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## community peacemaker teams

### Fully Locked: The Upcoming Turkish Military Operation in Spring 2024 Deep Within Iraqi Kurdistan



Turkey has conducted seven aerial and land military operations from December 2017 until April 2022 with the strategic objective of 'locking down' the border region of Iraqi Kurdistan. As a result of these operations, Turkey now controls 86.2% of the Iraq-Turkish border. Additionally, Turkey has established 64 military bases within Iraqi sovereign territory, ranging from 5 to 40 kilometers inside the border.

The main focal point of the next operation is Gara mountain. The aim of the upcoming military operation, along with the current preparatory phase, is to completely lock down Turkey's border, seize complete control of the border region, and effectively prevent and dismantle PKK guerrilla movements. Preparatory military actions have already been taken, resulting in the deaths of four civilians and severe injury to one.

Gara mountain is of strategic significance. It is considered the main road network for PKK movements and also connects both the Erbil and Duhok governorates together. Additionally, the mountain serves as a refuge, base of operations, and training ground for a large proportion of PKK members.

The mountain stands at 2251 meters above sea level and covers a span of 38.9 kilometers, serving as a center for four districts: Mergasor, Akre, Amedi, and Zakho. At the base of the mountain and on its slopes are 94 villages, 55 of which have been completely displaced since 1996 because of Turkish bombardments. Only 39 inhabited villages remain.

In preparation for its publicly announced upcoming operations, Turkey has conducted a vast number of bombardments. In just 70 days of 2024, Turkey has bombed the Duhok governorate at least 141 times, 75 of which targeted Gara mountain. The aim of the bombings is to pressure and force the villagers and civilians in Gara mountain to leave so that Turkey can establish and control a larger area to conduct their operations. This tactic has been frequently used by the Turkish military in Iraqi Kurdistan to seize control of civilian areas.

As a consequence of its bombardments in 2024 in Gara mountain, four civilians have been killed, and one has been severely injured. On February 20th, 2024, Turkish fighter jets bombed Kafia village located south of Gara mountain, in the Dinarte sub-district inside the Duhok governorate, killing Arif Taha and Bashir Ali. Furthermore, on March 8th, Turkish fighter jets bombed Dewike village north of Gara mountain, in the Dinarte sub-district inside the region of Akre, killing Araz Faraj and Saeed Mubarak while severely injuring Salih Mubarak. The data indicates that five civilians have been killed from villages surrounding Gara mountain, emphasizing the specific military interest for the Turkish military.

It is not the first time Turkey has conducted military operations to control Gara mountain. In February 2021, Turkey conducted an operation through the use of six helicopters with support from fighter jets and drones. Troops were deployed on the mountain in an effort to secure it. 12 Turkish soldiers and a Kurdish man were known to be held captive by PKK in the caves of Gara mountain and were killed in the operations. After four days of intensive clashing, Turkish military forces withdrew from the mountain and ended the operation.

CPT Iraqi Kurdistan is gravely concerned that if Turkey does conduct this operation on Gara mountain, 190 families will be permanently displaced from their villages. Additionally, CPT-IK is also concerned about the potential civilian casualties, casualties which have already occurred in the Turkish preparatory phase. CPT emphasizes and calls for a peaceful approach to solving the 40-year military conflict between the PKK and Turkey. It calls upon the Iraqi federal government, the Kurdish Regional Government, and the international community to protect the lives of civilians and safeguard the villagers near the border.