

US Defense Department: invasion of Afrin aided ISIS in Syria

by Meghan Bodette - 05/11/2018 23:39



A quarterly report to the United States Congress issued by the Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, the campaign to defeat ISIS, [described](#) how Turkey's invasion and occupation of Afrin Canton hindered the fight against the terror group.

"The DoD [Department of Defense] reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS exploited last quarter's 2-month pause in the fighting in northern Syria to recruit new members, gain resources, and conduct attacks. This pause occurred when the People's Protection Units (YPG) that are part of the SDF left the battlefield to fight Turkish forces in the northwestern enclave of Afrin," the report explained.

The report also suggested that "poor governance" in areas held by Turkey-backed rebel groups, such as those in Afrin, could "bolster" ISIS, and claimed that "pockets of opposition-held territory and general chaos caused by the war gave ISIS safe havens in areas beyond the reach of the SDF."

The invasion of Afrin, which began on January 20th, 2018, displaced nearly 200,000 people and plunged a relatively peaceful region into disorder, as Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army militias looted civilian property, took over homes, businesses, and public buildings for military purposes, and kidnapped civilians for ransom. British newspaper *The Independent* reported that Turkey had [recruited](#) former ISIS fighters to conduct the operation. The YPG paused its anti-ISIS operations in Deir Ezzor, citing the more pressing need to defend Afrin from Turkish aggression.

As the invasion progressed, local leaders warned that the invasion would help ISIS and other terror groups regain a foothold in Syria. "To all humanity defenders: Afrin [is] being slaughtered by ISIS and its sponsors, don't be silent," Saleh Muslim, the former co-chair of the PYD, [wrote](#) on Twitter in March 2018.

Turkish officials, on the other hand, disingenuously claimed that their operation targeted both YPG forces and ISIS. At no point during the Syrian conflict did ISIS have a presence in or near Afrin.

The US called for restraint on both sides, but avoided intervening and did not pressure Turkey to change its course of action. When Erdogan threatened to expand the operation to Manbij, where US forces are present, US military leaders responded by saying that, if necessary, US forces would defend themselves.

The report comes just as a new round of Turkish attacks is once again disrupting the anti-ISIS campaign. With the SDF fighting a difficult battle to close in on the last remaining ISIS pocket in Hajin, Turkey began to shell villages on the Turkish-Syrian border near Tel Abyad and Kobane.

The SDF paused operations against ISIS in response, and said that Turkey's action was intended to aid the terror group just as the SDF and its partners in the Coalition were close to defeating it. "We call on the international coalition to demonstrate a firm stance to deter Turkey from these attacks and its attempts to maintain and support ISIS," their statement said.

In response, the official spokesman of Operation Inherent Resolve wrote on Twitter that "The SDF temporarily suspended offensive actions against ISIS in response to cross border attacks by Turkey. We have been in communication w/both Turkey and the SDF to de-escalate the situation. Unity of focus on the defeat of ISIS is the goal!."

Joint Coalition-SDF patrols began in certain areas on the Turkish-Syrian border on November 2nd. While Turkey has avoided areas patrolled by US forces, the attacks have not stopped since then. So far, several civilians have been injured, including two ANHA journalists, and a six-year-old girl has been killed.

