

Turkish Air Strikes Kill Civilians in US-Backed Invasion of Syria

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Turkey began bombing Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria Saturday as the US-backed incursion continued to spread. At least 35 civilians were killed in the air strikes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

US air power and military “advisers” have been backing the Turkish invasion since it was launched last Wednesday, ostensibly to clear Islamic State fighters from Jarablus, one of the last towns ISIS controls near the Turkish border. But Turkey’s overriding aim is to dislodge Kurdish militia forces previously backed by Washington from areas near the Syrian-Turkish border over which they have gained control, in order to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish enclave in the region.

As for the United States, its motive for supporting the Turkish offensive is its desire to escalate the war in Syria and create the conditions for the overthrow of the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

Ankara’s invasion is inflaming the five-year-old civil war, which has already claimed the lives of close to half a million Syrians and reduced the country’s population by over 5 million. It is being carried out in conjunction with US- and Turkish-backed Syrian “rebels” who are hostile to Kurdish forces.

Turkey claimed initially that the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) would have one week to retreat east of the Euphrates River. But within a matter of hours, clashes broke out between the Syrian “rebels” mobilized by Turkey and the YPG. A spokesman for the Free Syrian Army said over the weekend that its forces had seized 10 villages from YPG troops and four from ISIS.

Turkey claimed to have killed 25 Kurdish “terrorists” in a series of bombing raids near Jarablus, and the first Turkish casualty was reported in connection with a grenade attack by the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.

The anti-Kurdish character of Turkey’s Euphrates Shield operation was underscored Saturday when video footage was released of members of the Sultan Murat brigade, a pro-Turkish Syrian “rebel” group, beating Kurdish prisoners in the village of Yusuf Beg and declaring them to be “PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] dogs.”

Washington’s readiness to throw its weight behind such sectarian forces reflects its contempt for the region’s peoples and stands as an indictment of all those who argue, in the name of “human rights,” that the US should intervene more aggressively in the conflict. The US double-cross of its Kurdish allies underscores the fact that Washington’s chief

consideration is the consolidation of its geo-strategic dominance of the Middle East through the installation of a puppet regime in Damascus.

Following talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva on Friday, Secretary of State John Kerry stressed that the Kurds had to remain part of Syria.

“We are for a united Syria. We do not support an independent Kurd initiative,” he declared, before claiming that US support for Kurdish forces had been limited. He pointedly added, less than 48 hours after the initiation of the Turkish invasion, “We understand the sensitivities of our friends in Turkey with respect to this.”

The intervention of what is in effect a NATO force into Syria heightens the potential for a direct clash between Russia and the US, which could quickly spiral out of control and draw in the other major imperialist powers.

Following the talks between Kerry and Lavrov, which failed to reach any resolution, the Russian foreign minister took a swipe at the US and the Turkish incursion by noting that only Russia and Iran were operating inside Syria with the consent of the government. All other forces in the conflict, Lavrov said, were in violation of Syrian sovereignty.

At a briefing Friday, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest sought to blame Russia and the Syrian government for the ongoing violence in the country, even though US forces were behind the latest Turkish escalation. “As long as Russia is willing to support the Assad regime’s murderous military tactics that often claim the lives of innocent women and children, the more difficult it is for a political solution to be reached,” Earnest stated. He added later that Russia’s actions “only fuel extremism” in Syria.

In response to a question on the creation of so-called safe zones within Syria, Earnest denied that this was being considered as a policy option by the Obama administration because it would require additional military forces. This was thoroughly disingenuous, given that Washington is backing a Turkish operation whose explicit goal is the creation of a zone in northern Syria controlled by Turkish troops.

Violence continued to spread within Turkey following a bomb attack Friday by PKK-aligned militants, which killed 11 Turkish police officers and wounded 78 people. PKK rebels launched a grenade attack on the airport in Diyarbakir Sunday, and a Turkish soldier and 10 PKK militants were killed in clashes in Hakkari province.

Speaking at a rally Sunday in Gaziantep, 30 kilometres from the Syrian border, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made clear that Turkey’s intervention would be a long and bloody one. He indicated that Ankara would not distinguish between the PKK, with which it has been in a virtual state of war since last year, and the YPG in Syria. After vowing to wipe out Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, Erdogan declared, “We are as determined about the PYD [Democratic Union Party], the separatist terror organisation’s Syrian wing... We will continue until we uproot this terror organisation.”

There has been a virtual blackout of the dramatic escalation of the Syrian conflict in the US media and it has not been raised as a major issue by either candidate of the two big business parties in the presidential election campaign. News coverage of Syria on Sunday focused on reports accusing the Assad regime of dropping barrel bombs on a civilian neighborhood in “rebel”-occupied Aleppo, while the killing of civilians by Turkish forces was

passed over in virtual silence.

Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, who enjoys the overwhelming backing of the military and intelligence establishment, has left no doubt about her readiness to vastly intensify US military operations in Syria after November, even if this means direct confrontation with Russia.

The Center for a New American Security think tank, which was co-founded by Michele Flournoy, a former Defense Department official who is reportedly on the short list for the secretary of defense position in a Clinton administration, called in June for a future US administration to authorize military strikes against Assad's forces.

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