



## 1. Declaration: DEFEND KURDISTAN Against Turkish Occupation

We – nearly 150 politicians, human rights advocates, journalists, academics, members of parliaments, political activists, ecologists, and feminists from all over Europe – have been closely following the dangerous developments resulting from Turkey’s attacks on South Kurdistan (North Iraq) since the 24th of April 2021. As a result, we have gathered in Erbil today and decided that we must speak out.

So, it is with one united voice of moral clarity, that we wish to unequivocally condemn the Turkish Military’s ongoing occupation of South Kurdistan and stand in solidarity with the people of South Kurdistan and Kurdish resistance forces in the protection of their homeland. In April, the Turkish state initiated a new, wide-ranging military campaign in South Kurdistan in the regions of Matina, Zap and Avashin. Heavy battles continue in these regions, with the Kurdish guerrilla forces fiercely resisting this illegal invasion. These large-scale attacks target not only the Kurdish guerrilla forces, but also the achievements of the Kurdish people, with the aim of occupying South Kurdistan. To date, the response to these attacks on the international level has unfortunately been muted. Seizing on this silence, the Turkish regime has put in place their plan to occupy all of Rojava (the region of North and East Syria) alongside South Kurdistan. In so doing, Turkey is determined to ethnically cleanse this vast area – 1400 km long – from North-West Syria to the Iraqi-Iranian border. At the same time, Turkey is waging a drone war against the Maxmur refugee camp, a gross violation of international law. Connected to this policy of ethnic cleansing, the Turkish military also hopes to depopulate the Sinjar region, home of the Yazidis—and thereby achieve what ISIS could not.

Since the summer of 2012, the Kurds of Rojava and North East Syria have been working hand in hand with local communities of Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmens, and Armenians, having led a revolution together that established an Autonomous Administration that is democratic and empowers women. In response, Turkey has used jihadist militants to directly attack these areas of Rojava including Afrin, Azaz, Jarablus, Sere Kaniye and Gire Spi (Tal Abyad), in the hopes of occupying and destroying the achievements of this women’s-led Administration. During these ongoing occupations, Turkey has engineered demographic change, systematic rape, and enslavement of women, causing mass displacement of the large Kurdish and other civilian populations, as part of their strategy to Turkify and eventually annex these lands.

And the issues are not only abroad. In fact, the latest example of Erdoğan’s unrelenting hostility towards Kurdish political and social gains derives from within Turkey itself, and his attempt to shut down the People’s Democratic Party (HDP). This is the latest step in a years-long campaign against the HDP – a progressive alliance of Kurdish, Turkish and many other

Protests against the Turkish occupation of South Kurdistan have taken place all over the world since the start of the attacks.



democratic parties, organizations, and individuals – which has led to the imprisonment of over ten thousand HDP members.

Unfortunately, the Kurdistan Region (KRG) and the Iraqi government have done little to stop Turkey's occupation attempt. In particular, it has been disappointing for us to see how Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) officials have even tried to legitimize the Turkish occupation. Whatever Ankara's economic pressure might be, the KDP must not allow itself to be turned into a Turkish proxy, as the consequences of this war can be grave for all of Kurdistan and the region.

