



(Yahoo News)

Turkey's Operation “Peace Spring”: Civilians under fire for 'Safe Zone'

11 October 2019

On Wednesday, 09 October 2019, Turkey launched Operation 'Peace Spring' across the northeastern border of Syria, which by Friday morning saw at least 11 civilians and dozens of Kurdish fighters killed and has displaced tens of thousands of people.¹ The offensive came after the immediate withdrawal of US troops from the area, announced by President Trump on 06 October 2019. Additionally, Turkey highlighted the US' failure to jointly implement a “safe zone” along the Syria-Turkey border, a goal President Erdogan had announced earlier this year. Turkey goal is to establish a “safe zone” which is 30 km wide and spans next to 480 km of border, in order to resettle up to 2 million Syrian refugees and

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[Turkey Syria offensive: Dozens killed as assault continues](#), *BBC*, October 11, 2019.

to ensure safety from “terrorist groups” threatening Turkish security.² Initially, the United States agreed to implement the safe zone with Turkey in order to ensure safety for its

Kurdish allies in the area.³ The area is currently under control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, a rebel group who have been at the forefront of the fighting against the Islamic State in Syria, with US support.⁴ However, Turkey views the YPG (People's Protection Unit), the backbone of the SDF, as posing a threat to Turkish security and includes YPG as well as other Kurdish groups in its definition of terrorist groups.

Turkey's offensive, as well as the US President's decision to withdraw its troops and thereby giving green light to Turkey, has received international criticism as European countries fear the jeopardization of the fight against ISIS. Currently, the Kurds are responsible for 90,000 men, women and children with links to terror groups held in their territory.⁵ Additionally, US politicians as well as the Kurdish forces have criticized Trump's decision as a backstab for its Syrian Kurdish partners which is likely to result in the eradication of Kurds in the area.⁶ The Kurdish YPG, which are currently leading the SDF, have announced its willingness to fight the Turks until the end.⁷

While the European Union has voiced criticism over Turkey's invasion, Turkey has threatened its European critics to “flood Europe with 3.6 million refugees” if the European Union continues to call the operation an invasion.⁸ Thus far, the UN Security Council has failed to address the operation, as Russia urged for 'direct dialogue' between the two countries while the Europeans presented a statement to urge the halt of Turkey's military action.⁹ The operation, which includes airstrikes and ground forces, does not only pose a threat to about 450,000 people living in the border area, it is likely to have destabilizing consequences for the region.

2 Dominic Evans, [Syria 'safe zone' deadline expires with Turkish threat looming](#), *Reuters*, October 01, 2019.

3 Dominic Evans, [Syria 'safe zone' deadline expires with Turkish threat looming](#), *Reuters*, October 01, 2019.

4 [Erdogan: Turkey to launch military operation in northeastern Syria](#), *Deutsche Welle*, October 05, 2019.

5 Bethan McKernan, Julian Borger, Dan Sabbagh, [Turkey unleashes airstrikes against Kurds in north-east Syria](#), *The Guardian*, October 09, 2019.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Suzan Fraser, [Invasion of northeast Syria carries gain and risk for Turkey](#), *The Washington Post*, October 09, 2019.

8 Bel Trew, [Erdogan threatens to flood Europe with 3.6 million refugees as Syria offensive forces tens of thousands to flee](#), *The Independent*, October 10, 2019.

9 [Divided UN fails to agree on Turkey's Syria offensive](#), *Deutsche Welle*, October 10, 2019.

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