

Syrian army, Iran threaten counterattack against Turkish invasion of Syria

Alex Lantier
14 October 2019

The war unleashed by Turkey's invasion of Syria, targeting formerly US-backed Kurdish forces, escalated out of control this weekend as the Syrian army and Iran moved to counterattack. With Turkish troops and allied Al Qaeda militias advancing deep into Kurdish-held territory in Syria, the Middle East is only days away from an all-out war between the major regional powers that could trigger a global conflict between nuclear-armed world powers.

UN reports show that 130,000 Syrians have fled their homes in the region amid the Turkish offensive, and Turkish officials claim they had "neutralized" at least 415 Kurdish fighters. Turkish troops seized the cities of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, amid heavy fighting including ongoing Turkish air raids, and seized a road crossing that cut off US and Kurdish troops in Kobani. Turkish troops also fired artillery at US troops near Kobani in what former US envoy Brett McGurk said was "not a mistake," although Turkish officials later denied this.

Turkey's Syrian "rebel" allies, the Islamist Syrian National Army (SNA, formerly the Free Syrian Army), are executing Kurdish civilians in areas they hold, according to multiple reports. Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf was executed; her bullet-riddled car appeared in a video surrounded by SNA fighters. Beyond Al Qaeda-linked calls to destroy infidels, the British *Daily Telegraph* noted, the SNA's main outlook "is sectarian: they are anti-Kurdish and they are Arab chauvinists."

Yesterday evening, the Syrian army announced it would march on the area. The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported: "Syrian Arab Army units began moving north to confront Turkish aggression on Syrian territory... The movement comes to confront the ongoing Turkish aggression on towns and areas in the north of Hasaka and Raqqqa provinces, where the Turkish forces committed massacres against locals, occupied some areas and destroyed infrastructure."

The Syrian army has reportedly reached an agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia, whose alliance with the United States was broken by

Washington a week ago. Under this agreement, Syrian army troops would reach the city of Kobani near the Syrian-Turkish border in 48 hours. On Saturday, President Donald Trump had authorized the remaining 1,000 US troops in Kobani to withdraw, and US forces were in full retreat across northern Syria this weekend to avoid being cut off by advancing Turkish troops.

Iran, which has deployed tens of thousands of troops as well as drones to Syria in recent years to back the Syrian regime against a NATO-led proxy war, indicated it would support the Syrian army.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's Advisor for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati met with Syrian Ambassador to Iran Adnan Mahmoud yesterday in Tehran. He gave Iran's "full support to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, calling for the withdrawal of the Turkish forces," SANA reported. Velayati added, "The principled policy of Iran is based on supporting the people and government of Syria and defending their righteous stances in a way that entails continuing joint cooperation until terrorism and terrorist organizations are completely eliminated."

At the same time, military tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia are surging amid mutual attacks on tankers carrying Persian Gulf oil supplies that are critical to the world economy. Last month, the US and Saudi governments blamed a September 14 missile attack on Saudi oil facilities that caused a sharp rise in world oil prices on Iran, without providing any evidence. Then on October 11, two missiles hit the Iranian tanker Sabiti off Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast.

Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, said yesterday that Iran would retaliate against unnamed targets for the attack on the Sabiti. "A special committee has been set up to investigate the attack on Sabiti... Its report will soon be submitted to the authorities for decision," Shamkhani told Fars News. "Piracy and mischief on international waterways aimed at making commercial shipping insecure will not go

unanswered.”

Saudi officials declined to comment on the Sabiti attack, and officials with the US Fifth Fleet in the Gulf sheikdom of Bahrain claimed to have no information on it. But there is widespread speculation in the international media that the attack was carried out by Saudi Arabia or with its support.

The conflicts erupting between the different capitalist regimes in the Middle East pose an imminent threat not only to the population of the region, but to the entire world. Workers can give no support to any of the competing military plans and strategic appetites of these reactionary regimes. With America, Europe, Russia and China all deeply involved in the proxy war in Syria, a large-scale Middle East war could strangle the world oil supply and escalate into war between nuclear-armed powers. The working class is coming face to face with the real possibility of a Third World War.

The Kurdish-led SDF militias in Syria, vastly outgunned by Turkish forces and vulnerable to air strikes, warned US officials in talks leaked by CNN that they would appeal for Russia to attack Turkey and protect SDF and Syrian army forces. As Turkey is legally a NATO ally of Washington and the European powers, such an attack could compel the United States and its European allies to either break the 70-year-old NATO alliance or go to war with Russia to protect Turkey.

“You are leaving us to be slaughtered,” SDF General Mazloun Kobani Abdi told US officials in a meeting last Thursday. “You are not willing to protect the people, but you do not want another force to come and protect us. You have sold us.”

Mazloun dismissed US officials when they replied by demanding that the SDF not cut a deal with Russia, but instead keep taking huge casualties from Turkish air raids. He said, “I need to know if you are capable of protecting my people, of stopping these bombs falling on us or not. I need to know, because if you’re not, I need to make a deal with Russia and the regime now and invite their planes to protect this region.”

US forces across Syria were in full retreat, however, and US Defense Secretary Mark Esper told US television news yesterday that the Turkish-Kurdish conflict “gets worse by the hour.” Given the attempts by the Kurds to work out an alliance with Syria and Russia, he added, Trump “directed that we begin a deliberate withdrawal of forces from northern Syria.”

Esper said he would “not place American service members in the middle of a longstanding conflict between the Turks and the Kurds. This is not why we are in Syria.”

Esper said the Turkish army was rejecting the Pentagon’s appeals for a ceasefire with the Kurds and instead expanding

its war aims inside Syria. “In the last 24 hours, we learned that they likely intend to expand their attack further south than originally planned, and to the west,” he said. Esper added that “all the exact things” US officials warned their Turkish counterparts would likely happen if they invaded Syria were now taking place, including the release of tens of thousands of Islamic State (ISIS) fighters held in prison camps by Washington’s former Kurdish allies.

What is unfolding in the Middle East is a bloody debacle produced by three decades of imperialist wars waged by Washington and its European allies since the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq. Their inflaming of national, ethnic and sectarian divisions in an attempt to divide and rule this oil-rich region has placed it on the brink of an all-out conflagration. Former US allies across the region are turning against Washington amid the deep discrediting of these wars and of the entire capitalist political order among hundreds of millions of people in the Middle East, America and Europe.

Radio France Internationale journalists along the Syrian border inside Turkey reported intense anger over US foreign policy among Turkish civilians and soldiers. One told RFI, “The United States do not fear God, they trust their strength. But they take 15 hours to arrive here by plane, and to do what? They interfere in our affairs and act like a fighter who only fights those he knows he can defeat. When they face a strong opponent, they run away.”

The only force giving a progressive expression to this elemental anger against imperialist war is the international working class and the resurgence of the class struggle. Mass protests against the US-backed regime in Iraq and the military dictatorships in Algeria and Sudan, and an escalating strike movement among US autoworkers, teachers and miners, testify to the growing radicalization of the working class. However, this international movement faces enormous dangers and enormous tasks.

To the extent that this growing anger is diverted behind the national ambitions and military staffs of the competing capitalist nation states, truly catastrophic global wars can break out—as they did twice in the 20th century.

It is critical to mobilize the workers independently of all the warring capitalist states in an international antiwar movement of the working class fighting for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact