

Turkey and the Kurds: Conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party and Implications for Turkey-United States Relations

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Abstract

Turkey's relationship with the Kurds is a long and complicated one. Since the founding of Turkey, its treatment of the Kurds has varied between assimilation and repression. These policies birthed several Kurdish rebellions, the most recent being the rise of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This paper discusses Turkey's relationship with the Kurds and the conflict with the PKK before discussing the challenges presented by the Kurds on Turkey's and the U.S.' policies on the Syrian Civil War and the Islamic State. The conflict with the PKK began in the 1980's and continues to be a struggle for Turkey to this day. The Syrian Civil War has exacerbated the conflict because of the rising autonomy of the Kurds in Syria as Bashar al-Assad's government withdrew. U.S. support for Syrian Kurds against the Islamic State has become a point of contention between the U.S. and Turkey because Turkey views them as extensions of the PKK. As Turkey takes a more active role in Syria, greater cooperation and agreement on goals are required for the U.S. and Turkey.

Keywords: Middle East, Turkey, Kurds, Kurdistan Workers' Party, Syrian Conflict

Introduction

The Kurds are an ethnic group in the Middle East plagued by a history of repression and injustice. Scholars believe that Kurdish history can be traced back as far as 50,000 years but it was not until the fifth century BC to the sixth century AD that the Kurds homogenized and consolidated into a "Kurdish" identity (Aziz, 2015). The Kurds have historically occupied the Zagros Mountains, which have provided a geographical buffer from the political interests of the great empires of history. The Persian, Arab, and Ottoman empires all failed to subdue the people of the Zagros Mountains, allowing space for the Kurdish language and culture to evolve (Aziz, 2015). The biggest change occurred after World War I with the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. Emerging from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks waged a successful war of independence and established the state of Turkey. The United Kingdom and France also established Syria and Iraq in the mandate system. By the end of World War II, the Kurds were divided amongst four separate states: Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. All four states suppressed the Kurds, some even banning the language and denying them citizenship (Gasiorowski, 2014)¹. In Turkey, this suppression gave birth to the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a Marxist/nationalist militant organization that rebelled against Turkish rule. In three decades, the conflict has taken

¹ Hafez al-Assad denied Kurds in Syria citizenship and systematically oppressed them. Saddam Hussein in Iraq used chemical weapons against the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980's and committed acts of genocide.

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more than 45,000 lives, with no end in sight, particularly with the Syrian Civil War and its impacts on the Kurds in the region. The Kurdish issue remains a point of contention in Turkey-U.S. relations, particularly concerning the Kurds in Syria and the fight against ISIS.

The Kurdish issue is just as important as ever in the Middle East. It adds another complication to the already complicated issues of the Syrian Civil War and the fight against the Islamic State. The rise of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and the recent autonomy of the Kurds in northern Syria combined with the ongoing insurgency of the PKK against Turkey have empowered the Kurds and challenged the existing Political Map of the Middle East (Gunter, 2015). This paper will examine Turkey's relationship with the Kurds and analyze the issues faced by both the U.S. government and Turkish government in addressing the Syrian Civil War and the fight against the Islamic State. This paper will discuss Turkey's relationship with the Kurds and the conflict with the PKK before discussing the challenges presented by the Kurds on Turkey's and the U.S.' policies on the Syrian Civil War and the Islamic State.

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne, carving out the Kurds of southeast Anatolia from the rest of the Kurds in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Mustafa Kemal "Ataturk," the founder of Turkey, enforced the Treaty of Lausanne's policy of one nation, one people, one language, establishing one Turkish nationality, which ignored the existence of other ethnic groups (Noi, 2012). One of the main drivers of the conflict with the Kurds in Turkey is the Turkish insistence of linguistic hegemony and assimilation. While Turkey has relaxed the policies in recent years in order to gain accession to the European Union, the relationship with the Kurds has varied between assimilation and discrimination (Kuzu, 2010).

The Turkish policies of assimilation produced several Kurdish rebellions in the first two decades after the First World War. The first rebellion, the Kochiri Rebellion, occurred in 1920 after the Ottoman Empire was dismantled and the Kurds in Anatolia fought for their own state in the chaos.² After the rebellion, Ataturk promised the Kurds a fair measure of autonomy in exchange for their support in the Turkish War of Independence but did not fulfill this promise once he signed the Treaty of Lausanne (Spyridon 2015). Ataturk's radical secular policies, which included enforced secularization and the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate, aroused resentment within the conservative segments of Kurdish society. In 1925, Shaykh Said, a Sunni religious leader, led a second revolt that appealed to the strong religious and nationalist sentiment among the Kurdish tribes on Southeastern Turkey. The rebellion attempted to take major Kurdish towns and spread the movement to other Kurdish-dominated areas. The rebellion failed to gain a large support base and was crushed by the Turkish army utilizing a massive deployment of troops, aerial bombardments of rebels and civilians, and the deployment of rival Kurdish tribes as auxiliaries (Noi, 2012). The third rebellion took place two years later and successfully established the Republic of Ararat in Northeastern Turkey. Led by Ihsan Nuri, the self-proclaimed state fought off the Turkish military for three years through guerilla warfare (Olson, 1994). By 1930, however, the Turkish military completely surrounded the region and subjected it to relentless artillery and aerial bombardments of both rebel and civilian positions until the Kurds eventually surrendered (Olson, 1994). One of the main reasons the rebellions were defeated is

² The rebellion failed because it failed to win the support of a majority of Kurdish tribal leaders, many of whom supported Ataturk and viewed him as their protector against radical Sunni zealots.

the failure of each rebellion to gain the support of the majority of the Kurdish tribes, which Turkey took advantage of in each rebellion.³

Abdullah Ocalan, a Communist political activist and a university graduate of Kurdish origin, founded the PKK in the 1970's during a time of political unrest in Turkey.⁴ Marxist ideology, not Kurdish nationalism, was the armed movement's original doctrine (Spyridon, 2015). The movement joined the civil conflict but clashed with both left-wing and right-wing groups before fleeing to Syria and Lebanon after the Turkish army staged a violent coup to restore law and order in 1980 (Gasiorowski, 2014). While in Syria, the PKK set up military camps, received training from Syrian officials, made connections with other militant organizations in Turkey, created a political apparatus that would serve as an effective propaganda machine, and refined its political ideology to rally the Kurdish rural population in Turkey (Cronin, 2009). The PKK's mission became a struggle for the self-determination of the Kurdish people and a radical socialist revolution of Kurdish peasantry against the dual oppression of Turkey and the feudalism of the local Kurdish tribal chiefs (Spyridon, 2015). Propaganda called for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan that would include the vast Kurdish-populated regions in the Middle East as well as the advancement of genuine democracy and socialism in Turkey (Noi, 2012).

Drawing also from Maoism, Ocalan set out to implement a three-staged strategy to achieve the goals of the PKK. The first, "defense," sought to organize the peasantry. The second, "balance," sought to establish bases in the countryside and to initiate guerilla warfare in the mountains. The final step, "offense," entailed a switch to regular warfare as the support base grew and sought the capture of towns and cities (Spyridon, 2015). By 1984, Ocalan considered the first stage to complete and proceeded to the second by launching a rural insurgency in Southeastern Turkey. In this insurgency, the PKK did not hesitate to utilize coercion to establish and maintain their support base. Since earlier rebellions had failed partly due to tribal disunity, the PKK attempted to root out Kurdish tribalism and sectarianism by promoting a secular Kurdish nationalism that would transcend all bonds of faith and kinship among Kurds throughout the Middle East (Cronin, 2009). The PKK used propaganda and coercion to forcefully impose uniformity of thought and behavior among the members of the movement and among local Kurds. As a result, a cult of personality emerged with Ocalan as the undisputed leader of the movement and those who questioned that leadership were regularly purged (Spyridon, 2015). Attempting to consolidate power in Southeastern Turkey, the PKK aggressively and brutally neutralized any opposition within Kurdish society, particularly powerful Kurdish landlords, tribal chiefs, and other militant Kurdish groups such as Kurdish Hizballah (Spyridon, 2015). Kurds who collaborated with the regime, particularly those who worked in state-funded self-defense units were considered traitors and were the targets of many attacks (Spyridon, 2015).

