

# Challenges to Stability Assistance in Rojava

## *A United States Policy Option*

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# Agenda

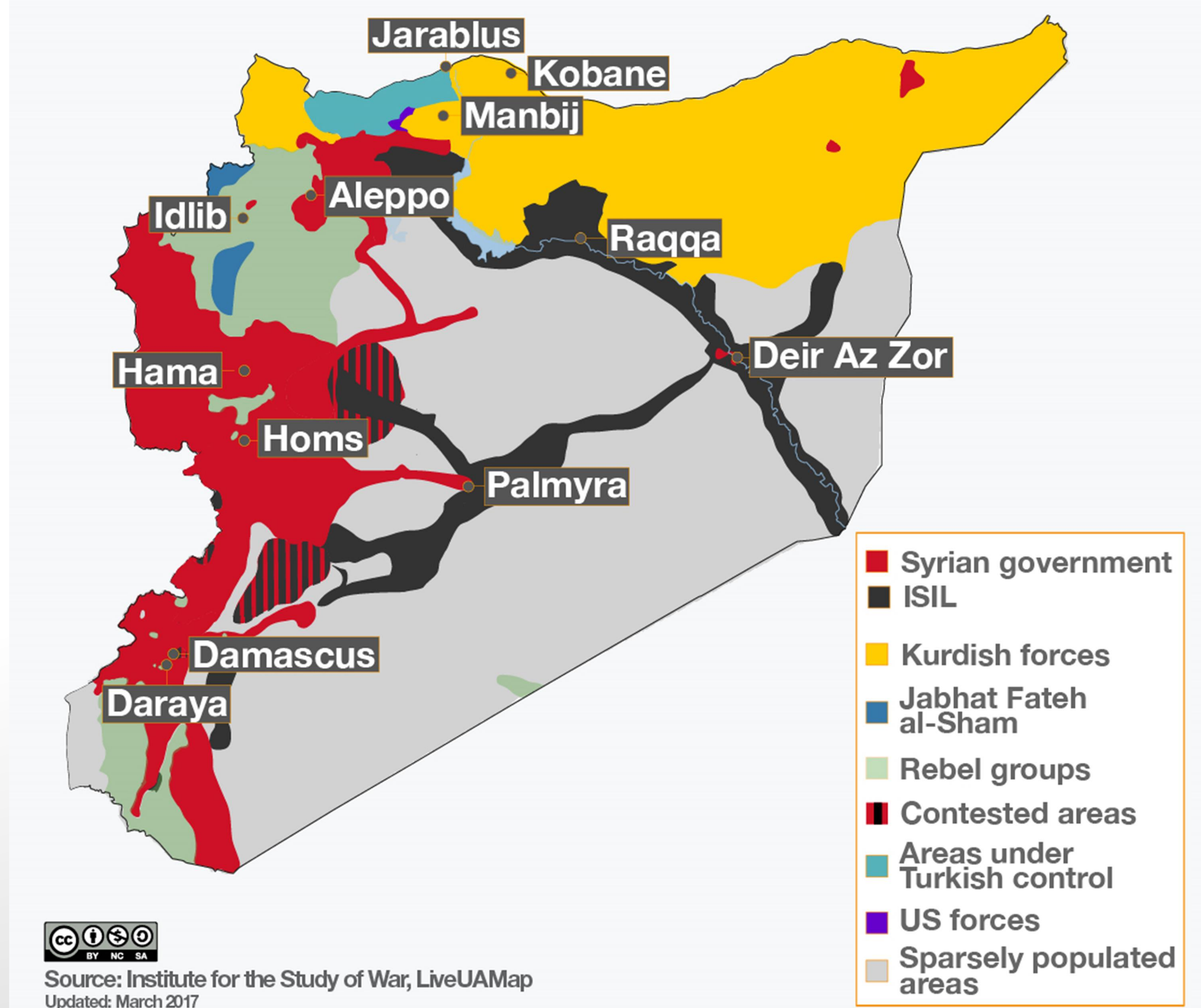
- Why is Rojava important?
- Research Methodology
- Defining Rojava
- Problems with the Rojava relationship
- Stakeholder Analysis
- U.S. – Kurdish relationships
- Stabilization needs
- Challenges to stabilization
- Potential Policy Road Map
- Conclusion

# Why is Rojava important?

- Rojava is one of the few internal stakeholders open to international support for reconstruction
- An opportunity to shape Syria and the region that supports U.S. goals
- Pro-western population with influence over the future of Syria
- Secure area within Syria that prevents further refugee flow



