

MAPPING OF KURDISH GROUPS AND FORCES IN EASTERN KURDISTAN

Noor Omer | March 30, 2026



Kurdish National Political Movements in Eastern Kurdistan

Kurdish national political movements in Eastern Kurdistan, also called “Rojhalat” in Iran have re-emerged as strategically relevant actors in the context of escalating regional conflict, not because of their internal strength, but because of the shifting balance between external pressure and state vulnerability. Kurdish parties from Eastern Kurdistan are primarily exiled opposition groups based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where some are known for advocating for Kurdish autonomy or secession from Iran. These actors do not operate in isolation, nor do they function as unified opposition. They exist within a constrained political space, one that has been shaped over decades through confrontation, division, and containment.

More importantly, the current moment, fueled by the Iran–US/Israel confrontation/war and the broader instability it produces, has created an opening in which Kurdish forces and groups attempt to reposition themselves. Yet this repositioning does not erase the structural conditions that have historically limited their unity, political stance, and overall coherence. The multiplicity of parties, competing ideological frameworks, and divided leadership structures are not simply the result of internal disagreements but reflect a longer trajectory in which division has become embedded in the political nature of Iran itself.

To understand the current positioning of these groups, this paper provides an overview of the main Kurdish political and armed actors in Eastern Kurdistan, outlining their historical development, ideological orientations, leadership structures, and areas of influence, while also highlighting recent developments in coordination and emerging political alignments.

Core Kurdish Political Actors

The primary Kurdish political actors in Eastern Kurdistan consist of several established opposition parties and movements, many of which operate in exile from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These groups differ in their historical origins, ideological orientations, and organizational structures but

collectively represent the main Kurdish opposition and political stance in Eastern Kurdistan, Iran, as shown in Table 1.

Party	Historical Background	Ideology / Political Vision	Leadership	Power Base / Area of Influence
Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI / PDKI)	Founded in 1945 in Mahabad. It assumed a central role in the Republic of Mahabad (1946) and led insurgency after the 1979 revolution	Kurdish nationalism, federalism, democratic governance within Iran	Mustafa Hijri	Iraqi Kurdistan Region (exile bases) and underground networks in Eastern Kurdistan
Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Mohtadi faction)	Originated in the 1960s–70s as a Marxist movement. It was a key actor in post-1979 uprisings which later moderated	Originally Marxist-Leninist. And now social democracy and federalism	Abdullah Mohtadi	Iraqi Kurdistan Region. political networks inside Iran and diaspora
Komala - Communist Party of Iran (CPI faction)	Split from Komala during ideological fragmentation in the 1980s–90s	Marxist / communist ideology	Ibrahim Alizadeh	Iraqi Kurdistan Region, and has limited underground presence in Iran

Komala of the Toilers of Kurdistan	Breakaway faction reflecting internal splits within Komala	Leftist / socialist with Kurdish national framing	Reza Kaabi	Smaller exile-based presence
Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK)	Founded in 2004, with links to PKK ideological framework. It has active insurgent presence in northwest Iran	Democratic federalism, decentralized governance, and supports a “democratic nation”	Siamand Moini, and Zilan Vejîn	Mountains along Iran–Iraq border. It also has Qandil-linked networks
Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK)	Emerged in the 2000s, and participated in anti-ISIS operations in Iraq	Kurdish nationalism, and some factions support independence	Hussein Yazdanpanah	Military units in Iraqi Kurdistan and diaspora networks
Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle (Khabat)	Founded in 1980, and is rooted in Islamic Kurdish activism post-revolution	Kurdish nationalism with Islamic orientation	Baba Sheikh Hosseini	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
KDP–Iran (Moloudi faction)	Split from KDPI due to internal disputes	Kurdish nationalism and federalism	Mostafa Moloudi	Limited exile-based political presence

Table 1: Overview of Kurdish Political Actors in Eastern Kurdistan, Including Leadership, Ideology, and Areas of Influence. **Credit:** *The National Context, The National, Middle East Forum, Center for Terrorism and Counterterrorism.*



Logo of the Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan, founded on 22 February 2026.

Recent Developments :Kurdish Party Coordination

Recent developments indicate increased efforts toward coordination among Kurdish opposition groups in Eastern Kurdistan. The Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan (2026) represents a notable attempt to unify major Kurdish actors in response to heightened regional tensions and internal developments in Iran. Participating groups include KDPI, PJAK, Komala factions, PAK, and Khabat. Objectives of the Coalition include advancing Kurdish political rights and self-determination, increasing political and strategic coordination, and positioning Kurdish actors within a changing regional and domestic context.

The formation of the coalition coincides with broader anti-government protests in Iran, growing internal pressure on the state, and shifting regional security. While the initiative reflects an effort toward coordination, longstanding ideological and organizational divisions remain present among participating groups.

Historical Evolution of Kurdish Political Movements in Iran

1940s-1970s

- Emergence of organized nationalism
- Republic of Mahabad (1946)

Post-1979

- Kurdish uprising
- Conflict with Tehran
- KDPI & Komala dominant

1980s-1990s

- Internal conflict
- Increasing fragmentation

2000s-Present

- Emergence of PJAK
- Ideological diversity
- Shift toward federalism

The Iran Freedom Congress and Opposition Coordination

The Iran Freedom Congress, held in London on March 28–29, 2026, brought together a diverse range of Iranian opposition actors, including political figures, civil society representatives, and diaspora groups, with the aim of discussing potential pathways for political transition beyond the Islamic Republic. The initiative reflects an effort to establish a more coordinated and pluralistic opposition platform, built around shared principles such as democratic governance and political inclusion. At the same time, early reporting indicates that the Congress also exposed underlying tensions regarding representation and participation, highlighting the continued challenges of unifying a divided opposition environment.

Exclusion of PJAK: Representation and Fragmentation within the Opposition

Despite recent coordination efforts, divisions among Kurdish actors remain evident. The “Iran Freedom Congress” held in London (March 28–29) brought together various Iranian opposition groups to discuss potential political transition scenarios. The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) was excluded from participation in the London conference. PJAK-affiliated voices and statements criticized the decision, describing it as politically motivated and reflective of selective inclusion within the opposition framework.

The exclusion of PJAK highlights differing approaches among Iranian opposition actors regarding legitimacy, representation, and acceptable political participation. As an organization associated with armed activity and linked ideologically to the PKK network, PJAK occupies a distinct position within the Kurdish political ranks, which may contribute to its contested status among both Iranian opposition groups and external stakeholders.

This development highlights broader structural tensions within the opposition environment. While initiatives such as the Iran Freedom Congress seek to promote unity, they also reveal the persistence of fragmentation, competing political visions, and differing thresholds for inclusion. In this context, the exclusion of PJAK illustrates the challenges of constructing a cohesive opposition platform that accommodates diverse actors while maintaining political consensus.

Key Observations

The Kurdish political movement in Eastern Kurdistan is best understood as divided, ideologically diverse, and organizationally fragmented. Multiple actors operate across distinct political frameworks, including nationalist parties, leftist movements, transnational ideological groups, and militarized organizations, each with its own leadership structure and strategic orientation. These groups primarily function in exile from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with varying degrees of underground presence inside Iran. This external positioning shapes their operational capacity, limits direct political engagement within Iran, and reinforces their reliance on regional actors and external developments.

Recent efforts toward coordination, including the formation of the Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan, indicate a degree of convergence among these actors. However, longstanding divisions, rooted in ideological differences, historical rivalries, and organizational fragmentation, continue to influence the scope and sustainability of such cooperation. Overall, Kurdish political actors in Eastern Kurdistan operate within a diverse yet politically

charged environment shaped by internal divisions, external pressures, and shifting regional conditions. These factors continue to define both the opportunities for coordination and the limits of unified political action.

References

- Center for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (CTC) at West Point. 2020. *Iranian Kurdish Militias: Terrorist Insurgents, Ethno-Freedom Fighters, or Knights on the Regional Chessboard?* <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/iranian-kurdish-militias-terrorist-insurgents-ethno-freedom-fighters-or-knights-on-the-regional-chessboard/>
- Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. n.d. *Official Materials and Historical Background*.
- Iran International. 2026. *Iran says it hit Kurdish fighters near border, Iraqi Kurdish officials deny incursion*. [Iran says it hit Kurdish fighters near border, Iraqi Kurdish officials deny incursion | Iran International](#)
- IranWire. 2026. *What Do We Know about the Kurdish Parties Opposing the Islamic Republic?* <https://iranwire.com>.
- JINSA. 2026. *The Rise of Iran's Kurdish Coalition*. https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/the-rise-of-irans-kurdish-coalition/
- Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan. n.d. *Party History and Ideological Evolution*.
- Kurdish Peace Institute. 2026. *The Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan: Risks and Opportunities*. [The Coalition of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan: Risks and Opportunities – Kurdish Peace Institute](#)
- Kurdistan Free Life Party. n.d. *Organizational Overview and Leadership*.
- Kurdistan Freedom Party. n.d. *Political and Military Activities Overview*.
- Middle East Forum. 2026. *The Regime's Worst Nightmare: Iran's Opposition Unites*. https://www.meforum.org/press-releases/the-regimes-worst-nightmare-irans-opposition-unites?utm_source
- Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle. n.d. *Party Structure and Ideology*.

The Jerusalem Post. 2026. *Planning for Iran's 'pluralist future': Iran Freedom Conference plans for day after regime falls.* [Iran opposition convenes in London to plan governance | The Jerusalem Post](#)

The National. 2026. "Kurdish-Iranian Opposition Parties Form Alliance amid Tension and Protests in Iran." February 23, 2026. [https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2026/02/23/kurdish-iranian-opposition-parties-form-alliance-amid-tension-and-protests-in-iran.](https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2026/02/23/kurdish-iranian-opposition-parties-form-alliance-amid-tension-and-protests-in-iran)

The National News. 2026. *Rifts Show Ahead of Iran Opposition Conference in London.* <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/uk/2026/03/27/rifts-show-ahead-of-iran-opposition-conference-in-london/?utm>

The New Arab. 2026. "What Role Will Iran's Kurds Play as the War Expands?" March 5, 2026. [https://www.newarab.com/analysis/what-role-will-irans-kurds-play-war-expands.](https://www.newarab.com/analysis/what-role-will-irans-kurds-play-war-expands)



ABOUT

Nestled in the mountains of Sulaymaniyah, the Culture Capital of KRI, iNOV8 Research Center pioneers cutting-edge research and innovation. We aspire for excellence as an independent research center by providing valid, valuable, and timely products to the public. We deliver impactful solutions and contribute to our industry's vibrant and forward-thinking community.

MAPPING OF KURDISH GROUPS AND FORCES IN EASTERN KURDISTAN



CONTACT

CHANNEL8 BUILDING,
KURDSAT QTR., SULAYMANIYAH, IRAQ
+964-773-608-8885
CONTACT@INNOV8.KRD