

US shoots down Turkish drone as Turkey bombs Kurdish forces in Syria, Iraq

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On Thursday, the Pentagon announced that it had shot down a Turkish armed drone with an F-16 fighter jet because it posed a “threat” to US troops in Syria. It was the first such incident between the two NATO allies.

On Thursday morning, Turkish drones carried out strikes near the Syrian city of Hasakah, about 1 kilometer from US troops, Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said. A few hours later, a Turkish drone that came within 500 meters of US troops was deemed a “threat” and shot down by an F-16, according to the statement.

The escalation of tensions in Syria came amid the possible deployment of British troops in the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the resurgence of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus. It points to the danger that the imperialist-backed war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which has been underway since 2011, could be reignited and escalate into a regional conflict.

Around 900 US troops maintain an illegal presence in northeastern Syria, in an area controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) led by Washington’s main proxy force in the region, the Kurdish nationalist People’s Protection Units (YPG). Allied with the SDF, US forces control Syria’s oil resources in the region. Ankara treats the YPG and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as “terrorist groups.”

Ryder said, “We have no indication that Turkey was intentionally targeting US forces. It’s a regrettable incident,” before adding: “The secretary has talked to his [Turkish] counterpart. They had the opportunity to have a fruitful conversation.... Turkey does remain a very important and valuable NATO ally and partner to the United States.”

Turkish Defense Minister Ya?ar Güler made a statement on the X platform, stating he told his American counterpart that “Turkey is ready for a joint fight with the USA against Daesh [ISIS].”

Speaking to Reuters, a Turkish defense ministry official denied that the drone belonged to Turkey. However, Al-Monitor, citing two US officials, suggested that it belonged to Turkish intelligence (M?T). An unnamed US official also said Turkish military officials had been warned a dozen times before the incident.

Ankara’s air campaign in Syria has continued despite the dangerous escalation between the US and Turkey. On Thursday evening, the Defense Ministry announced that 30 targets controlled by the YPG in northern Syria had been destroyed and many Kurdish militias were killed. The statement said the targets included oil wells and storage facilities. Local sources claimed that civilians were also harmed, an allegation denied by Ankara.

Turkey’s air strikes against Kurdish forces in Syria began after an armed attack on the Turkish National Police headquarters in Ankara last Sunday, during which two attackers were killed and two policemen were wounded. The stolen car used in the incident belonged to a civilian named Mikail Bozla?an from Kayseri, who was killed before the attack, according to the official statements.

The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack, stating it was intended to “send the necessary message to the relevant places and give them a serious warning.” In reality, the attack only served to provide justification for Ankara’s police-state repression at home and new military operations in Iraq and Syria, contributing to the possibility of a broader conflict in the region.

The legal Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democratic

Party (HDP) and Green Left Party (YSP) condemned the Ankara attack as “unacceptable.” However, at least 75 people have been detained so far in police operations mainly targeting the HDP-YSP.

The Turkish Defense Ministry has announced that air strikes have been carried out against PKK positions in northern Iraq since Sunday. On Wednesday, a “security summit” was held in Ankara with the participation of interior and foreign ministers, the head of the intelligence agency and the chief of the general staff.

On the same day, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan alleged that the perpetrators of the Ankara attack were YPG-PKK members coming from Syria. “All infrastructure, superstructure and energy facilities belonging to the PKK/YPG, especially in Iraq and Syria, are from now on the legitimate targets of our security forces, armed forces and intelligence elements,” he declared in a statement, warning the United States: “I recommend that third parties stay away from PKK/YPG facilities and individuals.”

SDF General Commander Mazlum Kobani rejected Ankara’s claim and called on the United States and other NATO allies to protect them. He said, “The perpetrators of the attack in Ankara did not travel there from our region, as the Turkish authorities claim. ... We expect the guarantor countries and the international community to stand up to these frequent threats and take a stand to ensure stability and peace in the region.”

On Thursday, the Turkish Armed Forces’ (TSK) Dab?k base in the Azaz district of northwestern Syria was attacked. The Turkish Do?an News Agency (DHA) reported that five Turkish police officers and three soldiers were wounded in the attack. The Turkish Defense Ministry claimed that 26 PKK-YPG militants were killed in retaliatory airstrikes. The Syrian government has demanded for years that not only the US but also Turkish forces end their illegal occupation and leave the country.

The increased military operations in the area signals a possible large-scale Turkish ground operation. After the terrorist attack that killed six civilians in Istanbul on November 13, 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an announced that a ground operation in Syria would be launched “at the most appropriate time.” However, he backed down after sharp opposition from both Iran and Russia, which back the Damascus regime, and the United States.

On Wednesday, however, a Turkish Defense Ministry spokesman implied that the Turkish government does not rule out a ground invasion into Iraq and Syria, targeting Kurdish forces.

Fearing the possible emergence of a Kurdish state in its southern border, Ankara has long demanded that the US end its support for the YPG. Erdo?an, who had been trying to reach an agreement with Washington, proved that his government essentially stands by the US in the war against Russia by lifting his veto on Finland’s NATO membership in March. He also approved Sweden’s NATO membership; the Turkish parliament is expected to vote on this soon.

Amid a military escalation in Syria between the United States and its Kurdish proxy YPG and Turkey, at least 89 were killed on Thursday in a drone strike on a graduation ceremony at a military academy in the Homs region, about 150 kilometers north of Damascus. Syria’s state-owned news agency SANA reported that 31 of them were women, five were children, and that 277 were wounded in addition.

Reuters reported that it was “one of the bloodiest strikes against the military” in the 12-year war. While no one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, the Syrian government, which blamed unnamed “terrorists,” launched artillery strikes on US- and Turkey-backed Islamist forces in Idlib and Aleppo.

Meanwhile, SANA reported on Tuesday that Israel bombed Syrian forces in Deir al-Zour in eastern Syria, wounding two soldiers. Israel has long carried out air strikes against government soldiers and Iranian-backed militias in Syria.



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