

Turkey Can Ally with Syria's Kurds Someday

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David Pollock was the Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute from 2007 until his death in 2024, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues.



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Most Kurds are now seeking rights in their respective countries, while downplaying the pan-Kurdish dream, giving Turkey more room to separate the PYD from the PKK instead of lumping them together.

The July 5 headline in Turkey's *Hurriyet* newspaper, quoting Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus reads as follows: "Turkey Says It's Not Declaring War on YPG [Yekineyen Parastina Gel or People's Protection Units]," the main Syrian Kurdish militia just across the border. But, Kurtulmus added, "if Turkey sees a YPG movement in northern Syria that is a threat to it, it will retaliate in kind."

That typically tough yet carefully conditional quote raises a crucial, if often overlooked, factual point. The YPG has in fact not threatened Turkey, nor even Turkish forces inside Syria, ever since 2012. It was in July of that year, exactly five years ago, when the Syrian Kurdish militia took over much of the border area. And it was then that it promised, in an agreement brokered by Turkey's ally President Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, to focus on Syria exclusively and refrain from attacking Turkey -- or even from supporting attacks against it by the YPG's parent movement, the PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan or Kurdistan Workers' Party)...

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