

# ISIS Caliphate Falls, but Could There be a Second War in Syria?

An Interview with Diliman Abdulkader, EMET Kurdistan Project

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant (April 2019)



Mazloun Kobani, Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) commander in chief, announces the destruction of Islamic State's control of land in eastern Syria, at al-Omar oil field in Deir Al Zor, Syria March 23, 2019.

**The defeat of the self-declared Caliphate of the Islamic State**

of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was [announced](#) on March 23, 2019 by Syrian Democratic (SDF) General Mazloum Kobani in televised ceremonies at al-Omar oil field in Deir Al Zor, Syria. There were still reports from Baghouz, the last sliver of land held by the die-hard ISIS fighters, of continuing sniper fire and searches in tunnels for others on the run, including the elusive Emir, known under his *nom de guerre* as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Baghdadi was mistakenly rumored by the Russians to have been killed during an air strike in 2017 on Raqqa, the then Administrative capital of the Caliphate. He was last seen publicly in July 2014 ascending the rostrum in the main Mosque in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, declaring the Caliphate. Voice prints of his audio messages to his Salafist Islamic followers indicated that he was still alive. As recent as the final days of fighting in Baghouz he could be heard on audio messages urging the remaining fighters to fight on to the death with the reward of entering paradise. The question now is, "Does the US coalition have the will to track him down 'neutralize' or capture him?"

General Kobani [said](#) in his declaration that the battle would continue against so-called sleeper cells. That is a daunting problem facing the Kurdish-led SDF as upwards of 20,000 ISIS fighters have fled Syria for Iraq. There were already reports that ISIS fighters had engaged in ambushes with Shi'ite Hashd al Shaabi Popular Mobilization Units south of Mosul. Other ISIS fighters may have inserted themselves in streams of 30,000 refugees fleeing to the Al-Hol UN High Commission Refugee Camp in northeastern Syria. That has placed an additional burden on the SDF and remaining US forces in Syria screening for possible sleeper cells. The Al-Hof refugee camp was the scene of an [attack](#) by a mob of so-called ISIS women

some of whom were armed, besieging the 30 camp security guards with cries that they would be beheaded.

The Syrian Democratic Council, the political arm of the SDF, [announced](#) a request for an international tribunal to be formed to prosecute the more than 1,000 foreign fighters detained in the course of the five year war.

The Syrian Human Observatory [reported](#) that since August 2018 139 members of the SDF had killed in such attacks by ISIS operatives. In January 2019, 19 SDF force members [were](#) killed, including four US service personnel in an ISIS bombing attack in Manbij that killed US service personnel and contractors. Manbij is an Arab City on the upper reaches of the Euphrates River.

Manbij is held by Kurdish SDF forces backed by 200 US troops. Manbij has been a flash point of contention between Erdogan of Turkey and the US since 2016 when his forces backed Islamist militia in seizure of Jarablus. Erdogan in January 2018 had further invaded the ancient peaceful Kurdish enclave of Afrin in northwest Syria effectively ethnically cleansing it through displacement of Kurds and so-called Turkification.

Further, Erdogan has demanded the US retrieve the heavy weapons lent the SDF to complete the conquest of the land held by ISIS in Syria. He has also proposed control over a 'safe zone' on the Syrian side of the international frontier effectively occupying the major Kurdish population centers from the Euphrates river to the Iraqi Kurdistan frontier.

Those threats were foremost in General Kobani's mind when he [issued](#) a warning that a second war may be arising with threats of Turkish 'safe zones' amid calls by President Trump for withdrawal of US forces. Kobani also [warned](#) the Assad regime that the Kurdish-led SDF deserved autonomy in the liberated northeast. Its political arm, the Syrian Democratic Council has demonstrated the ability to self-govern the liberated northeastern region. The Kurds also have a bargaining chip. They hold territory encompassing more than 80 percent of the country's oil and gas fields. Further, Kobani requested that Turkey and its jihadist militias leave Kurdish areas west of the Euphrates like Afrin.

