

Turkey launches anti-Kurdish raids into northern Iraq

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At least 24 Turkish soldiers were killed on Wednesday, in an attack by Kurdish militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Hakkari province of eastern Turkey, near the Iraq border.

Hours after the raid—the deadliest such attack since 1984—Turkey's government and military responded with an incursion of 22 army battalions, bombers and helicopter gunships, and drones against the PKK in five different areas on either side of the border. Turkish news agency DHA claimed Friday that seven leading PKK members were killed in the attacks.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül told NTV, a private Turkish television network, that “the vengeance for these attacks will be immense and much stronger; they will see that waging a war against the Turkish government will lead them nowhere.”

According to the *Daily News (Hurriyet)*, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told journalists during a press conference that the incursion is “a pursuit within the limits of international law,” adding: “We will never bow to any attack from inside or outside Turkey.”

Turkey claimed Sunday to have killed roughly 100 PKK members in offensives on both sides of the Turkish-Iraqi border. Chief of General Staff General Necdet Özel is personally commanding the offensive. Forty-nine PKK members were killed in the Kazan Valley region near Çukurca in Hakkari province.

Three Turkish soldiers were reported killed and six wounded in clashes in the Kazan Valley and in Semdinli.

The offensive is being widely promoted in the Turkish media. Funerals for the Turkish soldiers killed in the initial raid were covered on Turkish news, attracting large crowds who joined mourning families.

Several dozen demonstrators also tried to march

outside the prime minister's office and protest against the Turkish government's attack on Iraq. They were met by the police, who used a barricade, according to *Hurriyet*.

The US is tacitly backing the Turkish incursion. President Obama condemned the Kurdish attacks against Turkey, a NATO ally of the US, in a White House statement: “The United States will continue our strong cooperation with the Turkish government as it works to defeat the terrorist threat from the PKK and to bring peace, stability and prosperity to all the people of southeast Turkey.”

The US State Department classifies the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Erdogan was criticised by Turkey's main opposition party, the People's Republic Party (CHP), whose leader Kemal Kiliçdaroglu is of Kurdish descent. Kiliçdaroglu told the press on Friday that Erdogan should either find a solution to the Kurdish conflict or leave the government.

Faced with tensions between the Kurdish and Turkish populations in Turkey, and being the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has a significant percentage of Kurdish voters, Prime Minister Erdogan appealed to the citizens to stay calm and restrain themselves from impulsive action. “Those who fail to control their anger should know that they will be helping the terrorist organisation to achieve its objectives,” he told the Turkish press.

The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), a pro-Kurdish party that won 36 seats in the Parliament in June, faced opposition in cities around the country. Crowds gathered outside BDP offices and threw rocks, news agency IHA reported.

The BDP recently ended its boycott in parliament in protest against court rulings banning some of its elected

officials from taking their seats in parliament. The BDP is the successor of another pro-Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), after its closure by the Supreme Court for alleged ties to the PKK.

In a written statement, BDP party co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Gültan Kisanak urged the government and PKK to end the war. “We appeal to both the PKK and the government to immediately end the war without wasting another second.... Unfortunately, the government has not responded positively to calls by our party, civic groups and intellectuals to lay down arms and launch a dialogue. They have insisted on their policies of war, calling it a new period in the fight against terror.”

The Kurds are a historically oppressed ethnic minority in Turkey, numbering an estimated 11 to 14 million people. Fighting between the Turkish government and Kurdish militants has claimed up to 40,000 lives since 1984.

Ankara’s fear of Kurdish nationalism has been deeply exacerbated by the intervention of US imperialism in the Middle East, and particularly its wars in Iraq. The establishment of a nominally “autonomous” Kurdish region in northern Iraq under the protection of the US no-fly-zone after the 1991 Gulf War caused great concern in the Turkish bourgeoisie.

After the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Iraqi Kurdish parties and militias controlled by pro-US Kurdish warlords played a critical role in propping up the US occupation in Iraq, against resistance based primarily in Sunni and Shiite Arab areas. These forces included the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani, currently the President of the US occupation regime in Iraq, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Massoud Barzani. Barzani is currently the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Amid rising concerns over the future of US-occupied Iraq, the Turkish government invaded northern Iraq in 2008, with tacit US backing, to hunt down PKK members. However, Ankara did not target pro-US Kurdish forces in Iraq.

Such tensions have been exacerbated by social upheavals throughout the Middle East, particularly after mass working class protests toppled US-backed regimes in Tunisia and Egypt this winter. US and European imperialism have intervened in the region, bombing Libya and toppling the regime of Colonel

Muammar Gaddafi, and threatening the Syrian regime, which has also been hit by protests.

Ankara is now preparing a military intervention into Syria as fighting spreads. A major consideration for Ankara is whether the violence in Syria could spread to neighboring areas of Turkey and Iraq, enabling the PKK or other Kurdish militant groups hostile to Turkey to widen their base of operations (see “Turkey preparing military intervention in Syria”).

Now, as nationalist tensions spread throughout the region, Turkey is mounting another violent cross-border attack into Iraq.



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