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## **TURKEY, IRAQ TO CARRY OUT JOINT OPERATION AGAINST PKK IN IRAQ**

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Turkey and Iraqs central government in Baghdad will carry out a joint operation against outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in northern Iraq, Turkeys Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has said.

Çavuşoğlus comments came as Turkey pushed ahead with a cross-border military operation in northern Syrias Afrin region against Peoples Protection Units (YPG) militants, who Ankara considers terrorists for their links to the outlawed PKK.

Speaking to reporters on his flight from Germany to Austria, Çavuşoğlu said the joint cross-border operation with Iraq may start after Iraq holds parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2018, signaling Turkish troops may move to northern Iraq following the ongoing operation.

Even if the Afrin operation has not yet been completed, we have the capacity to carry out both operations simultaneously, Çavuşoğlu said.

The PKK has camps in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, from which it frequently carries out attacks into Turkey.

Turkey frequently holds operations on the PKK in Iraq in cross-border operations.

The Turkish General Staff said in a statement on March 1 that four PKK militants have been neutralized in air strikes, launched after the militants opened fire at military posts.

Authorities use the word neutralized in statements to imply that the militants in question either surrendered or were killed or captured.

Çavuşoğlu had paid a one-day visit to Baghdad on Jan. 21, where he held talks with Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi, Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Parliament Speaker Selim al-Juburi.

The ministers statement came after the Turkish General Chief of Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar met with his Iraqi counterpart Gen. Othman al-Ghanimi in Baghdad on March 1.

After Akar was received by Iraqi Defense Minister Erfan al-Hiyali at the Defense Ministry building in Baghdad, the three reportedly discussed regional security and means of enhancing bilateral military relations.

Turkey and Iraq have been facing the same risks and threats that generated from the latest regional situations, said Akar.

We would like to boost our relations and collaborate over the war against terrorism and border security, he added.

This visit will be beneficial for the people on both sides, Ghanimi said.

Last September, Ghanimi met Akar in the Turkish capital Ankara in the run-up to last years independence poll held by the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), an initiative that angered both Ankara and Baghdad.

Turkey and Iraq vowed in January to improve bilateral relations in all fields, including the economy, energy and security matters, Çavuşoğlu and his Iraqi counterpart, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, despite ongoing problems regarding water sharing and the continued presence of Turkish troops in the Bashiqa camp in Iraq.

The joint stance against the KRG vote, which the Arbil administration was later forced to freeze, was a milestone in Turkey-Iraq relations, which were strained particularly over the Bashiqa issue.

Iraqi government forces achieved their objectives in a lightning operation that saw them sweep through disputed Kurdish-held territory in October last year, a punishing riposte to the KRG vote in September.

On Oct. 16 and 17, 2017, federal troops and allied militia retook the northern province of Kirkuk and its lucrative oil fields, as well as formerly Kurdish-held areas of Nineveh and Diyala provinces.

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Kaynak/Source: