

THE INVOLVEMENT OF KURDISH ACTORS IN THE U.S.–ISRAELI–IRAN CONFLICT

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On February 28th, 2026, the United States, in cooperation with Israel, launched missile and air strikes against Iran and the Iranian regime as part of a new military operation. Tehran responded very quickly. Iran launched missiles and drones targeting Israel and several U.S. military bases across the Middle East, including US bases in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, and Iraq. Some attacks have also affected civilian infrastructure in the region. Several neighboring countries have faced potential security threats. Missiles also hit Cyprus and Türkiye, and the latest reports mention an attempted attack on airport infrastructure in Azerbaijan.

A few days ago, U.S. President Donald Trump also announced the possibility of cooperation with Iranian Kurdish groups and the potential supply of weapons to Kurdish militias operating against the Iranian regime.

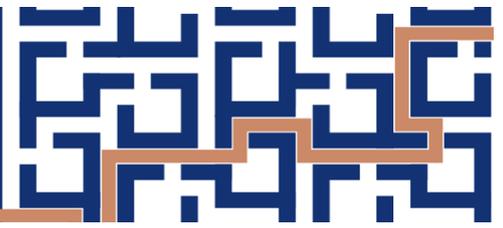
Main Kurdish actors

In recent days, the name most often mentioned in discussions about US cooperation with the Kurds is Mustafa Hijri. He is a longtime head of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDIK/KDP-I), one of the main Kurdish opposition movements against the Iranian government, based in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI). The main aim of the party is to establish a democratic political system in Iran, federalism and Kurdish autonomy. The PDKI maintains an armed wing with bases in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and its positions have reportedly been targeted by Iranian drones during the recent escalation (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, 2026).

The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) is understood to be part of a broader transnational structure of the Kurdish movement connected to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). PJAK emerged around 2004 amid the reorganization of PKK structures in the region, and its ideological and organizational orientation is closely linked to the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan. The organization operates primarily in Kurdish areas of western Iran and conducts its activities from mountainous regions along the Iranian–Iraqi border, from where it carries out guerrilla operations against Iranian security forces, particularly units of the IRGC. The intensity of the conflict between PJAK and the Iranian state is significantly lower compared to the PKK conflict in Türkiye, due to the organization's smaller mobilization capacity in Iranian Kurdistan, the strong state control over the region, and the broader geopolitical context. As a result, PJAK combines limited armed actions with political mobilization of the Kurdish population and ideological promotion of the broader Kurdish movement's program (Kaválek, 2021).

The Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan is an Iranian-Kurdish political party founded in the late 1960s. It is social-democratic and secular, advocating for a democratic and federal Iran with protection of Kurdish and other minority rights, mother-tongue education, and social justice. Historically, Komala included both political and armed wings, including units that opposed the Iranian regime, but today it focuses mainly on political organization and coordination with other Kurdish opposition parties. The party operates primarily from the KRI and, in 2026, joined the Kurdistan Parties Coalition, collaborating with KDPI, PJAK, and other Kurdish opposition groups against Iran. Its main goal is the

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transformation of Iran's political system into a democratic, secular, and federal state with full rights for minorities. In recent years, Komala has prioritized political strategy and alliances over direct armed conflict (Komala International, 2026).

The Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) is an Iranian Kurdish nationalist and militant political organization, founded in 1991 and based mainly in the KRI, that advocates Kurdish independence or broad autonomy. It has both political and armed components, including its armed wing, often referred to as the National Army of Kurdistan. Its fighters have carried out armed operations against Iranian security forces, including during protests in early 2026, and the group was previously involved alongside Kurdish forces in counter-ISIS operations while operating from the KRI. In the context of the 2025–2026 Iranian political crisis, PAK joined the Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan, along with five other Kurdish groups (Shafaq News, 2026). During the latest development, its bases have reportedly been targeted by Iranian strikes.

Several Iranian Kurdish communist organizations use the name Komala. Still, only Komala of the Toilers of Kurdistan (Komala) originally joined the Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan. However, it had not been among the founding members when the alliance was first announced the previous month. Another group using the Komala name is Komala – the Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran. These Komala organizations maintain both political structures and armed wings. According to an estimate from the Combating Terrorism Center, Komala has fewer than 1,000 fighters, though it is unclear which specific faction the estimate refers to (Al-Monitor, 2026).

In March 2023, Iran and Iraq reached an agreement to strengthen security along their shared border, requiring the disarmament of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups and their relocation from border areas to inland camps within Iraq. The deal aimed to address tensions caused by cross-border attacks by

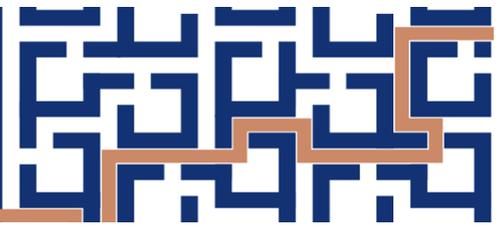
these groups in 2023. (Al Jazeera, 2023). Some steps were taken to implement the agreement, but it was not fully implemented.

