

Iran supports attack on Qandil mountains- Turkish Defense Minister

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Iran has voiced support for a potential Turkish operation against Kurdish forces just over its border in northern Iraq, Turkish Defence Minister Nurettin Canikli said on Tuesday.

The Turkish military has ramped up airstrikes in northern Iraq targeting Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) bases in Qandil, close to the Iraq-Iran border, where high-ranking members of the organization are thought to be located.

The government has also said Turkish troops have deployed roughly 30 km (nearly 20 miles) inside northern Iraq, not far from Qandil.

"Our offer to Iran was to carry out the operation together. Iran, in its remarks at least, has voiced very important support," Canikli told a roundtable interview with the state-run Anadolu news agency.

There was no immediate confirmation of his assertion from Tehran.

Canikli said Turkey was also in full agreement with Baghdad on a potential operation into Qandil, adding that Ankara was in talks with "all possible countries" on the matter.

Iraq, however, said it would not accept any Turkish operation against Qandil or other PKK strongholds.

"The Iraqi government will not accept any advance on its land by Turkish forces in pursuit of the PKK elements currently present in the Sinjar, Makhmour and Qandil mountains," Saad al-Hadithi, a spokesman for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told the Iraqi News Agency.

He added that the Iraqi government would "absolutely not allow" any aggression from inside its land against Turkey or other states.

Canikli however said there were "serious attacks and infiltration" into Turkey from Qandil, and that Turkey would remain in northern Iraq until the PKK was removed.

"Our goal now is to be a lasting presence there until terror is completely removed, we will remain in northern Iraq," he said.

With a large Kurdish population of its own, concentrated in the southeast, Ankara has long resisted Kurdish ambitions for independence in Iraq, Syria or Iran, fearing it could inflame separatism inside Turkey.

An offensive against the PKK in Qandil would mark Turkey's third cross-border operation since 2016, with the first two targeting Kurdish militia fighters in northern Syria.

Last week, Turkey and the United States also endorsed a roadmap for the withdrawal of the Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara insists is linked to the PKK, from the northern Syrian city of Manbij.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis told Pentagon reporters that Turkish and U.S. officials would meet in Germany this week to discuss the details of the roadmap, namely joint patrols inside Manbij to secure the region.

Canikli also said officials would discuss the Manbij roadmap during talks in Germany this week.