

Turkey allows Kurdish reinforcements into Syrian town of Kobani

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Under intensive pressure from Washington, the Turkish government has allowed Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters to cross its territory to reinforce Syrian Kurds battling Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia for the town of Kobani.

According to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which controls the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, some 160 of its peshmerga fighters crossed into Turkey via a road convoy and an airlift to the southern Turkish city of Sanliurfa early yesterday. They were expected to cross into Syria and reach Kobani later in the day.

KRG spokesman Safeen Dizayee told Reuters last weekend that the peshmerga would primarily provide back-up support, with artillery and other weaponry. "It will not be combat troops as such, at this point anyway," he said. Syrian Kurdish fighters in Kobani have appealed for heavier weaponry for weeks to counter the well-armed ISIS militia.

Every aspect of the deployment, including the size and weaponry of the peshmerga force, has been surrounded by bitter haggling between the Turkish government, the KRG in Iraq and the YPG militia, the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Kobani.

Just last week, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced the PYD as "a terrorist organisation" like the outlawed separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, with which the PYD is affiliated. Ankara has refused to allow PKK fighters to cross the border into Kobani or to provide medical treatment for Syrian Kurds wounded in battle.

The Turkish government, which has well-established ties to the KRG in Iraq, backed the dispatch of peshmerga to Kobani as means of undermining the PYD. However, it was not so keen about the supply of

heavy weapons, fearing that they might fall into the hands of the PKK's Syrian allies.

For its part, the PYD, distrustful of Ankara's motives, sought to limit the involvement of the peshmerga. The initial KRG offer was for a force of 2,000 but that was wound back to 200, then 150, in negotiations with the Syrian Kurds.

The PYD is similarly cautious about offers of assistance from the Western-backed coalition of militia groups known as the Free Syria Army (FSA), which is seeking to oust President Bashar al-Assad. The CIA has armed and supported FSA factions from a facility based in Turkey known as the Military Operations Centre.

With Turkish support, the FSA initially offered to send 1,300 troops to Kobani. The latest reports indicate that a group of 50 arrived in the town, after travelling through Turkish territory.

The FSA has previously clashed with Kurdish fighters in the Syrian city of Aleppo. For its part, the PYD has used the civil war in Syria to establish its control of Kurdish regions in the north of the country, while refusing to side with efforts to oust Assad.

The US has expended considerable effort in preventing the fall of Kobani to ISIS. Many of the US air strikes inside Syria have been directed against ISIS targets in or near the town. Of the 14 air attacks in Syria and Iraq on Tuesday and Wednesday, US Central Command reported that eight were near Kobani.

Critics have questioned the strategic value of focussing on the medium-sized Kurdish town near the Turkish border. Speaking to the *Telegraph* last weekend, a former British army brigadier Ben Barry suggested that the Obama administration was playing to the media, which is able to cover the battle from Turkish territory. "The CNN factor was at play," Barry said, indicating that Kobani was a distraction from

more important military targets.

In fact, the US is using the opportunity to forge closer ties with the various Kurdish militia groups as Washington pursues its broader aim of reviving its plans, shelved in September last year, for regime-change in Syria. From Washington's standpoint, Kobani could provide a new beachhead inside Syria from which to mount operations against Assad.

As well as pro-Western FSA and peshmerga fighters, the US is seeking to cultivate the PYD, despite the PYD's previous reluctance to take sides against Assad. The Syrian Kurdish militia was already coordinating its operations with the US military and the air strikes. The US State Department has held talks with the PYD, even though the PYD's Turkish ally, the PKK, is still on the US list of terrorist organisations. Last week, three American military transports dropped 24 tonnes of small arms and ammunition and 10 tonnes of medical supplies to Kobani, despite Turkish objections.

The US military is also tacitly collaborating with the PKK inside Iraq, where PKK fighters fought alongside peshmerga forces and are credited with playing a crucial role in repelling ISIS offensives. The American military has a joint operation centre at Irbil in northern Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region. The CIA and US military have long established ties with the Kurdish nationalist parties, having used the region as a base of operations against Saddam Hussein's regime before the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

"We welcome the deployment of peshmerga fighters and weapons from the Kurdistan region to Kobani," Brett McGurk, US deputy special presidential envoy for the coalition against ISIS, declared yesterday. Reporting the comments, a *Wall Street Journal* article declared that the operation coordinated by Turkey, Syrian Kurds and Iraqi Kurds marked "a turning point" and noted the willingness of Kurdish factions in Iraq and Syria to "set aside deep ideological rifts."

As for the PKK and its Syrian PYD affiliate, they have no objections to collaborating with US imperialism as it wages another criminal neo-colonial war in the Middle East. Like the more established Kurdish bourgeois nationalist organisations in the region, their perspective of a separate Kurdish state is based on an accommodation with the major powers. Such manoeuvring with imperialism, which has a long and sordid history, has produced disaster after disaster

for the Kurdish people.



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