

Erdogan Announces Military Operation East of Euphrates River to Push Back Kurds, US Urges Him to Reconsider

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Global Research, August 07, 2019

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD, US NATO War Agenda](#)

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In what would be Turkey's third cross-border military operation in Syria since the war began, in as many years, Erdogan announced on Sunday that he would be launching a [military operation](#) east of the Euphrates river, to push back Kurdish militias on Turkey's southern border.

Although Erdogan did not set a timeframe, [preparations](#) have been underway for well over a month. Increased deployment of Turkish military forces along with weaponry, and tanks, etc. have been reported by various sources, on the Turkish side of the southern border with Syria.

Preparations are also underway by Kurdish militias, to counter any possible Turkish aggression. Both sides have said that if the other attacks they will be ready to respond.

The [same announcement](#), regarding a military operation east of the Euphrates, was made by Erdogan over nine months ago, but was then called off due to talks with US President Donald Trump who agreed to set up a safe zone on Turkey's border to appease Erdogan. However, this never came into fruition, and a buffer zone was not created because of a difference of opinion on the depth. Erdogan now feels the US is stalling, and his latest threats seem to indicate that his patience is running thin.

Some believe that the chances of Erdogan carrying out his mission this time, are higher because he has notified Russia and the US, in advance of his plan.

However, if Turkey carries out this third operation, the outcome will most likely not be a swift defeat and take over by Turkish armed forces and their terrorist ally the Free Syrian Army (FSA) like we have seen in the past. The stakes are also much higher due to the presence of US troops, intelligence officers and US personnel stationed in northeastern Syria.

On Tuesday, U.S. Defense Secretary [Mark Esper](#) said that

“the U.S. intends to prevent any unilateral invasion by Turkey into northern [Syria](#), saying any such move by the Turks would be unacceptable.”

Esper seemed hopeful that negotiations and talks would lead to some sort of agreement but

did not disclose what that could be.

Some speculate that specific airstrikes targeting Kurdish militia installations are more likely to occur, than a unilateral land invasion. The demographics are such that all of the various ethnicities whether they be Syrian Muslims, Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, Arameans, etc. would most likely [bond together](#) against any Turkish aggression.

The first cross-border Turkish operation [Euphrates Shield](#) in 2017, focused on targeting a “terror corridor” made up of Daesh and Kurdish fighters further east from Afrin along its southern frontier with Syria. After completing that operation, Turkey set up local systems of governance in the swath of land captured, stretching from the area around Azaz — located to the northeast of Afrin — to the Euphrates River and protected by Turkish forces present there.

The second, [Operation Olive Branch](#), which began January 2018 and was completed in two months with Afrin being captured by the Turkish Armed Forces and their ally the Free Syrian Army. They quickly established control over Afrin and all of the villages that had remained under the control of Kurdish YPG (the People’s Protection Unit) north and northwest of the city. Many YPG fighters and their families fled to government-held parts of Aleppo.

In primarily the second operation, YPG fighters felt abandoned and betrayed by the US who stated that they would not get involved and seemingly allowed Turkey to carry out its operations without much objection. There was a noticeable silence from Russian and Syrian forces as well.

In order to understand Turkey’s contentions with the Kurdish militia’s it’s important to clarify the major players. The YPG is a Kurdish-majority militia that is the military wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Kurdish democratic confederalist political party in northeastern Syria. The YPG is the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is an organization based in Turkey and Iraq that has been engaged in armed conflicts with the Turkish state since 1984.

Turkey considers all these Kurdish organizations to be terrorists and has urged the United States for years to sever ties with them and has demanded a buffer zone. Both the United States and Turkey view the PKK as a terrorist organization.

The United States justified its military and economic support for the YPG by claiming they were the most [reliable](#) fighters in Syria against Daesh. Kurdish factions have been [used throughout history](#) to create chaos in the Middle East.

To disassociate the YPG from the PKK, General Raymond Thomas, the commander of the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM), revealed — at a Security Forum on July 21, 2017 at the Aspen Institute — that he personally discussed the importance of changing its name with the YPG. As he states in this [video](#) (watch below), he was impressed that they included the word “democratic” in their rebranding: their new name, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), would help them enter into political negotiations, where they had been excluded previously owing to their association with the PKK.

Recently tensions have been high between the United States and Turkey over the latter’s purchase of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia which the former disapproved of

and then subsequently removed the latter from the F-35 fighter jet program. The United States has also threatened to impose sanctions if [Turkey activates the S-400](#) system which Erdogan has stated they have every intention of doing by April 2020.

On Monday, an [American military delegation](#) met with Turkish officials in Ankara to continue negotiations and discuss an alternative Turkish military operation which wouldn't threaten U.S. troops stationed in the area. The U.S. is urging Turkey not to carry out its proclaimed mission.

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