Despite its harsh methods such as the assassination of fellow Kurds, coercion, and radical policies such as the advancement of gender equality and secularism, the PKK gained widespread popularity as the rural insurgency grew. The movement gained the support of the underprivileged and idealistic sectors of Kurdish society. The strongest support came from female and male youth, university students, women, intelligentsia, and peasants, particularly poor and landless

³ In the 1970's and 1980's, the PKK attempted to resolve the issue in the consolidation of their support base by eradicating the tribal nature of the Kurds in Turkey.

⁴ Political violence became a problem in Turkey in the late 1970's. Death squads of right-wing and left-wing groups were responsible for thousands of deaths.

peasants (Spyridon, 2015). The main support did not come from the PKK's ideology, but rather from the oppressive policies of the Turkish state.

In the beginning of the insurgency, the Turkish military utilized indiscriminate repression against the PKK and Kurds not affiliated with the movement, boosting support for the cause. Turkey possesses a legacy of authoritarianism, having experienced military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 (Gasirowski, 2014). The most recent coup swept aside the political turmoil present in the 1970's and reestablished democracy. The fragile democracy established by the military was not prepared to handle the powerful insurgency of the PKK and eventually handed power back over to the military, which launched a vicious campaign that killed thousands of noncombatants (Cronin, 2009).⁵ The Turkish military eventually improved its tactics through trial and error. It was able to contain the PKK through more discriminate targeting, reliance on small mobile units, better intelligence, and the deployment of more than 250,000 personnel to the Southeast (Cronin, 2009). Despite more effective tactics, human rights abuses continued, with reports of extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, burning of homes, and forced evacuations. Displaced Kurds were forced from the countryside into the cities, where the Turkish military presence was much stronger, allowing for better containment of the Kurdish populace (Cronin, 2009).⁶ The economic conditions in the Kurdish regions of Turkey also deteriorated further. The Turkish military implemented a scorched earth policy, burning crops, killing livestock, and not allowing Kurdish villagers to harvest their own crops in order to prevent the PKK from living off the land (Spyridon, 2015). These policies contributed to the PKK, a secular leftist organization, enjoying considerable support from the Kurdish population, despite its deeply conservative and traditional tendencies.

Despite the movement not reaching the strength required as a precondition for the third stage, Ocalan ignored his seasoned commanders in 1994 and switched from irregular to regular tactics. Ocalan attempted to capture the towns of Southeast Turkey in pitched battles and attempted to defend rebel-held positions against the powerful search and destroy operations of the Turkish military (Gasirowski, 2014). Predictably, the PKK could not stand up to the military might of the Turkish military and were overpowered in every operation. The military's tactics were eventually successful and drove the PKK into decline, catalyzed by Ocalan's arrest in Kenya in 1999 after the Syrian government ousted him (Spyridon, 2015).⁷ Leaderless and suffering defeat after defeat, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew its remaining military forces from Turkey. The Turkish military's controversial tactics in confronting the PKK derailed the government's European Union agenda and contributed to the conflict enduring. (Kuzu, 2010).

The conflict with the PKK is important because it continues to this day. The movement survived the capture of Ocalan and resumed its armed struggle in 2004, alongside the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Islamist government and the subsequent dismantling of the secular Turkish army's power (Spyridon, 2015). During the five years of inaction, the organization experienced an ideological and political transformation. A committee of senior political and military leaders took control of and reorganized the PKK and ruled in the name of Ocalan. The

⁵ The methods included forced evacuation of over 3,000 Kurdish villages, forced conscription of village guards, extrajudicial killings, and massacres of whole villages suspected of supporting the PKK (Spyridon, 2015).

⁶ In addition to the conflict, a draconian anti-terrorism law was passed, which employed a broad and vague definition of terrorism and placed those accused of terrorism under the jurisdiction of specially empowered state security courts. Under this law, thousands were imprisoned on dubious grounds (Cronin, 2009).

⁷ Ocalan was ousted from Syria after Turkey made direct threats against Syria over its support for the PKK.

movement abandoned separatism and embraced the idea of democratic autonomy as a more realistic option (Casier, 2010).⁸ After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq and the establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq, the PKK saw an opportunity to strike at Turkey again and rebuild its power in a region dramatically changed by two U.S. interventions. The PKK launched a new insurrection that seriously challenged the Islamist government politically and militarily, despite being a shadow of its former strength (Spyridon, 2015).

