

The War in Western Kurdistan and Northern Syria: The Role of the US and Turkey in the Battle of Kobani

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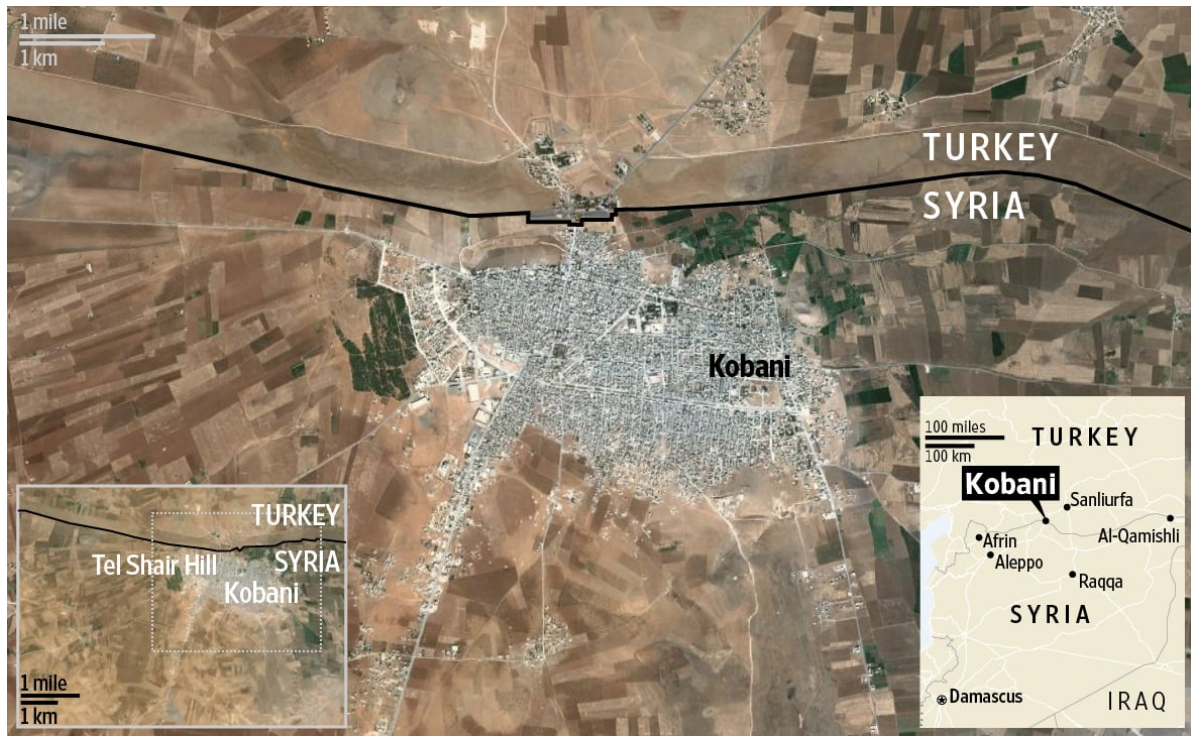
Note: *In light of recent tragic events in Ankara, we bring to the attention of our readers this piece originally published in November 2014.*

A war is being fought for control over Western Kurdistan and the northern areas of Syria, including three de facto Kurdish enclaves there. The fighting in Western Kurdistan is a means to an end and not a goal in itself. The objectives of gaining control over Syrian Kurdistan and northern Syria are critical to gaining control over the rest of the Syrian Arab Republic and entail US-supported regime change in Damascus.

Western Kurdistan is alternatively called Rojava in Kurmanji, the dialect of the Kurdish language that is used locally there and spoken by the majority of the Kurds living in Turkey. The word Rojava comes from the Kurdish root word roj, which means both sun and day, and literally means «sunset» («the sun's end») or the «end of the day» («the day's end») in Kurmanji and not the word «west». The confusion over its meaning arises for two main reasons. The first is that in the Sorani or Central dialect of the Kurdish language the word roj is only used to refer to the day. The second is that Rojava connotes or suggests the direction of the west, where the sun is seen to set when the day ends.

The Siege on Ayn Al-Arab or Kobani

Despite the fact that neither the Syrian military nor the Syrian government controls most of Syrian Kurdistan and that a significant amount of the locals there have declared themselves neutral, the forces of the Free Syrian Army, Al-Nusra, and the ISIL (DAISH) have launched a multiparty war on Rojava's mosaic of inhabitants. It has only been in late-2014 that this war on Western Kurdistan has gained international attention as the Syrian Kurds in Aleppo Governorate's northeastern district (mintaqah) of Ayn Al-Arab (Ain Al-Arab) became surrounded by the ISIL in late-September and early-October. As this happened, the behaviour of the US and its allies, specifically the neo-Ottomanist Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, exposed their true objectives in Rojava and Syria. By the time that the Syrian Kurds in northeastern Aleppo Governorate were being encircled by the ISIL, it was clear that Washington and its counterfeit anti-ISIL coalition were actually using the ISIL outbreak to redraw the strategic and ethno-confessional maps of Syria and Iraq. Many of the Syrian Kurds think that the goal is to force them eastward into Iraqi Kurdistan and to surrender to Turkish domination.



