

Turkish army launches ground attacks into Iraqi Kurdistan to target PKK

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Amid growing international conflicts over Libya, the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Syria between great powers and regional powers, the Turkish Armed Forces have invaded Iraqi Kurdistan. They reportedly aim to destroy Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militias in Shingal in Nineveh province, and Makhmour, Qarachogh, Mount Qandil, Khuakurk, and Zap across the Kurdistan region.

After launching airstrikes on regions of northern Iraq controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), code-named "Operation Claw-Eagle," on early Monday, the Turkish Defense Ministry announced on Wednesday on Twitter that a new "Operation Claw-Tiger" has begun. Commando forces are already in Iraq's Haftanin region, it said, "to neutralize the PKK and other terrorist elements that threaten the security of Turkish people and borders." Yesterday, according to Turkey's state-owned Anadolu Agency, "Turkish forces hit over 500 targets of the PKK" with F-16 jets, howitzers and multiple rockets.

The Turkish invasion of Iraq comes after a series of operations against the PKK in Turkey and against its Syrian section, People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, since the Trump administration green-lighted a Turkish offensive targeting YPG last October.

The Turkish Interior Ministry claimed that there are only 438 PKK militants in Turkey now, and that this number was around 2,780 in 2016. This month, the government accused the PKK of killing six road construction workers in two separate attacks in Van and Diyarbakir with roadside bombs.

After the Turkish airstrikes, Baghdad summoned Turkey's ambassador to Iraq, Fatih Yildiz and gave him a formal memorandum, asserting that "the airstrikes contravene international law and principles of mutual respect," according to Iraqi Kurdistan's Rudaw agency.

However, Iranian forces have carried out their own air strikes into Iraq simultaneously. Yesterday Iraqi Foreign

Ministry summoned both the Turkish and Iranian ambassadors in Baghdad over airstrikes. "We stress that Turkey must stop its bombardment and withdraw its attacking forces from Iraqi territory," the ministry's statement said on Thursday, calling the invasion a "provocative action."

"We deplore the penetration of Iraqi airspace by the Turkish planes which—at a depth of 193km from the Turkish border inside the Iraqi airspace—targeted a refugee camp near Makhmour and Sinjar," Iraq's Joint Operations Command said in a statement.

"Turkish jets struck the Khinera area in Sidakan sub-district, killing a shepherd named Abbas Maghdid, aged 30," the mayor of the Sidakan district told Rudaw on Thursday. Maghdid was the first reported civilian casualty.

Although there have been no official statements from Ankara or Tehran about a joint military operation against PKK militias in Iraq, several reports have suggested that it is a coordinated offensive. Rudaw cited a report from ISWNEWS, stating, "The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has shelled positions of groups of PJAK [Iranian section of the PKK] and PKK in northern Iraq."

The air and artillery strikes into Iraq came immediately after an official visit to Istanbul by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif last weekend. Both the Turkish and Iranian bourgeoisie fear that a potential Kurdish state in Iraq or Syria could promote similar sentiments among Kurds living within their borders.

As a result—even though Ankara has supported the NATO war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has the backing of Russia and Iran—Turkey and Iran have an unstated agreement on the need to prevent the YPG from building a US-backed Kurdish state inside Syria.

While this unofficial joint military operation by Turkey and Iran against the US-backed Kurdish nationalist forces

in Iraq is doubtless closely followed by the United States and the European imperialist powers, they have made no official statement so far, even though a NATO defense ministers' summit took place on Wednesday.

There are growing tensions between France and Turkey in particular over Libya, the eastern Mediterranean and Syria. Although Paris has not made any statement on the Turkish invasion of Iraq yet, on Wednesday the French Foreign Ministry accused Turkey's navy of "acting in a hostile manner towards its NATO allies" in the Mediterranean to keep them from enforcing a UN arms embargo on Libya. France and Turkey support rival factions in the Libyan civil war.

Last month, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu accused Paris of wanting "to help YPG elements carve out a terror state in northern Syria."

As a clear confirmation that Turkish state's growing attacks on Kurdish nationalists in Syria, Iraq and inside the country are bound up with these broader geopolitical conflicts, the United Arab Emirates, a French ally in Libya, denounced the Turkish and Iranian military operations in Iraq in a statement. It said that they "constituted a violation of the sovereignty of a sisterly Arab country and led to intimidation and the spread of terror among innocent civilians."

On June 8, President Erdoğan called his American counterpart, Donald Trump, in particular over Libya. Afterwards, Erdoğan declared "we had some agreements during our conversation," but did not give any details.

The Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella group including the PKK, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, and the PJAK in Iran, recently issued a statement. It accused not only Turkey but also Washington and its imperialist allies, the Iraqi government, and the major Kurdish bourgeois parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, the KDP and PUK, of backing the military operation. It stated: "The coalition forces led by the USA and the Iraqi state are responsible for the airspace of the attacked areas... The coalition forces led by the USA approve these attacks and have become a partner in the Kurdish genocide."

However, almost at the same time with Turkish ground operation against PKK militias in Iraq, Kurdish parties in Syria announced an initial political agreement towards "Kurdish national unity" under US auspices on Tuesday. The agreement has been made between Syrian Kurdish National Council, an affiliate of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by the Barzani family in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Kurdish National Unity Parties (PYNK) led by the

PYD.

In their statement, US-backed Kurdish nationalist parties declared that this agreement was reached "under anti-ISIS international coalition's representative William Reubuck's watch," adding: "We would like to thank the United States for its contributions to a democratic future that will include the rights of all organizations." On Wednesday, the US embassy in Syria welcomed the agreement with a Tweet.

On the other hand, the Turkish government continues its crackdown on the legal Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which received about 6 million votes in the elections. At the beginning of the month, two HDP deputies were stripped of their parliamentary mandates. Dozens of HDP majors have been dismissed by the government since the March 2019 local elections.

Organizing a "democracy march" against these growing attacks, the HDP is oriented not to the working class, the only social base of a struggle to defend democratic rights, but to the bourgeois Republican People's Party (CHP), a traditional Turkish-nationalist party that has always supported oppression of the Kurdish people and wars in the interests of the Turkish ruling class. What brings these parties together is their common orientation to NATO and to imperialism, and to installing a new government more directly aligned with these forces.

Amid rising international geopolitical conflicts that could easily erupt into war, and growing working class struggles globally amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the only way to oppose war and defend democratic rights across the Middle East is to build a united, international working class movement against both the imperialist powers and the local bourgeois factions in a struggle for socialist workers' power in the region and internationally.



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