

POLICY NOTES

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Turkey's Kurdish Path

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ARAB SPRING success stories have generally not been easy to come by. One, however, may be playing out in a regional non-Arab state, Turkey, where ties between the Turks and their adversary, the Kurds, have been improving. Signs of the thaw were apparent late on February 21, when Turkish troops transited through Kurdish-controlled Kobani, in Syria, to reach Turkey's Suleyman Shah exclave, deep inside Syrian territory, to evacuate relics and Turkish troops serving as guards. Media reports suggest coordination between Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and its Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), in the Suleyman Shah operation.

More important still, on February 28, PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned for life in Turkey but still leading peace talks with Ankara, made his strongest call to date for the PKK to lay down its arms. Continuing peace talks between Ankara and the PKK could improve Turkish-Kurdish ties further, while decentralization of both Iraq and Syria—which bodes well for Kurdish autonomy in those countries—could bring Ankara and Levantine Kurds into an alignment if Turkey plays its hand well.

The Kurds in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq have different levels of political and military power. For instance, the Iraqi Kurds have an internationally recognized autonomous entity, while the Syrian Kurds have declared autonomy but failed to gain international backing for the arrangement. The PKK has some support among Turkish Kurds and enjoys preeminence among the Syrian Kurds through its armed militia, whereas the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) dominates the

politics of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Given intra-Kurdish rivalries and external constraints, such as opposition to Kurdish independence from both the Kurds' neighbors and Washington, an independent Kurdistan seems unlikely to emerge at this stage. Together, this suggests that the future holds different degrees of autonomy inside each of the three countries involved, a development that could serve both Turkish and Kurdish interests.

Transformation of Turkish-Kurdish Ties

As recently as ten years ago, the relationship between Turkey and the Kurds was characterized by mistrust. Ankara opposed Kurdish autonomy in Iraq and fought the PKK at home, and the Iraqi Kurds feared a Turkish invasion and also tolerated PKK efforts against Ankara. The PKK, for its part, had long been carrying out a campaign against the Turkish government, including indiscriminate violent attacks against

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civilians. In the early 1990s, the group began engaging in suicide attacks, effectively introducing the tactic to the Middle East.

Today, the situation could not be more different. Turkey's relationship with the KRG, and especially with the KDP, is thriving. Intensive Turkey-PKK peace talks could ultimately lead to greater Turkish influence over the PYD in Syria, an outcome strongly desired by Turkey. If Ankara prevails, its sway over the Kurds at home and abroad in Syria and Iraq could have a tremendous impact, perhaps ultimately leading to a Turkish-Kurdish commonwealth, a refreshing development in an otherwise unstable Middle East.

A TURKEY-KRG ECONOMIC COMMONWEALTH. On the economic front, the stars seem to be especially well aligned for Ankara and the Iraqi Kurds. Already in 2007, at the nadir of Turkish-Kurdish ties during a period of inflamed violence, a visit to the KRG capital, Erbil, and meetings with prominent Iraqi Kurdish officials indicated the possibility of eventual rapprochement. One senior official, who asked to remain anonymous, answered this way when asked whether the Kurds would stay in Iraq: "Iraq and Syria will always be Arab states, and there will be no room for us Kurds in them, except as second-class citizens." He added that "the KRG will be part of Iraq only in the theoretical sense." Such a reply left only Iran and Turkey in the picture as possible partners. When asked which he would prefer, the official said Turkey. He explained: "The Iranians give us either honey with poison, or poison with honey. The Turks offer either honey or poison." Such conversations indicated that the Iraqi Kurds had decided by 2007 that they wanted to hitch their wagon to Turkey.

Shortly after these discussions with Iraqi Kurds, talks with Turkish officials proved equally surprising, showing their willingness to accept the Kurdish olive branch despite the word Kurdistan being anathema in Ankara. This was largely because Kurdish ties came with a perk: access to oil and gas, on which Turkey's growing economy depends heavily.