What has particularly exacerbated the conflict and has impacted it to the present is the Syrian Civil War. When Syrian Kurds rose up in rebellion with much of Syria in 2011, the PKK supported them and sent thousands of its fighters into Northern Syria to organize armed resistance. The most powerful political and military entity that arose in Northern Syria is the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and it is viewed as an offshoot of the PKK by Turkey (Gunter, 2015).⁹ In 2013, the PYD clashed with several Islamist insurgent groups in Northern Syria before occupying a large swatch of territory in the Kurdish-majority areas along the Turkish border, which both empowered the PKK inside Turkey and presented a frustrating problem for Turkey (Spyridon, 2015). The peace process between Turkey and the PKK collapsed in July 2015 as the PKK became encouraged by the PYD's success in Syria. The PKK attempted to seize small towns closer to the frontier of Syria and to incite another popular uprising in Southeastern Turkey (Spyridon, 2015). In recent weeks, radical Kurdish activists have detonated suicide bombs in Ankara and Istanbul, along with targeting military and police forces with a myriad of attacks. In late 2015, the PYD joined forces with other groups comprising of Turkmen, Assyrians, Arabs, and Armenians to form the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF), which is backed by the U.S and has successfully driven back the Islamic State in several locations¹⁰.

The Suruc bombing on July 20, 2015 changed Turkey's policy on involvement in Syria. Soon after this attack planned by the Islamic State that killed more than 33 and injured over 100, Turkey announced that it would participate in military operations against the Islamic State as part of the U.S.-led coalition (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). This was a shift from the tacit support Turkey gave the Islamic State previously by allowing jihadists to transit its territory and cross into Syria, which Turkey denies despite proof being well documented. Turkey's motivation was to enable the Syrian opposition to defeat Assad and the Syrian Kurds, who had declared autonomy on the Turkish border, sewing unrest in the Kurdish regions of Turkey (Gunter, 2015). Turkey was hesitant about getting involved in Syria prior to the attack but afterward, allowed U.S. forces to operate against the Islamic State out of airbases in Incirlik, Diyarbakir, and Malatya. This decision has provided the U.S. with operational flexibility and cost effectiveness in the fight against the Islamic State while contributing to Turkey's efforts to secure its border with Syria (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). The Suruc bombing is important because afterward, Turkey adopted a new counterterrorism strategy in order to deal simultaneously with both the Islamic State and the PKK, despite being in peace negotiations at the time. When this new strategy was adopted, the PKK started a process of escalation. High-ranking PKK members announced the end of the ceasefire and PKK militants began targeting Turkish security officers in attacks. The government

⁸ In addition, the PKK exploited Turkey's reluctance to implement a radical program of reforms to alleviate the chronic grievances of the Kurds by developing a new generation of Kurdish political parties and political organizations to rebuild its power structures (Spyridon, 2015).

⁹ Bashar al-Assad in Syria withdrew his government forces from the Turkish border because he could not devote the resources to maintaining it and because the PYD would frustrate Turkey, Syria's longtime rival.

¹⁰ U.S. special forces are embedded in SDF forces for support and training.

responded to this escalation with military operations against the PKK inside Turkey and in northern Iraq, leading to a new wave of violence that has killed hundreds of people in the conflict many had hoped was close to being resolved (Kanat & Ustun, 2015).

The PYD presents a complication for U.S. and Turkish interests in Syria. For Turkey, the PYD represents another branch of the PKK which they have been fighting for decades and thus, view it as an enemy. The Turkish military has shelled PYD positions across the Syrian border multiple times throughout the Syrian Civil War.¹¹ For the U.S., the PYD (now also the SDF) represents the only meaningful moderate Syrian opposition to work with and support in the fight against the Islamic State. The U.S. has sent special forces to fight the Islamic State and aid the PYD, which could potentially lead to a diplomatic disaster if Turkey conducts military operations against PYD forces while U.S. special forces are with them (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). Turkey is also concerned that any arms given to the PYD could end up in the hands of the PKK and used against Turkey.

