

Turkey, Iran carried out joint operation against Kurdish militants

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Mon, 2019-03-18 12:02

ANKARA: Turkey and Iran carried out a joint operation against militants from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) on Monday, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said according to state-owned media.

"We started carrying out an operation with Iran against the PKK on our eastern border this morning (and) will announce the result," news agency Anadolu quoted Solyu as saying. State broadcaster TRT Haber also cited him commenting on the operation.

Turkey's military regularly carries out air strikes against PKK militants in northern Iraq and has carried out operations to arrest alleged members of the group in Turkey. The PKK is deemed a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union.



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Two Iraqi troops killed in rare clashes with PKK: army Turkey says two of its soldiers killed, eight wounded in northern Iraq

[US-backed forces take positions in last Daesh enclave](#)

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Reuters

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1552901886887843200

Mon, 2019-03-18 09:22

BAGHOUZ, Syria: US-backed fighters said they had taken positions in Daesh's last enclave in eastern Syria and air strikes pounded the tiny patch of land beside the Euphrates River early on Monday, a Reuters journalist said. Smoke rose over the tiny enclave as warplanes and artillery bombarded it. Another witness said the militants had earlier mounted a counter attack. "Several positions captured and an ammunition storage has been blown up," said Mustafa Bali, a spokesman for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia, on Twitter late on Sunday.

The enclave resembles an encampment, filled with stationary vehicles and rough shelters with blankets or tarpaulins that could be seen flapping in the wind during a lull in fighting as people walked among them.

Backed by air power and special forces from a US-led coalition, the SDF has pushed Daesh from almost the entire northeastern corner of Syria, defeating it in Raqqa in 2017 and driving it to its last enclave at Baghouz last year. But while its defeat at Baghouz will end its control of populated land in the third of Syria and Iraq that it captured in 2014, the group will remain a threat, regional and Western officials say.

The SDF has waged a staggered assault on the enclave, pausing for long periods over recent weeks to allow surrendering fighters, their families and other civilians to pour out.

Since Jan. 9, more than 60,000 people have left the enclave, about half of them surrendering Daesh supporters including some 5,000 fighters, the SDF said on Sunday.

People leaving the area have spoken of harsh conditions inside, under coalition bombardment and with supplies of food so scarce some resorted to eating grass.

Last month, the SDF said it had found a mass grave in an area it captured. Still, many of those who left Baghouz have vowed their allegiance to the militant group, which last week put out a propaganda film from inside the enclave calling on its supporters to keep faith.

Suicide attacks on Friday targeted families of Daesh fighters attempting to leave the enclave and surrender, killing six people, the SDF said.

Late on Sunday, the Kurdish Ronahi TV station aired footage showing a renewed assault on the enclave, with fires seen to be raging inside and tracer fire and rockets zooming into the tiny area.

The SDF and the coalition say the Daesh fighters inside Baghouz are among the group's most hardened foreign fighters, though Western countries believe its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, has left the area.



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US-backed SDF says assault on Daesh enclave is as good as overSDF to resume attack on Daesh enclave if nobody else emerges by Saturday afternoon

[Two Iraqi troops killed in rare clashes with PKK: army](#)

Author:

AFP

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1552900583567794900

Mon, 2019-03-18 09:15

BAGHDAD: Two Iraqi soldiers were killed in rare clashes Sunday with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the north of the country where the group has bases, the army said overnight.

The PKK, seen as a "terrorist" group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. It has rear bases in the Qandil mountain area of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

An Iraqi military statement said PKK fighters "attacked an army checkpoint in the (northern) Nineveh province... (and) two soldiers were killed" around 100 kilometers west of Mosul near the Syria border.

Five PKK members were wounded in the clashes which erupted when an Iraqi soldier manning the checkpoint asked the group for a permit, usually issued by Iraqi security forces, which would allow them to go across.

"It is the first time that we have confrontations of this scale in the region," Mohammad Khalil, the mayor of the nearby city of Sinjar, told AFP. The PKK deployment in northern Iraq has been a constant source of tension between Baghdad and Ankara, with Turkey pressing Iraq to play a bigger role in fighting the group.

Earlier this month Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said his country would carry out a joint operation with Iran against the PKK.

Soylu did not specify which PKK bases the planned operation would target but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has previously said it would be against militant hideouts in Iraq.

