

Turkish Tanks Roll into Jarablus, Syria Denounces Flagrant Violation of Sovereignty

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A dozen Turkish tanks rolled across the Syrian border as part of a military operation backed by jets and US-led coalition warplanes after heavy Turkish shelling of an area held by Daesh [Arabic acronym for "ISIS" / "ISIL"].

Military sources told Turkish media 70 targets in the Jarablus area had been destroyed by artillery and rocket strikes, and 12 by air strikes.

Turkish Special Forces entered Syria earlier as part of the offensive.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the operation was aimed against both Daesh and Kurdish fighters.

Turkey shelled Syrian Kurdish forces in the region this week, determined not to let them fill the vacuum if Daesh leaves.

The concern in Ankara is that the Kurds could create an autonomous area close to the border which might foster Kurdish separatism within Turkey itself.

The tanks were followed by pick-up trucks believed to be carrying Turkish-backed Syrian militants from the so-called "Free Syrian Army".

"At 04:00 [01:00 GMT] our forces began an operation against the Daesh and PYD [Kurdish Democratic Union Party] terror groups," President Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara.

The offensive is aimed at "putting an end" to problems on the border, he said.

The Turkish town of Karkamis – just across the border from Jarablus – was evacuated as a precaution following earlier Daesh mortar attacks.

Turkey has vowed to "completely cleanse" Daesh from its border region, blaming the group for a bomb attack on a wedding that killed at least 54 people in Gaziantep on Saturday.

A source at the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates denounced this military intervention by Turkey on Syrian territory.

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that the fight against terrorism on Syrian soil by any party must be conducted in coordination with the Syrian government and the Syrian Arab army, which has been engaged in these battles for more than five years," he was quoted by SANA as saying.

He went on to say that the Syrian government “condemns this violation of sovereignty and stresses that the fight against terrorism is not in the expulsion of Daesh and replacing them with other terrorist organizations backed by Turkey.”

The same source pointed out that “What is happening in Jarablos now is not a fight against terrorism as claimed by Turkey, but a replacement of a terrorist by another.

Accordingly, “Syria demands an end to this aggression and calls upon the United Nations for the implementation of related resolutions, in particular, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the ministry source said.

The source demanded that “Turkey and the US-led coalition respect international resolutions, particularly those related to the closure of the border and the eradication of terrorism.”

In another development, US Vice-President Joe Biden arrived in Turkey on Wednesday in the highest-ranking visit by a Western official since the failed coup on 15 July.

This is Turkey’s first known ground incursion into Syria since a brief operation to relocate the tomb of Suleyman Shah, a revered Ottoman figure, in February of last year.

The air strikes are Turkey’s first inside Syria since the downing of a Russian jet in November. Moscow and Ankara only mended ties in June after punitive Russian sanctions.

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