The disagreement over policies was very apparent during the Islamic State siege of Kobani in 2014 and 2015. In September 2014, the Islamic State besieged the Kurdish village of Kobani in an attempt to capture one of the cantons of the autonomous Rojova region of Northern Syria from the PYD. The siege drove tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians to the Turkish border and caught the attention of the international community for the length of the siege. While the U.S. carried out hundreds of airstrikes against Islamic State forces in support of the PYD, Turkey watched passively, only eventually allowing Kurds from the KRG in Iraq to pass through its territory to reinforce Kobani (Gunter, 2015). To Turkey, supporting the Syrian Kurds in Kobani would be supporting the PKK, a terrorist enemy that had been attempting to topple Turkey for more than 30 years. Aiding the PYD against the Islamic State would only strengthen the PKK and its ally Assad in Syria, who continued his father's support of the PKK after coming to power, although to a lesser extent. Turkey was also reluctant to get any further involved because to them, why should they when the U.S. would not do more (Gunter, 2015)? It was in Turkey's interests that the Islamic State and the PYD were weakening each other through an expensive, lengthy siege because if the Kurds were weak, they would be unable to attempt to destroy Turkish territorial integrity. After ISIS was successfully driven from Kobani, the PYD's strategy has been to present itself as a reliable, effective, and secular fighting force against ISIS in order to gain international support and legitimacy. To Turkey's chagrin, this strategy has been largely successful, with Western media fascinated by the rise of the "Kurds" and failing to understand that the PYD has connections to the PKK and does not represent all Syrian Kurds (Kanat & Ustun, 2015).

Another point of divergence for U.S. and Turkish policies is the fate of Assad. For Turkey, the Islamic State is considered a product of the broader conflict created by, and exacerbated by, the Assad regime and will accept no peace settlement that retains Assad as the leader of Syria.¹² The U.S. has shown no sign of adopting a comprehensive policy on Syria that addresses the Assad regime (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). In fact, U.S. policy has focused solely on containing and pushing back the Islamic State by using local forces such as the PYD to avoid sending U.S. troops to the ground. The U.S. has also been reluctant to embrace a strategy

¹¹ In August 2016, after an attempted coup against President Erdogan and a terrorist attack at a wedding in Gaziantep, Turkish forces moved into Syria to combat both the Islamic State and prevent the PYD from claiming further territory on the Turkish border.

¹² Turkey has indicated in August 2016 that it would accept Assad as a transitional leader with a peace deal but not as a permanent one.

concerning the regime because of the concern that the regime's fall could create further chaos and bloodshed (Gunter, 2015). Turkey has insisted on the creation of a comprehensive strategy on the Syrian Civil War before committing military forces to the fight against the Islamic State. The differences in policy remains a point of contention and makes it very difficult for Turkey and the U.S. to respond to the changing dynamics of the conflict with a united front. The failure to come to an agreement on how to address Syria and the Islamic State could have long-term implications for the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey and for the future of the region, particularly now that Turkey is involved directly in Syria engaging both the Islamic State and the PYD.

Despite the differences however, both the U.S. and Turkey have emphasized cooperation with regard to the big picture in Syria to ease the strain on relations. Both countries have agreed that the Assad regime created the conditions for the emergence of terrorist networks and that Syria has turned into a "magnet for terrorism (Kanat & Ustun, 2015)." Both countries also recognize the Islamic State as a terrorist organization and as a threat to regional and global security. There is also agreement on the need to train and equip moderate Syrian opposition forces but the contentious issue of the PYD has made progress in this endeavor very difficult.

