

Report on the Situation in North and East Syria, 8am 17th October – 8am 18th October 2019

Rojava Information Centre

Although news of the agreement between Turkey and the USA has dominated headlines, it is uncertain whether it will have a significant impact on the progress of the war. Reports from local sources indicate that shelling and ground clashes continued in Sere Kaniye following the announcement, and it is unclear how the negotiations differ from those ten weeks ago which ultimately did not dissuade Turkey from invading.

On the ground

Today several members of the Rojava Information Center team will be joining a civilian convoy to Sere Kaniye to get first-hand and in-depth information about the situation in Sere Kaniye. The convoy will depart from Qamishlo at 8:30 AM, and then proceed to Tel Tamer and onwards to Sere Kaniye. The convoy is made up of local structure representatives, community leaders and media. On the 13th October a civilian peace convoy was attacked by Turkish artillery, killing 12 and wounding 73. On 17th October hundreds of civilians joined another peace convoy to Sere Kaniye. We will send regular updates throughout the day.

Humanitarian Crisis

The roads exiting Sere Kaniye to the east, west and north (Turkish border) have generally been controlled by Turkish-backed forces, with the southern road trading hands. Even when SDF ground forces control the southern road (leading to Tel Tamer), Turkish artillery and air strikes target medical and civilian traffic, making it an unsafe route to the hospital in Tel Tamer. There have been many reports of medical workers, facilities and vehicles being targeted by Turkish artillery and air strikes. Paramedic Hail al-Salih became the 5th medical staff to die due to attacks, following an air strike hitting an ambulance in Asadiya, south of Sere Kaniye on the 15th October. Three other nurses were injured and are in critical condition. Kurdish Red Crescent have stated that since the night of the 16th, they have had no access to Sere Kaniye to provide medical services, though a small team remains in the hospital treating the wounded. Humanitarian organizations and institutions in Ain Issa have called for a humanitarian corridor to be opened so that civilians and the wounded can leave Sere Kaniye.

There are increasing reports that Sere Kaniye hospital is being targeted by artillery (reports received 11:30 AM, 3:50 PM, 10:00 PM). As ground clashes and artillery approached Tel Tamer, most patients and workers have been moved to Hasakah. Tel Tamer and Hasakah are also the sites of large numbers of IDPs. With over 100,000 displaced crowded into schools, community centres and surrounded villages, local associations and administration are completely overwhelmed and are describing it as a "human catastrophe." Regular water supply has still not been restored to Hasakah and Tel Tamer following the targeting of the Alouk water station. Kurdish Red Crescent and the Autonomous Administration continue to call for international support in identifying whether unconventional weapons are being used.

The Health Commission has given the number of civilian fatalities as 218, including 18 children. 653 are listed as wounded, including 35 children, and 300,000 displaced. The Autonomous Administration has said that Turkey has targeted 810 schools with artillery.

Ceasefire announcement

At 9:00 PM Turkey and the USA announced a ceasefire of 5 days. The conditions included SDF withdrawal to 32 km south of the Turkish border, ceding primary "enforcement" of the so-called "security zone" to Turkey, as well as destruction of all heavy weapons. The head of SDF forces Mazloum Ebdi said that "whatever we can do as SDF to make this ceasefire work, we will do," while also asserting that a Turkish occupation or intentional demographic change or prevention of

returns would not be accepted. Abdi also emphasised that the agreement would only cover the areas where there is a current Turkish invasion: Sere Kaniye (Ras al Ain) and Tel Abyad.

Sere Kaniye

In the morning of the 17th journalists from inside Sere Kaniye reported heavy war throughout the night, with Turkish shelling and air strikes reinforcing waves of Turkish proxy forces attacking on the ground. Turkey is targetting the hospital, which is overcrowded with wounded. In the afternoon SDF was able to recapture most of the city and to capture the Alouk area east of the city. After the announcement of the ceasefire discussed between Turkey and the USA, artillery and airstrikes on Sere Kaniye continued.

Tel Tamer

There were again heavy clashes between SDF and Turkish proxy forces (TPF) in the villages Alya and Manajir between Sere Kaniye and Tel Tamer. Our team on the ground reported: "There was heavy fighting in the village Manajir with shelling, but also direct clashes between SDF and Turkish proxy forces." The area changed hands several times in the last days, in the evening the village was controlled again by SDF. The SDF also announced in the evening that the international highway M4 has been cleared.

Region between Tel Abyad and Ain Issa

There also have been fights in the countryside surrounding Tel Abyad. Clashes between SDF and TPF have been reported in the villages Abu Surry, Jalabiya and Kendali. Many villages north of Ain Issa were regained by the SDF. In the evening Turkey started to shell this region, continuing after the ceasefire agreement. Turkish air planes and drones continued to fly over Ain Issa.

Derik

At 8:00 PM we spoke to a person in the morning about the situation in Derik: "In the night [16th to 17th] from 2:00 AM until 7:00 AM there were air planes and drones over the region. In the morning Turkey targeted the Christian village Hekemiye and shelled it, the SDF answered. In the evening along the border from the village Sirmsaxe (Girke Lege) until the village Xirab Reske (the last point of the Derik border) there was fire exchange between the SDF and TPF. As a result many shells were fired at border villages like Xirab Reshk, Zihiriye, Ain Diwar, Qeser Dib, Sermsaxe, Banokiye and Hayakah. The SDF answered. Until now there is still sometimes fire exchange."