

Beat: News

Iraq requests U.N. emergency meeting on Turkish troops in north

Turkish troops in north of Iraq

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USPA NEWS - Iraq has requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the presence of Turkish troops on its territory as a dispute with Ankara escalates
Turkey's parliament voted last week to extend the deployment of an estimated 2,000 troops across northern Iraq

By a year to combat "terrorist organisations" - a likely reference to Kurdish rebels as well as Islamic State.

Iraq condemned the vote, and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi warned Turkey risked triggering a regional war. On Wednesday, Ankara and Baghdad each summoned the other's ambassador in protest at remarks from the other camp.

"The Iraqi foreign ministry has presented a request for an emergency meeting of the Security Council to discuss the Turkish violation of Iraq's territory and interference in its internal affairs," said a statement on the ministry's website.

Turkey says its military is in Iraq at the invitation of Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish regional government, with which Ankara maintains solid ties. Baghdad says no such invitation was ever issued.

Most of the Turkish troops are at a base in Bashiqa, north of Mosul and close to Turkey's border, where they are helping to train Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga and Sunni fighters.

Tensions between Baghdad and Ankara have risen with expectations of an offensive by U.S.-backed Iraqi forces to retake Mosul, the last major Iraqi city under Islamic State control, captured by the militants two years ago.

Turkey has said the campaign will send a wave of refugees over its border, and potentially on to Europe.

Ankara also worries that Baghdad's Shi'ite Muslim-led forces will destabilise Mosul's largely Sunni population and worsen ethnic strife across the region, where there are also populations of Turkmens, ethnic kin of the Turks.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim echoed this worry again on Thursday, saying the presence of Ankara's troops in Bashiqa will continue to ensure that the demographics of the region will not change. Iraq's hostile reaction is "incomprehensible", he added.

However, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu sought to play down the spat over Bashiqa in comments later on Thursday. "We do not see a serious problem there and we think this problem will be overcome," he told a news conference with his Italian counterpart in Ankara. "Iraq must leave the rhetoric aside so we can assess how to resolve this subject."

He said around 3,000 local fighters, Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen, were being trained against Islamic State at the camp and they had so far "neutralised" around 750 of the group's militants in the area.

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