

Erdogan vows to thwart any 'Kurdish state'

Ankara

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed Turkey would thwart any attempt by a Kurdish militia it deems "terrorists" to carve out a Kurdish state in northern Syria.

Ankara views the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (PYD) as a terror group. But the United States is closely allied with the groups' fighters in the battle against jihadists in Syria.

"We do not and will never allow a so-called state to be established by the PYD, YPG in northern Syria," Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara.

"They want to establish a terror corridor in northern Syria reaching the Mediterranean," the president said.

The Syrian Kurdish groups have two "cantons" in Syria's northeast as well as the Afrin region to the west.

Erdogan added that Turkey would continue to fight against terror organisations "wherever we find them", referring to the YPG which Turkey says is the Syrian affiliate of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK is



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during the 39th Mukhtars Meeting, at Presidential Complex in Ankara

proscribed as a terror group by Turkey, the US and the European Union. It has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 during which over 40,000 people have been killed.

In August last year, Turkey launched a cross-border operation in northern Syria, aimed at clearing the border zone of both YPG fighters and jihadists.

There has been speculation Ankara may be planning to extend an operation against the YPG to clear it from the town of Afrin, where Erdogan has said its presence is a "threat" for Turkey.

Erdogan on Monday said a joint operation with Iran

against Kurdish militants which "pose a threat," including the PKK, is "always on the agenda."

He was speaking after a visit last week by the Iranian armed forces chief, General

Mohammad Hossein Bagheri.

Iranian security forces have also fought the PKK's affiliate, the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK). Both groups have rear bases in neighbouring Iraq.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Iraq on Wednesday, his ministry said, to discuss issues including next month's independence referendum in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

Cavusoglu will meet Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad and then Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani in Arbil.

Ankara has repeatedly warned against holding the non-binding September 25 poll. (AFP)

Iran denies joint operation

Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday denied claims by Turkey that the two countries were planning joint military operations against Kurdish rebels in Iraq.

"We have not planned any operations outside Iran's borders," said a

statement from the Guards' regional ground forces headquarters published by the ISNA news agency.

"But as always we will strongly confront any group, team or person who wants to penetrate into Iran's territory for anti-security or terrorist operations," it added.

Iraqi forces retake three districts of IS bastion

Tal Abta

Iraqi forces yesterday recaptured from the Islamic State group the first three districts of jihadist bastion Tal Afar as the Pentagon chief visited Baghdad in a show of support.

The United Nations said thousands of civilians had fled Tal Afar in the two days since the start of the broad offensive backed by the US-led coalition fighting IS.

In remarks in Baghdad after meeting Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said the jihadists were "on the run".

"Cities have been liberated, people freed from ISIS, from Daesh," Mattis said, using

alternative names for IS.

The jihadists had not been able "to stand up to our team in combat, and they have not retaken one inch of ground that they lost", he said.

Iraqi troops backed by a US-led international coalition routed IS in Mosul in July after a gruelling nine-month fight for Iraq's second city.

They launched an offensive Sunday to recapture Tal Afar, once a key IS supply hub between Mosul -- around 70 kilometres (45 miles) further east -- and the Syrian border to the west. IS fighters inside Tal Afar, estimated to number around 1,000, responded with artillery fire Tuesday as Iraqi forces massed outside the city.



A picture taken on August 4, 2017 shows a displaced Syrian child, who fled from the Islamic State (IS) group's Syrian stronghold of Raqa, sitting behind humanitarian aid boxes delivered by UNICEF at a temporary camp in the town of Tabqa

Baghdad

At least 250 US-led air strikes have pounded the Syrian city of Raqa and surrounding territory in the past week, the coalition fighting the Islamic State group said Tuesday.

Coalition spokesman Colonel Ryan Dillon said that the air raids targeted the greater Raqa area.

Activists and monitoring groups have reported that intensifying coalition bombardment of the city has left scores of civilians dead.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 42 civilians had been killed in US-led strikes on Raqa Monday, taking the civilian toll for the past eight days to 167.

Dillon told AFP that the allegations would be taken seriously and investigated.

Since a US-backed offensive ousted IS from Mosul in neighbouring Iraq in July, the coalition has had more available aircraft to strike Raqa, he added.

German minister says Erdogan backers threatened his wife

Berlin

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has accused supporters of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of threatening his wife amid a festering diplomatic crisis.

He said that Erdogan's strident style "had apparently led some to feel motivated to try to threaten and harass my

wife," in comments broadcast Tuesday by news channel NTV.

"Of course, this is a terrible outcome," he said without giving further details, at a time when relations between the NATO allies have plunged to their lowest point in years.

On Saturday, Erdogan launched a bitter personal attack

on Gabriel, who has frequently criticised the president's leadership and his treatment of opponents and critics.

"Who are you to talk to the president of Turkey?" Erdogan said in a televised speech. "Know your limits. He is trying to teach us a lesson... How long have you been in politics? How old are you?"



German Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel sitting next to his wife Anke (R) and their daughter Marie during a handover ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin.