



**WHY IS THE ISIS FLAG
BEING FLOWN OVER RAQQA**

ONCE AGAIN?

Lêgerîn

There was a video of an ISIS flag been flown over the entrance to the city of Raqqa in Syria which recently circulated a lot around digital media. Perhaps you saw it too and maybe thought it was taken back in 2016, when ISIS still controlled the city and used it as the capital of its caliphate. But in fact it was taken at the beginning of this year, in 2026. So, why is this happening? Had ISIS not been defeated? Does this mean they are back? For those who are concerned with the possibility of a resurgence of ISIS and want to understand what is happening, this article will try to explain it.



INDEX.

What is Rojava?	2	Why are the Western powers not helping?	6
What does it have to do with ISIS?	3	So what happens now?	8
When did the current conflict start?	4		

WHAT IS ROJAVA?

The region known as Rojava (meaning “West” in Kurdish) is the part of Kurdistan (the land where the Kurds live, an ancient Middle-Eastern Arianic people autochthonous to the region) which falls within the borders of the Syrian state. Other parts of Kurdistan are divided among Turkey, Iraq and Iran. This makes Kurdistan a region of incredible geopolitical importance in the Middle East and a site of constant conflict among different local and international powers. During the different regimes that have ruled Syria since its formation, the Kurdish people have faced discrimination and violence of many kinds and have never been seen as true citizens of Syria. In fact from 1962 to 2011 they were denied birth certificates, essentially rendering them “foreign” or “unregistered” under the eyes of the state. This is just an example of the discrimination and abuse faced by Kurds for years.

During the «Arab Spring» that swept the Middle East in 2011 (it would be more accurate to call it the “People’s Spring”, as many different peoples took part in it), the people in Syria rose up against the regime of then-dictator Bashar al-Assad. Initially there were many democratic and even leftist elements among them. But different international powers such as Britain had been planning for years to reshape the balance of power in the Middle East in their favour. This included overthrowing the al-Assad regime and replacing it with a government more friendly to the West (like they did in most other countries at this time). To accomplish this they supported different factions of radical Islamist groups, with which the West had been cultivating ties since they times they had been used to fight against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Other regional states, like Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also provided support

for different groups, aligning themselves with the West but sometimes also pursuing their own opposing agendas.

Thanks to this support, these Islamist groups ended up monopolizing the so-called «Syrian opposition». At first the situation of the regime was weak and many predicted it would quickly fall. But Russia still saw it as an ally against the increasing influence of the West in the Middle East, so in 2015 it propped it up and allowed it to stay in power. At the same time the opposition had the backing of external powers to train them and arm them, so they were also not immediately defeated. In consequence the country devolved into a bloody civil war that lasted more than 13 years and created one of the biggest humanitarian crisis of modern times.

The exception to this was the Kurdish region of Rojava. Since the 80s the Kurdish people in Rojava had been organized by the PKK. The PKK (the Kurdistan Worker’s Party) was a Kurdish political party created in Bakur (the part of Kurdistan within Turkey) in 1978 by Abdullah Ocalan and other Kurdish and Turkish militants to pursue the liberation of Kurdistan. Although initially a Marxist-Leninist organization that pursued national liberation through guerrilla warfare, since the 90s it had slowly changed its ideology, adopting a form of socialism known as «Democratic Socialism». This model does not seek to create a separate nation-state nor to destroy the existing ones; but instead it organizes society outside of the state at every level to achieve its rights and demands in a peaceful manner while only defending itself when attacked. Its main pillars are communal radical democracy, women’s liberation and communal eco-industry. The PKK and its ideology also had a great influence on Rojava and was widely supported, with different underground committees and self-defense units being organized since at least 2004 by the PYD, a Kurdish party created in Rojava following the same ideology as the PKK. So when

the uprising started in Syria and the forces of the regime were weakened, the Kurdish people seized the opportunity and declared their «autonomy» from the state, not fully separating themselves from it but creating structures of self-governance and self-defense following their ideology. This is what is known as the Rojava Revolution. Its political self-administration eventually came to be known as the AANES (later DAANES or Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria), which comprised not only the Kurdish region of Rojava but also majority-Arab regions that were incorporated into the administration after they were liberated from ISIS. While still facing war and isolation, the region of DAANES enjoyed a relative peace and stability for all ethnicities and religions living inside of it thanks to its confederal and pluralistic system of political organization. Women for the first time secured their rights and were able to fully participate in social and political life. They did this by leading the fight in every aspect of the revolution, from the military to the ideological. This is why the creation of the military unit of the YPJ, composed entirely and lead by women, made headlines everywhere and made the revolution become known all through the world as the first “Women’s Revolution”.

WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH ISIS?

The other main thing Rojava is known for is for being the main actor in the defeat of ISIS. Although the origin of ISIS is subject to discussion, it is clear that they were a project supported by different state-powers and intelligence agencies to pursue their agendas in the Middle East. Among them, most likely the UK, the USA, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were involved. The group officially organized themselves in Iraq out of remnants of the national army after it collapsed following the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003. But much of its leadership was composed of operatives that had been trained and prepared by the West for years. Subsequently, fighters from all around the world were recruited using the internet and a complex international network of Islamist organizations. They were then smuggled into the region with the help of countries like Turkey, trained militarily and ideologically in special camps, armed with heavy weaponry and given different drugs like Captagon to turn them into ruthless and emotionless fighters. And every one of their attacks was accompanied with a highly sophisticated propaganda campaign on digital media to recruit new fighters and spread fear everywhere they went. All of this was a highly professional and organized operation which could not have happened without years of preparation and the support of different state powers.

In consequence, when ISIS came to Syria in 2014 they expanded rapidly, with no force able or willing to oppose them. They created the capital of their caliphate in Raqqa, the place where the video of the flag is from. But then, despite having the chance to go to Damascus and take the capital of the country practically unopposed, they

suddenly changed course and attacked the Kurdish areas. This is probably a consequence of Turkey's influence. Turkey was a long-time opponent of the Kurdish liberation movement and saw the Rojava Revolution as a big threat. It feared that it would spread over the border and inspire Kurdish people in Turkey too.

Surrounded everywhere by both ISIS and Turkey and with little external help, many feared that the young Rojava Revolution would be rapidly crushed. Indeed ISIS quickly swept over the countryside like a black cloud. But in the battle of Kobanê (a small Kurdish city in Rojava) the Kurdish forces put on a fierce resistance, fighting street by street and house by house on a siege that lasted 6 months. And after great sacrifices, on the 27th of January of 2015 the city of Kobanê was finally liberated. Thus the first significant defeat to ISIS was dealt by the Kurds.

In that moment the USA, which until then was mostly watching from the sidelines to see who would come on top, suddenly came to the support of the Kurds and started providing them with aerial support. Presumably they feared they would lose their influence in the region if they didn't intervene. And at this point it was becoming clear that factions within ISIS were escaping the control of the West and had started to pursue the independent agenda of regional powers like Turkey, Qatar and Pakistan. And thus the «International Coalition» to fight against ISIS was created and the USA entered into an uneasy tactical alliance with the nascent Kurdish-led project.

WHEN DID THE CURRENT CONFLICT START?

Now moving forward to 2024, ISIS had been basically defeated by the SDF (the multi-ethnic military force created because of the expansion of the Rojava Revolution from its initial borders into majority-Arab regions) and its main surviving cadres are imprisoned. In this moment there was a delicate balance between the different forces present in Syria: the al-Assad regime on one side, the different factions of the "Syrian Opposition" on the other, and the SDF as a third alternative refusing to get involved in the bloody war but pursuing its own project. And each of them with different international powers backing them and maintaining this balance.

But at the same time there is different things happening around the world and in the region that are quickly changing the balance of power: First, the war in Ukraine has taken a lot of the attention and resources from Russia. Second, the offensive carried out by Israel since the 7th of October weakened many of the other allies of the Assad regime, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, and dissuaded others like Iran from getting involved. And third and final, the Trump administration, which was less interested in continuing its involvement in the Ukraine war, came into power again in the USA. These three factors finally broke the equilibrium upon which the status quo in Syria was resting. At this point, either a deal was struck between the USA and Russia or it simply became too costly for the latter to continue supporting the Assad regime. Either way, at the end of 2024 all the militias from the opposition are

mobilized against the regime and, through the collaboration of elements inside the government's structures that most likely had been infiltrating it for years, the government falls in a matter of weeks with almost no fighting after more than a decade of civil war.

And who is chosen to replace it? Ahmed al-Sharaa, previously known as al-Jolani, a Sunni Islamist and leader of the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, which latter re-branded itself as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. Since 2016 he had officially cut ties with al-Qaeda and abandoned the call for a "global jihad", limiting its aspirations to the Syrian context. But this was just a re-branding strategy to gain the support of the West, which since the al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11 has been trying to replace their radical Islamist operatives and promote a «moderate Islam» alternative. Even though in practice there has not been much difference between the two. And al-Sharaa is just one of the figures who accepted to work with them and in consequence was trained and prepared to take the position of al-Assad. This is why there was such a smooth transition after he took power, donning a modern look with suit and tie in his interview with the BBC, which served as a carefully curated operation aimed at legitimating the new regime even when al-Sharaa and many of his subordinates and allies were being decried as terrorists by the West just a few years earlier.

After this happened, then came a period of «negotiations» between the new self-appointed "transitional government" in Damascus and the DAANES/SDF. The latter wanted to integrate into the new administration while retaining its autonomy to pursue its own political and social project and in fact proposing it as an example in which different peoples and religions could live together under a new decentralized, pluralistic Syria. The former sought to impose a centralist Arab state that follows its Islamist ideology. So as one can imagine the

negotiations were difficult. And in the interim several massacres took place against other minority populations in Syria, such as of the Druze and the Alawite. In effect Damascus wanted to neutralize other possible obstacles for its centralist regime, as they prepared to deal with the SDF. Despite this, an agreement was reached between the two on March 10, 2025 with the mediation of the USA. But behind the curtains there were many forces working to undermine any attempt at protecting the gains gained by the Kurds and the DAANES.

Finally, at the end of 2025, the negotiations completely broke down. Damascus did not respect anymore the previous agreement and moved to attack the regions of the DAANES. Through their press and media they made a display of quick successes, going from village to village committing massacres against civil population, women and children. They also activated some Arab tribes, that had been organized in the last years with the help of Turkey, in order to attack their neighbors in Kurdish areas. They capitalized on the political and economic interests of Arab elites, their rejection of the women's freedom ideology and on nationalist tendencies that never accepted the democratic administration of co-existence promoted by the DAANES, despite many attempts to include them on equal terms over the years. But more importantly, in the al-Jolani administration, being backed by the West, they saw the opportunity to become citizens of an internationally recognized state, overcoming the embargo and isolation to which both Baathist Syria and the Autonomous Administration had been subjected to for years. And in this way, to establish again a centralized system of power in which Arab elites could profit as collaborators of the state. So once again al-Jolani was able to win not so much through military force but by taking advantage of internal division among his opponents and using the support of the West. As a result, most of the

Arab-majority areas previously held by the DAANES are now in the hands of the Damascus Islamist regime.

But it would not be accurate to say that there is widespread animosity among the Arab people towards the DAANES or towards the Kurds, despite what the narratives spread by the government are trying to portray. The constant conflicts and protests that are happening in those areas since the Damascus regime took over show that the reality is more complicated than what they show through their press channels. The dissatisfaction of a big amount of Arab population towards the administrative system of the current Islamist regime reveals the deep conflicts inherent to the relationship between the highly autonomous Arab tribes and the centralist Syrian state that is being build. If anything, the decentralized DAANES model had been much more successful at navigating these tensions, which are now once again resurfacing.

It is also worth saying that during their attacks, the new regime and its affiliated gangs have unleashed a wave of violence that recalls that of ISIS. And similarly it has been accompanied by a huge disinformation campaign to justify it and hide their atrocities. These parallels are not incidental. In fact, when the SDF lost control of the prisons in which the ISIS militants were being held, many of them were liberated and started to immediately reorganize themselves and commit massacres. This led to the famous video of the ISIS flag over Raqqa with which we started this article.

WHY ARE THE WESTERN POWERS NOT HELPING?

It is said that the USA is allowing this to happen because they plan to bring these ISIS militants to fight against Iran-aligned militias in Iraq. In fact, the majority of them have been transported there already. The Syrian government has equally sworn to support them in this. It has also been reported that one of the reasons the USA withdraw their support from the SDF is because the Kurdish leadership refused to support them in this conflict.

Ultimately, the USA wants to reduce its direct involvement in the Middle East so they can concentrate on reinforcing their grip over the American continent (the recent kidnapping of Maduro in Venezuela is an example of this) while promoting ideologically-aligned (aka fascist, nationalist and authoritarian but still integrated with Western global capital) regional partners in other parts of the world. Their objective is to diminish the conflicts in which they are directly involved without giving up areas of influences, important trade routes and access to rare minerals critical for the current technological race. On the long-term they want to decouple from China's economy, on which they have become highly dependent in manufacture, finance and technologies that power most of the modern economic expansion. They see the Asian giant as their main opponent and they are preparing themselves to confront them in the future in order to maintain their position as the main global superpower. In the Middle East, they are getting rid of whatever opposition is left and supporting regional partners aligned

with them to oversee it. Israel will become representative of the West and main hegemon in the region, the role for which they have been preparing since its foundation. And Western-aligned Arab states like Saudi-Arabia and the developing Al-Jolani regime will be its collaborators, as symbolized by the signing of the Abraham Accords. The rhetoric of “importing democracy” into the region through direct military presence has been abandoned, seeking instead to create reliable partners willing to support the West against their enemies and integrate into the global chain of production centered around the dollar and backed by petroleum. Islamist and authoritarian rule, as long as its open to Western capital, are tolerated and even encouraged, since anyway it mirrors the model that Trump and the Republican party is building at home. This why, after Syria, now the time has come for Iran to go through regime change. All its main partners in Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq have been eliminated or weakened one by one. Following this, Turkey may also be on the chopping line if they don't give up their expansionist neo-Ottoman policies and resign themselves to play a secondary role in the region under Israel's supervision.

Britain, even though they prefer not to shine light on their role in all of this, has a hand in everything that is taking place. They have years of experience, connections and preparation in the region which even the USA lacks, which they developed since the 19th century to weaken the Ottoman Empire and that continues until now. And they control a network of “tax heavens” in Overseas Territory that allows them to unofficially harbor and funnel money to and from different organizations and states as needed. This makes them the main “brain” and facilitator behind any development in the Middle East. The fact that the UK was among the first Western governments to lift sanctions against the new Syrian regime is an indication that they played a central role in brin-

ging it to power in the first place.

Israel for its part is wary of the Islamist government of al-Sharaa and doesn't want ISIS to spread again. This is why as soon as it came to power, Israel carried out a massive bombing operation to completely destroy the military capabilities of the Syrian army. But it is known that before the attack against the DAANES started, Israeli and Syrian leaders met in Paris for US-sponsored talks. In them, the Israel government was given assurances that the Syrian regime would not be a threat to them in the way that the previous regime was. This is another sign of the new Syrian regime acquiescence to Israel, following the erasure of the until-then contested area of the Golah Heights from Syrian maps just a month previous. So it is understood that the attack started with the tacit support of Israel too. Nevertheless, they may still be willing to collaborate with the Kurds, but only on the condition that they give up on their socialist ideology and become a classical nationalist ethnic movement under its protection.

Other Western powers, such as France, have made their intention of supporting the new Syrian regime clear. Recent Whatsapp chats between Macron and Trump, leaked by Trump himself, show that the French president is “totally in line on Syria”, demonstrating that they are willing to sacrifice the Kurds as an attempt to dissuade the Americans from taking over Greenland. Germany has deep economic and political ties with Turkey and has been at the forefront of Kurdish repression in Europe since the 90s, so no help will be coming from them either. And neither China nor Russia would gain anything from intervening. No, the self-organized people in North-East Syria can't count on any guarantee of the state power to help them out of the goodness of their heart.

SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Although the al-Sharaa faction has some ideological differences with ISIS, which has caused conflict among them in the past, it is clear that they are much more willing to work with them than with the DAANES. At least they are very happy to unleash them upon their enemies, both in Syria and Iraq, presuming they will be able to deal with them once they have done their dirty work. Whether this actually materializes or ISIS will be able to reestablish itself in the region is hard to say at this point. But in the end, both the Damascus government and ISIS are seeking to establish an Islamist regime that will only bring more suffering to the people of the region. So anyone who hopes for peace and stability in the Middle East (and by extension, in the world) should not see much difference between the two, if there is any at all at this point.

But. The Rojava Revolution is not over yet. The forces of the SDF have retreated into the majority-Kurdish areas (Rojava) and have declared that they will fight until death if necessary to defend themselves and protect the gains of the revolution. So far they have successfully repelled all the attacks in their main strongholds. And, as we speak, there are hundreds of people who are crossing the borders to reach Rojava and join the fight. There has even been a caravan organized to travel from different parts of Europe all the way to Rojava to support it. At the same time, many actions and protests are taking place all around the world in solidarity. So, although it is fair to say that the vision of a peaceful and united Middle East, exemplified by the Rojava Revolution, has been gravely wounded, it is far from dead. It has been the target of a conspiracy between Western

powers, local authoritarian nation-states and their Islamist collaborators. But what we are witnessing can't be reduced to the result of geopolitical calculations or ethnic and religious conflicts. Nor it's the result of the failure of the ideology of the DAANES, which despite limitations in its implementation continues to be the most successful model for the region. At its core, this attack must be seen as a counterrevolutionary process explicitly aimed at dismantling the social gains achieved in North and East Syria and to stop it from becoming an example for the whole region which could threaten imperialist and authoritarians interests.

Furthermore, following what has happened, it's not hard to see that this was also an attack against the women's revolution and the women's achievements of freedom. In fact, the most vicious attacks were against young women, which form the moral and ideological vanguard of the revolution. The body of Deniz Çiya, a young woman who was part of the Internal Security Forces of the neighborhoods of Asrafiye and Sheik Maqsoud in the city of Aleppo (the targets of the first attack), which was thrown down a building by the Islamist gangs of the Damascus regime while recording it and sharing it on digital media, is an example of this. But also the destruction in Tabqa of the statue of Rojbin Arab, a young Arab female that fought against ISIS. There is also numerous videos of young women being sold to rich Islamist men, just as it happened during the time of ISIS. And finally, the video of an Islamist militia-man showing the braid of a women fighter that he had previously massacred as a trophy is the maximum expression of what clearly is a direct attack on the women's revolution.

But what this gangs affiliated with the Damascus regime did not expect is that all over the world people stood up against these atrocities, with hundred of women

braiding their hair to show solidarity with the Kurdish women, leading to widespread condemnation. Due to the wave of support after the attacks started, together with the fierce resistance of the people, the Damascus government announced a 4 days cease-fire, which was later extended. A new agreement has now been reached which is supposed to protect a lot of the autonomy achieved in the Kurdish regions as they integrate with the Syrian government. This shows that they are vulnerable to the pressure and want to preserve their moderate image towards the West. This is why the best ally for the revolution is the support of grassroots initiatives

from all around the world to put pressure on the Syrian regime and every other country involved in the conflict to stop the violence. So we call on everyone to follow what is happening and support Rojava in any way they can. If we organize and take action to protect this revolution, we can contribute to guarantee its resistance and continuity. Because at this crucial moment, not only the fate of the Kurds and other peoples in North and East of Syria is at stake. But also the hope for a peaceful, democratic and united Middle East which could become the first step towards a better world for all of us.





Follow and write to us:

legerinkovar@protonmail.com

www.revistalegerin.com

instagram: [@legerin.official](https://www.instagram.com/legerin.official)

telegram: t.me/legerinmagazine

and visit riseup4rojava.org to see what you can do to support!