

Accidental Allies:

The US–Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State

by [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights/\)](/experts/michael-knights/), [Wladimir van Wilgenburg \(/experts/wladimir-van-wilgenburg/\)](/experts/wladimir-van-wilgenburg/)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.



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To some, America's partnership with the SDF exemplified an economy-of-force effort that minimized U.S. casualties and wrested control of northeast Syria from the Islamic State. To others, it was a cautionary tale about a U.S. military hoodwinked into working with a terrorist group.

The story of America's military and political partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces is a controversial one. To some, it is a shining example of an economy-of-force effort that minimized U.S. casualties, wrested control of northeast Syria from the Islamic State, and improved the area's general political trajectory. To others, it is a cautionary tale of a U.S. military that was hoodwinked by a charismatic and capable partner closely tied to a U.S.-designated terrorist group, the Kurdistan Workers Party, with Washington deliberately averting its eyes from the strategic, political, and moral costs of the partnership. The subject deserves a neutral, data-led investigation that follows the facts wherever they lead.

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In this volume—copublished by The Washington Institute and I.B. Tauris—military expert Michael Knights and journalist Wladimir van Wilgenburg dive deep into the U.S. relationship with the SDF. The study benefited from intensive debates on sourcing, objectivity, and the need to probe uncomfortable issues. The findings cast light not only on the successes and shortcomings of this particular alliance, but also on how Washington might most profitably pursue “by, with, and through” operations with other forces in the future. ❖

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