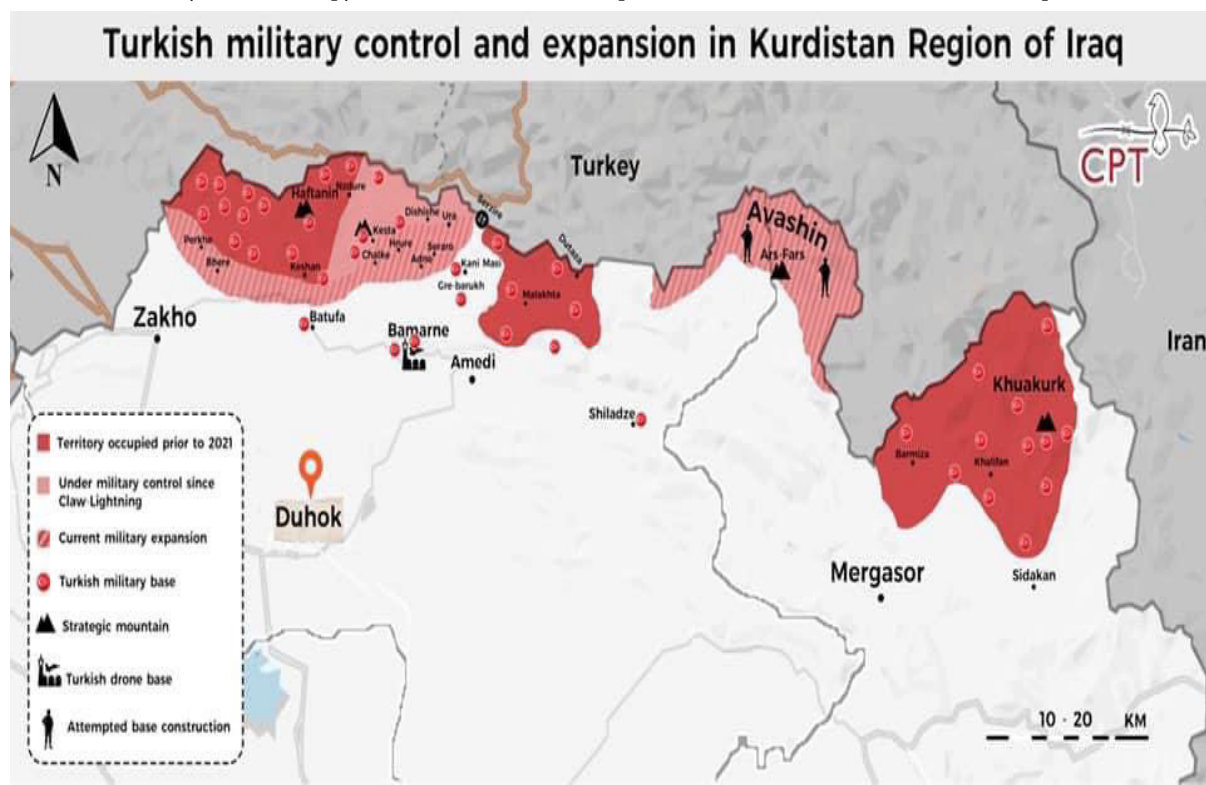
The world must also recognize that Turkey is attempting to carry out a genocide against the Kurdish people. And it is only the Kurdish resistance movement which is preventing the full occupation of Kurdistan and annihilation of the Kurd's political rights. The current armed resistance in Zap, Avashin and Metina has turned Kurdistan into a stronghold of defiance, not just for the Kurds, but for all the people in the wider region threatened by Turkish neo-Ottoman expansionism. To this end, Turkish President Erdoğan has made no secret of his ambition to restore the lost glory of the Ottoman Empire by reconquering its former territory.

As such, parallel to Turkish military campaigns against the Kurds in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq, Erdoğan has meddled in various conflict areas, including Libya, Artsakh/Azerbaijan, Yemen, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, and Lebanon. Connected to this, are his threats against many nations, such as Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and France.

We must also recognize that Erdoğan's regime has a long track record of funding, arming, and supporting the Islamic State (ISIS) and various other similar violent jihadist groups, using them officially and unofficially as proxy forces to augment the Turkish state's reach abroad. During the recent conflict in Artsakh involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, Erdoğan sent hundreds of jihadist proxy fighters from Syria to support Azerbaijan and has also sent these fighters to Libya to participate in the country's protracted conflict. Through these actions, Turkey is violating the sovereignty of other countries, and spreading its mercenary terrorism throughout the globe.

Erdoğan is well aware of Turkey's unique geopolitical position and exploits it to his advantage. He knows that his military, the second largest in NATO, is a formidable force and bulwark

Turkey seeks to occupy all of South Kurdistan. (map taken from Christian Peacemaker Team report)



for the ‘West’. So, the Turkish state, under his rule, continues to openly and systematically defy international law and violate human rights conventions. Turkey continuously violates sovereignty of many countries. Meanwhile, NATO, the United Nations, the European Union, and the Council of Europe all respond with deafening silence. But the international community must be driven by morality not geo-strategy. And their failure to challenge Erdoğan’s authoritarianism and war crimes, effectively gives him permission to continue his military aggression. In turn, it also makes them a partly responsible conspirator in his ongoing destruction.

We therefore proclaim an international initiative DEFEND KURDISTAN Against Turkish Occupation!

## 2. Background and Consequences

On April 24th 2021, the Turkish army launched its extensive military operations dubbed ‘Claw-Lightning’ and ‘Claw-Thunderbolt’ in South Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) in the regions of Matina, Zap and Avashin. We know too well that this is not the first attack of Turkey against the Kurdish people. The Kurdish population in North Kurdistan (Southeast Turkey) has been suffering from the oppression of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s regime for years. Thousands of politicians, journalists and women activists, amongst others, are harassed by Turkish police and military forces in the Kurdish provinces. Women in particular face the constant threat of violence, rape and murder. In Rojava, Turkey has occupied Afrin, Azaz, Djerablus, Serekaniye and Gire Spi. Hundreds of thousands of people have thus become refugees in their own land. Islamist mercenaries – many of them former members of ISIS and Al-Nusra – have now been settled in the villages and towns in these areas. As if all this was not enough, Erdogan and other Turkish government officials are uttering new threats against Rojava almost every day.

It is no coincidence that this most recent invasion began on the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, 24th April – this ongoing assault was clearly intended as an open threat of genocide against Kurds. The biggest counterweight against this racist war policy is the Kurdish Freedom Movement, which is organized in Turkey, Syria and Iraq and its democratic confederalism is supported as a multi-ethnic project by Kurds, Yezidis, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians and members of many other communities.

### *The War’s Significance for Domestic Politics in Turkey*

Turkey’s illegal invasion and occupation in South Kurdistan (North Iraq) must be understood in relation to the larger context of the regimes’s agenda to annihilate the Kurdish people and crack-down on any democratic opposition. In the general elections of 2015, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) surpassed both Erdogan’s expectations and the 10% threshold to be the first predominantly Kurdish party elected to the Turkish National Assembly. For the first time in 16 years, the AKP was unable to gain absolute majority and was obliged to forge a coalition with the right-wing extremist MHP. What followed since has been a sustained attack on democracy with the result of Erdogan controlling all executive, legislative, and juridical institutions of the country, and effectively ruling by decree. Journalists, protesters, political opponents, human rights activists, teachers, students, and many more have been dismissed, imprisoned, prosecuted, and tortured<sup>1</sup>. After local elections in 2019, this totalitarian regime compensated its losses by seizing 49 out of 65 municipalities, persecuting lawfully elected HDP representatives, and replacing them with government-appointed trustees<sup>2</sup>. In predominantly

1 Human Rights Watch (2020). World Report 2020: Turkey: Events of 2019. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/turkey#>

2 Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) Representation in Europe (2021). Systematic Oppression as the Basis for Erdogan’s ‘New

Kurdish areas of Turkey this crackdown has materialized in the form of destruction, bloodshed and the displacement of more than half a million people due to brutal attacks by the Turkish army and Islamist mercenaries, revealing once again the regime's willingness to carry out a genocide against the Kurdish people.

Erdogan's domestic politics are inseparable from his neo-ottoman aspirations, coined by Turkish nationalism. On the one hand, Erdogan has responded to increasing socio-economic tensions and the loss of democratic support underpinning the legitimacy of his presidency as defined by the now suspended constitution with authoritarianism and the criminalization of dissent. On the other hand, Erdogan's neo-ottoman project serves as a vehicle for outwards power projection that feeds on the construction of "worldly and religious supremacy of Ottoman sultans as autocratic rulers and defenders of the faith against Western intrusion and other foreign threats"<sup>3</sup>.

For this expansionist project, Turkey deploys with Islamist mercenaries to invade and occupy foreign territories. It is common knowledge that Erdogan's government has been supporting ISIS and other Islamist groups in the region with weapons, training, and funding<sup>4</sup>. This cooperation played an important part in the illegal aggressions against the people in Afrin, Libya, and Armenia, and it is clear that Turkey is now pursuing the same strategy in South Kurdistan. According to new reports, one thousand Islamist mercenaries from Libya and Syria are stationed in the Sirnak (North Kurdistan) province while 560 more are stationed on a Turkish military base in South Kurdistan. To make it even worse, there is information saying that Turkey plans to ethnically cleanse this territory and settle said mercenaries and their families in occupied areas<sup>5</sup>. This would mean a repetition the atrocities and crimes that have been committed in Afrin, Serekaniye and Gire Spi.

### *War Against the Environment*

Turkey's colonialism inextricably links Erdogan's intention to break the Kurdish liberation movement, ethnic cleansing and the annexation of territory to environmental devastation and the exploitation of natural resources to bolster Turkey's ailing economy. Approved by the Barzani regional government, companies like Cengiz Holding, are cutting down tons of trees in South Kurdistan every day. Like in the Sirnak region (North Kurdistan) the wood is used immediately to build military bases. Yet, large quantities are illegally transported on newly built roads, for which historical sites were destroyed – mainly to supply the Turkish market, and construction sector in particular, which has been boosted by Erdogan's economic policies<sup>6</sup>. Turkey has been building numerous dams in the region and cutting off the Euphrates River amongst others, which are highly significant for the persistence of the unique ecosystems in the region that so many livelihoods depend on, leaving people threatened by a major food crisis. In addition, more than 8000 acres of farmland and forests as well as about 1300 beehives have been burned in the areas Metina, Avasin and Zap due to deliberate Turkish air strikes and artillery fire<sup>7</sup>. These fires are still continuing, and new ones are being added every day – with

Turkey'. HDP Europe. <https://hdpeurope.eu/2021/05/systematic-oppression-as-the-basis-for-erdogans-new-turkey/>

3 Van Veen, E. and E. Yüksel (2018). Too big for its boots: Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East from 2002 to 2018. Clingendael. <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/too-big-for-its-boots/>

4 Bekdil, B. (2015). Dateline: Turkey's Double Game with ISIS. Middle East Quarterly. <https://www.meforum.org/5317/turkey-isis>

5 Brauns, N. (18.05.2021). Neosmanische Expansionspolitik: Giftgas gegen Kurden? Junge Welt. <https://www.jungewelt.de/artikel/402597.neosmanische-expansionspolitik-giftgas-gegen-kurden.html>

6 Altan, E. (2021). Turkey buying lands in Federated Kurdistan. Mezopotamya. <http://mezopotamyaajansi33.com/en/ALL-NEWS/content/view/136788>

7 Christian Peacemaker Teams - Iraqi Kurdistan (2021). No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning. CPT. <https://cptik.org/reports-1/civilian-impacts-claw-lightning>

ammunition that contaminates the environment and poisons wildlife. It clearly demonstrates that Turkey – just like in Afrin – pursues a policy of weakening the population of South Kurdistan through relentless destruction and exploitation of all natural resources. Without intervention, the beautiful and rich nature of these areas – its rivers, forests, air and earth – will be burned and polluted by Erdogan’s regime.

#### *Impacts on the Civil Society*

Like in Rojava, Turkey wages an illegal war under the pretense of erecting a ‘security zone’ in its fight against terrorism. However, the reports of several NGOs, international media outlets, and local population attest that the attacks by the Turkish army and its mercenaries have specifically targeted civilians. Thousands of air raids have been carried out in the areas Metina, Zap and Avasin. Armed drones have been hovering over the areas 24/7 for the past weeks and months. Many villages have been directly hit by Turkish air strikes wounding over a dozen Kurdish villagers and causing great damage to their livelihoods. More than 20 villages have been forcefully depopulated as a result of the Turkish attacks. Turkish soldiers have even dared to enter South Kurdish villages and directly threaten the local population. There are reports of house raids and the consequent destruction of property by Turkish soldiers<sup>8</sup>.

The example of the village Keste in the Metina area has made it very clear for us how devastating the effect of the Turkish occupation of South Kurdistan is. In this village, many Ezidi families had sought refuge after the IS attack on Sinjar in 2014. They had found a new home and a safe place for their families. Now, the Keste village is being bombarded almost daily by the Turkish army. Many families – including those from Sinjar – have been forced to leave their homes without knowing where to go next. In total, more than 1500 people – including whole families with children, women and elderly – have been forced to flee their homes. This alone shows that Turkey deliberately tries to depopulate the whole area and thus ethnically cleanse the indigenous population of South Kurdistan.

