



Turkey Conducts Military Operations in Northern Iraq After Past Strikes in Syria

Turkey has launched a new ground and air operation in northern Iraq in an attempt to neutralize the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is operating there. The PKK is classified as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, and Turkey. Dubbed "Operation Claw-Lock," jets and artillery were used to strike suspected ammo caches, bunkers, and headquarters currently being used by the PKK. The strikes were also coupled with ground operations conducted by Turkish special forces. This recent military action is in response to reports that the PKK was planning a large-scale attack in Turkey. The cross-border operations also have the wider goal of securing broader peace and stability in the area, according to Turkish defense officials. The military action has the support of the regional autonomous government in Erbil, while the central Iraqi government has voiced unease in the past and accused Turkey of violating their territorial sovereignty. The latest strikes this week come two months after a similar operation was carried out in Syria.

The operation took place in the Metina, Zap, and Avashin-Basyan regions. According to the Turkish defense ministry, 19 PKK fighters were killed in the initial round of attacks while 4 Turkish soldiers were also wounded. Before this, Turkey largely relegated their operations to the air, as ground attacks were often significantly more dangerous. Abdullah Hawez, an analyst who closely follows Kurdish affairs describes the situation by pointing out that "The PKK has spent decades entrenching in Zap. The group has spent years building webs of tunnels, so eradicating it from the area is going to be complicated and costly." The Turkish military is working in cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which controls the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq. They have coordinated in the past, and tensions have recently been high between the KRG and the PKK as Turkish operations have begun pushing them farther south into the Kurdish Autonomous Region. Despite past objections from the central Iraqi government in Baghdad, it is privately believed among Turkish officials that they are supportive of Turkey's actions. The operation is still ongoing, and Turkish officials also made sure to emphasize that maximum caution was being taken to avoid civilian casualties.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, operates mostly in southeast Turkey and northern Iraq and Syria. They have been in conflict with Turkey since the mid-1980s, with tens of thousands of people having been killed since then. The main political goal of the PKK is the establishment of an independent Kurdish nation-state. The group has been accused of engaging in terror tactics and targeting civilians.

The latest operation in northern Iraq is part of a growing trend in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has recently been flexing its international muscle in an attempt to fill the void left by the United States, which has significantly stepped down operations in the Middle East after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Turkey is seeking to increase its foothold in the region, and analysts have argued that their actions in Iraq and Syria serve two main purposes: the first is to stamp out terrorist attacks on Turkish soil and the second is to try and demonstrate that they can play the role of peacekeepers in the region.