

Turkey ignores calls by US, goes on with attack on Afrin

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The US State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert on Thursday called on Turkey not to attack Afrin. However, Turkish officials still threatened to carry out the operation on Friday.

The call is a change in the position of the US that previously stayed silent. In a similar press conference on Tuesday, the US State Department Spokesperson [couldn't comment](#) much on Turkish plans to attack Afrin, adding there was no specific report yet that Turkey would attack Afrin.

But on Thursday, this changed.

“We would call on – certainly on the Turks to not take any actions of that sort. We want everyone there to keep their eye – I’ll go back to something I said when we were talking about Iraq and the referendum – to keep their eye on the ball,” Heather Nauert said.

“And the focus needs to be on ISIS. So we don’t want them to engage in violence, but we want them to keep focused on ISIS,” she said. “We want people to stay focused on ISIS,” she said.

However, Turkey’s Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli vowed they will carry out the operation on Friday.

“The [Afrin] op will happen, will be carried out, as our President has said [...] there is no other solution,” he [said](#).

Moreover, the Defense Minister said the operation already has de-facto begun with cross-border shelling according to a report of [Reuters](#).

The Turkish army on Friday continued shelling Afrin, but no attempts to take territory from the Kurdish People’s Protection Forces (YPG).

On Friday, the Rubar camp hosting displaced Syrians fleeing war in other provinces of Syria, was hit with mortar shells, the local news agency ANHA [reported](#).

“The Turkish occupation army and its mercenaries targeted the Rubar camp for the displaced in Shirawi in Afrin area with three mortar shells, resulting in material damage in the camp,” Abdulkarim Omar, Co-Chair of the Foreign Affairs of the Al Jazeera Canton confirmed on Twitter.

Moreover, the Turkish army continued shelling the village of Zor Maghar, 30 kilometers west of Kobane, that was also targeted on Thursday.

“Erdogan is trying to intimidate the United States by threatening the stability of the U.S. project in Syria. Erdogan wants Trump to know that in this matter, support for the Kurds, it is Erdogan, not Trump, who is the alpha,” Nicholas A. Heras, Middle East Security Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, told The Region.

“What is happening is that Afrin, because it is not an area of Syria that is immediately concerned with the counter ISIS campaign, is outside the U.S. military’s mission in Syria. Until the Trump team at the White House says otherwise, and orders the U.S. military to act to extend its security umbrella over Afrin, nothing will happen,” he added.

However, the US-based analyst added that there is plenty of concern for Afrin in Washington.

“The problem is not a lack of American concern for Afrin, there is plenty of it, it just happens to be siloed off at the State Department and is part of the de-escalation zone strategy portfolio. And the State Department doesn’t have the assets on the ground in Syria, or in the air flying over it, to force Erdogan to back down,” he added.

“The U.S. is practising benign neglect when it comes to Afrin because Afrin has not risen to the level of attention that Raqqa has. Afrin is a comparatively small, isolated, and distant region of Syria from the U.S. military's counter-ISIS campaign. That's the fact,” he concluded.

“The US is not silent against Turkish threats and attacks and both the State Department and Pentagon are warning Turkey seriously to not invade Afrin,” Alan Semo, a representative of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) told The Region.

However, he added that it remains to be seen what Russia does in case of a Turkish intervention.

The Syrian government [warned](#) Turkey on Thursday that Syrian air defenses would target the Turkish army, if Afrin was attacked.