Like Turkey, Iran has for decades fought the PKK affiliate, the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), which also has rear bases in neighboring Iraq. The Turkish military has often bombed PKK bases in Iraq's mountainous regions.

In January, one person was killed when Turkish troops opened fire at Iraqi Kurds who stormed a Turkish army position in northwestern Iraq to protest the deaths of four civilians in alleged Turkish bombardment.

Baghdad summoned the Turkish ambassador while Ankara accused the PKK of having provoked the incident.

US-backed Kurdish fighters are leading the battle against the Daesh group in Syria.



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Iranian border guard killed in fight with armed group near IraqTurkey says two of its soldiers killed, eight wounded in northern Iraq

[Syria to UN envoy: Constitution is a 'sovereign' matter](#)

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Sun, 2019-03-17 15:39

DAMASCUS: Syria's foreign minister says the country's constitution is a sovereign matter to be decided by the Syrians themselves without any foreign intervention.

The comments by Walid Al-Moallem were made during a meeting with the United Nations' special envoy to Syria, Geir Pederson.

Pederson, who took up his post in January, arrived in Syria on Sunday for

meetings with Syrian officials. The envoy has said that the long-delayed formation of a committee to draft a new constitution for Syria is “a potential door-opener for the political process.” The 150-member committee is intended to represent the government, the opposition and civil society and is seen by the UN as key to holding free elections and ending the civil war in Syria, which entered its ninth year this week.



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For Syrians, 8 years of war leaves stories of loss and hope
Syria slams 'hypocrisy' of donors

[Fresh rallies against Al-Bashir as Sudan secures \\$300M loans](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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1552831415740881000

Sun, 2019-03-17 13:45

CAIRO: Hundreds of Sudanese took part in anti-government protests in the capital and other cities on Sunday as the government announced it had secured \$300 million in loans to address the economic crisis that triggered the unrest.

The demonstrations began in December over price hikes and food shortages, and quickly escalated into calls for President Omar Al-Bashir to step down, posing one of the biggest challenges yet to his nearly 30-year rule. Security forces have responded with a fierce crackdown that has killed dozens of people.

The rallies are being led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella group of independent professional unions. Footage posted online showed dozens of people marching in Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, chanting: "Freedom, dignity and justice." In some videos, security forces are seen using tear gas to disperse demonstrators.

Also Sunday, dozens of families demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the National Intelligence and Security Service in Khartoum, calling for the release of detained relatives, according to activists who spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their safety.

A leading Sudanese geneticist was among those arrested. Muntasir Ibrahim, who heads the University of Khartoum's Institute of Endemic Diseases, was arrested on Feb. 21 from a mosque in the capital, said his son, Gassim Ibrahim.

Ibrahim said his father and other university professors had drafted an initiative for a peaceful transition of power. Police previously arrested his father on two occasions in January.

There was no immediate comment from authorities on Sunday's protests and a government spokesman did not respond to requests for comment.

Sunday's demonstrations took place as a US congress delegation is visiting Sudan to meet with government officials and opposition leaders, ahead of the start of a second phase of dialogue between the two countries.

Sudanese lawmaker Mutwakil Ahmed said in a statement the US delegation, led by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis, a Republican from Florida, met with Salah Gosh, the head of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services and other officials on Saturday to discuss religious freedoms in Sudan, as well the country's counterterrorism efforts.

In 2017, the US lifted decades-long sanctions, arguing that Sudan is making progress in areas of concern, including improving humanitarian access. The State Department last year agreed to a second phase of rapprochement with Sudan, laying out priorities to reconcile the two nations which have been at odds for nearly three decades.

At the time, no specific timeline was placed for the removal of the terrorism designation which was first placed on Sudan by the Clinton administration in 1993.

Meanwhile Sunday, the state-run SUNA news service reported that the Finance Ministry secured a \$230 million loan from the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund to support the country's balance of payments.

It said the ministry signed another deal worth \$70 million with the Arab Trade Financing Program, which is also based in the Emirati capital.

Al-Bashir, who seized power in an Islamist-backed military coup in 1989, has responded to the protests by suspending plans for constitutional amendments that would allow him to seek a new term in next year's elections. He has also stepped down as leader of the ruling party, appointing a loyalist in his place.

Critics say he is trying to buy time and remain in power. Al-Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court for charges of genocide linked to the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region.

Activists say at least 57 people have been killed in the recent protests. The government's latest tally stands at 31 killed, including policemen. Neither figure has been updated in weeks.



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