## Syria: Who controls what?



# Rojava and the SDF

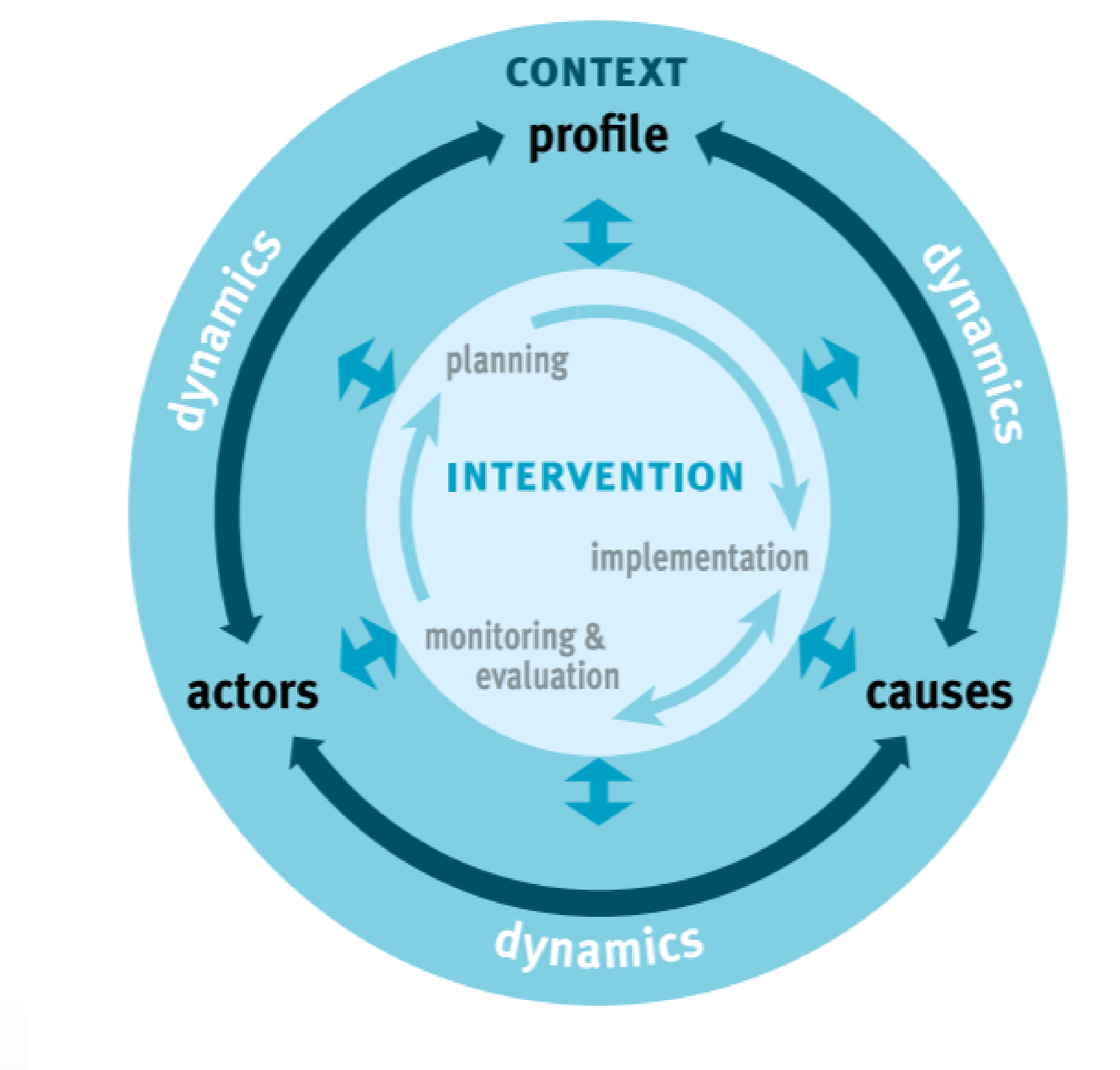
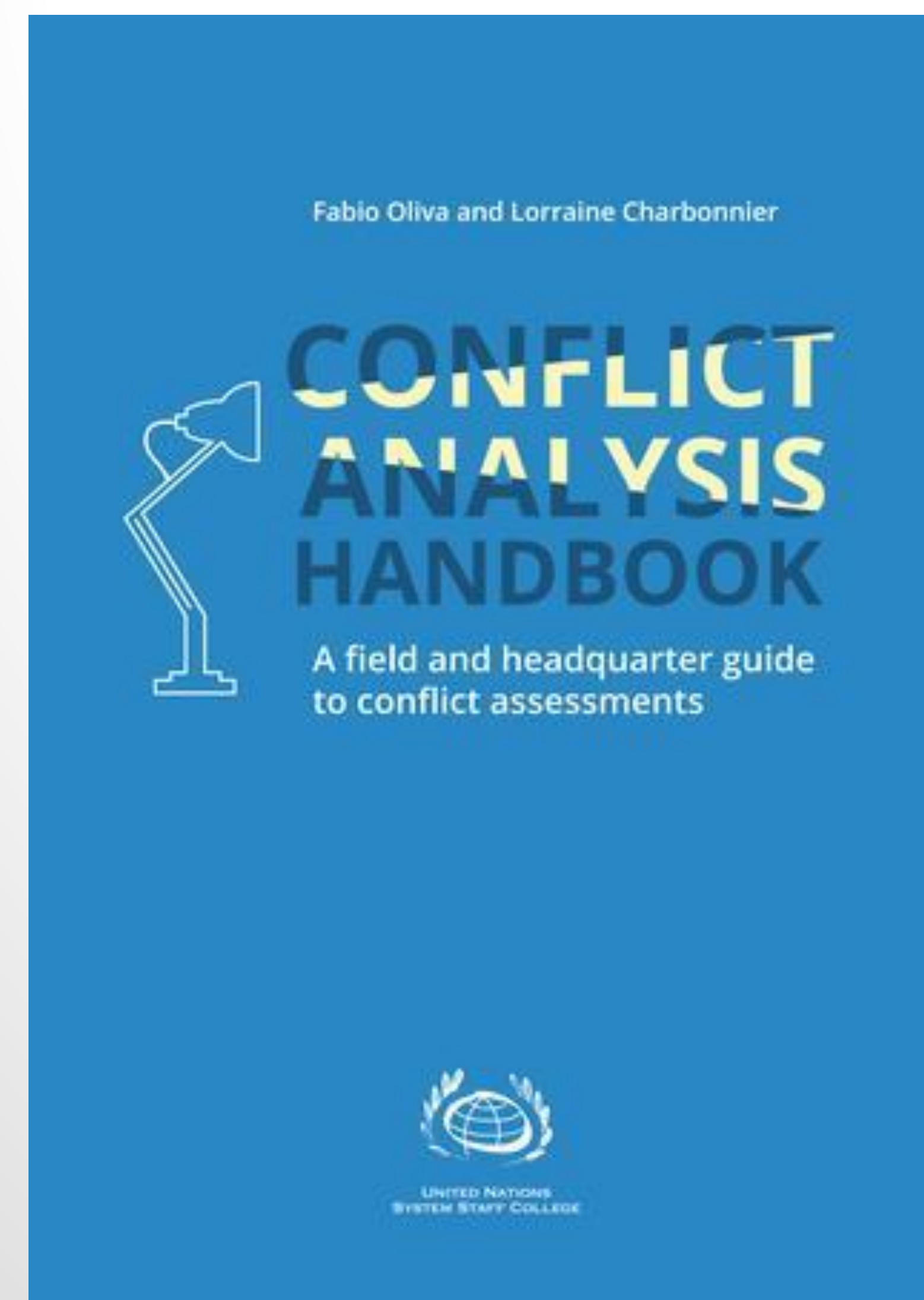
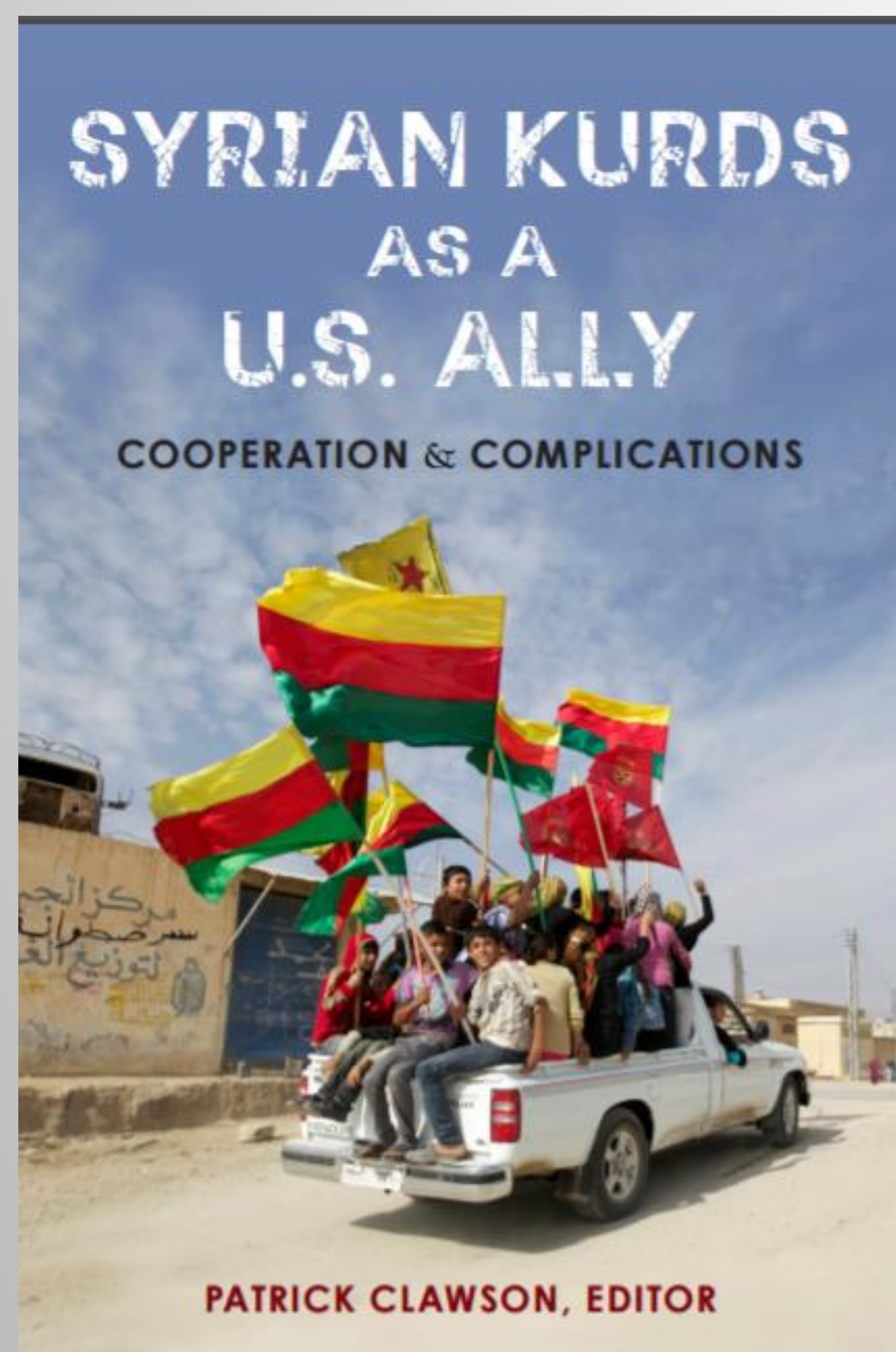


U.S. Coalition best counter-ISIS surrogate in Syria



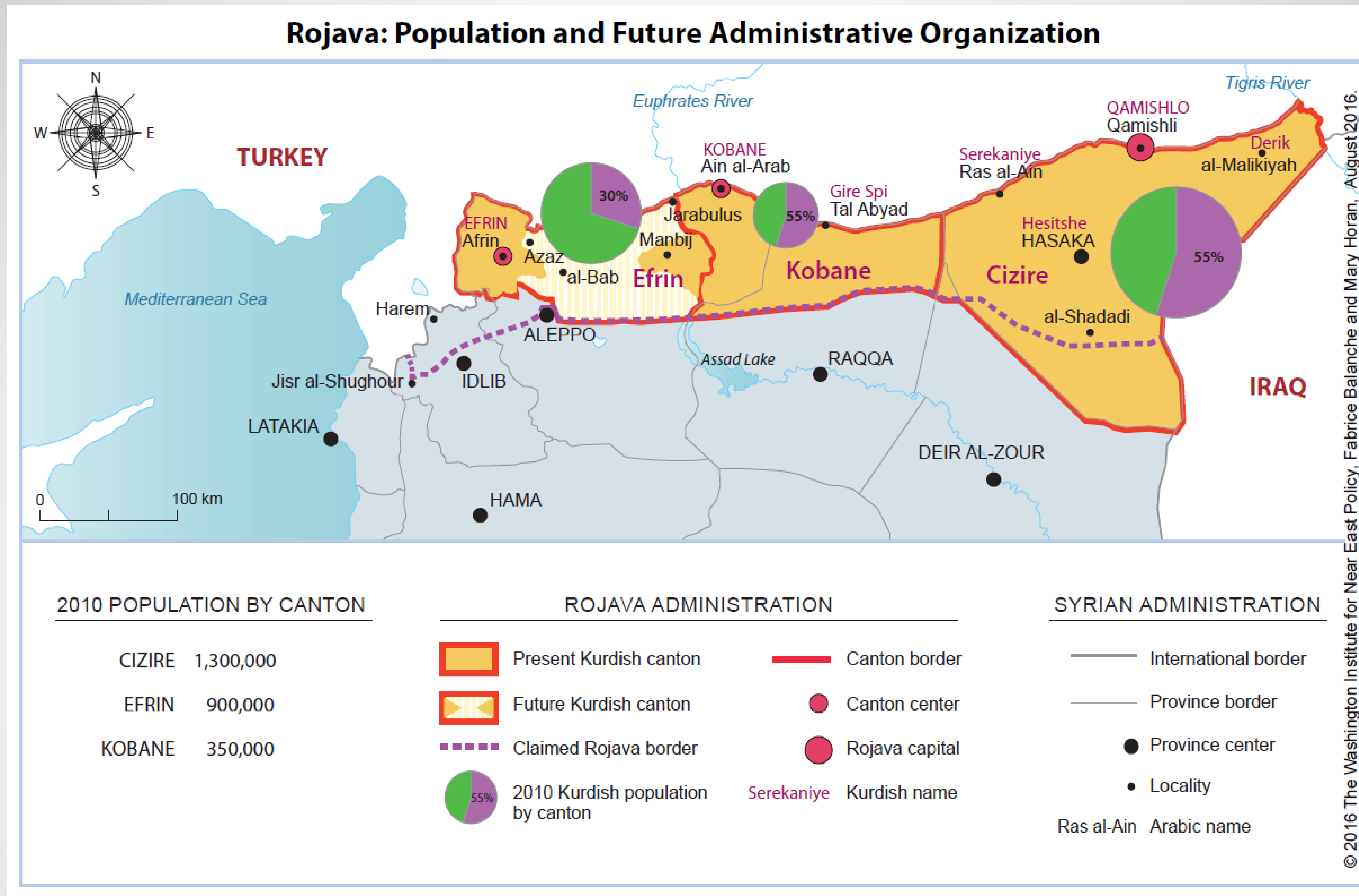
# Research Methodology

- Extensive literature review of Kurdish regional history, the Syrian civil war, the rise of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and establishment of Rojava
- In-depth analysis of the stakeholders and powerbrokers in Northern Syria utilizing the UN model of conflict analysis.
