

Turkish Aggression in Northern and Eastern Syria: Assessing Impacts and Public Opinion

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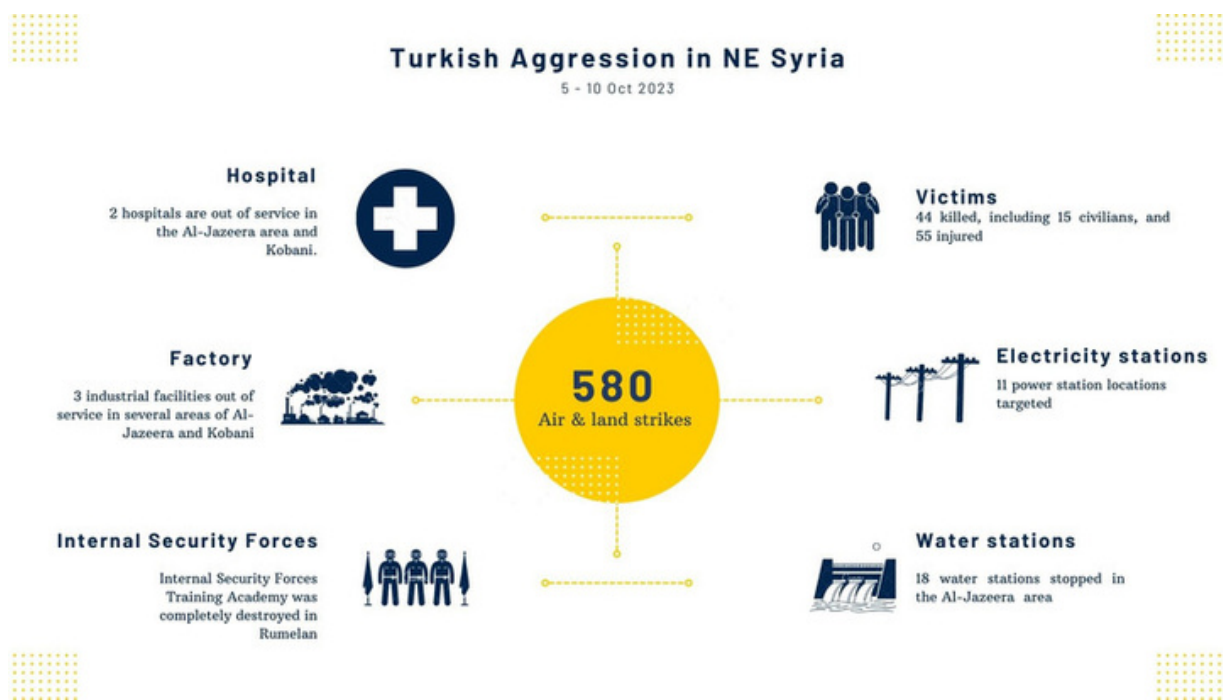
TEVIN, founded on February 2, 2020, is an independent think tank focused on Kurdish affairs. We provide a platform for coordination and dialogue, striving to foster common understanding and cooperation.

What's New?

In recent times, the northern and eastern regions of Syria have witnessed an escalation in military operations conducted by Turkey and Syrian armed groups allied with it. These attacks, involving airstrikes, drones, and artillery shelling, have been primarily focused on critical infrastructure such as power stations, water networks, and gas facilities, resulting in significant disruptions to these services.

Additionally, these operations targeted locations affiliated with the Autonomous Administration (AANES) and the Internal Security Forces. This recent escalation, from October 4th to October 10th, 2023,

has been described by observers and media outlets as the most violent since Turkey's occupation of the cities of Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad in 2019. According to reports from the AANES, 580 air and land strikes were carried out, utilizing various weapons, including warplanes, drones, and artillery. These attacks focused on destroying infrastructure in several cities and their outskirts, including Derik, Tirbespiyê, Qamishli, Amouda, Hasakah, Kobani, and Ain Issa. According to the latest statistics, the attacks resulted in the deaths of 44, and injuries more than 55 others, including civilians and military and Internal Security Forces.



What are the Effects on Stability in NE Syria?

The repeated Turkish airstrikes on regions in northern and eastern Syria have had a significant and ongoing impact on the stability of the region. The notable effects of these airstrikes, which targeted infrastructure extensively, include:

1. Displacement and Refugees: The airstrikes have led to a slight displacement of the population and have reinforced the prevailing idea among a wide range of residents, which is the preference for emigration beyond the borders towards Iraqi Kurdistan and Europe. This drains the human resources of the region and can increase the pressure on resources in neighboring areas and countries, creating challenges for shelter, food, and healthcare. Additionally, it contributes to the depletion of the remaining financial resources in the hands of citizens, which are then used by international smuggling networks to leave northern and eastern Syria. Public sentiment has been marked by increased levels of fear and anxiety, with even children being frightened by knock sounds at their doors.

2. Undermining Local Stability: According to a statement from the Self-Administration issued on October 18th, over 5 million citizens have been affected as a result of targeting the oil sector, which has had a direct impact on gas and fuel services. Seventeen facilities were targeted, including the main Swedish station that provides electricity and gas to the northern and eastern regions, in addition to other sites in the rural areas of Tirbespiyê, Jal Agha, and Derik.

