

Turkey launches US-backed offensive targeting Kurdish forces in Syria

By Alex Lantier
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After Washington on Sunday withdrew its protection of Kurdish nationalist militias who previously had been the main NATO proxy force in the Syrian war, Turkish forces launched their attack across the Turkish-Syrian border at the Kurdish forces yesterday. In the afternoon, air raids and artillery bombardments hit cities and military and civilian targets along approximately 100 kilometers of the border, stretching from Tal Abyad to Ras al-Ain. Early this morning, the Turkish Defense Ministry announced it had hit 181 targets in the first day of its invasion of northern Syria.

Reports of civilian casualties and damage to civilian installations mounted as Turkish warplanes and heavy shelling hit military installations, cities and the surroundings of the strategic Bouzra dam, which provides water to hundreds of thousands of people in northern Syria. Two civilians were killed, and two others injured in a Turkish airstrike on the village of Misharrafa, west of Ras al-Ain. There was also heavy damage to civilian homes in the village of Sikarkah, in the Qamishli area.

CNN journalists on the ground reported scenes of terror as civilians tried to escape Turkish shelling: “Chaotic scenes are unfolding now, with roads choked with fleeing families, motorcycles piled with five to six people, mattresses strapped to cars. Smoke can be seen rising from at least one area, which appears to be on fire. People don’t know where they will go, where they will sleep tonight, or what they can expect from this Turkish operation.”

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia, which had worked closely with US and European special forces until this weekend, pledged to “clash against the Turks to stop them from crossing the border” and “use all our possibilities against Turkish aggression.” The SDF reportedly is calling on its forces from across the region of northeastern Syria that it holds to march rapidly on the Turkish-Syrian border to try to repel the Turkish invasion.

Late last night, however, the Turkish Defense Ministry confirmed that its ground forces had invaded regions of Syria held by the SDF after the initial artillery barrages. It tweeted, “The Turkish Armed Forces and the Syrian

National Army [a collection of Turkish-backed Syrian militias] have launched the land operation into the east of the Euphrates river as part of the Operation Peace Spring.”

The principal responsibility for the bloody onslaught mounted by Turkey lies with Washington and its European imperialist allies, who ever since the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq have waged decades of war in the Middle East, including the proxy war for regime change in Syria launched in 2011.

Trump, who double-crossed NATO’s Kurdish proxies by giving the green light to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for the attack, bears direct responsibility for its consequences. However, the entire political establishment in the United States and in Europe is directly implicated in the bloody attack set into motion by Trump’s Sunday phone call to Erdoğan, in which he withdrew guarantees of protection to the Kurdish militias. Attempts by the European and American ruling elites to distance themselves from this invasion reek of hypocrisy.

Statements rained in from across Europe yesterday criticizing the Turkish offensive. After British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Trump, Downing Street issued a statement declaring Britain’s “serious concern at Turkey’s invasion of northeast Syria and the risk of humanitarian catastrophe in the region.” NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who is traveling to Turkey to speak to Erdoğan, called on Turkey to “act with restraint.”

Perhaps the most repulsive statement came from French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Though he has played a central role in the French state’s extrajudicial targeted assassination program and is close to Egypt’s bloodstained dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Le Drian claimed to be morally outraged by the Turkish army’s bloodshed. “I condemn the unilateral operation launched by Turkey in Syria,” he tweeted, adding that it threatened the “security and humanitarian efforts” of the NATO powers against terrorist groups in Syria.

French European Affairs Minister Amélie de Montchalin added last night that Germany, Britain and France were

preparing a joint statement “that will be extremely clear on the fact that we condemn very strongly and firmly what has been reported.” They are also calling for a joint, closed-door meeting of the UN Security Council.

These statements reek of hypocrisy. Not only does the NATO powers’ eight-year proxy war in Syria have nothing to do with “humanitarian efforts,” but they have no need to rely on “what has been reported” when formulating their policy on the Turkish attack. This is because they were working closely with the Turkish government as it launched its bloody offensive against the NATO powers’ Kurdish “allies” in Syria.

Yesterday afternoon in Turkey, envoys of the United States, Russia, Germany, Britain, France, Italy, NATO, and the UN went to the Turkish Foreign Ministry for briefings on the upcoming attack.

The offensive then began at 4 p.m. local time, as Erdoğan announced the attack on Twitter. He tweeted: “Our Turkish Armed Forces with Syrian National Army has started Operation Peace Spring against the PKK/YPG and Daesh terrorist organizations, in northern Syria. Our aim is to wipe out the terror corridor, trying to be implemented in our southern border, and bring peace and security to the region. ... We will protect the territorial integrity of Syria and save the region’s people from the claws of terror.”

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who is arriving today in Turkey for talks with Erdoğan from Italy where he met with Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, endorsed the invasion. Claiming that Turkey has “legitimate security concerns” about Syria, he said: “I am ensured that any action it may take in northern Syria is proportionate and measured.”

Amid a growing outcry against the Turkish invasion of Syria, as calls spread internationally for protests outside Turkish consulates, top US officials backtracked, distancing themselves from the offensive. After Trump called the attack a “bad idea,” US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denied US responsibility for the Turkish attack. “The United States didn’t give Turkey a green light” for the offensive, he lied. At the same time, Pompeo echoed Stoltenberg’s claim that Ankara has a “legitimate security concern” to justify bombing the Kurds.

Trump’s decision to abandon US security guarantees to the Syrian Kurdish militias and effectively green-light a Turkish invasion of Syria is proving to have catastrophic consequences. But it is the final product of decades of wars waged by successive US governments, including when Washington was ruled by Trump’s Democratic critics, and their European imperialist allies. The 1991 Gulf War in Iraq and the 2001 NATO invasion of Afghanistan began decades of Middle East wars that have claimed millions of lives,

turned tens of millions into refugees, and devastated entire societies.

The Democratic Obama administration in Washington launched the Syrian war in 2011 with the support of Berlin, London, Paris and the other European imperialist powers. Initially they relied on Al Qaeda-linked militias carrying out car bombings and attacks as the spearhead of their war against President Bashar al-Assad’s regime. It was only when these Islamist militias were defeated, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia turned on the US puppet regime in Iraq in 2014, that Washington turned to Kurdish-led militias as its principal proxy force in Syria.

The Kurdish bourgeois nationalists betrayed the Kurdish people, by subordinating their struggle for democratic rights to the maneuvers of US imperialism to dominate the Middle East.

While the US and European media hailed the SDF as a democratic ally of the NATO powers, the SDF aligned itself on the war policy of the NATO powers—including by jailing 11,000 people in the territory they controlled, on the pretext that they were irredeemable ISIS fighters. Yesterday, SDF officials announced that the forces they had assigned to imprison ISIS personnel had abandoned these duties to instead redeploy to fight the Turkish invasion.

Only a few years after the Kurdish nationalists emerged as the main US proxy force in Syria, Washington has sacrificed it to the latest zigzag in its Middle East policy, tacking closer to the Turkish government—which violently opposes Kurdish nationalism both in Syria and Turkey itself.

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