The US is faced with a conundrum. How to protect this valued ally that has paid a heavy price in a brutal five-year war in Syria losing more than 10,000 lives? The SDF liberated, with US air and ground support, lands occupied by the self-declared Caliphate that at its peak encompassed an area the size of Britain. The question of how to protect the Syrian Kurdish - led SDF has been complicated by apposite statements from the Trump White House versus those of Central Command commander US Army General Joseph Votel, featured in recent Congressional testimony. Votel suggested that an immediate withdrawal of 2,000 US troops from Syria was impractical as ISIS could reconstitute as a resurgent threat in both Syria and Iraq. What emerged from the White House was a new proposal for a contingent of upwards of 1,000 US troops deployed in Manbij, along the Euphrates River and at the strategic bastion of Al-Tanf in Southern Syria near the Jordanian, Iraqi and Israeli Golan frontiers. There were comments from National Security Adviser John Bolton about 'progress' with UK, French and German NATO and Global alliance partners like Australia that might build up a 'footprint' of 2,000 for the proposed force engaged in protection of the Kurdish-held northeastern Syria. The Administration had further suggested that the 5,500 troops

at the Al-Sad base in Anbar province in Iraq near the Syrian border might be relied on to 'monitor' Iranian activities in both Iraq and Syria. A recent visit to Baghdad by an Iranian delegation headed by President Rouhani and demands for removal of all US forces from the country by Iraqi Shi'ite parliament members raised question as to whether US commitments are realistic.

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We reached out again to Diliman Abdulkader, director of the Kurdistan Project at the Washington, DC-based Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET), for an interview on his discussions with Congressional lawmakers concerning these issues.

**Rod:** We have a great show lined up for our listeners. We have as a [repeat](#) guest Diliman Abdulkader and he is a real *mensch* of a guy who has been working on behalf of the Kurds in Syria. He recently conferred with Congressmen and Senators to explain the positions of the Syrian Kurds.

**Jerry:** Diliman is an articulate spokesman for the Syrian Kurdish cause. He was born in Kirkuk, from which he and his family escaped, during the Second Gulf War. They ended up in the very same U.N. refugee camp in northeast Syria at al-Hol

now holds tens of thousands of civilians fleeing the final stages of battle in Baghouz with, unfortunately, ISIS fighters among them. He is the head of the Kurdistan Project for the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET) in Washington DC, headed by a very good friend, Sarah Stern.

**Rod:** And we know that the work they are doing has had some affect. You and I have been talking about this subject for well over two years now, beating the drum, keeping an eye on the Kurds discussing what's going on and making sure you provide protection for them. For the longest time we were a lone voice out in the wilderness talking about it. Now we are seeing this become a mainstream conversation not only in the media but in Washington D.C. That is the reason so the reason why we wanted to bring Diliman back for an update—to understand what's going on the ground and within the halls of Congress, and to find out what the reality is for the future of ISIS with the final battle to end the Caliphate in Syria. Has the Caliphate been destroyed? Has ISIS been destroyed or are they still there willing to put up a fight if they can?

We are with our guest that we brought on a couple of weeks ago Diliman Abdulkader. We brought him back on the show because so many interesting things are taking place in Washington DC with his meetings with several Congressmen to talk about the Kurds. We wanted to bring him back on to give us the latest updates. Diliman, we appreciate you taking time to let our audience know what work you are doing. Could you tell us what you have been up to in the last couple of weeks?

**Diliman:** First, thank you for having me on again. As you both know, this is a very important and hot topic around Capitol Hill and Washington DC. As to the latest developments, we have

had some important hearings on the Hill. General Joseph Votel has testified before Congress. The overall feeling and mood is that we know for sure ISIS is not defeated and there is a fear that there is a likely re-emergence of ISIS. The Caliphate may be defeated, but their numbers are high in about twenty to thirty thousand fighters. There is also the humanitarian crisis that continues to be a threat. A vital question is are there enough forces to leave behind as the US gradually withdrawals?

**Rod:** Yes, and so far, do you feel that the reception has been good in Congress and in the Administration on these issues in Washington, DC?

**Diliman:** The reception in Congress has been good. They understand the threat coming out of Syria. They understand that if we don't fight them there, if we don't keep them there, the threat might come here and in Europe. This is understood. I would say the Administration is coming to understand this as well. Most of the US group of Senators and Congressional representatives at the recent Munich Security Conference sent the President a letter saying you need to stay in Syria. The President just responded saying all is good, 100%, everything is understood; I agree with you. So, this is a good response that we received.

**Rod:** Yes, that must make you feel pretty good that you have at least somebody listening to you now.

**Diliman:** People are listening, but there is a lot more work to be done.

**Rod:** What is the Syrian Democratic Forces' understanding of the change in the position regarding withdrawal from Syria?

**Diliman:** The SDF has pushed for keeping US troops in Syria; the entire 2,000 force that we have there. We have two hundred in Al-Tanf on the Southwest border. There are two thousand East Euphrates. The President now wants to gradually withdraw them and keep two to four hundred troops in Syria. I believe the latest number is four hundred troops. The SDF does appreciate. Obviously, an American presence is very symbolic in Northeast Syria largely because it keeps Iran away from the oilfields, it keeps the Assad legitimacy at a minimum, it keeps the Russians away who are more than happy to fill that vacuum. The understanding throughout from the DOD, Congress and the Administration is that it will keep the Turks from, slaughtering the Kurds. So, this is very important. The Kurds appreciate the American stance currently at four hundred troops because even one American will keep the enemies at bay.

**Rod:** These four hundred US troops are going to be working in an advisory position and perhaps indirect combat roles?

**Diliman:** Yes, the first position was that they will be peacekeepers when it was first announced by the White House. Both the President and Sarah Sanders said that will be their position there—predominantly peacekeepers. However, that has changed to training, equipping, advising and patrolling. Basically, this would be like their previous roles, instead of just being peacekeepers staying there at the border. That peacekeeper role is going to be based in the Northern border between the Syria and Turkey and along the Euphrates Valley



between the Assad regimes and the SDF.

**Rod:** I'm really sold on the US footprint in Syria used this way. I know that in Afghanistan at the beginning of the war, there were two dozen Special Operators along with Afghan fighters who were able to completely root out the Taliban with air support. That demonstrated it can be done. You can be mobile and accomplish the tactical objectives.

**Jerry:** Ambassador John Bolton was recently interviewed and indicated there was progress in building out the combined force with allies from the U.K, France and Germany. Diliman, what do you think are the issues of bringing about these forces onboard for this combined force in Syria?

**Diliman:** These European allies haven't fully committed yet. The intent from the United States position was to bring in our European allies to do more of their part, as well, so that it was not fully a United States role. The United States would take the lead on this. From the Kurdish standpoint, I think this is understood. This makes sense if you have a combination of about 2,000 forces. The French have already committed to provide a contingent. After the four American service members and consultants lost their lives in an ISIS bombing attack at Manbij in December 2018, President Macron stated that he would like to stay for more than a year if they have the American air support. According to John Bolton, the UK looks like they are onboard. I would add there are about twelve countries of the US-led coalition that will keep troops, including the Dutch and the Australians. I think they are willing to stay there if the United States commits forces to Syria. As you know, before they came into the coalition to fight ISIS, the policy was, we came in together we will leave together, and

the United States can't leave alone.

**Rod:** Are you saying the number of combined US and other troops on the ground still could be from four to six thousand?

**Diliman:** About two thousand—so give or take about two thousand. I think that number would go back up, so it won't be two thousand US troops alone. It would be a combination of say four hundred US troops, a few hundred French, U.K. and others amounting to two thousand.

