

# Ascent of the PYD and the SDF

by [Barak Barfi \(/experts/barak-barfi\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Barak Barfi is a research fellow at New America, where he specializes in Arab and Islamic affairs.



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**In this well-documented Research Note, Barak Barfi explores the evolution of the PYD -- the preeminent Kurdish faction in the Syrian conflict -- and its relationship to U.S. objectives.**

In a detailed new study, Barak Barfi, recently returned from spending time with Kurdish forces in eastern Syria, explores the evolution of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) -- the preeminent Kurdish faction in the Syrian conflict -- and its relationship to U.S. objectives. Washington has repeatedly articulated its anti-IS policy, including its Iraq component, for which it works in tandem with the central government. But it has found the task much harder in Syria, given the diverse groups operating on the ground and the lack of a state partner. U.S. objectives are further complicated by the PYD's relationship with the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a group that has historically distanced itself from other Kurdish parties in both Iraq and Syria. The PYD has an uneasy relationship with the Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani and has periodically clashed with his forces since 1995.

Although the PYD has proved thus far to be the most effective U.S. ally in the fight against the Islamic State, its anti-rebel stance and relationship with the Syrian regime and Russians poses problems. The escalation of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict could eventually put Washington in a bind, forcing it to choose between an ally that has repeatedly frustrated it in the IS campaign and a potential ally that has exceeded all expectations.

## THE AUTHOR

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