

# Congress Steps up for the Kurds



Pro-US & Israel Syrian Peshmerga Women Fighters

Source: KUDNAS

The war against the Islamic State is shredding the map of the modern Middle East based on the Sykes Picot Treaty of 1916. The Treaty divided the WWI spheres of influence in the post-Ottoman Empire era between the French and British wartime allies. That was reflected in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, the declaration of Mandates at San Remo in the same year and after the Greco –Turkish war ended with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. From that emerged Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq and with the 1947 UN partition plan, the modern Jewish nation, the State of Israel. That left out the Kurds, perhaps the largest landlocked ethnic group with an estimated population of over 35 million divided among Southeastern Turkey, Northern Syria, Northwestern Iran and Northern Iraq. The eruption in 2013 of the self-declared Islamic State conquering vast stretches of both Syria and Iraq has forced the world to recognize the role of the Kurds as an important bulwark against the spread of violent Islamic extremism in the post modern Middle East. One of the results of the US led Operation Iraqi Freedom begun in March 2003, ending in 2011, was the creation of the Kurdish Regional Government. The bloody civil war in Syria began in 2011, it is now well into its fourth year. With more than 230,000 dead and four million refugees, the war has left the Assad regime in control of less than one quarter of the country. The balance of Syria is in the hands of ISIL, al Nusra rebels and the Kurds in the Northeastern province of Hasakah.

The Administration has found itself in a dilemma given the burgeoning successes of Kurdish fighting forces in the

“generational war” with the Islamic State. In May and June 2015, Syrian Kurdish YPG militia forces, supported by US –led air strikes, effectively shut down the major north south lines of communications between the Turkish frontier and the ISIL capital of Raqqa. That was evident in the capture of Tel Abyad, the repulse of ISIS forays at Hasakah and battles for control of Ain Issa, 22 kilometers north of Raqqa. These recent YPG advances followed the successful defense against the ISIL forces at the city of Kobane on the border with Turkey at Suruc in December 2014.

Thus, the Obama Administration was confronted with the need to determine how to recognize and reward these vital contributions by Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish fighting units in the war against the Islamic State. Neither did it want to antagonize either Turkish President Erdoğan (who [supplied](#) Syrian Islamist rebels fighting Syrian President Assad) or Iranian President Rouhani (with whom a possible nuclear weapons deal was being negotiated). Further, the Administration also wished to avoid further involvement with Iranian-led Iraqi Shiite militias and Hezbollah cadres functioning in both Iraq and Syria.

Nevertheless, the YPG’s relations with the Assad Regime and Iran are problematic for the majority of Syrian Kurdish Peshmerga fighters prevented them from building of an effective force devoid of these connections to combat ISIS. Iraqi Peshmerga forces have secured control of Kirkuk and its major oil fields in Iraq.

The questions posed by this dilemma confronting the Administration are; how to recognize and reward these vital contributions by Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish fighting units in the war against ISIL, all while trying to avoid further involvement with Iranian –led Iraqi Shiite militias and Hezbollah cadres in both Iraq and Syria. The subject of Kurdish contributions in the war strategy combating ISIL was

front and center at both a Pentagon news conference on July 6<sup>th</sup> and a US Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on July 7, 2015. It also figured prominently in private discussions on Capitol Hill on July 8<sup>th</sup> with Senators who support the Kurdish war effort.

Enter Shoshana Bryen of the Jewish Policy Center

One of Washington's more astute analysts of Administration policies in the Middle East is [Shoshana Bryen](#) executive director of the Jewish Policy Center. She outlined her views about US policies towards the Kurds in a Washington, DC Center for Security Policy (CSP) [Seminar](#) video released on June 4, 2015. She presented on the current issues defining US relations with the Kurds. Among her takeaways from the CSP seminar were:

- The US should recognize the Kurds politically;
- The US should directly engage in discussions and arming them;
- That one of the plausible outcomes of the current war with ISIS should be the protection of minorities in the Near East- the Kurds, Israel and the Berbers in North Africa;
- That Iran and Assad created the space for the rise of ISIS;
- That the US failed to take advantage of the drop in oil prices to pressure compliance by Iran that has spent billions in support of Assad and Hezbollah, its proxy in Lebanon.

[Listen](#) to this You Tube audio of the CSP-sponsored presentation by Bryen.

In our July NER article, [“Empowering Kurdistan”](#) we highlighted early May 2015 discussions between President Barzani of the Iraqi KRG and President Obama and his National Security aides. That included the vital issue of promised arms deliveries; a

key point of Bryen about recognizing and talking directly with the Kurds. A recent *Iconoclast* [post](#) highlighting Pentagon news conferences on July 6<sup>th</sup> contrasted the President's lack of a coherent strategy in combating ISIL with the laudatory comments by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter praising the Kurdish forces for their victories against ISIL.

In an *American Thinker* article by Bryen, "[Pristine War and Zero Casualties](#)," she noted the ISIL war doctrine adopted by the President as Commander in Chief:

President Obama had a brief—and unusual—visit to the Pentagon this week. Normally, he receives his national security briefings in the White House, but he had a message to deliver about America's war against ISIS. "Ideologies," he said, "[are not defeated with guns](#)