**Jerry:** You mentioned French President Macron's reaction after the four US individuals were killed in the ISIS bombing attack at Manbij—both to combat and to non-combat casualties. That raises the question about whether there might be an additional complement of contractors from various US defense agencies that would bring the total above the two thousand support level.

**Diliman:** Correct. This is more complicated by their use during the 2003 Iraqi War. However this does make sense as well; this is very much realistic. I know they can fill in the gaps where the US forces can't. This would please the President's demand and it would also allow the Europeans to make smaller force commitments altogether. Thus, using contractors wouldn't be a bad idea.

**Rod:** The rules of engagement for contractors have become more restricted especially for those who are operating outside the United States. For instance, they are doing a major

contribution protecting Embassies abroad. Most people are not aware of that.

**Diliman:** Exactly, I think they can play a significant role in securing the oil fields. A lot of people don't know that the oil fields in Syria—especially in Northeast Syria—are also military bases. This is very important as we must secure these regions because if we are not there, Russia will be there. If we are not there, Iran and Assad will be there.

**Rod:** Yes. Turkey would love to be there.

**Diliman:** Turkey has no natural resources. Capturing these Syrian oil fields and regaining these territories would fulfill a long-held grievance held since the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.

**Rod:** Speaking of Turkey, we know that Turkey is bent on controlling a so called, "safe zone" effectively liberating Kurdish Northeastern Syria. What is the Syrian Democratic Council and US positions on this issue?

**Diliman:** The SDF's position as far as a Turkish safe zone or buffer zone is absolutely *no*. Turkish military forces should be allowed into the sovereign territory of Syria. The Kurds and the Americans understand very well what Turkey's intent is: to slaughter the Kurds, to commit demographic changes, to bring in Arab Syrian refugees into areas where the indigenous population of Kurds live in Kurdish villages and cities. There are seven or eight major Kurdish cities along the Turkish

border inside Syria. They would be occupied by Turkish and jihadist allies. Kurdish flags or the Syrian flags would be removed and replaced by Turkish flags. Schools would be Islamified—so this is very dangerous. The United States is also against this. When the President first announced his withdrawal to Turkey, he suggested that Erdogan said he would fill this gap to fight ISIS. However Turkey does not have the capabilities to control such a large region.

**Jerry:** Turkey's Erdogan requested the US retrieve all the heavy weapons that the SDF had been provided by the US. Diliman, what is the US position regarding SDF retention of such weapons and modernization of arms? Moreover, what appears to be Congressional views on these issues from your encounters on Capitol Hill?

**Diliman:** The US position—as far as collecting these weapons from the SDF Kurdish component of the SDF, the YPG and the Women's Protection Unit, the YPJ—to please Turkey is an absolute no! This is unrealistic. Let's be honest. No one has the capabilities to collect all these weapons as they are all over Northeast Syria, they are in the hands of the SDF—not only Kurds but also the Arab components as well. Erdogan is pushing this because he sees the Kurds as terrorists. He believes that one day the PKK will use these against Turkey. We know this is not true. As far as Congress' position, well, I believe they want to make sure that the SDF is well armed and equipped in order to fight this last phase of whatever is left of ISIS.

**Jerry:** Okay one of the flashpoints between Turkey and the US has been Kurdish held city of Manbij. There have been now two suicide attacks there—one in January and this past week. What

does that say about the resiliency of the ISIS sleeper cells to continue their conflict along the Euphrates River?

**Diliman:** These attacks prove that ISIS still exists. This proves that there are sleeper cells across Syria and Iraq. They are a major threat. The US cannot leave the area while these ISIS cells continue to create humanitarian crisis. They are a threat to the villages, to the resources. They can come back and create another Caliphate. We don't want that. That is not in the interest of the United States; that's not even in the interest of Turkey and not even in the interest of the Kurds. In Manbij, we have seen ISIS bombings. The United States has committed to staying in Manbij to continue the joint patrol with the Turks, which was the previous position.

