

Northern Syria: ISIS' attack on Rojava in the Kurdish autonomous region

The development and course of the battle for Kobanê

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The attacks directed against the Kobanê Canton of Rojava by gangs of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) began on July 2.

According to the most recent casualty figures 338 members of ISIS have died and 36 YPG/YPJ (People's Protection Units-Women's Protection Units) fighters have lost their lives in the clashes.

The fighting marks a second-wave of attacks following an earlier ISIS offensive in March.

It comes immediately after the capture of Mosul by ISIS forces and is thought to have the secret backing of international and regional powers, who are reported to have gathered in Amman on June 1st, just days before the most recent ISIS advance in Iraq.

The field of operations around Kobanê extends from Raqqa to the Turkish border.

Kobanê under siege from gangs

The Kobanê Canton is the smallest of the three cantons of Rojava. Before the French occupation of Syria Kobanê was a small village located on the railway line along which the border between "North and West Kurdistan" (Turkey and Syria) would be drawn. When the German company which built the railroad established its headquarters here it came to take the name Kobanê (a Kurdish rendering of Company). To the east of the town ISIS forces occupy the town of Tel Abyad, part of Raqqa province. To the south lies Raqqa itself, the HQ of ISIS in Syria. To the west of the town lie the districts of Jarablus and Menbij, and to the north lies the district of Suruç across the Turkish-Syrian border.

Why Kobanê?

Together with its outlying villages Kobanê had a population of 200 thousand before the war, but it has grown substantially with the influx of a large number of refugees fleeing the fighting in the rest of Syria.

There are around 100 villages attached to the town, with 90% of the population being of Kurdish origin. Its principal economic sector remains agriculture, with wheat production and livestock predominating.

Despite being a small town its position on the border made it an important site politically, as well as a principal conduit for passage between Turkey and Syria as well as smuggling. The city also possesses another importance for Kurds.

It was through Kobanê that many leaders of revolutionary movements within Turkey passed when they came to Rojava. The PKK Leader Abdullah Öcalan also passed through Kobanê when he first came to Syria in 1979.

Kobanê as birthplace of Rojava Revolution

Following the partition of Kurdistan, the Syrian regime attempted to separate the Kurdish cities of Rojava one from another through its policy of denial and annihilation. With this goal in mind it settled Arabs from other regions of Syria in villages between the Kurdish towns. Kobanê was thus separated from the Afrin and Cizîre regions in this way. However, the residents never lost their Kurdish identity or belief in the Kurdish cause. Kobanê is known as a town with a strong national consciousness. It was this political identity which made Kobanê the region where the Rojava Revolution began. On July 19th, 2012, the people compelled the regime forces to abandon its positions in the region and lit the torch of revolution. The revolution then spread from here to Afrin and Cizirê. It is necessary to recall that following these events Kurds, who had been divided for years, were first able to proclaim a system of democratic autonomy and that these regions became among the safest in Syria.

Resistance repulses 'dirty games' of international powers!

The developments in Rojava upset the plans of many powers for the region. The powers in question were not long in organising attacks. They began in 2012 in Aleppo and Afrîn using many different groups, and the fighting grew worse in Cizîre. Yet their plans were frustrated by the local resistance. Hence, the plan and nature of attacks changed. Closed meetings were held with the participation of international and regional powers. Following each of these meetings Rojava faced another wave of attacks. The most violent of these attacks was launched on 8 March 2014. Before the attack there was a meeting in the city of Antep (Kurdish: Dilok) held by the representatives of various gangs in Syria. The Turkish border serves as a point of passage for these gangs. These gangs, once established to the west and south of Kobanê, increased their attacks around the town of Sirrin and the village of Qereqozak. The gangs targeted this area in particular as it is located along the Euphrates River dividing the region around Kobanê from that of Afrin and Aleppo. It is also located alongside the Tomb of Suleyman Shah, the site of the grave of the founder of the Ottoman Empire Osman Gazi and officially recognized as Turkish territory. ISIS gangs entering the village of Qereqozak on March 13th captured the village's bride across the Euphrates. After entering the Tomb of Suleyman Shah they coordinated their movements with Turkish soldiers.

Amman meeting, Mosul and new attack on Kobanê

The ISIS gangs suffered a serious defeat in March but continued to hold the same designs for the region. According to an article in Özgür Gündem, a meeting was held by representatives of the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the KDP in the Jordanian capital of Amman in which the ISIS attack on Mosul was agreed upon. In fact ISIS entered Mosul only 7 days after this meeting. In addition, ISIS gangs have taken over a number of villages on the Syrian border with Iraq through which they transported arms, tanks and other military equipment captured in Mosul to Raqqa. The ISIS gangs' movements around Kobanê grew in intensity.

Attack from three sides

On July 2 ISIS fighters attacked the village of Zormaxar to the west of Kobanê. They followed this with attacks on the villages of Beyadi and Cideydi. YPG/YPJ forces moved in to defend the area and clashes continued for four days. On the fourth day of the fighting the YPG launched a major operation around the villages of Beyadiyê, Cideydi, Xirab Etto, Cîb El Ferece and the district of Siyoxa. A total of around 100 ISIS fighters were killed in this fighting.

Barbaric assaults of ISIS continue

36 YPG-YPJ fighters and one Kurdish civilian have been killed in the fighting. One of the most noted aspects of the fighting has been how the attacks to the west of Kobanê began at the Turkish border and then spread south to the border with Raqqa and then east to Tel Abyad, also on the border of Turkey. It is also reported that ISIS members can easily cross the Turkish border and that the wounded are frequently transported back to Turkey for treatment. PYD co-President Salih Müslüm has said that “some organisations in Turkey support ISIS.”

Despite statements from all international powers condemning ISIS, they have remained silent about their attacks on Kobanê. Protests have been held in all four parts of Kurdistan against these attacks and many Kurds are heeding the calls to mobilise for Kobanê.

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* <http://en.firatajans.com/news/news/the-development-and-course-of-the-battle-for-kobane.htm>