- Monitored current events and the news to track the evolution of Rojava and interaction with the stakeholders
- Researched challenges of providing stability assistance, and utilized additional tools from the UN conflict analysis framework. These tools highlighted potential areas of difficulty in the direct application of stability and humanitarian assistance in Rojava.





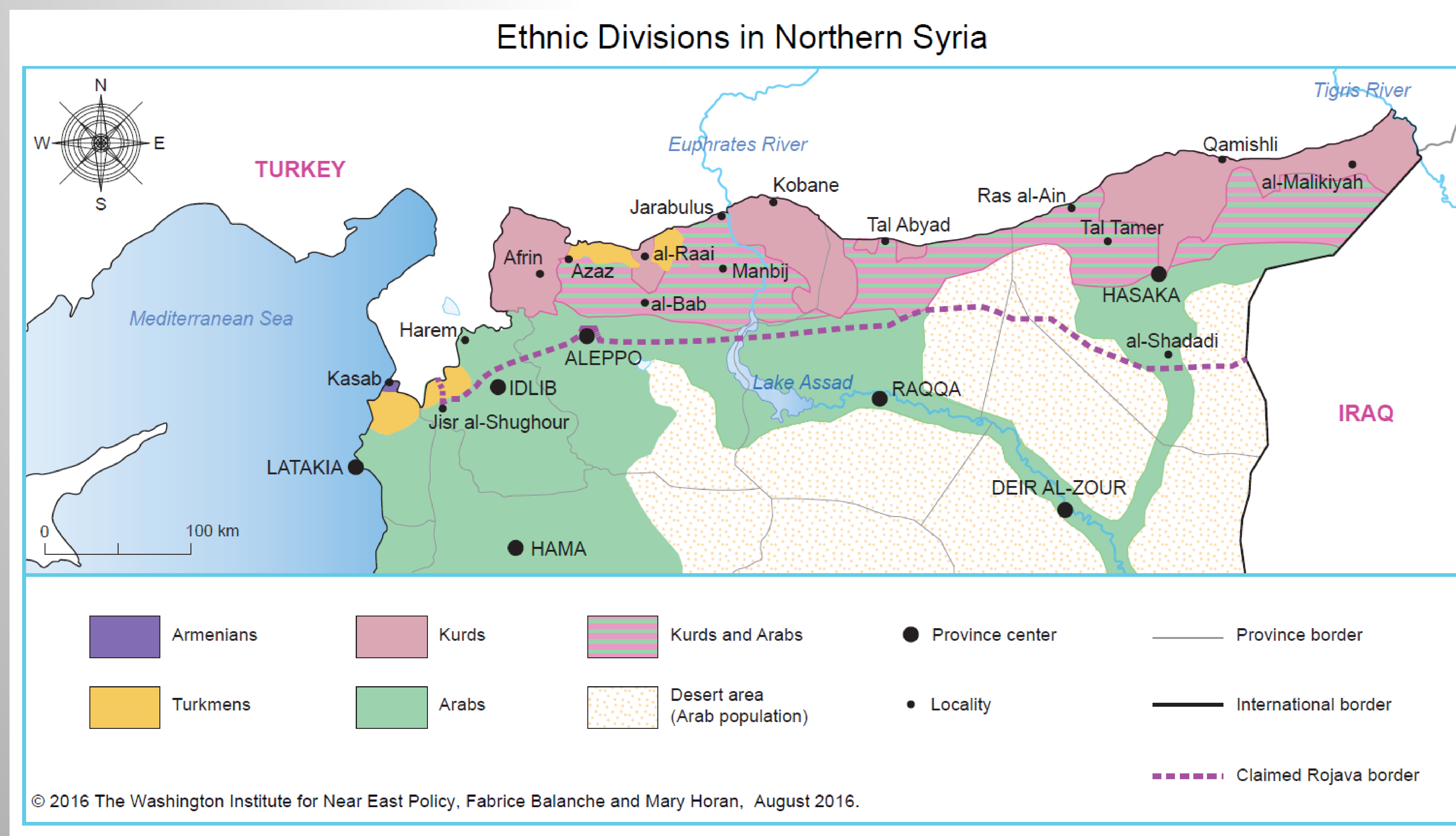
# What is Rojava?



- A de-facto semi-autonomous region liberated from ISIS by the Syrian Democratic Forces
- Led by TEV-DEM political coalition with a majority Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)
- Federalist form of government centered local councils and assemblies

# Why Not Rojava?

- The PKK is the problem
- Threatens strategic US-Turkey-NATO alliance
- Syrian Kurds represent a small 10% of Syrian population
- Russia-Kurdish relationship



# Stakeholders



## Internal

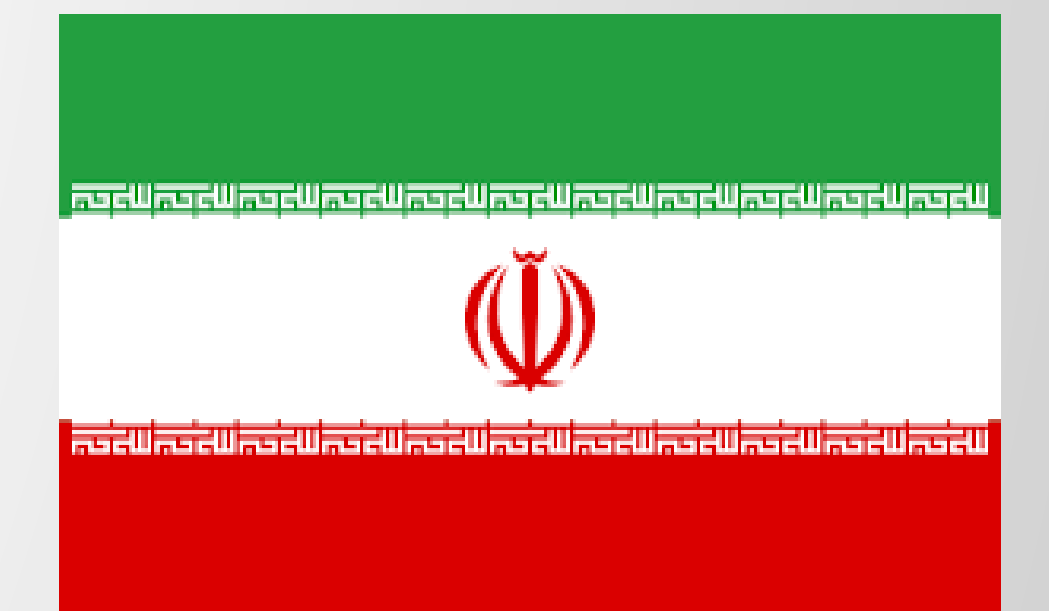
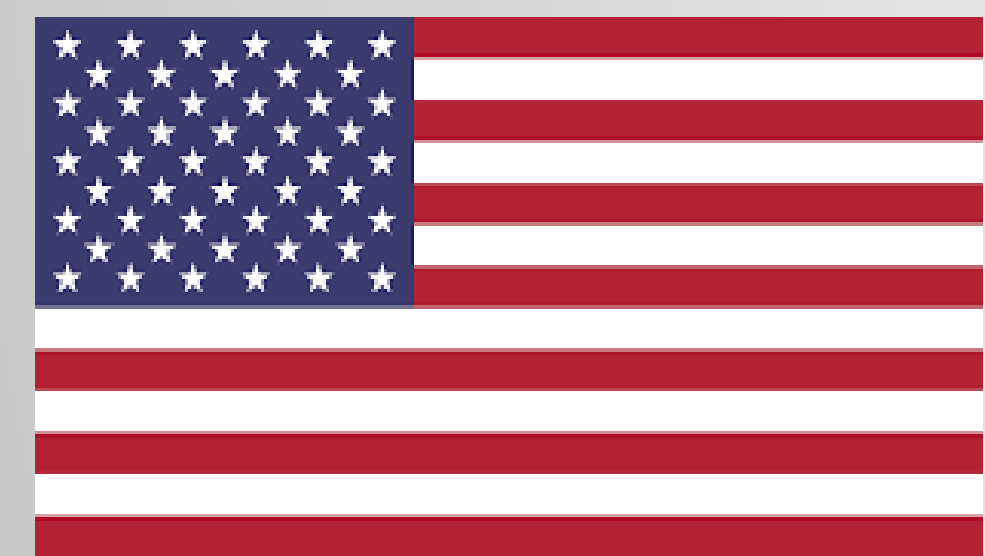
### **Syrian Arab Opposition**

Transnational Salafi Jihadist  
National Salafi Jihadist  
Political Islamist  
Secularist

### **Rojava (Syrian Democratic Forces)**

Democratic Union Party (PYD)  
Syriac Military Council  
Luna Thuwar Al-Raqqah (Raqqah  
Revolutionary Brigade)  
Syria' s Tomorrow  
Jaysh Al-Thuwar (Army of Revolutionaries)  
Arab Tribes

### **Assad Regime**



## External

US (and European Allies)  
Turkey  
Russia  
Kurdistan Regional Government  
(Iraqi Kurds)  
PKK  
Iran (Hezbollah)

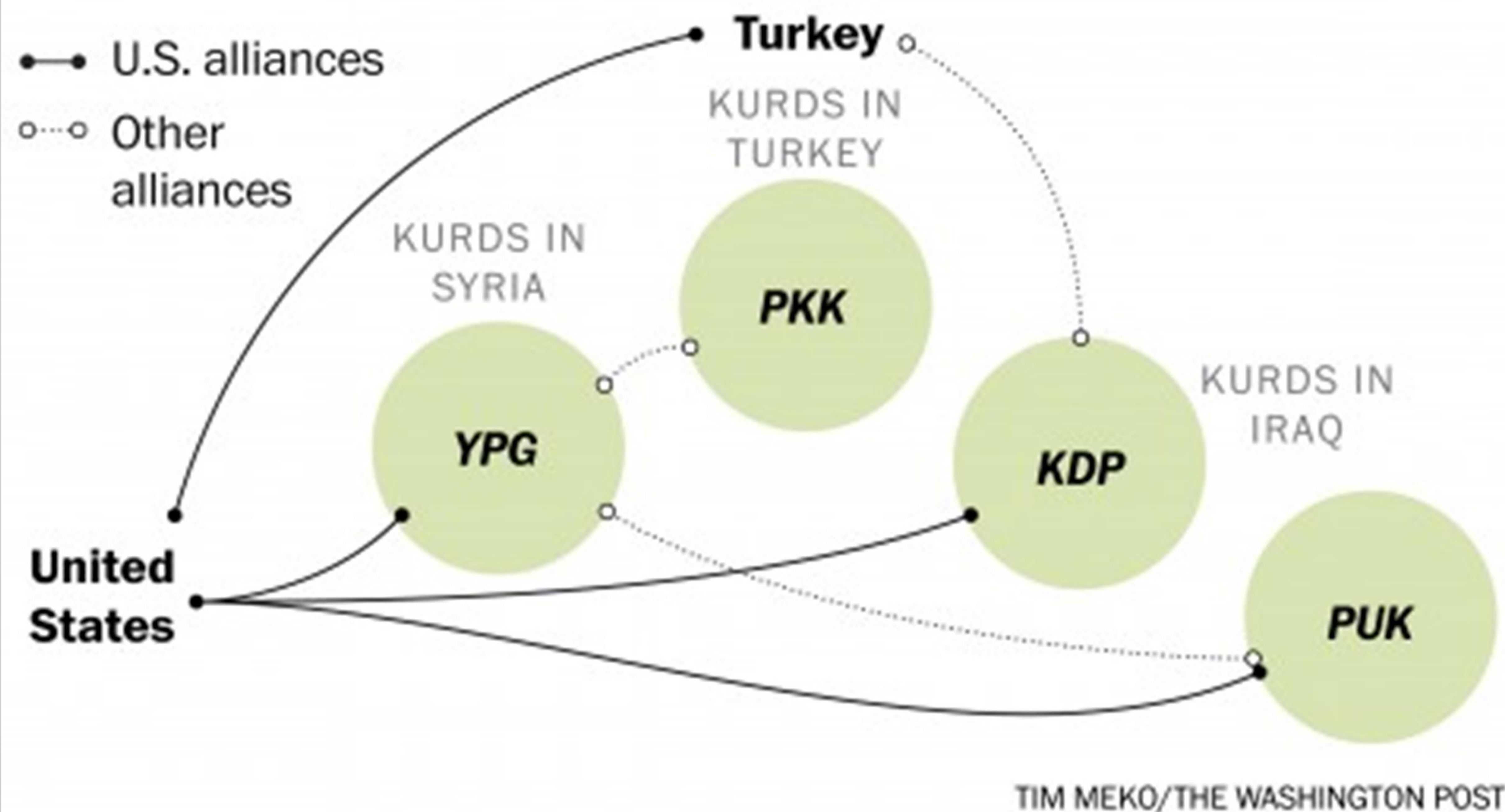
Saudi Arabia  
United Arab Emirates  
Qatar  
Jordan  
Egypt  
Iraq



# Kurdish Stakeholders

## Conflicting Kurdish allegiance

The United States is supporting the region's Kurdish groups as well as Turkey in the fight against the Islamic State.