#### *Violations of International Law*

The occupation campaign of the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ultra-nationalist ally MHP constitutes a violation of several international agreements including, amongst others: Article 51 of Protocol I (1977) additional to the fourth Geneva Convention (1949) protecting the civilian population from indiscriminate attacks, e.g. “those which are not directed at a specific military objective”; Article 53 of the fourth Geneva Convention and Articles 52, 53, 54 and 55 of Protocol I protecting “cultural objects and of places of worship” as well as private property and “infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population” from the destruction or appropriation by the occupying force; Article 55 of Protocol I, which prohibits “the use of methods or means of warfare which are intended or may be expected to cause [widespread, long-term and severe] damage to the natural environment”; and Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which foresees sanctions against states which commit war crimes and damage to natural life.

We have been shocked to hear about the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army against the guerrilla forces defending South Kurdistan. According to international news coverage, Turkish soldiers have used chemical weapons 13 times leading to the death of several members of the HPG (People’s Defense Forces) guerrilla. Shocking videos of the aftermath of these attacks with chemical weapons were even spread by Turkish nationalists online and later

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

published in the British and German newspapers Morning Star<sup>9</sup> and Junge Welt<sup>10</sup>. As much as we are aware of the sad history of the Turkish state and its use of chemical weapons ever since the foundation of the Turkish republic, we cannot accept that Turkey's use of such horrific methods for the occupation of South Kurdistan, and the consequent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (1997) – which both the EU and Turkey have ratified – is being condoned by the international community today.

### *International Silence and Complicity*

The EU certainly has an economic interest in Turkey, the EU's 6th biggest trading partner. Much more important however, is Turkey's geostrategic position for both EU and NATO. Like Erdogan himself, they have an interest in the preservation of his regime. The inhuman EU-Turkey refugee deal has allowed the EU to keep migrants at Europe's external border. While at the same time, it supplies the weapons and technology that allows Turkey to continue its aggressive and genocidal policies. For the NATO, Turkey has the second largest military force of the members and provides a strong geographic foothold and base for operations in the Middle East. These international players put their repulsive interests above the values and rights they claim to defend. With its silence, the international community condones war crimes like Turkey's repeated illegal bombardment of the UN-protected Maxmur refugee camp<sup>11,12</sup>, and in this way further encourages such dreadful course of action.

Therefore, we fully support the local population's determination to defend itself against the dangerous plans of Erdogan's regime and call on all institutions and governments in Europe and beyond to act according to the before mentioned international agreements and stop their acquiescence and support of the Turkish occupation of South Kurdistan immediately. This is a critical moment, and the silence of all democratic forces, of women, of advocates for peace as well as of human rights and environmental activists must be broken!

### **3. Our Demands**

In order to achieve an immediate stop of the Turkish attacks on South Kurdistan and a withdrawal of all Turkish troops and Islamist mercenaries we demand the following:

- Stop the Turkish occupation, demographic change, instability, and ethnic cleansing campaign in South Kurdistan.
- Stop the destruction and exploitation of Kurdistan's nature.
- No complicity of international and regional powers in the Kurdish genocide.
- Support of all Kurdish parties, institutions, and people for the guerrilla's resistance and their united stance against the Turkish occupation.
- No to Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman expansionist project throughout the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.

For more information please visit: [defend-kurdistan.com](http://defend-kurdistan.com) / [anfenglish.com](http://anfenglish.com) / [medyanews.net](http://medyanews.net)

<sup>9</sup> Sweeney, S. (16.05.2021). Footage of Alleged Chemical Weapons Attack leaked to Star amid calls of independent investigations. Morning Star. <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/turkish-chemical-weapons-attack-leaked-to-star-amid-calls-for-independent-investigations>

<sup>10</sup> Brauns, N. (01.06.2021). Türkischer Expansionskrieg: Wieder Giftgas gegen Kurden. Junge Welt. <https://www.jungewelt.de/artikel/403459.tuerkischer-expansionskrieg-wieder-giftgas-gegen-kurden.html>

<sup>11</sup> Durgut, Z. (2021). People of Maxmur: UN condones the attacks. Mezopotamya. <http://mezopotamyaajansi33.com/en/ALL-NEWS/content/view/137807>

<sup>12</sup> Reuters (05.06.2021). Turkish air strike kills at least three in refugee camp in Iraq. Reuters. (<https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-drone-strike-on-iraqi-refugee-camp-kills-three/a-57788635>)