



Fact sheet:

Latest Turkish Attacks Leave the Door Open for ISIS Impact of Turkey's latest attacks on the struggle to defeat ISIS

On the night of November 20, 2022, Turkey launched a large-scale air operation against Rojava/North and East Syria (NES). Since then, airstrikes and artillery shelling have continued unrelentingly. At the time of writing on November 26, 21 civilians, 17 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters, one Asayish (internal security forces) member, and twenty-five soldiers of the Syrian army have been killed by Turkish aggression. The SDF saw its largest casualty count at a Turkish airstrike against one of their checkpoints in Al-Hawl Camp, where tens of thousands of ISIS-affiliated individuals and families are detained. Turkey consciously attacked the forces guarding ISIS-affiliates, aiding the terrorist organisation in the process, and compromising the efforts of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Their track record clearly shows that Turkey has long been willing to use ISIS, and help them reorganize, in order to destroy the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and Kurdish efforts at self-determination. These sorts of reckless power games on the part of the Turkish government pose a threat not only the people of North and East Syria, but to the world at large. There is more than enough evidence that Turkey has been cooperating with ISIS for many years, and is continuing to do so. Additionally, if this current operation continues, there are indications that ISIS sleeper cells have plans to approach NES from the south, as Turkey advances from the north, in order to sandwich and trap the SDF in the ensuing ground conflict.

Prisons and Camps with ISIS Detainees in NES: Ticking Time Bombs

Former ISIS fighters and their affiliates are detained in different locations across North and East Syria. The Syrian Democratic Forces, in cooperation with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, maintains the security in the detention centers. The biggest facility is Al-Hawl Camp, located 40 kilometres east of al-Hasaka, and housing over 53,000 ISIS-affiliated people. The Ghweiran Prison (also called al-Sina Prison) is a high-security detention centre that houses about 3,500 ISIS detainees. Prisons such as Ghweiran are a dangerous powder-keg: one which exploded at the beginning of this year. On January 20 2022 ISIS stormed the prison from the outside, while detainees simultaneously rioted from the inside in order to stage a prison break. The battle around the prison, during which many ISIS fighters were able to escape, lasted for over a week and threatened civilians in the surrounding neighbourhoods. There are at least twenty other prisons with thousands of ISIS detainees spread around different cities of North and East Syria (NES). Among those detained, in the prisons and in Al-Hawl camp, are thousands of foreign nationals. The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria works tirelessly to repatriate these individuals, but most governments lack the political will to repatriate their nationals in fear of bringing radicalized people back into the country.

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Timeline

23 November

The security forces' checkpoint of Al-Hawl Camp was targeted with three Turkish airstrikes, resulting in the death of eight members of the SDF on guard duty at the camp. The Turkish attack on the facility led to some individuals and families escaping the camp. Six of the escapees were caught and re-detained later. The same day Turkey struck a site near a prison holding ISIS members in the village of Himo, just outside of Qamishlo.

24 November

Mazloum Abdi, General Commander of the SDF, announced that their forces are pausing counter-ISIS operations: "We are forced to be preoccupied with confronting Turkish aggression."

25 November

While Turkish UAVs were flying over the Al-Hawl Camp in the late evening hours a group of ISIS-affiliated women and children attempted to escape. They were caught by the security forces. Jihan Hanan from the camp administration reported that the 33 NGOs have suspended their work inside the camp due to the critical security situation.

26 November

Mazloum Abdi, General Commander of the SDF, said during an online press conference: "We got intelligence information about ISIS preparing itself for a riot. When Turkey attacks, they will also attack from the South in the Ghweiran prison and Hawl Camp. [...] A Turkish offensive will strengthen ISIS."

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International reactions

“France calls for restraint and refrainment from any action that would threaten the region’s stability and that of its inhabitants at a time the threat of Daesh activity remains elevated in the region.”

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs - 21.11.2022

“We are deeply concerned by recent military action that destabilizes the region, threatens our shared goal to fight ISIS, and endangers civilians and U.S. personnel.”

US State Department - 23.11.2022

“Turkey’s airstrikes in Iraq & Syria, including against US partner forces in the SDF, have already killed civilians & destroyed critical civilian infrastructure while threatening to undermine the fight against ISIS. These are not the actions of an ally.”

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee - 23.11.2022

We demand:

- Members of the Global Coalition must ensure that Turkey stops its aggression against the Autonomous Administration and the self-defence forces of North and East Syria. All attacks must be immediately halted.
- Turkey’s plans to launch a new military occupation offensive must not be tolerated and authorised by the Global Coalition, especially the USA and Russia.
- The airspace of North and East Syria must be closed to Turkish war planes as well as armed or unarmed UAVs by the USA and Russia.
- International responsibility for the repatriation of foreign ISIS-detainees and the legal reconditioning of crimes by ISIS

27 November 2022
Kongra Star Information Center

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