Turkey bombs Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq

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The Turkish Defense Ministry announced early Sunday morning the start of "Air Operation Claw-Sword" targeting Kurdish nationalist militias in northern Iraq and northern Syria. According to the statement, Qandil, Asos and Hakurk in northern Iraq and Kobane, Tel Rifaat, Cizire and Derik in northern Syria were hit. Mass protests were reportedly organized in many places in northern Syria against the air strikes.

The ministry said the airstrikes "were carried out in line with the right of self-defense under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter." Turkish warplanes are reportedly using Syrian airspace, which is controlled by Russia, whose government is therefore tacitly allowing the bombings to take place.

This operation against the US-backed People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) comes amid NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

According to the Turkish Defense Ministry statement, the bombardment targeted "shelters, bunkers, caves, tunnels, ammunition depots and so-called headquarters and training camps" belonging to the PKK and YPG, claiming that civilians were not harmed. However, according to ANHA (Hawar News Agency), 11 civilians, including ANHA reporter ?sam Ebdullah, were killed and 6 people, including another journalist, were wounded in the bombardments. The report claimed that 14 Syrian soldiers were also killed.

Syria's state-owned Sana news agency confirmed the deaths of Syrian soldiers but did not state how many were killed.

Turkish Interior Ministry blamed the PKK and YPG for a rocket attack on the Öncüp?nar Border Gate in Kilis yesterday, which injured 8 security personnel. Anadolu Agency also reported that four rockets were fired at Karkam?? district of Gaziantep province from northern Syria yesterday evening, and that the rockets landed in empty areas. The YPG was held responsible for the rockets in the report.

Farhad Shami, head the media center of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG is the backbone, reported that airstrikes destroyed the COVID-19 Hospital in Kobane, the power plant in Derik and grain stores in Dahir al Arab.

SDF General Commander Mazlum Ebdi warned in a statement that the conflict could escalate. He said, "We don't want a big war to break out. But if the Turkish state insists on war against us, we are ready for a great resistance. The war is not only limited to here, it spreads everywhere and everyone is affected by this war." The PYD added, "Russia and the International Coalition led by the United States are responsible for the atrocities committed by the Turkish state against our people."

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government presented the operation as a response to last Sunday's terrorist attack targeting civilians on Istiklal Street, one of Istanbul's most crowded centers. The Defense Ministry described the air strikes as "Payback time! The scoundrels are being held to account for their treacherous attacks," while Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin tweeted: "The day of reckoning for ?stiklal!"

The Turkish government blamed the PKK and YPG for the terror attack that killed six people, including two children, and wounded 81 others, but they denied the allegation. Ahlam Albashir, the alleged main perpetrator of the attack, allegedly tesified that she was "a member of the YPG" but also that they had "threatened to harm her siblings" to force her to carry out the attack. After the incident, 19 people were

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arrested and 29 were deported.

Beyond the suspicions about Albash?r, who is said to be an “intelligence officer of the YPG,” revelations from the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), an ally of the Erdo?an government, placed phone calls to Albash?r has raised doubts about official statements. Mehmet Emin ?lhan, the head of the MHP’s Güçlükonak district in ??rnak, claimed that the telephone line registered to him had been illegally obtained and that he had not spoken to Albash?r.

This raises the issue of whether Erdo?an’s blaming of the PKK and the YPG for the terrorist attack in Istanbul were in fact part of Ankara’s planning of an operation in Syria targeting Kurdish militias.

Significantly, in recent days, the US Consulate General in Erbil also issued a warning to US citizens on its web site, stating that it is “monitoring credible open-source reports of potential Turkish military action in northern Syria and northern Iraq in the coming days. The U.S. government continues to strongly advise U.S. citizens to avoid these areas.”

Ultimately, the Erdo?an government has seized on this terrorist attack as a pretext for a new operation against Kurdish nationalist forces in Syria and Iraq. In fact, Ankara’s preparations to invade Syria date back to May. “We will soon start taking new steps regarding the incomplete parts of the work we have started to create safe zones 30 kilometers deep along our southern borders,” Erdo?an declared on May 23.

However, at the time, Ankara could not get the green light for a new operation from Washington which was using the YPG as a proxy force against President Assad’s regime in Syria, and from Russia and Iran, which support the Assad regime.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Group call on workers to oppose the use of a terrorist attack as a pretext for militarism and war and warn workers internationally of the dangers of military escalation. The fact that Syrian government soldiers have already been killed points to the possibility of further escalation between Turkish and Syrian forces. Growing tensions between Damascus and Ankara, an ardent supporter of NATO’s war for regime change in Syria, escalated into direct confrontation in 2020.

Since 2016, Ankara has launched numerous operations in Syria to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state on its southern borders, demanding that its NATO allies, particularly the United States, stop using the YPG as a proxy force in Syria. The Turkish Armed Forces and their Islamist proxies currently control around 10 percent of Syria, home to 4.4 million people.

In addition, the Erdo?an government is facing an explosive economic and social crisis at home. Official annual inflation has reached 85 percent, while tens of millions of working people have suffered unprecedented impoverishment. As discontent grows within the working class, Turkey is heading for presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023.

In these circumstances, Erdo?an is seeking to suppress class tensions and re-consolidate his support base by promoting Turkish nationalism and militarism. The government also aims to expel Syrian Arab refugees from Turkey by forcing the YPG militia out of northern Syria so it can place the refugees there.

The only progressive response to this conflict, which has developed as a by-product of the thirty-year imperialist war of the US-led powers in the Middle East, is the revolutionary socialist unity of the working class against imperialism and all its capitalist proxies.

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