3. Empowering and Disseminating Extremist Groups:

The recent attacks have had a detrimental effect on ongoing initiatives aimed at stabilizing areas that were liberated from the grip of the ISS in recent years. Many of these areas have witnessed significant local and international efforts to establish stability, with millions of dollars allocated by international institutions to support this objective.

4. Empowering and Deploying Extremist Groups:

Extremist groups, such as the ISS, exploit the chaos and disturbances resulting from these attacks. ISS, which remains active in several areas of Syria, has regained some of its strength and has repeatedly attempted to destabilize the region after losing its caliphate in Baghouz. Another example is the expansion of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Manbij. In coordination with clashes in Deir al-Zour between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and groups from the Deir al-Zour Military Council and tribal fighters, HTS sent hundreds of its fighters and dozens of military vehicles from its areas of control in Idlib towards the Manbij fronts. These fighters arrived from Afrin through the Gazawiye crossing, according to a report by Syrians for Truth and Justice organization.

5. International Responses: The international community has reacted to the Turkish airstrikes with varying positions. Some countries have viewed these attacks as violations of Syria's borders and sovereignty, while others have expressed support for Turkey's actions. However, the responses of countries directly involved in the events, such as the United States-led international coalition and Russia, have been weak and lacking in decisiveness. There has also been a noticeable bias in media coverage, both Arab and Western, towards other conflicts such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

6. Heightened Tensions between Turkey and the Kurds: Turkey justifies its military activities by focusing on targeting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters, especially after one of the buildings belonging to the Turkish Ministry of Interior was targeted by the PKK. This escalation exacerbates tensions between the two sides and can lead to internal unrest within Turkey's borders, further diminishing the prospects for peace. Additionally, it escalates tensions in northern and eastern Syria.

7. Reconfiguring Political and Military Balances: Given the multi-faceted interference in the Syrian situation, any new military move, such as Turkish operations, can redraw the landscape and alter current balances. Militias loyal to Iran, Syrian regime forces, and Russia may use these situations as opportunities to reassess their strategic positions. In this context, airstrikes could become a new point of conflict in the broader Middle East scene, especially amid rising tensions between Israel and Hamas and the potential for confrontations in Lebanon and Syria involving Israel. This could further complicate the political environment in Syria, hindering efforts to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful settlement in accordance with UN Resolution 2254, while simultaneously bolstering the intentions of parties supportive of continued military escalation.



What is the Public Opinion among the population?

Based on the analysis of social media, as well as the public opinion expressed by citizens and stakeholders in the public sphere regarding ongoing Turkish violations in northern and eastern Syria, several points can be identified to gauge the public opinion:

1. Future Expectations: There is a prevailing sense of anxiety among the population due to the uncertainty surrounding future developments in the region. Doubts about the prospects for a solution in Syria have grown, which has encouraged a significant portion of the population to consider emigrating to neighboring countries or Europe. Meanwhile, others cling to the option of staying despite the current challenges either because of their convictions or due to the high costs associated with migration.

2. Perceptions of Turkey: The vast majority of the population sees Turkey as an occupying power aiming to destabilize the region and alter its demographics, as well as damage its way of life. Many citizens view Turkey as using the threats posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a pretext for its hostile policies towards the Kurds.

3. International Outlook: People express frustration and disappointment with the international stance, especially from the U.S.-led international coalition, as many citizens feel that this coalition is either incapable or unwilling to exert pressure on Turkey. This sentiment is also reflected in Arab and international media coverage.

4. Attitudes Towards Local Parties and Institutions: Most people believe that the policies and actions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have provided justifications for Turkey's attacks. At the same time, some express concern about certain decisions and actions taken by the institutions of the Autonomous Administration. Areas under their control have seen PKK marches, with banners and images of the attackers, as well as PKK flags and those of its leader, Abdullah Ocalan. Some have accused certain leaders within the Autonomous Administration of collusion, which aided Turkey in facilitating its strikes, especially after targeting a gathering of the Internal Security Forces (Asayish), raising significant questions about the justifications for assembling a large number of Asayish members in a single military point while Turkish aircraft were present in the area.

What Should We Do?

1. Call for cessation of hostilities: The international community and the countries concerned must pressure Turkey to halt its repeated attacks on northeast Syria, including a total flight ban.

2. Support Infrastructure: Given the damage to infrastructure, financial and technical support should be provided for the rehabilitation of affected facilities.

3. Protect Civilian Populations: Secure safe areas for civilian populations and provide necessary support for food, shelter, and healthcare during conflict. Turkey should avoid targeting civilians.

4. Regional Cooperation: Enhance cooperation between local parties and neighboring countries to maintain regional stability, as security solutions alone will not bring stability and peace to any party.

5. Promote Political Solutions: Support political dialogues and efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution in Syria in accordance with UN Resolution 2254.

In conclusion, this analysis highlights the complexities and challenges faced by the residents of northern and eastern Syria in light of current developments. It is clear that the repercussions of Turkish airstrikes in northern and eastern Syria have profound effects on local and regional stability. This necessitates intensified efforts and a more serious commitment to ensuring stability and peace in the region. All relevant parties, whether regional, local, or international, must work together to achieve a just and lasting solution that involves all parties and is committed to.



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