



REPORT ON SITUATION IN NORTH EAST SYRIA 22th October 2019

As the US - Turkey "ceasefire agreement" drew to a close, a new Turkey - Russia agreement emerged following negotiations in Sochi. The SDF have yet to give an official response to the new agreement, which cedes Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad to Turkey, and establishes Turkey - Russia patrols along a 10 km zone along the border (with the exception of Qamishlo). Although there are reports that there was Russian presence in Qamishlo on the night of the 21st, it is unclear to what extent the SDF were involved in the negotiations. There are reports of ground clashes by Turkish proxy forces, but shelling and air strikes appear to have ceased for the time being.

Displaced families continue to move south from the border, and many have also fled from Tel Tamer fearing further incursion by Turkish proxies. The situation in IDP camps is reaching breaking point, as international aid food packets have not arrived in Al Hol and the population of Mahmoudli camp swells from new arrivals.

Humanitarian Crisis

The conflict has disrupted the flow of humanitarian aid to the region. A source within the Al Hol camp has said that international aid food packets - which generally arrive three times a week - have not arrived. Most United Nations aid arrives from the Al Waleed/ Al Tanf border crossing, managed by the Syrian regime. The Autonomous Administration is providing food and water, but is unable to provide additional supplies. Waves of displacement continued throughout the day as people fled border areas, particularly in Amude and Dirbesiye. Our team on the ground in Dirbesiye saw many people leaving with cars full of household goods, but also some people staying, determined to remain in their homes. Thousands have arrived at Mahmoudli camp in Raqqa region, exceeding the capacity of the camp management to provide tents and food. Kurdish Red Crescent stated that due to the conflict there are 5 hospitals and clinics out of service and two temporarily evacuated, no access to Kobane or Manbij regions and two refugee/IDP camps (Mabrouka and Ayn Issa) evacuated. Foza Yusiv of TEV DEM - the umbrella body for civil society in North and East Syria - has announced that new camps are being built to accommodate newly displaced people. At the Semalka - Peshabor border crossing, a steady flow of refugees into the Kurdish region of Iraq continues, but there are no longer crowds waiting to cross.

Reports of war crimes continue to emerge from the occupied regions in Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad. It has been reported that on the 22nd October the grain silos in Tel Abyad were raided by Turkish proxies, and that ISIS-affiliated factions within Turkish backed forces have continued to loot houses and shops and sell the stolen goods. A video has emerged which appears to show members of Turkish proxies from "Al Majd Division" mutilating a corpse which they claim is a deceased YPJ fighter. There are also reports of imposition of sharia law in Tel Abyad, with women being forced to wear full face covering and not leave the home without a male chaperone. This echoes the situation in Afrin since Turkish invasion in 2018.

ISIS resurgence

Several attacks have taken place in Deir ez Zor region, with ISIS claiming the assassination of the local SDF-backed military council. Attacks in Deir ez Zor which follow the pattern of ISIS but have not yet been claimed include an attack by gunmen on an SDF checkpoint in Al Shuhayl, an IED explosion on the main road of Al-Hawayj village, and the shooting at short range of two young men whose bodies were found in a trench in Al Susah. Manbij military council issued a warning saying that ISIS cells are increasing their activity. The Council also accused Turkish backed forces of trying to break ISIS-linked families out of camps. A group of ISIS-linked women and their children, who had broken out of Ayn Issa camp, were arrested while trying to enter Turkey from Manbij region. One was German and two were Lebanese. The lawyer of a 39 year old German ISIS fighter from Hamburg has confirmed that he has broken out of SDF facilities and is now in hiding. There are new reports of former leaders, members and affiliates of ISIS and al Nusra presence among Turkish proxy forces, which we are investigating.

Tel Abyad, Sere Kaniye and surrounding countryside

The Turkish army and proxy forces continue to violate the ceasefire. In the morning they attacked the villages of Chate, Bir Arab and Jalba in the west of Tal Abyad. SDF recaptured the villages Bidah, Mahith and Hamir, as well as securing the "Sawamagh Kafifa" silos on the Kobane road near the city Tel Abyad today morning. In Sere Kaniye a sniper from Turkish backed forces shot at two civilians as crossed the city to return to their homes. The two injured were taken to the hospital in Hasakah. In the evening there were reports of attacks on the villages Mishrefa and Manajir south of Sere Kaniye. The attacks were repelled by the SDF.

Tel Tamer

Early in the morning military vehicles of Syrian government forces crossed the city carrying equipment and about 500 soldiers, heading west along the international M4 road. During the day nylon sheets were raised over the main streets of the town center to protect from drone surveillance and strikes. Across the region of Tel Temir, Dirbesiye and Tirbespi some shopkeepers were packing up and leaving ahead of the expected offensive. In Til Temir our team spoke to Kawa of the Kurdish Red Crescent, who reported on the targeting of medical facilities by Turkish forces: "We had a medical base in the village Safili. First there were drones overhead, and after the warplane struck. Our ambulance was damaged and we couldn't go on to the city because planes would strike us there."

Dirbesiye

Our team on the ground in Dirbesiye reports that many people had left the city, though many also chose to remain. There was a lot of fear of possible attacks after the expiration of the ceasefire. Most of the shops were closed and people stayed inside their homes, and the atmosphere throughout the city was very heavy. There was a report of the Syrian army entering Dirbesiye, but our team was not able to confirm this.

Other regions

As of 4:30 pm government troops were not yet stationed on the border area of Qamishlo although many troops were sighted south of the city, waiting in trucks. In the night, drones and fighter planes were reported over Kobane and in the border areas in the canton of Jazeera. In the city of Derik nylon sheets were erected above the main roads to protect against drones, and throughout the day there were thousands of people in Amude, Kobane, Girke Lege and Til Kocher protesting against the Turkish invasion and accusing Turkey of war crimes.