

Iran will regret lack of co-operation with Turkey over northern Iraq

Iran may come to regret its lack of co-operation with Turkey over military moves Turkey is making in northern Iraq aimed at the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), wrote Burhanettin Duran, director of a pro-government Turkish think-tank, in the Sabah newspaper on Saturday.

The Turkish military launched a ground incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan in March, seizing control of villages and territory previously controlled by the PKK, a group that has been fighting the Turkish state for decades.

Statements by Turkish government officials suggest the incursion may develop into an attempt to take control of the Qandil mountains, which have served as the PKK's main base for decades. However, any such aims will be difficult to achieve without the co-operation of Iran, whose northern border with Iraq the mountain range straddles.

According to Duran, the Iranians have, thus far, shown little inclination to co-operate with Turkey over the operation for two main reasons.

First, Iran is wary of the long-term consequences substantial Turkish military operations against the PKK's main bases will have for its growing influence in Iraq, which has expanded steadily as US influence over Iraq has waned.

Iran also feels, wrote Duran, that co-operation with Turkey over the PKK in Iraq is not required to achieve its wider goals in the region. This is despite Turkey having refrained from openly supporting the block formed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United Arab Emirates that aims to curb growing Iranian regional influence and having worked closely with Iran as partners in the Astana process that aims to bring the Syrian conflict to an end.

Iran may soon come to regret its uncooperative stance regarding Turkey's military operations in Iraq, says Duran, as strained relations between the United States and Turkey are improving following a recent agreement between the two

countries over the status of the disputed Syrian city of Manbic.

Such improvements in US-Turkish relations, he implies, may result in Ankara becoming more receptive to US overtures that aim to convince Turkey to play a more active role in limiting Iranian ambition. Iran, in turn, will have cause to regret its “swollen ambitions”.

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