

Turkish threats against Kurds set stage for ground invasion of Syria

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The Turkish government is escalating its accusations that Syrian Kurdish forces carried out Wednesday's terror bombing in Ankara, which left 28 people dead, including 20 high-ranking soldiers, and 61 wounded. These charges are being made in order to pave the way for a Turkish ground invasion of Syria and a clash with Syrian, Kurdish and Russian forces there.

Both Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu have denounced the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Syrian government, vowing to retaliate. Fourteen people in seven provinces have been detained in connection with the attack.

President Erdoğan said on Thursday that the PKK and PYD were behind it, notwithstanding their denials. Earlier on the same day, Davutoğlu claimed that the Syrian regime was directly responsible for the bombing and that "a direct link between the attack and the YPG has been established."

At a press conference after his visit to the General Staff, Davutoğlu said, "The YPG [People's Protection Units, the militia of the PYD] is a tool of the Syrian regime, and the regime is directly responsible for this attack. The right to take all kinds of measures against the Syrian regime is reserved for us."

Davutoğlu identified one of the suicide bombers as Neccar, a Syrian who allegedly entered Turkey in July 2014 as a refugee and was in contact with both the PYD and the Syrian military intelligence service.

The Turkish government informed the ambassadors of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and envoys of Germany and the Netherlands that the attack was carried out by the Kurdish militia. Ankara alleges that the PYD is an offshoot of the outlawed PKK and calls on its NATO allies not to support it.

The US and other NATO powers have used the PYD as

a key proxy force fighting the Islamic State (IS) on the ground in Syria, and both Moscow and Washington have supplied weapons and provided air support to the PYD's armed wing, the YPG.

In response to Turkish accusations of YPG responsibility, the YPG general command released a statement, saying, "We would like to reiterate our message to the peoples of Turkey and the world; We have no links to this incident. It is not specific to this case alone, as we have never been involved in an attack against Turkey... With this statement, Davutoğlu wants to pave the way for an offensive on Syria and Rojava [Syrian Kurdistan], and to cover up their relations with the ISIS which are known to the whole world by now."

Cemil Bayrak, the leader of the PKK, has also denied Ankara's claims and stated that he did not know who was responsible for the Ankara bombing. He said the attack could be "an answer to massacres in Kurdistan."

Washington declined to endorse Ankara's claims of Kurdish responsibility for the attacks. "We are in no position to confirm or deny the assertions made by the Turkish government with respect to responsibility," US State Department spokesperson John Kirby told reporters. Asked about Erdoğan's question as to whether Turkey or the PYD was Washington's ally in the region, Kirby again refused to take a position. "The side that we all need to be on here is the counter-Daesh [ISIS] side," he said.

Indicating the divisions within NATO over Syria, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accused the US government yesterday of making conflicting statements about the YPG militia. At a news conference in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, Cavusoglu said, "Resorting to terrorist groups like the YPG in the fight against Daesh in Syria is above all a sign of weakness... Everyone must stop this mistake. In particular, our ally the United States must stop this mistake immediately."

Indicating that “My friend [US Secretary of State John] Kerry said the YPG cannot be trusted,” the Turkish foreign minister said that Ankara was “glad to hear from John Kerry yesterday that his views on the YPG have partly changed.” However, he added, “When you look at some statements coming from America, conflicting and confused statements are still coming.”

Meanwhile, the Turkish military, which previously hit PYD/YPG targets only with artillery shells, has reportedly started to fire Stinger and HAWK missiles. It fired about five missiles at PYD targets in Syria’s Afrin province.

Moreover, there are reports of border violations by Turkish troops. The pro-Kurdish Anfnews agency reported on Thursday that “military vehicles of the Turkish army crossed into Rojava land across the Efrin border today.”

These reports were accompanied by a report Wednesday from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that some 500 Islamist fighters crossed the Turkish border and headed for the Syrian town of Azaz in northern Aleppo province. Anfnews reported that they were led by Turkish forces.

According to *Today’s Zaman*, “At least 2,000 Syrian rebel fighters have re-entered the country from Turkey over the last week to reinforce insurgents fending off an assault by Syrian Kurdish militias, rebel sources said on Thursday.” Citing Reuters, the newspaper reported that Abu Issa, a commander in the Levant Front, had said, “We have been allowed to move everything from light weapons to heavy equipment, mortars, missiles and our tanks... There is tight security on the four-hour drive from one border crossing to the other.”

The Syrian government also claimed last Sunday that some 100 Turkish forces with heavy machine guns had entered Syria in an ongoing supply operation to the insurgents. Citing from “another rebel source,” *Today’s Zaman* reported, “The Turkish military have stepped up delivery of munitions and heavy military hardware in the last two days to bolster rebels facing the major offensive launched by the Syrian army and its allies.”

The threat that Turkey’s aggression in Syria will provoke a far wider and potentially catastrophic war was the subject of a draft resolution submitted by Russia to the United Nations Security Council Friday, calling for an end to cross-border shelling and a halt to “attempts or plans for foreign ground intervention.” The US and France, both of which wield a veto on the council, opposed the resolution. Even while rejecting the Russian measure, France’s ambassador to the UN, Francois

Delattre, acknowledged, “We are facing a dangerous military escalation that could easily get out of control and lead us to uncharted territory.”

The main Turkish opposition parties have contented themselves with pointing a finger at the government for failing to stop the terrorist attack in the capital, but do not oppose the drive to war.

Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) Chairperson Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu told reporters yesterday that he could “only say one thing: Turkey is not properly ruled”, adding, “Turkey has turned into a bloodbath. We do not deserve this.” The CHP urged the interior minister to resign.

The Turkish-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) also pointed to “security and intelligence negligence”. Its vice chairperson, Umit Ozdag, stated, “There was no strategic or operational intelligence deficiency here, but rather pre-emptive police negligence. The security forces were notified about a potential bombing in Ankara, but unfortunately no efficient measures were taken.”

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) responded with threats to close some critical media outlets on charges of making terrorist propaganda. On Wednesday, an AKP deputy said the *Cumhuriyet* daily and news portals such as T24 “should definitely be closed down.” He continued: “What they are doing is not journalism, but making propaganda for the terrorist organization. Nothing in Turkey will be the same as before. Our independence is in danger.”

For months, some government and AKP officials have threatened to strip deputies from the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) of their parliamentary immunity. The government charges the HDP with having links to the PKK and YPG and has excluded it from all its official talks.



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