To begin with, more than half of Turkey's electricity is generated in turbines driven by natural gas. And Ankara imports more than 95 percent of its oil and natural gas, of which some 75 percent comes from Russia and Iran. Notably, these two countries

represent Turkey's main nemeses in the Syrian war, in which Turkey has failed since 2011 to oust the Bashar al-Assad regime. Tehran provides Assad with weapons, fighters, and advisors, while Moscow supplies the regime with international protection, using its veto power at the UN Security Council to shield Damascus from international intervention and sanctions. The Turks are loath to remain dependent on Russia and Iran for their supply of natural gas and oil. Thus, although the KRG has until now supplied just a very small fraction of Turkey's energy needs, Ankara sees the wisdom of relying on the Iraqi Kurds for a larger share.

When in 2007 the KRG offered Turkey to jointly explore the region's hydrocarbon riches, the Turks jumped at the opportunity. Ties had hit rock-bottom and were rebounding. Once the KRG was declared open for Turkish business, Turkey's vigorous private sector moved in, establishing itself as the KRG's dominant business partner. Since 2007, Turkish companies have built Erbil's new international airport, the main point of entry for visitors into the KRG, major roads, and—last but not least—government buildings in Erbil. In other words, the Turks have painstakingly built the infrastructure of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.

In the meantime, bilateral trade between Ankara and the KRG has boomed, jumping from an estimated \$1.4 billion in 2007 to \$8 billion in 2013. Turkish Airlines flies daily from Istanbul to Erbil and the KRG's second largest city, Sulaymaniyah. Indeed, Turkey and the KRG are increasingly coming together as an undeclared economic commonwealth: visitors arriving to Erbil's Turkish-built airport with no Iraqi dinars will likely find their cab driver into town willing to accept Turkish liras.

Further cementing the Turkey-KRG economic commonwealth, in May 2014 Kurdish oil started to flow through Turkey en route to international markets. Although the Turkey-KRG relationship is symbiotic, it is largely uneven. The Iraqi Kurds need Turkey more than Turkey needs the Kurds. By picking Turkey as its chief regional patron in 2007, the KRG has become too dependent on the Turks. This is also seen in Ankara's management of KRG oil sales—all the proceeds of which are housed at a Turkish bank and then shipped to Erbil at Turkey's whim. KRG

leader Masoud Barzani is keenly aware that to receive his oil money he needs to keep Turkey's all-powerful president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, content.

As for the political component of the Turkey-KRG commonwealth, Erdogan and Barzani have seen each other as best friends in a region where most are enemies. They also have a growing security relationship: Ankara supplies weapons and trainers to the Peshmerga, the KRG's military force, to help defend against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State. Both leaders distrust the Shiite-majority, Arab nationalist, pro-Iran government in Baghdad, with Erdogan taking particular issue with the "Shiite majority" component and Barzani doing so with the "Arab nationalist" part. The distrust for Iran's role is more or less equally shared. While oil deals and booming trade brought the business-minded Barzani and Erdogan together, former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's rise in Baghdad after the 2010 Iraqi elections sealed their relationship.

Since Maliki stepped down last year, Turkey-Iraq relations have improved to some extent because the Erdogan-Maliki personal relationship added a particularly negative cast. Now that the less partisan Haider al-Abadi is prime minister, and given the recent agreement stipulating better coordination between the Kurds and the Iraqi central government on international oil sales, Ankara and Erbil's "anti-Baghdad alliance" may have been destabilized somewhat. Still, deep economic and political ties between Ankara and the KRG—whereby if the KRG were an independent country Turkey would be its top trading partner—will help keep Ankara and the Iraqi Kurds together. At the same time, some of the shared conservatism between Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the KDP will help reinforce the Turkey-KRG alliance.

Erdogan has even begun to promote the KDP as an alternative to the PKK among Turkish Kurds. In November 2013, the Turkish leader organized a KDP rally in Diyarbakir, the largest city in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey and a PKK bastion. Surprisingly, Barzani himself attended and delivered a passionate speech in Kurdish.

ANKARA-PKK TIES: BETTER BUT STILL ROCKY. Despite gestures such as the Diyarbakir rally, Erdogan's vision

will not be simple to enact. Within Turkey, the KDP hardly poses a significant challenge to the PKK. Turkey's Kurds overwhelmingly vote for two parties, the AKP and People's Democracy Party (HDP), which shares the PKK's Kurdish nationalist vision. If Erdogan's core strategy were to use Barzani to draw voters away from the HDP, he would be miscalculating severely. The PKK and the HDP are leftist, socialist movements—in the past the PKK even espoused Stalinism and Maoism. Neither the KDP's old-fashioned conservatism nor Erdogan's religious politics will find resonance among PKK supporters. And the budding Kurdish Islamist alternative inside Turkey, the Free Cause Party (HUDA-PAR), is likely to create a backlash as in October 2014, when PKK- and HDP-organized rallies to defend Kobani against ISIS aggression sparked violence between PKK and HUDA-PAR supporters, resulting in more than forty deaths.

Erdogan, however, is well aware of this dynamic, and promotion of Barzani represents a Plan B in addressing the PKK issue. His Plan A is to placate the PKK, an approach solidified in 2012 when Erdogan launched official peace talks with the group's leadership, bringing about a respite from fighting. Maintaining this peace is especially important for the AKP, which has been running the country since 2002 and faces parliamentary elections in June 2015. If Turkey remains peaceful, the popular AKP will likely soar to another electoral victory. With no other elections until 2019, Erdogan and the AKP would rule Turkey until the end of the decade.

Peace is also a strong incentive for Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK's founder and ideological leader, who is effectively conducting the PKK's side of the talks through his lawyers from his solitary-confinement cell on Imrali island, in the Marmara Sea, where he has been jailed since 1999. Notably, on February 28, Ocalan made his strongest call to date for the PKK to lay down its arms. As indicated by his role in the talks, Ocalan still wields strong influence over the PKK, and he well understands that peace would be his get-out-of-jail card. He is therefore expected to continue using his influence to ensure the current calm.

Yet the peace talks are clearly motivated by more than Erdogan and Ocalan's personal ambitions.

Turkish analysts suggest that the PKK is using the talks to set up an “underground state” in southeastern Turkey, complete with PKK- and Kurdish-run courts and tax offices—in effect, the initial infrastructure for potential future Kurdish autonomy in Turkey.

EFFECTS OF OUSTING ASSAD. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Ankara finds itself with two weakened neighbors. Iraq and Syria are at different stages on the path to becoming failed states, and sectarian warfare, humanitarian crises, jihadism, and civil war are rampant. Turkish elites believe Iraq and Syria will remain unstable for decades. Living between the Arabs and the Turkish border, the Kurds could become Ankara’s cordon sanitaire against weak, and potentially failed, states in Iraq and Syria, as well as ISIS.

Whatever the risks of Kurdish autonomy, Turkish leaders recognize that ending the country’s four-decade conflict with the PKK is paramount for developing a real security partnership with the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds. Indeed, Turkey cannot become a true and lasting friend of the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds unless it first befriends its own Kurds. For this reason, Turkey’s security establishment, including the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supports the peace talks with the PKK. Policymakers envision turning the “Kurdish threat” into Turkey’s “Kurdish card.” Turkey and the Kurds would be bound together by deep economic, security, and political ties, with the Kurds acting as Turkey’s proxy in Syria and Iraq.

But Syria presents challenges for Turkey’s “Kurdish card” policy. In descending order, Turkey’s Syria policy subscribes to the following priorities: ousting Assad, staying away from ISIS, eventually making the PYD a consumer of Turkish security similar to the KRG, and rendering PYD-controlled areas in Turkey’s economic sphere similar to KRG areas in Iraq.

Since 2011, Erdogan has tried to oust the Assad regime, allowing weapons and fighters to flow from Turkey into Syria. Thus far, however, this policy has failed. Assad’s violent crackdown has radicalized the opposition, and at least some of the fighters who crossed into Syria with tacit Turkish approval have morphed into ISIS foot soldiers.

ISIS now threatens the Kurds in Syria, and the battle between ISIS and the PYD will be won by one group or

the other. While Turkey’s priority is to facilitate Assad’s ouster, thereby relegating ISIS to a secondary threat, socialist and deeply secular nationalist Syrian Kurds in the PYD see matters differently, beginning with their generally benevolent relationship toward the regime. The PYD meanwhile is the best organized force among the Syrian Kurds. A visit to Syria in 2008 revealed the PYD’s visible presence in many areas of northern Syria, including the city of Qamishli, on the Turkish border. Ocalan’s pictures ubiquitously displayed in coffee shops suggested that the PYD was perhaps even more popular in Syria than the PKK was in Turkey.

KOBANI BATTLE: UNEXPECTED FAILURE. In July 2012, the PKK and PYD assumed joint control of the Kurdish regions of northern Syria—Afrin, Kobani, and Jazirah—declaring them cantons. Flanked by ISIS on three sides and bordering Turkey to the north, Kobani has been the most vulnerable of these regions, and ISIS forces have been pressing to capture it for more than a year. ISIS bolstered its efforts to offset recent losses in Iraq with a victory in northern Syria.

When ISIS attacked Kobani, Turkey was conspicuously absent from the battle and shied away from confronting ISIS. This was because Turkey’s key objective in Syria, ousting Assad, takes priority over all others. To this end, Ankara was intent on using the battle for Kobani to make the PKK/PYD recognize that it needs Turkey to survive in Syria, thus folding the Kurds under its strategic vision for Syria’s future.

Until this point, meanwhile, the PKK/PYD had noticeably avoided fighting Assad, choosing to establish control of Kurdish areas and stay out of the war. When ISIS attacked Kobani, Ankara saw an opportunity to force the Kurds to request Turkish security assistance on its terms. More specifically, it wanted the PKK/PYD to forgo autonomy plans in Syria and join the anti-Assad coalition. Generally, it wants to see the PYD weakened in Syria so that the PKK will conduct the peace talks with Turkey from a place of desperation.

Yet this strategy has had unintended consequences for Ankara. As international media broadcast the ISIS attack on Kobani, only yards away from the Turkish border, international pressure built on Turkey to help the PKK/PYD.

As alluded to earlier, pro-Kobani demonstrations have already taken place in several Turkish cities,

resulting in casualties and significant material damage. Unrest among pro-PKK Kurds in southeastern Turkey has threatened both the country's stability and Ankara's talks with the PKK. The battle for Kobani, therefore, became the true test of Turkey's "Kurdish card"—a test Erdogan failed in the eyes of the region's Kurds for his unwillingness to provide necessary support. In the end, relenting to pressure from Washington and the realization that its strategy had faltered, Ankara allowed KRG Peshmerga fighters into Kobani, undoing some of the damage to its image among the Kurds. This Turkish decision can also be seen through the lens of Ankara's broader policy of trying to build the KDP as a competitor to PYD/PKK interests among the Syrian Kurds.

ANKARA'S FUTURE TIES WITH KURDS. Even in light of the Kobani episode, the Iraqi Kurds will not walk away from their budding commonwealth with Turkey. The KRG is too enmeshed in the Turkish economy to pivot elsewhere, and the political-business-security alliance between Erdogan and Barzani is "too big to fail."

For Ocalan's part, he knows that if the deal falls through, he will likely die in jail. At the same time, with its worst fears about Erdogan confirmed in Kobani, the PKK will continue to take advantage of the negotiations with Ankara to deepen its "underground state" in southeastern Turkey. A recent visitor to the region's cities said that the PKK not only collects "revenues" but now does so brazenly in "tax offices," marked at times with the PKK insignia. Such trends appear to be widening the gap between the PKK and Ankara, to the PKK's advantage. If the talks fail, the group will declare its infrastructure autonomous, challenging Ankara's authority and embarrassing Erdogan in the eyes of his core nationalist voters. This is why, to succeed, Erdogan must keep the PKK at the bargaining table, even if a final deal is not yet in reach.

This also begs the question of whether Turkey can bring the Syrian Kurds under its influence. Turkey and the PYD have had contacts since July 2013, when PYD leader Salih Muslim visited Ankara. Yet, as intimated, Ankara and the PYD have major policy differences in Syria, especially on whether to fight Assad. Far from being a regime antagonist, the PYD has

had a long and cozy nonaggression and support pact with Assad. In the summer of 2012, Assad pulled his forces out of Syria's Kurdish areas to focus on fighting the rebels. The PYD filled the void. Since then, where regime-controlled areas abutted PYD regions, Assad forces and the PYD have helped each other logistically. At times, however, in the nonbinary Syrian theater, Assad and PYD forces have fought each other, most recently in Hasaka in January 2015. More recently, on February 27, regime forces and PYD militia conducted an offensive against Tel Hamis, a town south of Hasaka held by ISIS, capturing that city.

