elections boycotted; seats reserved for Kurds a small fraction of the chamber; a Kurdish vice-presidential self-nomination drawing ten votes; no constitutional recognition. Kurdish as a national language is gazetted, not constitutionalised, and revocable.
- Standing was recoded.** Agreements signed under American sponsorship wrote the administration into the Syrian state's legal framework, so future offensives can be described as internal policing. This loss appears in no substance metric.
- Civil integration is stalling at the periphery.** Employees of five former administration councils in the southeastern Arab-tribal belt have petitioned Damascus ministries because they have *not* been merged, while other Hasakah institutions were — months of uncertainty, no official explanation. Shaddadi wage arrears run to eight months in some units. The grievance now points at the state, but the two-book model measured in paychecks is producing two peripheries, not one.
- January's own losses were real.** Kobani besieged over a month after the agreement with internet cut and movement restricted; violations on both sides including desecration of Kurdish corpses and a massacre of Arab civilians by an SDF fighter; graves vandalised in a government-held city; and in Arab-majority areas previously administered by the administration, government forces welcomed as liberation. Arbitrary detention and abuses under the administration were widely reported and should be carried, not managed.
- Security is not restored.** An integrated position was attacked in the Qamishli countryside in August with four casualties. Whatever the attribution, the core is not quiet, and the counter-terror indispensability argument arrives as dead men rather than as leverage.

0. **The al-Awda precedent.** Reconciled, retained local command, tolerated six years, dismantled when the guarantee lapsed and the cost of breaking him fell below the annoyance of keeping him. The differences are real; the lesson is that tolerance is serviced like debt and expires when the collateral stops being maintained.

Corrections logged against earlier working files

- **Field count:** the concession is **eight** fields including Oudeh, not seven with Oudeh excluded.
- **Revenue structure:** a sliding 60→70% state share, not a flat split and not the retired “60/32/8”.
- **Serê Kaniyê grant:** \$1,000 per family, not \$1,800 — which sharpens rather than weakens the connectivity pricing model against Afrin's \$2,000, and reduces the programme total.
- **Force denominator:** ~60,000 SDF with 50,000+ unplaced, on the Deputy Defence Minister's own figure — retiring the 100,000 estimate and implying mobilisable line strength was always far below the paper number, a force-structure explanation for January's speed independent of Washington.
- **Capital-as-hostage retired** in favour of the unilateral veto (\$6).
- **The 2026 Iran conflict** comprised two campaigns, not one, with the second opening 28 February 2026.
- **Hostile-source taxonomy:** the principal notary account labels YPG, YPJ and TEV-DEM colours as PKK flags as a matter of course. Discount all its “PKK presence” claims accordingly.
- **Teardown is not theft.** Removal of equipment from a checkpoint the force built and manned is disposal of its own infrastructure; the analytically relevant fact is who conducts the breakdown. Distinguish this class from reallocation of residential property, which has a claimant and therefore tests adjudication.
- **Name to verify:** the operator's chief executive is given as Rollins in most reporting and Lewins in one outlet. Pin before publication.

11. Falsifier watch-list

Resolvable — these will produce evidence.

1. Where the baseline settled at the 60/90-day mark, read through proxies: salary continuity in the core, tanker counts at the crossings, whether the inherited workforce stays paid.
2. The 60th Division command roster and the Northern Region Corps commander and staff — movement-origin officers or parachuted appointees. Cartography tells you what is possible; the roster tells you what happened.
3. Whether the Kobani brigade's division migrates to the northern line or stays under Aleppo — and, if Aleppo is folded into the Central bloc, whether a Kurdish brigade ends up inside the loyalist grouping.
4. September school bells: does the administration's curriculum open the year in Kurmancî, and does the examination bridge operate for this cycle?
5. Whether the Afrin brigade enters under a division number and state flag, or arrives as an unnumbered Afrin force.
6. Serê Kaniyê: whether the Turkish base file reaches formal negotiation, and whether restitution runs through a mechanism or through night-time evictions.
7. Core-versus-periphery salary comparison, and whether the unmerged councils are absorbed or left.
8. Whether the operator hires the region's own petroleum engineering graduates.
9. Whether a co-director functions beside the appointed regional director in Qamishlo.
0. Tax collection and the border gates (\$3).
1. Whether a formal SDF dissolution decree issues before year-end, and whether it is a rebadge with command intact or organisational dissolution with atomised personnel.
2. Ownership and route of the private haulage company operating branded tankers on the M4 — and, separately, the direction, load state and destination of tanker movements announced as heading to Hasakah, which distinguish field support from Shaddadi support from Iraqi transit.
3. **New:** attribution for the Tawil Harb attack, and whose forces conduct the pursuit the Deputy Defence Minister promised.
4. **New:** whether any state or Turkish response follows the Qamishlo parade and the absent flag — and whether the next military funeral in the core carries a Syrian flag.

