

Turkey continues its incursions into northern Iraq

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Over the weekend and again on Tuesday and Wednesday, Turkey carried out new air raids against Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. According to a representative of the Kurdish Peschmerga, villages in the province of Dohuk were bombed on Wednesday. There are as yet no reliable reports on the number of victims or the material damage from the attacks.

The Turkish high command said its air force attacked more than 200 targets between December 16 and December 22, “disabling” between 150 and 175 fighters of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). The raids hit Iraqi targets several kilometers from the Turkish-Iraqi border.

The prime minister of the autonomous Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq and head of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), Massoud Barzani, condemned the attacks against alleged PKK bases. On Monday, Barzani told journalists in Sulaimaniya, “We cannot accept that our villages are bombed and the inhabitants killed.”

In fact, Barzani has tolerated the bombings and done nothing to counter them. The main concern of his commanders is to play down the effects of the raids.

According to Turkish sources, the reaction of the Iraqi president and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Jalal Talabani, was even more muted. He was quoted as saying, “We acknowledge Turkey’s right to defend itself against a terrorist organization. We know Turkey’s sensitivities. We will not stay silent, but we will not declare war.”

The Iraqi Kurdish leaders are well aware of the military superiority of the Turkish forces. Moreover, northern Iraq is heavily dependent on Turkey as an economic and trading partner.

Barzani cannot rely on any support from the US, which until a few months ago indicated its disapproval of Turkish military action inside Iraq. However, at the beginning of November, during a visit to Washington by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President

Bush gave the go-ahead for military raids against the PKK and promised logistical and intelligence support. Since then, the Turkish air force has been able to identify targets based on information from the US occupation force in Iraq.

This collaboration between the US and Turkey was behind Barzani’s boycott of a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice two weeks ago. However, his protest failed to make an impression on either the US or Turkey. In fact, according to an Associated Press report, Bush held a telephone conversation with Erdogan on Monday and promised to continue the collaboration between the two countries—including the exchange of intelligence information.

With this backing, the speaker for the Turkish government, Cemil Cicek, responded to protests from the Kurdish government in northern Iraq with an undisguised threat: “Our demand is that those who complain (about Turkish attacks) should not abet” the rebels in Iraq, Cicek said. “These operations will continue until this evil is eliminated.”

The Kurdish nationalist parties have served as a critical prop of the US occupation force in Iraq. The Kurdish elite, in which the KDP and the PUK play the leading political role, hope that their close collaboration with the imperialist occupiers will enable them to realize their aim of an independent or broadly autonomous Kurdish state, with the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as its capital. Such a goal is completely unacceptable to the Turkish ruling elite, which fears that any form of Kurdish state on its eastern border will encourage separatist tendencies inside Turkey itself.

As part of its efforts to isolate Iran and develop stronger links to Sunni layers inside Iraq, US foreign policy is somewhat distancing itself from the Iraqi Kurds and turning increasingly towards Ankara. On December 25, the right-wing *Washington Times* published a lead article

that made this clear in a blunt and cynical manner.

According to the *Washington Times*: “This is evidently a time for everyone to test their perceptions against reality. No one with common sense would argue that the president of the United States agreed to sacrifice American lives to create a semi- or fully-independent Kurdistan. But Kurds feel they’re privileged partners of the United States... Last week’s operation was a signal that the United States has heard Turkey’s message loud and clear. It was also a sign that the United States is troubled by the situation it is in—appearing to tolerate a terrorist organization and creating the perception of favoring the Iraqi Kurds.”

Not so long ago, the suppression of the Iraqi Kurds by the regime of Saddam Hussein was held high by Washington as justification for its invasion of Iraq. According to this scenario, the “liberation” of Iraqi Kurdistan was indeed a reason for “sacrificing American lives.”

A major reason for this tilt toward the Iraqi Kurds was the eagerness of the Kurdish nationalist parties to offer their services as mercenaries and collaborators, at a time when the “northern route”—i.e., the invasion of northern Iraq by American forces via Turkey—was blocked as a result of popular opposition within Turkey to the US aggression.

It is time to draw a balance sheet of these developments. The liberation of the Kurdish population from poverty and repression cannot be realized on the basis of a nationalist perspective, which isolates Kurds from their fellow workers in Turkey and the Arab countries. On the basis of such a perspective, the Kurdish masses have been reduced to pawns of the great powers and competing national cliques. In order to defend their social and democratic rights, Kurds must join with the other peoples of the Middle and Far East in a united struggle against Western imperialism and the local bourgeois elites.



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