**Rod:** How complicated is this final SDF assault on the last bastion of ISIS fighters in Baghouz, Syria?

**Diliman:** Baghouz is basically a tent encampment. ISIS uses human shields. Thousands of civilians have left Baghouz to local refugee camps and many are afraid that they will lose their lives. The SDF is coordinating this attack with the US coalition air support. They are doing it step by step. They are allowing civilians to come out as they don't want to harm these innocent lives. It is further complicated because ISIS does have hostages as well. The SDF is trying to figure out ways to release these hostages while at the same time taking down the last territory held by ISIS.

**Rod:** I imagine this is a sensitive subject for yourself as a child whose family left Iraq to live in a refugee camp in

Syria. That's not a very pleasant world to live in, is it?

**Diliman:** It's not. You know, it is that same UNHCR al-Hol refugee camp that many of these civilians are fleeing to in Northeast Syria. Having lived there for seven years, my family and I understand very well what these people are going through.

**Jerry:** Given the ten thousand estimated civilians and two thousand ISIS fighters who fled Baghouz and surrendered to SDF troops, how much of a burden has that placed on the SDF and the US troops for the processing and detention of them in Northeast Syria?

**Diliman:** It is a heavy burden largely because you must vet these refugees because many of the ISIS terrorists are posing as refugees. They have their family members posing as refugees. Their children are caught up in this act. It is a heavy burden and the SDF cannot do it alone. The US troops cannot do it alone. That is why it is very important for the Global Coalition to continue this strategy of protecting not only the SDF but the humanitarian crisis as well from ISIS. With tens of thousands fleeing all at once here, there must be coordination organization in order to screen these civilians as there might be terrorists among these people.

**Rod:** Is the UN coordinating this?

**Diliman:** The UN is coordinating with the Americans, the European allies and the SDF. The major refugee camp is al-Hol

camp run by the United Nations. I believe since March 7th, four to five thousand civilians have come into to al-Hol camp alone. The refugee camp has more than 50,000 residents.

**Rod:** What do you think the commitment of the ISIS fighters who have given up? Do you think this is the end—the beginning of the end for them?

**Diliman:** I don't think it's the beginning of the end, I think these are basically the ISIS fighters who are doing this because they have no choice. If they could, they would still fight. If the Caliphate still existed, they would fight for the Caliphate. As we have discussed earlier, thousands are still fighting for the Caliphate. There was an audio recording released by ISIS supposedly from Baghouz during battle saying, "The Crusader war planes and the Kurdish atheists are coming to attack our land." This just shows that ISIS fighters still believe in this radical ideology.

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**Rod:** So this is the reason why it is important to keep up the pressure and maintain a presence there in the region.

**Diliman:** Exactly.

**Rod:** ISIS is not going to go away.

**Diliman:** Yes, it is not going away anytime soon. We can't rely on the central governments of these states to take up the burden because we know how ISIS came about. It is the isolation of major Sunni population such as in Iraq.

**Rod:** As much as I would not like to see our troops serve in that area as my own children serve in the military, I realize this is the new norm in the world. It is unfortunate. However, we must face that reality.

**Diliman:** Thank you for your son's service as well. We really do appreciate that. Unfortunately, this is the new norm. However, there is one positive thing I can say about Syria. There is a willing sixty-thousand force made up of majority Kurds, Arabs and Christians that want to do the fighting themselves and protect the land. To achieve that, we need American support and advice.

**Jerry:** There are media reports that many of these foreign ISIS fighters and families may not be able to return to their countries of origin despite requests to do so from President Trump. Could that possibly slow down the US troop withdrawals schedule to conduct diplomacy and develop alternative arrangements for processing detention?