Fears of another exodus in Syria—similar to the one that was felt when Turkey assisted Jubhat Al-Nusra’s violent takeover of the mostly ethnic Armenian town of Kasab (Kessab) in Latakia Governorate in March 2014—began to materialize. Nearly 200,000 Syrians—Kurds, Turkoman, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arabs—fled across the Syrian-Turkish border. By October 9, one-third of Ayn Al-Arab had fallen to the pseudo-caliphate.

The Stances of the US over Kobani Exposes Washington’s Objectives

Washington’s stance on Ayn Al-Arab or Kobani was very revealing of where it really stood in regards to the battle over control of the Syrian border city. Instead of preventing the fall of Kobani and supporting the local defenders which were doing the heavy fighting on the ground against the ISIL and containing its pseudo-caliphate, Washington did not move. The US position on Kobani is an important indicator that the US war initiated against the ISIL has been mere bravado and a fictitious public relations stunt aimed at hiding the real objective of getting a strategic foothold inside Syrian territory.

When the ISIL attacked the forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan in August 2014, the US acted quickly to help the KRG’s forces. In July, a month after the June capture of the Iraqi city of Mosul by the ISIL, which coincided with the military takeover of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk by the KRG, the ISIL began its siege of Kobani in Rojava. Up until October, the US just watched.

Even more revealing, the Pentagon announced on October 8 that the US-led bombing campaign in Syria, which it formally named Operation Inherent Resolve on October 15, could not stop the ISIL offensive and advances against Kobani and its local defenders. Instead the US began arguing and insisting for more illegal steps to be taken by NATO member Turkey. Washington began to call for Turkish soldiers and tanks to enter Kobani and northern Syria. In turn, President Erdogan and the Turkish government said that Ankara would only send in the Turkish military if a no-fly zone was established over Syria by the US and the other members of Washington’s bogus coalition.

Repackaging Plans for a Northern Buffer Zone in Syria

Using Kobani to make a case, the US and Turkish governments took the opportunity to repackage their plans for an invasion of Syria from 2011, which called for the establishment of a Turkish-controlled northern buffer zone and a no-fly zone over Syrian airspace. This time the plans were presented under the humanitarian pretext of peacekeeping. This is why the parliamentarians in the Turkish Grand National Assembly had passed legislation authorizing an invasion of the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrian Kurdistan on October 2, 2014.



Although Turkey passed legislature to invade Syria on October 2, Ankara remained cautious. In reality, Turkey was doing everything in its power to ensure that Kobani would fall into the control of the ISIL and that Kobani's local defenders would be defeated.

Due to a lack of coordination between the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and Turkish law enforcement officials, a domestic scandal even emerged in Turkey when undercover MIT trucks were detained in Adana by the Turkish gendarmerie after they were caught secretly transporting arms and ammunition into Syria for Al-Nusra and other anti-government insurgents.

In the context of Kobani, numerous reports were made revealing that large weapon shipments were delivered to the heavily armed battalions of the ISIL by Turkey for the offensive on Kobani. One journalist, Serena Shim, would pay with her life for trying to document this. Shim, a Lebanese-American working for Iran's English-language Press TV news network, would reveal that weapons were secretly being delivered to the insurgents in Syria through Turkey in trucks carrying the logo of the UN World Food Organization. Shim would be killed shortly after in a mysterious car accident on October 19 after being threatened by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization for spying for the «Turkish opposition».



To hide its dirty hands as a facilitator, the Turkish government began claiming that it could not control its borders or prevent foreign fighters from entering Iraq and Syria. This, however, changed with the battle for Kobani. Ankara began to exercise what appeared to be faultless control of its border with Syria and it even reinforced border security. Turkey, which is widely recognized for allowing Jabhat Al-Nusra and the other foreign-backed insurgent forces to freely cross its borders to fight the Syrian military, began prevented any Kurdish volunteers from crossing the Syrian-Turkish border over to Kobani to help the besieged Syrian city and its outnumbered defenders. Only under intense domestic and international pressure did the Turkish government finally let one hundred and fifty token KRG peshmerga troops from Iraqi Kurdistan enter Kobani on November 1, 2014.

Turkey Takes Note of Syria's Friends

The Syrian government rejected the suggestions coming from Ankara and Washington for foreign ground troops on its territory and for the establishment of a northern buffer zone. Damascus said these were intentions for blatant aggression against Syria. It released a statement on October 15 saying that it would consult its «friends».

In context of the US-Turkish invasion plans, the Turkish government was monitoring the reactions and attitudes of Russia, Iran, China, and the independent segments of the international community not beholden to Washington's foreign policy objective. Both the Kremlin and Tehran reacted by warning the Turkish government to forget any thoughts about sending ground troops into Syrian Kurdistan and on Syrian soil.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Lukashevych, the spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry, announced that Moscow opposed the calls for a northern buffer zone on October 9. Lukashevych said that neither Turkey nor the US had the authority or legitimacy to establish a buffer zone against the will of another sovereign state. He also pointed out how the US bombardment of Syria had complicated the problem and influenced the ISIL to concentrate itself among civilian populations. His words echoed the warnings of Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the permanent representative of Russia to the UN, that the US-

led bombings of Syria will further degenerate the crisis in Syria.

