



Security Forces: Kurdish Forces across Iraq, Syria and Iran

There are a large number of Kurdish armed groups represented across the dataset. They are considered rebels in Syria, Turkey and Iran. In Iraq however, the Peshmerga are recognized as the military/security forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Iran

Low-level violence occurs between Kurdish groups and state security forces although the September 2017 KRG independence vote has raised tensions.

Iraq

Peshmerga have been fighting alongside state forces to defeat IS, but since the Sept independence vote, there has been pressure on the KRG to walk back its moves towards independence. This has led to clashes between Peshmerga and state forces, particularly the Popular Mobilization Forces which are largely composed of Iranian-backed Shia militias; these militias alongside Iraqi state forces retook Kirkuk (strategic town KRG wanted as part of an independent Kurdistan, close proximity to significant oil wealth) and a number of other areas over the last couple months.

Weekly clashes between PMF and Peshmerga have been reported since Kirkuk was taken. Factions exist within the Peshmerga, which is roughly split between the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) which is aligned with the Barzani family (Masoud Barzani led KRG until early this month when he resigned), and the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) seen as having close ties to the Iraqi central government (the co-founder of PUK, Fuad Masum, is the current President of Iraq). Analysts have speculated that the bloodless retaking of Kirkuk involved a deal between the Iraqi central government, Iran, and PUK Peshmerga forces, as they retreated from Kirkuk, leaving the KDP alone (they then followed shortly after, basically without a fight despite having consolidated their positions in the city over the last couple years). This [video](#) gives a good summary of the events and Kurdish factionalism involved.

Syria

Kurdish groups are mostly involved in battles with IS and regime forces as part of the QSD, which itself is largely composed of YPG/YPJ fighters, i.e. Kurdish forces.

Turkey

PKK, HBDH and TAK are the main Kurdish forces fighting the state. PKK/HBDH engage in battles and remote violence against state forces. TAK are more radical, and use terrorist tactics such as suicide bombing and targeting civilians. In 2013-2014, a peace process between the state and the PKK (the "[Solution Process](#)") was working well to end fighting, however this has largely broken down over the past 3 years. Various reasons for this exist, including tensions involving the Syrian civil war and the KRGs moves to independence, although political calculations by the Turkish AKP party and President Erdogan seem to have played the major role, in terms of seeing continuing to



fight the Kurds as preferable to accommodation, especially after the AKP lost their super-majority in the legislature because the HDP (Kurdish party) [managed to surpass the 10% minimum](#) needed to get into parliament in the June 2015 national election, taking some proportionally-allocated seats away from the AKP. Erdogan was relying on retaining the AKP's super-majority to allow him to pass his constitutional reform to expand his powers as president, and this is when the government seems to have started to take a much harder line with the Kurds. Not having this majority [resulted in the need to call a referendum](#) instead in 2016.

List of Main Kurdish Groups Represented in the ACLED Middle East Actor File

Iraq

- **AQKB: Al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions** (Inter: 2)
- **Military Forces of Iraq (2014-) Peshmerga** (Inter: 1) - Technically made up of PUK/KDP Peshmerga units

Iran

- **KSZK: Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan** (Inter: 2)
- **HAK-R: Kurdistan Freedom Eagles for East Kurdistan** (Inter: 2)
- **PDKI: Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan** (Inter: 2)
- **PJAK: Kurdistan Free Life Party** (Inter: 2)
- **YRK: Eastern Kurdistan Units** (Inter: 2)

Syria

- **QSD: Syrian Democratic Forces** (Inter: 2) – Predominantly composed of YPG+YPJ
- **YPG: Peoples Protection Units** (Inter: 2)
- **YPJ: Women's Protection Units** (Inter: 2)
- **Asayish (Syria)** (Inter: 2) – Kurdish police forces (while all Kurdish regions have them, usually they're considered part of a particular Kurdish rebel group)
- **KNC: Kurdish National Council** (Inter: 2)
- **PYD: Kurdish Democratic Union Party** (Inter: 2)

Turkey

- **HBDH: Peoples United Revolutionary Movement** (Inter: 3)
- **PKK: Kurdistan Workers Party** (Inter: 2) – Military wing known as HPG
- **TAK: Kurdistan Freedom Hawks** (Inter: 2)
- **YPS: Civil Protection Units** (Inter: 2)