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The Turkish threat in northern Iraq

The Turkish Parliament has authorised the country's Government to carry out a large scale military operation against the PKK armed opposition group in northern Iraq. The reasons for the decision are to be found in the internal situation in Turkey, but its consequences go far beyond the country's borders.

The autonomous region of Kurdistan, the Iraqi territory where the attack has been authorised, is currently facing many difficulties - on the one hand, trying to contain the spread of the violence to which the rest of Iraq is subject; and on the other, dealing with numerous aspects of the tension with the central government that threaten its stability. An armed attack within its frontiers would make management of these problems extremely difficult, and as a result the Government of Kurdistan has hastened to ask for a political solution to the Kurdish problem. The other parties involved have also made a move - while the Baghdad Government has asked for restraint, Syria has supported a possible intervention. The Turkish decision will force those involved to take sides, leading to dangerous polarisation and instability. So far, the USA, NATO and the EU have rejected the offensive.

Beating the drums of war is not only a strategy by Turkey to pressurise its allies and neighbouring countries to act more firmly in the fight against the PKK. It is also a warning to the Government of Iraqi Kurdistan against any secessionist strategy that could act as an example to the Kurdish movements in the area. However, the strength of nationalist rhetoric in Turkey manages to silence the fact that the PKK renounced independence some time ago. It also prevents the demands of the Kurdish group regarding increased rights and freedoms from being heard. The alternative has been an almost exclusively military approach which not only has not led to any results but has also created a long term conflict with increasing levels of violence. In this context, the unilateral ceasefire declared a year ago by the PKK has met with no response.

Resorting to military force is always bad news for those who believe that peace requires in-depth negotiations and dialogue. However, when it occurs in the Middle East, a complex and afflicted area, stopping it is urgent in order to prevent victims, suffering and another armed conflict in a region that is already suffering from too much violence.