On the part of Tehran, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian publicly announced that Iran had warned the Turkish government against any adventurism in Syria.

Why has Operation Inherent Resolve made the ISIL Stronger in Syria?

Is it a coincidence that the ISIL or DAISH gained ground in Syria as soon as the US declared war on it? Or is it a coincidence that Rojava contains most the oil wells inside Syria?

The inhabitants and resistance in Kobani fighting the ISIL offensive have repeatedly asked for outside help, but have defined the US-led airstrikes in Syria in no uncertain terms as utterly useless. This has been the general observation from the actual ground about the illegal US-led bombing campaign of Syria by local paramilitary and civilian leaders. Locally-selected officials in Syrian Kurdistan have repeatedly said, in one form or another, that the US-led airstrikes are a failure.

The People's Protection Units (Yekineyen Parastina Gel, YPG; the all-female units are abbreviated as YPJ) of Kobani made multiple statements that pointed out that the US bombing campaign did nothing to stop the ISIL advance on Kobani or throughout Syria. While calling for Kurdish unity and a united front between Syria, Iraq, and Iran against the pseudo-caliphate of the ISIL, Jawan Ibrahim, an YPG officer, has said that the US and its anti-ISIL coalition are a failure as far as the YPG and Syrian Kurds are concerned, according to Fars News Agency (FNA).



Before the US officially inaugurated its campaign in Syria by launching airstrikes on Ar-Raqqa, the ISIL's fighters had left the positions that the US and its petro-sheikhdom Arab allies bombed. Instead of bombing the ISIL, the US has been bombing Syrian industrial and civilian infrastructure. While saying that some of these bombings, which include civilian homes and a wheat silo, were mistakes, it is clear that the Pentagon strategy of eroding an enemy state's strength by destroying its infrastructure is being applied against Syria.

After heavy criticism and international pressure, the US began to drop token medical supplies and arms shipments for the locals and Kobani's local defenders. Some of these US arms got into the hands of the ISIL. The Pentagon says this was the result of miscalculations and that the ISIL were not the intended recipients. Skeptics, however, believe that the Pentagon deliberately parachuted the US weapons near places that the ISIL's battalions could easily see and obtain them. The arms caches included hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and ammunition, which were all displayed in at least one video produced by the ISIL during the battle for Kobani.

In parallel to the reluctant help of the US, the Turkish government was pressured into allowing a token number of KRG peshmerga fighters from Iraq cross its border into Kobani on November 1. These peshmerga, however, are part of the security forces of the corrupt, Turkish-aligned KRG. In other words, «Turkey's Kurds» (as in their allies; not to be mistaken for Turkish Kurds) were allowed to enter Kobani (instead of the YPG, YPJ, or volunteers). Since Turkey's detrimental role in Kobani became widely known, Ankara was also fearful that the fall of Kobani would effectively end the peace talks between the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish government and result in a massive revolt in Turkish Kurdistan.

Useless US Bombing War Against the ISIL or Stealth US War Against Syria?

The US-led bombing campaign is not intended to defeat the ISIL, which is also doing everything it can to destroy the fabrics of Syrian society. The US-led bombing campaign in Syria is intended to weaken and destroy Syria as a functioning state. This is why the US has been bombing Syrian energy facilities and infrastructure, including transport pipes, under the excuse of preventing the ISIL from using it to sell oil and gather revenues.

The US rationale for justifying this is bogus too, because the ISIL has been transporting stolen Syrian oil shipments through transport vehicles into Turkey and, unlike the case of Iraq, not using the transport pipes. Moreover, most the oil stolen by the ISIL has been coming from Iraq and not from Syria, but the US has not taken the same steps to destroy the energy infrastructure in Iraq. Additionally, the purchases of stolen oil from both Syria and Iraq have taken place at the level of state actors. Even the European Union's own representative to Iraq, Jana Hybaskova, has admitted that European Union members are buying stolen Iraqi oil from the ISIL.

The Pentagon's two different approaches, one for Iraq and one for Syria, say a lot about what Washington is doing in the Syrian Arab Republic. Washington is still going after Syria and in the process it and Turkey wants to either co-opt the Syrian Kurds or to neutralize them. This is why the battle for Kobani was launched with Turkish involvement and why there was inaction by the US government. Also, when it comes down to it, the ISIL or DAISH is a US weapon.

The Syrian government knows that Washington's anti-ISIL coalition is a façade and that the masquerade could end with a US-led offensive against Damascus if the US government and Pentagon believe that the conditions are right. On November 6, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem told the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* that Syria had asked the Russian Federation to accelerate the delivery of the S-300 anti-aircraft surface-to-air missile system to prepare for a possible Pentagon offensive.

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