

The Kurds Have Backed Damascus into a Corner

The Kurds aren't playing Damascus like a fiddle just yet, but they're coming dangerously close.

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Conflict Context

The past week has seen a flurry of conflicting reports about the true status of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its allied militias in Afrin, with the general conclusion being that Damascus is playing a dangerous game of brinksmanship with Ankara in coyly playing with the possibility of allying with the PYD-YPG "federalist" Kurds. The author wrote about this in his most recently analysis titled "[Syria's Afrin Move: 'Artful Assistance To Allies' Or 'Armageddon In The Making'?](#)", which includes references to his two crucial foundational texts on this topic questioning whether "[It's Even Possible To "Betray" The Kurds?](#)" and warning that "[The Syrian Kurds Think They Can Play Damascus Like A Fiddle](#)".

The main point being expressed is that no actor should feel any "guilt" about breaking their previous "commitments" to the Syrian Kurds because it's impossible to "betray" them anyhow, but that Damascus might not realize this and is therefore susceptible to being taken advantage of by the PYD-YPG as it seeks to provoke a conventional Turkish-Syrian conflict. Regrettably, the fact alone that Damascus is flirting with the Kurds is proof that it might be falling for their ruse, though to the government's defense, it might only be doing so as part of a short-term tactical measure aimed at countering what it believes to be the larger and more existential threat of Turkey.

Spheres Of Influence

That, with all due respect to Damascus, is a risky supposition to make because it overlooks the nuances of the Russian-Turkish Strategic Partnership and Ankara's legitimate claims about fighting Kurdish terrorists, which everyone should be reminded were passively approved by Moscow withdrawing its military forces from Afrin and de-facto greenlighting the "Operation Olive Branch". Turkey does not intend to "annex" any part of Syria like some misleading infowar voices claim but it admittedly wants to establish a sphere of influence within the country by replacing the PYD-YPG with pro-Turkish Kurds and Arabas afterwards. They're not the only one gaming to set up their own 'fiefdom' in the country, though, since the Kurdish "federalists" themselves already allowed 2000 US troops to deploy to 10 bases in the agriculturally and energy-rich northeastern one-third of Syria.

Israel is also in on this too, since it's [no secret](#) that they intend to expand and then ultimately crystallize the so-called "de-escalation zone" next to the occupied Golan Heights in order to carve out their own sphere as well. Iran, however, isn't playing its hand as obviously as the others are and actually has international law on its side since its envisioned

region of influence corresponds with the territories under the SAA's control. As for Russia, it's engaged in a complex "[balancing](#)" act attempting to multi-manage these sometimes contradictory aspirations in order to advance its own end game designs of replacing America's fading leadership in the region and therefore strengthening the [Multipolar World Order](#) that's emerging in its wake.

"Balancing"

To that end, Russia wants military hostilities to end as soon as possible so that it can use its influence over the political process to divvy out de-facto spheres of influence to every competitor, thereby making it the indispensable Mideast power. The problem is that both Syria and Iran are against this design: Damascus is opposed in principle and also because it believes that anything less than liberating 'every square inch' of the country like President Assad promised would discredit him, while Tehran fears that it and its Hezbollah allies will be "backstabbed" during this process and compelled to withdraw from Syria. That's why these old partners are coordinating with one another in order to keep hostilities simmering for as long as possible in the hope that the resultant uncertainty can create windows of opportunity for them to push back against their Turkish, American, and Israeli rivals' spheres of influence.

Russia wised up to their game plan and is [increasingly losing patience](#) with both of them, knowing full well that its grand strategic vision risks being undermined by Syria and Iran if these latter two succeed in their objectives. Moscow believes that it has more to gain in the long term and in view of the "bigger picture" by pragmatically going along with Turkey and Israel's sphere of influence claims while simultaneously reaching a "gentlemen's agreement" with the US for passively accepting its own in the Kurdish-controlled northeast, but all of Russia's hard-fought diplomatic-strategic work is now endangered because Syria appears to have heeded Iran's presumed advice in backing up the PYD-YPG Kurds in Afrin against the Turks.

Damascus' "Kurdish Card"

It's not only that Syria wants to spite the Turks, or cause enough confusion that it can then exploit to liberate more territory, that explains its support – however temporary and tactical it may be – for the Kurds, but deeper motivations as well. Syria is a richly diverse state comprised of many sub-identities that have come together in order to form the contemporary nation, and the Kurds are one of its main components. If President Assad was seriously perceived of by his people as "selling out" what are technically his own citizens despite their treasonous collaboration with the US and anti-constitutional declaration of "federalization" in setting up an Amero-Zionist proxy state in the country's northeast, then it could lead to the collapse of the modern Syrian state.

