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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, September 16, 2011 9:01 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Turkey "may act with Iran against PKK in Iraq" (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Friday, September 16, 2011 08:50 AM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: SES-O
Subject: Turkey "may act with Iran against PKK in Iraq" (Reuters)

ISTANBUL, Sept 16 (Reuters) - Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has signalled that Turkey could launch a joint operation with Iran against Kurdish militants' main base in northern Iraq, according to reports in Turkish newspapers on Friday.

In August, Turkey carried out a series of air and artillery strikes against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels in northern Iraq and the interior minister said this week a ground operation could be launched any time against the guerrillas there, depending on the result of talks with Iraq.

The military action was triggered by an increase in PKK attacks in southeast Turkey in which dozens of security personnel were killed.

Speaking to reporters while travelling to Tunisia on a north African tour, Erdogan said the minister's comment had been a slip of the tongue that had been corrected, and that there would be no forewarning of any such operation.

"Things like this are not said, they are done," the Hurriyet daily quoted the prime minister as saying. The same comments were reported by other newspapers.

"The chief of the general staff has completed assessments in the region (southeast Turkey) together with force commanders," he said.

There was no immediate official comment from Iraq.

Speculation about a ground offensive was fuelled when Erdogan met military chiefs before his trip to north Africa.

Erdogan was also asked in Tunisia about relations with Iran and cooperation against the PKK and he said: "It's going well. We may act together at Qandil."

The Qandil mountains are on the Iraq-Iran border and the main PKK bases are believed to be located in the mountains, a part of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region around 80-100 km south of the Turkish border.

Iran, Turkey's southeastern neighbour, said this month its troops had killed or wounded 30 members of the PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), an offshoot of the PKK that is reported to have launched ambushes and

sabotaged pipelines on the Iranian side of the border.

The Turkish military has said its strikes against the PKK in Iraq in August killed 145 to 160 militants. The PKK has only referred to a few casualties and the figures could not be independently confirmed.

A senior Turkish diplomat has been in Iraq for talks with the government this week as Ankara seeks more cooperation against the PKK from Iraq, whose large Kurdish minority, concentrated in the north, is politically influential.

Turkey has launched several cross-border air and ground operations in northern Iraq in a conflict that first erupted in the 1980s. The PKK is fighting for greater autonomy and Kurdish rights, having earlier sought a separate state.

More than 40,000 people have died in the conflict and fighting has escalated over this summer.

The last major incursion was in early 2008, when Turkey sent 10,000 troops, backed by air power, into northern Iraq.

Erdogan's comments to reporters also indicated a tougher approach on the Kurdish issue generally after government efforts to negotiate a solution failed to yield a result.

"The separatist terrorist group and its political offshoots should not expect goodwill and understanding from us as in the past," Erdogan said.

This week, recordings have been posted on the Internet of apparent talks in recent years between top Turkish intelligence officials and leading PKK members with the aim of ending the conflict.

Erdogan said investigations were continuing on how the recordings were leaked. He has said previously that the state has held talks with the PKK.

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