



Kongreya Civakên Demokratîk ên Kurdistanîyên li Ewropa

Le Congrès des communautés démocratiques du Kurdistan en Europe

Democratic Communities Congress of Kurdistan in Europe

Avrupa Kürdistanlı Demokratik Toplumlar Kongresi

■ Rue de Porto 132 - 4020 Liège - Belgique ■ +32-71318719 ■ info@kcdk-e.com

Turkish use of chemical weapons in Southern Kurdistan (Northern Iraq)

Turkish military offensive in Southern Kurdistan

Since 23rd June 2021, the Turkish army has been conducting a cross-border military operation against positions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq). The offensive, which has been named "Operation Claw Lightning", has caused numerous casualties on both sides. As a result of widespread airstrikes by the Turkish Armed Forces, dozens of civilian settlements have had to be evacuated, and numerous civilians have lost their lives.

The Turkish Armed Forces have a long history of running crossing-border military offensives deep into Iraqi state territory. Since 1991, Turkey has also established dozens of military bases in the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq. More than 10,000 Turkish soldiers are permanently stationed in the neighbouring country. In the recent operations, additional Turkish military bases and outposts have been established.

In an attempt to justify the current ground and air invasion of Iraq, Turkey is invoking its right to self-defence. According to an expert report by the Scientific Service of the Bundestag from 2020, however, this justification is not tenable [1].

Rather, the report expresses doubts that the attacks of the Turkish Armed Forces in northern Iraq are compatible with international law.

Impact of the operations on the civilian population

Little independent research is available from the areas directly affected by the Turkish attacks because few independent and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) report directly from on the field. One of the few exceptions is the Southern Kurdistan-based NGO Christian Peacemaker Teams-Iraqi Kurdistan (CPT-IK). CPT-IK has been monitoring the impacts on the civilian population since the beginning of the Turkish offensive. Their first report on the topic was published on 3rd June 2021, under the title "No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw Lightning" [2]. The Human rights organisation reports massive clashes between the Turkish Armed Forces and the PKK in the region. Many of the Turkish air and artillery attacks have directly hit civilians: "While Turkey claims to target the PKK with its operation, it is actually civilians living in the border regions who are the ones most affected by the Turkish bombardments. These bombings have devastated a region where hundreds of families live. [...] Turkey's bombardments threaten not only the livelihood of the families, but also their lives. Four civilians have been injured by the Turkish bombardments, and more than 1,500 civilians from 22 villages have evacuated their villages to escape Turkish attacks."

Use of chemical weapons

In addition to the widespread bombardment of civilian areas, the Turkish Armed Forces are also accused of using chemical weapons in the course of the current military offensive. These accusations made by the PKK have been corroborated by video recordings [3].

According to the reports, the Turkish Armed Forces have been using chemical weapons since the beginning of its offensives, against the cave and tunnel complexes of the "People's Defence Forces" (HPG). Due to the precautions that the HPG had taken before the start of the offensive, their guerrillas suffered few initial casualties from the use of chemical weapons. However, according to the HPG, the Turkish Armed Forces have been using a new chemical agent since the second half of September, which,



Kongreya Civakên Demokratîk ên Kurdistanîyên li Ewropa

Le Congrès des communautés démocratiques du Kurdistan en Europe

Democratic Communities Congress of Kurdistan in Europe

Avrupa Kürdistanlı Demokratik Toplumlar Kongresi

■ Rue de Porto 132 - 4020 Liège - Belgique ■ +32-71318719 ■ info@kcdk-e.com

when detonated, first produces a large shock wave and then releases a chemical that burns the human body in a very short time. The other chemical warfare agents used are, according to survivors' reports, in one case a greenish gas, which left a sweet taste in the mouth, and in another case, a whitish-grey gas that smelled like bleach.

According to the HPG press office, the Turkish Armed Forces has carried out a total of 138 attacks with chemical weapons in the last five months, during which several guerillas lost their lives. According to the report, three fighters in Girê Sor in the Avaşîn region on 3rd September, five fighters on 5th October and four fighters on 10th October in the Werxelê mountain massif in the Avaşîn region were killed by chemical weapons attacks. On 4th September, the village of Hiror was attacked with chemical weapons, injuring members of a local family. The CPT-IC confirmed that the injuries to the family members were caused by chemical weapons [4].

Chemical weapons banned internationally - No consequences for Turkey

Already with the Geneva Protocol of 1925, the use of asphyxiating, poisonous, or similar gases, as well as bacteriological agents in war was prohibited by an international agreement. At that time, Turkey was one of the 36 initial signatories of the international treaty. In addition, Turkey is signatory to the United Nations Chemical Weapons Convention. This treaty prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons and obligates Turkey to destroy existing chemical weapons stockpiles. With the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), an independent structure has been created to monitor compliance with and implementation of the UN Chemical Weapons Convention. However, despite the incriminating findings against the Turkish Armed Forces, no action has yet been taken by the OPCW or other international actors.

Demands from Kurdish actors

Numerous Kurdish parliamentary deputies, media professionals, intellectuals, women's rights activists, and human rights activists from Southern Kurdistan have called on the OPWC to send teams of experts to the region to investigate the allegations of chemical weapons. The "Kurdistan National Congress" (KNK) has, in its most recent statement [5], called on the international community to refrain from further use of prohibited chemical weapons in Southern Kurdistan. The UN, the USA, the EU, or Russia should not turn a blind eye to Turkey's crimes because of their economic interests. Further, Kurdish activists and associations call on the international community to impose an arms embargo and further sanctions against the Turkish government due to the use of chemical warfare agents.

Endnotes

[1] <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/705826/ec1d59d7709a4dfd3c0f14cb8fea6b76/WD-2-057-20-pdf-data.pdf>

[2] https://cptik.org/reports-1/civilian-impacts-claw-lightning?fbclid=IwAR2v8aCXtbdy4pDyabCSIrsmo4c7A-WP1xi_ply894-qaXH2Jg4SZitR140

[3] A listing of links to video recordings documenting the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army can be found in the appendix of the fact sheet.

[4] <https://cptik.org/reports-1/2021/8/23/updates-on-turkish-military-operation-claw-lightning>

[5] <https://anfdeutsch.com/kurdistan/knk-fordert-intervention-gegen-turkischen-chemiewaffeneinsatz-28958>

Appendix



Kongreya Civakên Demokratîk ên Kurdistanîyên li Ewropa

Le Congrès des communautés démocratiques du Kurdistan en Europe

Democratic Communities Congress of Kurdistan in Europe

Avrupa Kürdistanlı Demokratik Toplumlar Kongresi

■ Rue de Porto 132 - 4020 Liège - Belgique ■ +32-71318719 ■ info@kcdk-e.com

Video footage of the use of chemical weapons

▶ The online portal Medyanews has published a video with English subtitles in which the tunnel facilities of the guerrillas can be seen. The footage was taken by the guerrillas in August and shows how the visibility in the tunnel drops to within half a meter: <https://medyanews.net/new-footage-of-green-smoke-again-raise-suspicions-of-turkeys-use-of-chemical-warfare/>

▶ This video shows an 11th September 2021 guerrilla attack on Turkish troops in the Werxele area of the Avaşîn region. In the video, numerous pieces of equipment can be seen in the positions of the Turkish soldiers, which indicate the use of chemicals: https://gerilatv.com/calakiya-qada-berxwedane-ya-werxele-avasin-11e-ilona-2021_975dc19c8.html

▶ This video was taken on 2nd September 2021, and shows the use of chemical weapons against a tunnel position of the guerrillas in the Werxele area in the Avaşîn region. A Turkish soldier wearing a gas mask is seen approaching the tunnel: <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/turkish-army-continues-to-use-chemical-weapons-against-guerrillas-55339>

▶ This video documents smoke coming out of a tunnel position of the guerrillas after an attack with chemical weapons in the Werxele area in the region of Avaşîn: <https://medyanews.net/iraqi-kurdistan-new-video-footage-of-gas-clouds-raise-further-concerns-about-turkeys-long-suspected-use-of-chemical-gas/>