

DANGEROUS GAMBLE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON TURKEY'S ATTACKS ON SYRIAN KURDS

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Turkey's recent [attacks on Syria's Kurdish towns](#) and its threat of a ground invasion could destabilise the border region, which has yet to recover from the scars of a long civil war and the violence by the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group. The trigger was the [November 13 blast in Istanbul](#) that claimed six lives. Turkey has blamed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Kurdish militant group operating in its southeastern parts, and the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian-Kurdish militia, for the blast (they have denied the allegations) and has carried out air strikes in Syria's Kurdish towns. Turkey has reportedly asked the YPG to withdraw from key towns on the border — Manbij, Tal Rifaat and Kobane — soon and has threatened to launch another cross-border incursion into Syria if the YPG failed to do so. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wants to create a buffer zone between the YPG-controlled towns in Syria and Turkey's own Kurdish territories, where the state has been fighting the PKK. Ankara sees the YPG as an ideological and organisational brother of the PKK, which it has designated, along with the U.S. and European countries, as a terrorist organisation.

Turkey has carried out several incursions in the past into Syria, gobbling up territories now manned by the Syrian National Army, a rebel umbrella group that is opposed to Damascus and backed by Ankara. But, Turkey had also come under pressure from the U.S., its NATO partner that backs a YPG-led militia group, and Russia, an ally of the Syrian regime, which placed constraints on its operations. However, Russia's Ukraine war seems to have altered the geopolitical reality in the region in Turkey's favour. A preoccupied Russia would not like to antagonise Turkey, which despite being a NATO member has not joined the U.S.-led sanctions, and the U.S. would want Ankara's support for the inclusion of Sweden and Finland into NATO. This opens space for Mr. Erdoğan to up the ante in Syria. But this could be a dangerous bet. The IS had captured most of these border towns in 2014-15. The YPG, with U.S. help, had fought hard against the IS to liberate the region. Now under attack, the YPG has already said it would end patrolling of many towns on the border. A Turkish incursion could trigger further chaos, which could help Islamist militants to regroup and push the Kurdish population, already victims of years of wars, into further misery. Instead of taking the military path, Mr. Erdoğan should hold talks with Russia and the U.S., which have better ties with the Syrian Kurds, to find a workable solution to stabilise the border.

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