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Reports: Turkey Plans to Invade Syria to Fight Kurds

By Jason Ditz

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On Friday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued another vociferous anti-Kurdish speech, vowing Turkey would never allow the YPG to establish an independent state in northwestern Syria. Since then, reports are emerging that Erdogan has ordered the Turkish military to send troops into Syria to fight against the Kurds.

If true, the move would be hugely controversial, as the Kurdish YPG are being openly backed by the US in their fights against ISIS. Having Turkey, itself allied with the US, attacking the YPG and trying to carve out a “buffer zone” from Kurdish territory would be seen as bolstering ISIS.



The real opposition is likely to come from the Turkish military itself, however, and there are reports that Gen. Ozel, the Turkish military Chief of Staff, has delayed previous directives to intervene in Syria, citing questions about international law. The Erdogan government has been lobbying them heavily ever since, trying to convince them to be on board for the deployment.

Turkish policy in Syria has been built around hostility toward the Kurds from the start, backing the rebellion in Syria against former ally Assad in hopes that a Sunni Arab nationalist government would tamp down on Kurdish secessionist ambitions better. This failed, creating a de facto Kurdish state in the northwest, and two Islamist factions along the Turkish border as well.

Erdogan, it seems, hasn't learned from his mistakes, and is trying to double down on the move hoping to weaken the Kurds again. The YPG has ties to Turkish Kurdish groups that are considered terrorist organizations, so it is unsurprising Turkey is alarmed by their growth.

But Turkish officials are trying to spin this as backing the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a secular rebel faction openly allied with the YPG and against ISIS, and the move is inevitably going to benefit ISIS, adding to complaints that Turkish policy is de facto pro-ISIS.