In response to the Iranian protests in February 2026, six Iranian Kurdish actors joined the Kurdistan Parties Coalition, including PJAK, PDKI, PAK, Khabat, Komala of the Toilers of Kurdistan, and Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan. (Al-Monitor, 2026)

Trump's Call: Miscalculated Expectations and Kurdish Hesitation

As in previous alliances like the anti-ISIS operation with Kurdish forces in Northeast Syria, Trump believed that Iraqi and Iranian Kurds would join forces with the United States and Israel against Iran by supplying bases and logistics for Iranian Kurdish fighters to launch from Rojhelat into western Iran (Scoop: Trump Calls Kurdish Leaders in Iran War Effort, 2026). However, this assumption ignored skepticism coming from past U.S. betrayals, such as the pullout from Syria in 2019 and the betrayal of the post-Gulf War protest in 1991. As a result, Iraqi Kurds, who are important gatekeepers, mostly refused the deal (ibid., 2026).

On Sunday, March 1, 2026, a few days following the U.S.-Israel bombing campaign got started, President Trump called Kurdish officials in Iraq to talk about the war between the United States and Israel with Iran and what might happen next (ibid., 2026). Trump discussed why it matters with leaders of the two major Kurdish factions in Iraq, Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Bafel Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). As Trump said to Bafel Talabani, "to choose the side either with America and Israel or with Iran" (MCNEIL, 2026). With thousands of soldiers stationed along the Iran-Iraq border, the Kurds maintain tight relations with Iran's Kurdish minority while controlling important regions that may become important as the conflict progresses (Scoop., 2026). Trump allegedly made contact with PDKI (Iranian Kurdish) commander Mustafa Hijri, offering "extensive U.S. air cover" and logistical



support to enable a ground operation attacking Iran from within (PUK Says 'Trump 'Clarified' His Objective on Iran War in Call With Party Leader, n.d.). Trump said that he "clarified the objectives of Washington's war against Iran" to Talabani, according to PUK (Gebeily et al., 2026). Referring to Kurdish operations, "I think it's a great idea if they want to do that, I'd be totally with it," (Yenişafak, 2026). Washington views Iranian Kurdish militias stationed in rough mountainous areas as tools to weaken Tehran internally, while the Peshmerga forces' combat experience and the strategic location of Iraq's Kurdish region serve as a western entryway to Iran (ibid., 2026).

The Kurdish hesitation was shown again in a strong statement on X, Shanaz Ibrahim Ahmed, the wife of Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid and aunt of PUK leader Bafel Talabani, expressed both official and popular rejection: "Today, the Kurds of Iraq have finally tasted a measure of stability and dignity in life. This is why it is very difficult, indeed impossible, for the Kurds to accept being treated as pawns by the world's great powers. The experiences are there. The empty promises are there... Leave the Kurds alone. We are not mercenaries". This builds up neutrality as a survival tactic in the face of Iranian missile attacks on Erbil/Sulaimaniyah and represents the collective Kurdish memory of betrayal (ibid., 2026).

Hijri posted on X, "I urge all conscious... soldiers... in Kurdistan to leave the barracks... reject regime forces," showing interaction despite trust concerns. However, no verifiable sources show that an Iranian Kurdish leader explicitly rejected Trump's demand. Instead, Hijri called for Iranian soldiers to flee after contact.

On Wednesday, March 4th, some rumors began to circulate about the beginning of an invasion from Iraq to Iran. Kurdish militias denied the rumors of any cross-border attack on Iran. However, PAK confirmed that in the event of a US ground operation, they would join the US but wouldn't lead it (Martany, 2026).

Trump officially changed his mind by March 7th, telling reporters that he had asked Kurds not to enter to prevent bloodshed and escalation: "I don't want the Kurds going in. I don't want the Kurds to suffer harm."

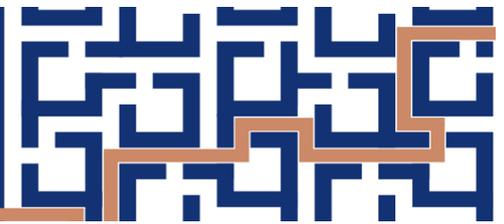
According to DW and Axios analysis, this reflects U.S. post-Iraq policy, which prioritizes strategy over long-term alliances and uses local fighters as "boots on the ground" to save American lives, leaving Kurds to take risks in the face of Iranian retaliation (Knipp, 2026).

In addition, Syrian Kurds, regarding their own latest negative experiences with US withdrawal, warned Iranian Kurds of partnering with the US. At least they advised requesting guarantees when forming a coalition (Reuters, 2026).

Possible future development and threats in the case of Kurdish involvement

The involvement of the Kurdish actors in the escalating tensions between Iran, Israel, and the United States could open additional fronts and significantly intensify the conflict. If the Kurds were to take a more active role, targeted strikes against Kurdish militia positions in Iraqi Kurdistan would likely follow. Such developments would considerably worsen the security situation and could effectively draw another state more directly into the conflict. At the same time, repression against the Kurdish population in Iran would probably increase. As a result, potential attacks might not remain confined to the KRI but could also extend to targets located within Iranian territory.

At the same time, closer cooperation between Kurdish groups and the United States could be perceived by Turkey as a direct security concern. Ankara might interpret such cooperation as a threat to its domestic stability and respond with military action against Kurdish militias. Should Kurdish forces accept financial or military assistance from the United States, there would also be a heightened risk of the conflict evolving into a proxy confrontation.



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