

Middle East experts: Syrian Kurdish safe zones could thwart Iranian threat to Israel



Syrian Kurdish Crowd

March 15, 2017

Source: Faridon A. Abbas

In an exclusive [interview](#) with *JerusalemOnline*, Middle East experts David Keleti and Jerry Gordon stated that in last month's meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump, the two discussed ways of managing Iranian belligerency. The two Middle East scholars noted that establishing a Syrian Kurdish safe zone dominated by the democratic Kurdish National Assembly of Syria (KURDNAS), an umbrella organization comprised of a majority of Kurdish tribes and Syrian political parties led by Dr. Sherkoh Abbas, is the best guarantee that Israel has to thwart the Iranian threat. According to them, the KURDNAS-sponsored militias are also part of the 65,000-strong Kurdish contingent

of the SDF, leading the push to liberate the ISIS-controlled capital city of Raqqa.

Keleti and Gordon noted that Israel has many reasons to support the Kurds: "Kurds and Israelis share many similarities; a regional minority with an ancient history, deep connection to their land, and a voice of moderation. Ancient ties bind Jews and Kurds together. The Talmud recounts the generosity of Kurdish Jewish converts and Jerusalem residents King Monobaz and Queen Helena of Adiabene (c. 50 C.E.), especially their donations to the Second Temple, including the famed menorah. The Sultan Saladin, a Kurd, permitted Jews to live in the holy city. In 2014, Prime Minister Netanyahu stated his support for an independent Kurdistan in opposition to the federated model favored by the Obama administration."

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Recently, retired U.S. Marine General James Jones, former National Security Adviser (2009-2010), spoke in the Iraqi Kurdish capital city of Erbil: "Today, when we consider the net gains that OPC [ed. Operation Provide Comfort] produced for Americans, Europeans, and Kurds alike, this operation remains an example of what could yet be achieved in Syria. Certain tactics employed in Iraq, such as the establishment of

“no-fly” and “safe” zones” for refugees, could be applied to a particular advantage in Syria. President Trump has stated that such options remain “on the table” for discussion.”

According to Keleti and Gordon, KURDNAS developed a proposal, which is currently under review by the Trump Administration that will help advance such a safe zone that could help to thwart the Iranian threat and at the same time promote the largest ethnic group in the Middle East that lacks a state. It has a phased approach including:

1. **North/Northwestern Syrian Kurdish Safe Zones.** A U.S.-led coalition would secure safe zones in a quiet section of northwestern Syria to admit vetted refugees. A KURDNAS-backed National Guard would maintain law and order while defending itself against Islamist terror attacks.
2. **Kurdistan Regional Government of Syria.** The establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government of Syria (KRGs), modeled after the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government, who maintain positive relations with the U.S., Israel, the European Union and Turkey. The Turkish Government is likely to accept a KURDNAS-administered governorate over a PYD-administered one.
3. **Democratic, representative, and pluralistic Kurdistan in northern Syria.** The KRGs will be committed to personal freedom, economic prosperity, and human rights, promoting greater political and economic ties with Turkey and Israel. The prosperity will encourage Kurds in the diaspora to return home and rebuild Kurdistan, and support greater integration with other like-minded Kurdish regions. KURDNAS is well-suited to adopt pluralistic governance, having developed strong relationships with leaders of Druze, Arab, Alawite, and other ethnic communities.
4. “With a new administration in Washington, Russia and Turkey appear more willing to cooperate with the West in

de-escalating the Syrian conflict,” they noted. “Russia currently favors a federalist model for Syria granting limited regional autonomy for the Kurds—a strategy now supported by the PYD—over the safe zone model but it can be induced to support Kurdish independence in return for official guarantees preserving their Syrian interests including their naval facility in Tartus. The Turkish Government, friendly with Iraqi Kurds, has shown a new willingness to open dialogue with Syrian Kurds. However, no Turkish government, secular or Islamist, will accept an autonomous PYD-administered Kurdish government.”

In conclusion, the two Middle East experts proclaimed: “Syria’s Kurds desire peace, prosperity, and the opportunity to shape their own future without the twin scourges of Islamist fundamentalism and Iranian imperialism. A unique opportunity exists to work with the U.S. and its allies to achieve stability in Syria and the wider Middle East. Israel, an early supporter of Kurdish self-determination, can continue to play an important role in supporting a strong, democratic and independent Kurdistan.”

Originally [published](#) in JerusalemOnline.