



## 74 Kurdish-led fighters killed in Turkish offensive

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He expected Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation member, to "act with restraint", he added.

Turkey's military confirmed the first death of a Turkish soldier and said three others had been wounded.

Intense gunfire also resounded from within Ras al Ain while warplanes could be heard flying overhead.

Supporting the president's move, Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute, who served as a special assistant to former President Ronald Reagan, said it was "just unreasonable" to expect the U.S. to keep its forces in Syria. Some 64,000 people have already reportedly fled their homes, the International Rescue Committee aid organisation said.

Meanwhile a statement by the United Nations refugee **agency** says the Turkish bombardment has affected key civilian infrastructure such as water pumping stations, dams, power stations and oil fields.

Turkey is targeting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Overnight, clashes erupted at different points along the border from Ain Diwar at the Iraqi frontier to Kobani, more than 400 km to the west.

The senior Turkish official said "nearly all" YPG forces had fled south from Ras al Ain.

"The whole border was on fire", he said.

However Russia on Friday blocked a UN Security Council statement calling on Turkey to halt its military offensive, diplomats said.

Reflecting global fears that Turkey's offensive could revive the Islamic State group, two auto bombs exploded outside a restaurant in the Kurdish-controlled urban centre of Qamishli, killing three people, and the extremists claimed responsibility.

"The (Syrian rebel) national army took control of the town center this morning".

The foreign ministry said that by accusing Turkey, rather than a "terrorist organisation that threatens the territorial integrity of Syria", the League was betraying the Arab world.

Turkey launched the Operation Peace Spring on Wednesday in northern Syria against the Kurdish militia known as the People's Protection Units (YPG), seen by **Ankara** as the Syrian offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party.

The SDF have been key allies of the USA in the battle against the Islamic State (IS) group. They have been holding thousands of captured IS fighters in prisons and tens of thousands of their relatives in detention.

When Operation Peace Spring began, the USA government was informed at all levels, Aksoy said, adding Turkey is fighting against *terrorist* organizations posing a threat to its national security and will press ahead with this fight. Top Pentagon officials stressed the need for Turkey to avoid doing anything to endanger United States forces inside Syria, which numbered about 1,000 before the incursion.

The longer the fighting goes on, the greater the chances for more accidents. "They are a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partner, we do a lot of trade with Turkey, but we don't want them to kill a lot of people".

Even some of Trump's staunchest Republican supporters have sharply criticized the decision, which some regard it as a betrayal of the US-armed Kurdish fighters who partnered with USA forces against the Islamic State, at great cost.

Analysts say the USA *withdrawal* in effect gave Turkey the green light to begin its cross-border assault.

"I want to emphasize at this point, we are not activating the sanction", Mnuchin told reporters at a White House briefing.

A senior Turkish official in Washington suggested that the USA mediation offer would not be welcomed in **Ankara** due to Turkey's opposition to negotiating with *terrorists*. Officials told ABC News that there are plans to withdraw all US troops from Syria if the security situation worsens.