**Diliman:** As far as those ISIS fighters that want to return to Europe or to the United States, I have heard some members of Congress say that we should send them to Guantanamo. For



example, I know Tom Cotton [suggested](#) that. Others say that we should hold them for trial, while others say that we should keep them in Syria. I think that the SDF doesn't have the capabilities to keep them in Syria unless the United States and Americans and the Europeans don't have the appetite to bring them back. I think it is reasonable that the US and allies should help the Kurds solve this issue. We should give them what they need to keep them there. I think this just continues to prove the fact that we should delay the withdrawal. The President, I think, is finally realizing that ISIS still exists, there is a threat and they are trying to come back to the US too.

**Rod:** Diliman are you suggesting that it could be a problem keeping the ISIS fighters who have surrendered there in internment camps?

**Diliman:** It could be done. The problem is it's very difficult to vet them because many are posing as refugees

**Rod:** Right.

**Diliman:** Many of the refugees, innocent civilians that are suffering, are being manipulated by these individuals as well. It is hard to tell the difference. It places the Americans, the SDF and the United Nations relief agencies in a difficult position.

**Jerry:** That seems to have been the problem in the final stages of the conquest in Iraq by combination of the Kurds and the

Iraqi National Army that the stream of those refugees was penetrated by ISIS lay behinds. Diliman what complication does that have for the processing now in Syria?

**Diliman:** The biggest threat is that ISIS uses human shields. With that said, we must be careful that we don't harm these civilians but, at the same time, we must be careful that we don't allow these terrorists to pretend they are suffering from a humanitarian crisis they created. We know that they are the real enemy. This is a huge complication. How do you vet these people? How do you go from neighborhood to neighborhood making sure that you are capturing the right people, killing the right people and that you are not harming civilians in the tens of thousands? I don't think any country, let alone the Iraqi Security Forces or the KRG Peshmerga can take care of all of this.

**Jerry:** There have been reports of ISIS fighters coming across the frontier into Iraq engaging in ambushes against the Shiite Popular Mobilization Units south of Mosul. Does that indicate resiliency of ISIS to reconstitute and re-enter Northeast Syria?

**Diliman:** This reminds me of back in 2014 when ISIS there was coming about. We must remember that ISIS rose due to an isolation affect coming from the Central government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. He basically gave all the power to the Shi'ites; the Sunnis were left isolated. They were not given government or military positions. This is what we should expect this when the Caliphate is gone. It is that Sunni-Shiite tension. that could lead to another ISIS; ISIS 2.0. The Iraqi military is made up predominately of Shi'ites. and Iran-controlled and funded Shiite militias, the Hashd al -

Shaabi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

**Jerry:** We had recent visits to Iraq by Iranian President Rouhani seeking trade deals and more. There has been pressure on the existing Iraqi regime from the PMU leaders for the withdrawal of those 5,500+ US forces at the al-Asad base in Western Iraq. What is Iran's intent?

**Diliman:** Iran's intent is largely to control the Shi'ite population in Iraq. 60 percent of Iraq's population is Shi'ite with 20 percent Sunni and 20 percent Kurds. Iraq is caught between a tug of war where the Americans want to continue to have a presence there. The President said we must keep an eye on Iran there. However, we know what Iran has done in the region. This is not a secret. Iran continues to expand throughout the Shi'ite region in the South. They have total control of the military and the Hashd al-Shaabi Shi'ite militias. Some of these are prominent in the political system and government of Iraq. This is an attempt to institutionalize the Iraqi life with Iran's agenda like what they have done successfully under Hezbollah in Lebanon.

**Rod:** Basically, Iran is attempting to make what already exists, as we would call in Jewish life, kosher.

**Diliman:** Right. My response to that is the Americans did liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein. The Shi'ites were oppressed by Sunni Ba'athist strongman Saddam Hussein it was the Americans that sacrificed their lives. It was the American Second Gulf war in 2003 that liberated Iraq from the Ba'athist regime which both the Shi'ites and the Kurds wanted. Now that

the job is done, why are 5,500 American troops still there at Al-Sad in Anbar province on the frontier with Syria? The Iraqi Shia don't want them there; the Sunnis and the Kurds do.

