

# Russia and the Kurds: A Soft-Power Tool for the Kremlin?

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Anna Borshchevskaya is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East.



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## An in-depth look at how Russian leaders have played the Kurdish card over the past two centuries, including recent engagement in Syria and Iraq.

**R**ussia's longstanding patronage of the Kurds has been motivated primarily by the cynical desire to use them against adversaries in broader great-power games while casting itself as a champion of the Kurdish cause. This multifaceted relationship demonstrates that when it comes to Russian geopolitics, the United States has more than brute force to contend with. The Russian state also utilizes soft power as an authoritarian state defines it: a tool of pragmatic leverage. While the Kurds are not a monolith, they are anxious about the trajectory of U.S. politics and feel they cannot rely on anyone. The Russian state has opportunities to undermine American interests in places such as Syria and Iraq through its connections with Kurdish groups. This article reviews tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet policies toward the Kurds, including Kurdish communities in Russia. It concludes with a discussion about implications for the United States, given that Moscow will not let go of its Kurdish card, including in the context of the Ukraine invasion...

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