- All Kurds are not the same
- Why does it matter?
- The U.S. has different leverage with each group

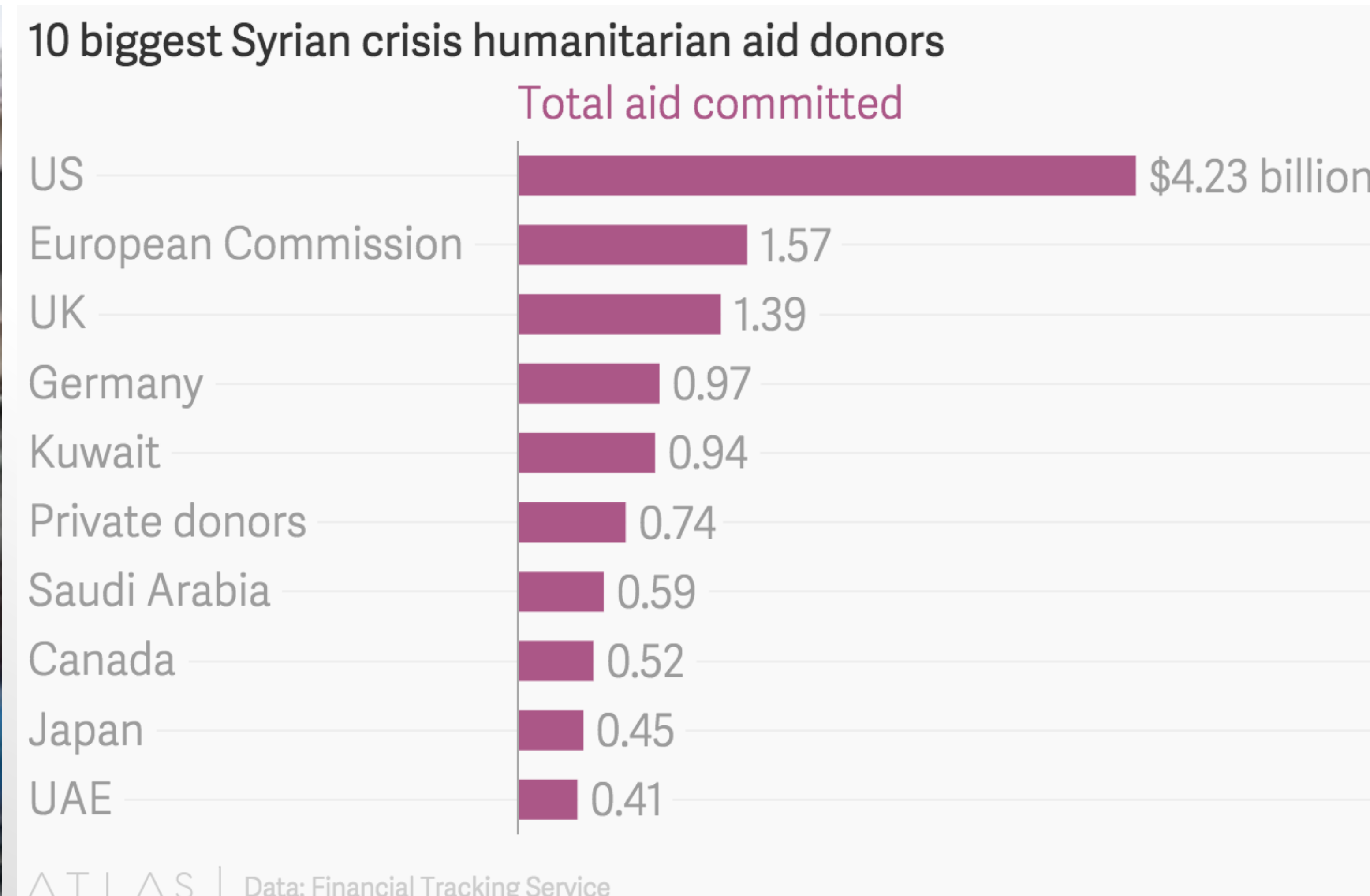
# What to Stabilize?

- Governance – Legitimacy
- Economic:
  - significant losses to agrarian economy: 50% of live stock killed/ 10% farm machinery remaining
  - Turkish and KRG economic embargo having significant effects
  - Oil resources are the main source of income but woefully short of economic needs for reconstruction. Only currently using 20% of the oil resources due to embargo and infrastructure
- Humanitarian Assistance
  - Significant damage in major cities from ISIS and war. Kobane reconstruction alone is estimated at \$6 Billion



# Challenges to Stabilization

- The Syrian Identity is widely contested between the main stream opposition, Rojava supporters, the Assad Regime and key international actors.
- Sharply divergent “visions” of Syria’ s future:
  - a united democratic country maintaining territorial integrity
  - a federated country with self-autonomy for ethnic groups
  - status quo
  - something else?
- International intervention equals opportunity, but with risks and cost



# KRG – Turkey relationship

## A possible roadmap?



- Turkey fearful Iraqi Kurds quest for independence, supported the Iraqi regimes efforts to quell the Kurdish uprising in the 1960s and following decades
- Economic Interest and stability provided by the U.S. presence and influence created a stable environment for Iraqi Kurdish growth
- Turkey changes its views of the Iraqi Kurds over the past 15 years from an existential threat to an important economic and security partner

# Conclusions

- Someone will rebuild and redefine Syria. We can choose to watch or choose to get in the game.
- Foreign aid is a tool for influence and instrument of foreign policy. The U.S. is already the top donor for aid in Syria. We should not limit it to humanitarian aid.
- Stability assistance for Rojava will support U.S. influence in Syria for the future.