Erdogan's effort to align PYD and Turkish interests will therefore be difficult. Alongside the PYD's links to Assad, the group loathes Erdogan's conservative politics as much as the PKK does. On the flipside, unlike the KRG, Syrian Kurds have few energy riches to offer Erdogan.

But the fact is, ISIS is a bigger threat to the Syrian Kurds than it is to Turkey. The Kurds can rely on the United States to help them against ISIS, but such help can be delivered most easily through Turkey. For its own part, the PYD may not have oil to offer Erdogan, but in Syria it has an even more valuable asset: war-hardened and ideological leftist fighters who are ready to die fighting ISIS's own ideological fighters. Most recently, PYD militia have reportedly helped Turkish troops in the Suleyman Shah operation, providing protection and surveillance against ISIS. The PYD controls around half of Turkey's 510-mile-long border with Syria, providing a useful cordon sanitaire against jihadists.

Ultimately, along with a peace deal with the PKK, the Turkish leader can peel the PYD away from the Assad regime by acquiescing, however grudgingly, to de facto Kurdish autonomy in Syria. Continued Turkish contacts with the PYD even in the aftermath of the Kobani debacle suggest that both sides know they cannot let their relationship crumble.

In today's Levant, already autonomous Iraqi Kurds are moving ever closer to Ankara, while Turkish and Syrian Kurds are trying to build and preserve their respective positions of autonomy. Turkey can benefit from all three developments—if it plays its cards well.

Implications for Washington

Developments between Turks and Kurds in the Levant hold many implications for the United States, including its effort to defeat ISIS.

IRAQ AND SYRIA. In Iraq and Syria, Turkey and the Kurds make for good U.S. allies, but so, perhaps ironically, does the Iraqi government. Regarding the Iraqi central government, a United States that bases much of its foreign policy on internationalist values rather than realpolitik is unlikely to acquiesce to shuffled Middle East political and border cards. Iraq's unity is central to U.S. efforts to stabilize the region, an interest shared by Ankara, which sees collapsed states on its border as a security threat. Moreover, Turkey's fondness for Masoud Barzani does not extend to wanting the creation of an independent Kurdish state. For Washington, continued Turkish-Kurdish rapprochement would reinforce Turkey's stability and dedication to human rights, important U.S. and Turkish interests alike. Much can therefore be built on between Ankara and Washington as regards the Kurds, and through them enhanced stability may follow in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and possibly in relation to Iran.

To fully exploit these opportunities would require a shift in the U.S. position toward Turkey in opposing the Assad regime. Ankara's vision would include efforts ranging from the creation of a safe haven to protect rebel-held areas in northern Syria to U.S. boots on the ground. Such a step would open up extraordinary potential for U.S.-Turkey cooperation in the region. But given the obstacles to this step, Washington should focus on taking advantage of its joint interests with Turkey for shorter-term gains. One such effort would be to strengthen the Iraqi central government and its unity. Turkey understands that Iraq's Arab south and center have far more gas and oil than the Kurdish north, and thus are more important over the long term to Turkey as markets and as hydrocarbon suppliers than Kurdistan. That and Turkish opposition to KRG independence can be utilized by a United States seeking to seal a Washington-Erbil-Ankara-Baghdad axis that preserves KRG autonomy—including for oil and especially gas exports to and through Turkey—Iraqi unity, and the common fight against ISIS. Turkey's influence in Baghdad as

a counterweight to Iran is possible—not all or even most of Iraq's Shiite majority want to become second-class Iranians—but Turkey would have to play its cards more carefully than in the past, particularly in its relations with the Kurds and Iraqi Sunni Arabs. Although its ties with these groups are useful in dealing with Baghdad, they cannot be exploited as trumps, as Turkey has tried to do in the past, to dictate internal Iraqi politics.

TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS. Last but not least, Turkey needs to make permanent peace with its own Kurdish community. Given Turkish political dynamics, territorial Kurdish autonomy looks unlikely. One reason is that a majority of the Turkish population would object to this step. More important, a potential autonomous Kurdish region inside the country would have to exclude nearly half the country's Kurds, who live in western Turkey, having moved there over the years for jobs and other opportunities. Geographically, the distribution of Kurds in Turkey is very different from that in Iraq, Syria, and Iran, where population concentrations in Kurds' territorial homeland make territorially based autonomy a realistic outcome.

The solution to the Kurdish problem in Turkey is, therefore, not autonomy but broader liberties for all citizens. Turkey needs to provide its citizens with the broadest individual freedoms imaginable if it is to satisfy its Kurdish citizens regarding their rights, including Kurds in western Turkey. A prescription for individual rights is also most appropriate given Turkey's historical experience, whereby the forms of repression endured by Kurds resulted from distinct historical circumstances. In contrast to religious minorities, Turkey's Muslim ethnic communities, including the Kurds, were never categorized separately in the country's political sphere or discriminated against collectively because of their identity. In this respect, Turkey's Kurds are not a minority *sensu stricto*. Moreover, Kurds have not faced the same sorts of societal discrimination as have non-Muslims, who are indeed seen as minorities. The Kurds have, for example, never been barred from office or assigned a subcitizen status, and they have held posts at every level of government.

A framework based on strengthening individual rights would almost certainly be embraced by Kurds

and Turks alike. In the short term, the government could take a number of specific steps. First, a very feasible goal would be to remove the legal uncertainties that surround using indigenous names for villages and landmarks, a change that would be welcomed not only by Kurds but by many other linguistically non-Turkish communities as well. During the twentieth century, many buildings, towns, and streets with Armenian, Georgian, Syriac, Kurdish, or Greek names were reassigned “Turkish” names.

Changing judicial culture should be a goal as well, even if it takes time. Turkish criminal law entails a good deal of vague wording, gaining much of its significance from how technical and legal terms are interpreted by the judges reviewing a case. Even if criminal statutes may seem perfectly reasonable if interpreted prudently, Turkish judges have gained a reputation for illiberal interpretations of the law. This factor has been behind many of the harsh rulings against political activists and journalists in Turkey.

Further, Turkey should revise its electoral laws to give Kurdish parties a secure voice. Current Turkish electoral laws bar any party that does not attain at least 10 percent of the popular vote from entering parliament. Other countries in Europe have minimum thresholds as well, but Turkey's 10 percent is the highest. And its primary function has become to block the Kurdish nationalist HDP from running as a party in elections.

By granting broad individual freedoms, Ankara can win the Kurds while also satisfying the country's greater populace. Many Turks are uncomfortable with the country's current military-written constitution, which reads like a “don't do” list. Not just the Kurds but Turks of all stripes would welcome a fresh constitution that lists their freedoms and those alone. This is the best way to help Turkey consolidate as a liberal democracy.

Washington should help promote deep political liberalization in Turkey, a strategy that could usher in a solution to the Kurdish issue and make Turkey a stronger U.S. ally. Turkey, meanwhile, cannot unleash its creative energy to rise as a regional and potentially global power so long as it does not solve its Kurdish problem. A resolution would bring not only domestic stability, further improved ties with Iraqi Kurds, and closer ties with Syrian Kurds, it would also make the Kurds a much-needed Turkish ally in the Middle East.

An Independent Kurdistan Is Unlikely

For all practical purposes, the creation of an independent Kurdistan seems unlikely. Washington does not support this outcome in Iraq for fear that it would almost certainly spark the country's violent disintegration, inviting robust U.S. intervention and long-term military commitment to contain the collapse. Regarding Syria's Kurds, Washington wants to see them remain in the country so that they can be effective U.S. and Syrian opposition partners in the fight against ISIS—and possibly against the Assad regime, should Washington decide to oppose the regime militarily.

In Turkey, Washington has reason to fear that an independent Kurdistan would severely destabilize a major ally, ushering in conflict between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists as well as political violence toward “western Turkey Kurds”—in the case of Kurdish independence, nationalist Turks would almost certainly target these Kurds, casting them as a fifth column.

Other obstacles to an independent Kurdistan include opposition from the Kurds' neighbors—namely, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—and intra-Kurdish rivalries embodied in the opposing ideological views held by the PKK and KDP. These rivalries would likely hamper the success of an independent Kurdistan.

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