

Turkey's Kurdish Path

by [Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay\)](/experts/soner-cagaptay)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Arab Spring success stories have generally not been easy to come by, yet one may be playing out in a regional non-Arab state, Turkey, where ties between the Turks and their Kurdish adversaries have been improving.

As recently as ten years ago, the relationship between Turkey and the Kurds was best described as one of mistrust. But the last several years have seen an unmistakable warming between the two sides, highlighted in late February by Turkish troops transiting through Kurdish-controlled Kobani to evacuate relics and troops serving as guards from the Suleyman Shah enclave deep inside Syria.

Iraq, Turkey, and Syria set the stage for this evolving dynamic: In Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, ties with Ankara rooted in energy exploitation are so close that the two governments are said to share an economic commonwealth. In Turkey, reconciliation talks since 2012 have brought the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish government closer to entente, with peace being in the interests of both Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. The situation is most complicated in Syria, where the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD) has generally supported the Assad regime, Ankara's bitter enemy.

In this Policy Note, [Soner Cagaptay \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner) examines emerging possibilities and lingering obstacles associated with improving Turkish-Kurdish relations. The upsides, including a boost to Washington's anti-ISIS campaign, could signal a refreshing development in an otherwise unstable Middle East..

THE AUTHOR

[Soner Cagaptay \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner), the Beyer Family Fellow and director of the [Turkish Research Program \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/research-programs/turkish-research-program/\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/research-programs/turkish-research-program/) at The Washington Institute, is the author of *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-rise->

of-turkey-the-twenty-first-centurys-first-muslim-power (Potomac Books), named by the Foreign Policy Association as one of the ten most important books of 2014. ❖

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