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Amid Own Tensions, Turkey and Iran Pledge Mutual Aid Against Kurdish Rebels

By Margaret Griffis

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Turkey and Iran have [pledged](#) assistance to each other in their mutual fight against Kurdish rebels based in northern Iraq. The new promise for support comes two days after rebels killed 24 Turkish soldiers and amid tensions between the two countries over a new missile defense system. Details of the partnership were not released.



On Wednesday, the Kurdistan Workers Party (P.K.K.) [attacked](#) two military posts in southeastern Turkey, killing 24 Turkish soldiers and wounding 18 more. Ankara's response has been to send [over 10,000 troops](#) into southeastern Turkey. One Turkish newspaper reported that some troops have entered as far as [15 miles into Iraq](#) after the rebels, but most of the soldiers have [remained](#) on Turkish soil.

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The attacks came just a day after Turkey [resumed bombing](#) P.K.K. bases in northern Iraq and months after the P.K.K. [ended](#) its unilateral ceasefire. The air and artillery strikes have occurred all summer, at the same time that Tehran [separately staged](#) its own operations against the Party Of A Free Life Of Kurdistan (P.J.A.K.), a P.K.K.-offshoot that primarily targets Iran. Although both countries have sent some ground troops into Iraq Kurdistan recently, a ground war inside Iraq would be difficult due to the mountainous terrain. Such an operation could also [destabilize the region](#) further.

Although Baghdad [sided](#) with Turkey after the most recent attacks, Iraq has mostly been [critical](#) of Turkish incursions into Iraqi territory. Iraqi forces, however, are [unable](#) or [unwilling](#) to defend the borders properly and [refused](#) to take steps against the P.K.K. this time. The regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been accused of siding with the Kurdish rebels in the past, [said](#) it would to stay out of the conflict.

Iran recently [disapproved](#) of Turkey's agreement to host an early warning radar system that is part of N.A.T.O.'s European missile defense plans. Tehran sees the [U.S.-backed system](#) as a direct threat to their defense efforts, but Ankara [says](#) the system is meant to protect Turkey as well as other N.A.T.O. concerns. At the very least, by hosting the system, Turkey has garnered new [political and material support](#) from the United States in the form of [Predator drones and helicopters](#) to use against the Kurdish rebels.