**Rod:** I cannot see that al-Asad would become something that is abandoned. I just cannot see that happening unless they are able to re-mobilize in the KRG, which might make complete sense. We talked earlier about how you have been up on Capitol Hill in Washington talking to Congressmen and Senators. How strong is the bi-partisan Congressional support for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Force?

**Diliman:** The SDF has a lot of support on the Hill. Those lawmakers we have spoken with well understand the SDF fighting capabilities. The next step after the Caliphate is defeated—while we know there may be ISIS terrorists still left—would be the recognition of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). I'm trying to educate lawmakers on why it is important to recognize this—so we don't recognize Damascus. We know Assad's legitimacy stops at the Euphrates River and the SDC is a self-governing system that has been implemented since 2015. It has worked and it is inclusive of the minorities in the region. The SDF has strong support as far as the military relationship with the West and the Global Coalition. I think we should start recognizing the Syrian Democratic Council so they can function independently—so they can sell their oil legally and create a haven like what the Americans did for the Kurds and the KRG in Iraq.

**Rod:** Could you explain how the SDC has been operating in Northeastern Syria as a very pluralistic society?

**Diliman:** The Syrian Democratic Council governs Northeast Syria. It is composed of not only Kurds but Sunni Arabs, Syriac, Assyrian and Armenian Christians, Yazidis and other minorities. It is a representative of the indigenous Syrian population not only Kurds. Turkey would like to say that this is a Kurdish project, but it's not. Further, the SDC provides equal representation for both men and women. This is unheard in the Middle East. Aside from Israel in the region, only the SDC has held elections. Therefore, it is important for the SDF, the military aspect of this project to continue to have the tools they need in order to secure this region.

**Rod:** So, the biggest argument for the SDC is that they have a track record. They have been doing this without too many problems and they know how to work together in a bipartisan way.

**Diliman:** Exactly. It has worked and it will continue if they are protected from the air. That is the biggest threat: if they don't have an air force. That is why we need the Global Coalition to continue to support the SDF.

**Jerry:** If this area in Northeast Syria is going to survive with some degree of autonomy, would it ever be renamed Kurdistan Rojava?

**Diliman:** I wouldn't be opposed to that. However, the SDC has worked because it is not Rojava; it includes all the indigenous population. I think the Arab population and other minorities of Northeast Syria would not like that because then it would be a Kurdish project. That would give Turkey more

ammunition to say, "We told you this was a Kurdish PKK stalking horse all along." This was the intent of the Kurds. I think this would allow Turkey to move in from the North. Turkey fears another autonomous region for the Kurds if they have a self-administering government and a border shared with the KRG. For now, I think this is the best step.

**Rod:** Could you give us a website so that our listeners can go and stay up to date with what's going on in the region?

**Diliman:** You can follow my twitter account [@d\\_abdulkader](https://twitter.com/d_abdulkader). I tweet frequently and give updates on both the issues on the Hill and what happens on the ground in the Kurdish region.

**Rod:** Israel obviously has in some way provided some moral support. How detrimental do you think that it is when it comes to Turkey sort of attaching Israel and the United States to the Kurds to say this is an Israeli-American project and these "atheists and hordes of horrible people" need to be stamped out of Syria?

**Diliman:** As far as tying Israel to the Kurds, this has always been a double-edged sword like it was during the KRG independence referendum in Iraq. The Shiites came out and spoke against it, Iraqi Premier Nouri al-Maliki spoke against it, saying, "We don't want a second Israel in Iraq and we will not allow that." It is the same thing in Syria. The Kurds must be realistic because their neighbors are Assad, Turkey, Iran and the Iraqis.

**Rod:** We really appreciate you coming on. Hopefully we will be able to chat with you real soon again you have been listening to Beyond the Matrix here on Israel News Talk Radio. We will see you next week. Shalom.

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