Unobservable by design — these will not resolve until they are used. Kept separate so the list does not appear to contain more testable content than it does.

1. Retained FPV capability and stockpiles.
2. The Îmralı arsenal in the Zagros caves.
3. Closed-circle commercial facts: metering, the unwritten domestic arrangement between operator and state company, private haulage ownership.

12. Method

The involuntary notary. Hostile local outlets publish, as complaints, the best evidence for the thesis. They have local access, no incentive to flatter, and every incentive to document what the movement controls. Sort their output ruthlessly: observable-fact reporting is credible against interest; anonymous-source prediction is propaganda. In August a single such account notarised movement authority over oil-sector hiring, a district education apparatus, the disposal of state security infrastructure, and — in its own headline — the absence of the Syrian flag at the burial of the state's own soldiers.

The friendly source is a different instrument. Movement-side publication (parade footage, unit media, official statements) asserts rather than concedes, and should be tiered separately. Its value is in what it shows, not in who is admitting it. A hostile complaint about the same event converts assertion into notarised fact — which is why the absence of such a complaint about the 13 August parade is itself worth tracking.

Source tiering. Mass-known facts — grant amounts every displaced family argues about, a tethered aerostat over a city — are near-verifiable even from a single source, because widespread knowledge is self-checking. Closed-circle facts are leads, not facts, even from well-placed sources; a good source says so. Survival knowledge — checkpoint staffing, to someone who must pass the checkpoint — is the highest-confidence class available from a field source, because misreading it is fatal. Always separate planned / registered / retrained / returned, and registered / programmed / returned. Hostile readers treat the gaps as contradictions.

The polysemy trap. The same artifact reads as insolent continuity, capitulation, collusion, and dictatorship-with-a-puppet-show simultaneously, depending on the critic. The contradictions cancel and between them the critics span the whole thesis. The failure mode of a thesis critics keep confirming is that one stops noticing the datum that would not fit — hence \$10 and \$11.

Reporting versus analysis. Field reporting supplies datapoints an analytical model cannot generate: a named official calling the integration coerced, a force denominator, a division number, a timestamp that makes a later statement legible as a change rather than a constant. Analysis supplies the frame reporting omits — party affiliations of interviewees, the inherited workforce, the revenue circuit. Neither substitutes for the other, and collapsing the distinction is how a model runs ahead of its evidence.

13. One-paragraph statement

Post-January 2026, constitutional Rojava is dead but functional Rojava persists. The movement shed the net-drain Arab periphery and kept the Jazira core it has held for twelve years, now holding both de facto control and de jure recognition — a Damascus-blessed governorate under a movement-cadre governor, four brigades on state payroll with their specialty tails intact, roughly nine thousand internal security personnel rebadged, Kobani's internal security fully staffed by former Asayish on a pro-transition analyst's own account, and a unified Northern Region Corps drawn around the map the movement thinks in while Aleppo is kept out and paired with loyalist Idlib. The oil deal wraps a movement-operated field complex in sovereign title and American capital at a sliding 60-70% state share, with the region's cut affirmed and unnumbered, its workforce retained and paid more, and its refined product now supplied from Homs and Baniyas — the state's most effective lever. In August the state's own soldiers were buried in Qamishlo with no state flag present, claimed as martyrs by a serving deputy defence minister writing in Kurmancî, and mourned by formations that paraded days later under their own colours before a crowd of thousands; neither Damascus nor Ankara answered. The deterrent that keeps all of this cheap to tolerate and expensive to break is not foreign capital but retained, dispersed, unverifiable strike capability held by cadre the ministries have formally declined to employ. Al-Sharaa cannot win their loyalty and can only negotiate; he can hope to absorb Aleppo, so he spends his capital there and manages the northeast at arm's length while his approval falls in his own heartland. The costs are real — political exclusion, eroded co-chairs, a leaking women's-protection layer, standing recoded so any future offensive is internal policing, a periphery neither administration is paying, and a core where integrated soldiers are still being killed. Diminished, holding the part that matters, on a clock longer than its adversaries' attention.

Key sources cited by link

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- [North Press — Syrian Petroleum Company takes over all oil fields in Jazira \(4 Aug 2026\)](#)
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Uncredited items rest on social-media artifacts, unattributed readouts, broadcast summaries and private field reporting held in the working files; these are marked in the text as leads rather than facts. Field observations are reported without identifying detail by design. Screenshots of the hostile-account posts cited in §3 and §4 are held with the working files and should be preserved for provenance.