To explain, the government's implicit "acknowledgement" that one of its constituent people have betrayed the country for identity-centric "nationalist" reasons could quickly lead to the erosion of the country's contemporary (key word) identity that was constructed in the aftermath of independence when this millennia-old civilization abruptly became a nation-state after centuries of Ottoman occupation. It's not to say that Syria has always "needed" the Kurds, but just that nowadays the removal of this strategic factor from the national equation could be disastrous in the sense that it might "legitimize" other [identity separatist "causes"](#) elsewhere, rapidly leading to the unraveling of the very essence of the modern-day

Syrian state. This doesn't have to happen, but it's the fear of such a scenario that might be why Damascus has felt compelled to back up the Kurds in a desperate bid to ensure their "loyalty", however flimsy and short-term it may be.

Another possible motivation might have to do with Syria's history of supporting Kurdish militants ever since it decided to host PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan in 1979 in an effort to asymmetrically equalize its strategic disparity with much stronger NATO-member Turkey. While former President Hafez Assad expelled this controversial figure in 1998 following unprecedented Turkish pressure, it's likely that elements of the Syrian "deep state" retained some uncertain degree of contact with his organization in order to not lose the unconventional leverage that they would need to rely on in the event of an actual future war with their neighbor. In view of this, it makes sense why the SAA reportedly armed the PYD-YPG, which itself is an offshoot of Ocalan's PKK, in the early stages of the Hybrid War of Terror on Syria when the Kurds were fighting against foreign-backed terrorists and had yet to openly betray Damascus.

Nowadays there's no denying that the PYD-YPG committed treason against the Syrian state through its collaboration with the Americans and blatant ["federal" regime change calls](#) against its democratically elected government, but the irony is that Damascus doesn't yet feel comfortable with recognizing this reality because of the earlier mentioned fear that it might catalyze the destruction of the country's contemporary "nationalism" and subsequently its very being. The Syrian authorities and their Iranian allies believe that there are several vultures circling the Arab Republic and waiting to take a piece of it for themselves, whether through the unrealistic scenario of doing so de-jure (which would never be recognized by any other player and isn't seriously considered by anyone at this time) or de-facto via "decentralization" along the "de-escalation zones" into spheres of influence, and they think that the state actors (which includes their Israeli foe that they [don't recognize as legitimate](#)) constitute a greater threat than the non-state Kurds.

Concluding Thoughts

This might be a massive miscalculation on their part because it downplays the danger that the PYD-YPG poses not only to the integrity of the Syrian state via their Amero-Zionist "federalist" crusade but also the reaction that it risks provoking from Turkey, which probably isn't going to stop until the threat is quashed. Ankara's response might even include attacking the SAA under the pretext that the national military is "defending terrorists", a scenario which might likely see Russia stand on the sidelines as passive "punishment" to Syria for "overstepping" and trying to undermine Moscow's meticulous multipolar "balancing" strategy. Damascus is between a rock and hard place after being encouraged by Tehran to "confront" the Russian-Turkish-Israeli spheres of influence plan and the implied one that would likely follow between Moscow and Washington by playing Syria's own version of the "Kurdish Card", but it stands to dramatically backfire in the worst ways imaginable.

The danger isn't just that the Turkish Armed Forces will wage an all-out war on their Syrian counterparts - a scenario that is frighteningly real - but that Damascus has shown that it is unable to overcome its identity-"dependency" on the Kurds in doing away with the long-held notion that they form an "integral" part of Syrian society and can't be directly fought against at any cost no matter what they do, which includes working with the country's hated Amero-Zionist enemies. The fact that the Kurds can "get away" with this is striking since no Arab or Turkish member of the country's society has ever been given such an "exception",

but that just proves that the Syrian leadership still feels that it needs the Kurds more than the reverse, which is a major strategic vulnerability that's being exploited by PYD-YPG that Syria ironically says at times [doesn't even represent the will of the majority of the Kurds](#) anyhow.

It's because of these reasons that it can be concluded that the Kurds have backed Damascus into a corner, but as the saying goes, "a cornered fox is more dangerous than a jackal", and this means that Syria might react very unpredictably in the next week or two as it fights for what its leadership truly believes to be the existential fate of the state itself.

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