Turkey's use of forced assimilation is a source of radicalization for the Kurds and this radicalization has typically translated into violence (Kuzu, 2016). The conflict has existed for almost a century and has become intractable. With the recent surge of violence since the peace process collapsed in 2015, an end of the conflict in the near future seems unlikely. While many Kurds have successfully been assimilated into Turkish society, many have not and do not want to be. In fact, many Kurds have developed a strong sense of being different from the Turkish mainstream (Yegen, 2009). The failure to assimilate the Kurds has been a major source of disappointment for Turkey, which has struggled for almost a century to create a homogenized, mono-linguistic nation of Muslims. Added to this disappointment is the fact that most of the Kurds that have failed to be assimilated are in one region of the country, creating a second territorial-linguistic community and a parallel nation that exists both alongside of and challenges the Turkish nation (Celebi et al, 2014). While the Turkish government has taken steps in recent years such as legalizing the Kurdish language and allowing for the formation of Kurdish political parties, these policies are not enough to satisfy the Kurds. In addition, the pressure by external actors such as the EU to cease assimilation policies will likely continue to increase.¹³

Turkey's view of the Syrian conflict and of the PYD cannot be separated from the Kurdish issue and the search for a political resolution to the decades-long conflict. Even though Turkey considers the PYD the Syrian extension of the PKK, it recognizes the realities on the ground and has attempted to treat the PYD as a legitimate actor by asking the PYD to distance itself from Assad, to fight alongside the moderate opposition, and to avoid creating autonomous Kurdish zones that would further complicate both the Kurdish issue in Turkey and any eventual political solution (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). While the PYD did not agree to the terms, they have not openly threatened Turkey and have devoted most of their efforts to fighting Islamists. The success of the PYD however, gave the PKK an opening to take advantage of the chaos and lengthen its reach by appealing to Kurdish youth inside Syria rather than completing the peace process with Turkey. After Turkey refused to overtly aid the Kurds in Kobani, the PKK attacked government buildings and offices along with conservative segments of Kurdish society (Gunter,

¹³ The purges of the public sector after the attempted coup in July 2016 throws into doubt Turkey's chances of advancing any further into the EU.

2015). The PKK continues to threaten Turkey's sovereignty and refuses to disarm while Turkey has taken a more proactive counterterrorism strategy despite the historic progress achieved by both sides during the peace talks. The PKK is taking advantage of the Syrian conflict to position itself as an alternative to Islamic State terrorism in the hopes of finally establishing a Kurdish homeland. Turkey's approach to the PYD would be significantly different without the threat of the PKK (Kanat & Ustun, 2015).

The Kurdish problem is no longer an issue that Turkey can afford to ignore, particularly with the dramatic changes that have occurred in the region in the past decade. The recent establishment of an autonomous Kurdish state in Northern Iraq has further served to increase the Kurds' alienation in the Turkish political community and has reinforced the confidence of Turkey's Kurdish citizens in resisting assimilation. Between the recent autonomy of the Kurds in Iraq and in Syria, the Kurds in Turkey are more emboldened than even in their desire to be Kurdish. The Turkish government began military operations against the PKK once the peace process collapsed but the conflict is unlikely to end unless Turkey grants the Kurds at least some form of autonomy and ceases forced assimilation attempts. The Kurds of the Middle East are playing a key role in changing the political map of the region, challenging the artificial borders established after World War I. Although very different in almost every way, the Islamic State and the Kurds both claim to be post-state entities that ignore Westphalian definition.

Going forward, prospects for the region look grim. In August 2016, Turkish tanks and forces entered Syria to take Jarablus from the Islamic State, cutting off the group's access to Turkey. Turkey has also engaged the PYD to push the Kurds back from the Turkish border. With Turkey directly involved in Syria, the risk of confrontation between Turkish forces and U.S. forces embedded in the PYD is more likely than ever. The Obama Administration has been reluctant to become further involved in the Syrian Civil War and the fight against the Islamic State. The next administration will have important decisions to make in addressing the conflicts and will need to work with Turkey no matter what those decisions are. For a more united front and for the sake of relations between Turkey and the U.S., the two countries must forge a common strategy on how to deal with ISIS and the Syrian Civil War. They need to have a shared view of the conflict and create a strategy together for a political resolution in addition to changing the dynamics on the ground to aid the moderate opposition (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). The U.S. needs to understand that while the fight against the Islamic State is essential for the region's stability and Turkey's own security, the renewed conflict with PKK and its desire to carve out an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria is equally important. Effort needs to be made to separate the PYD from the PKK before Turkey comes into conflict with U.S. special forces, which would be disastrous to relations between the two countries. Turkey has good relations with the KRG in northern Iraq because the KRG is not a security threat. If the PYD did not have PKK connections, Turkey could eventually work with them just like it has with the KRG.

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