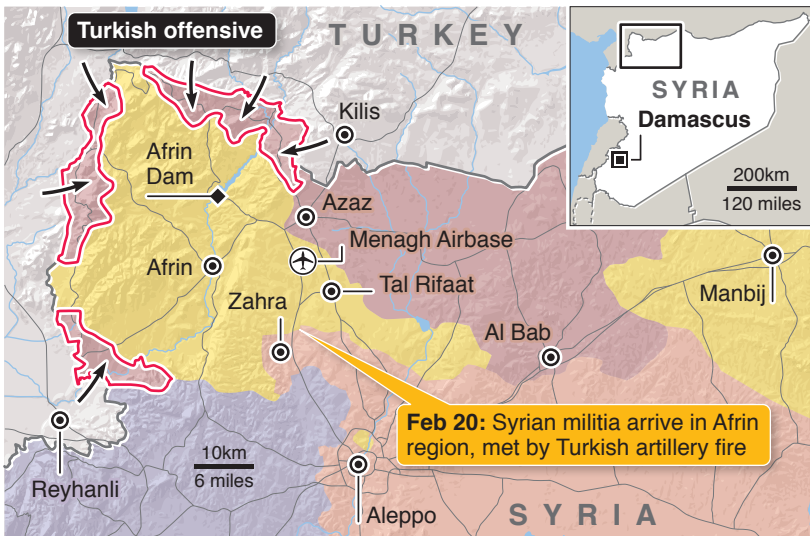


Iran and Turkey face off in Syria's Afrin

In a further escalation of Syria's complex civil war, Iranian-backed pro-government militia have entered the north-western Afrin region to help Kurdish fighters repel a Turkish military offensive



GOVERNMENT AND ALLIES

Syrian President **Bashar al-Assad** has denounced Turkish offensive. **Pro-regime forces entering Afrin appear to largely consist of Iranian-backed militia**

KURDS: People's Protection Units (YPG) have controlled Afrin since Syrian troops left in 2012. YPG also forms bulk of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – backed by U.S. in fight against so-called Islamic State (IS) in eastern Syria

REBELS: Include Free Syrian Army (FSA), Al Qaeda-linked Tahrir al-Sham, and other factions

TURKEY AND REBEL ALLIES

Turkey began offensive on Jan 20 to clear Afrin of YPG fighters, who it sees as “terrorists” because of their links to Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey. **Turkey fiercely opposes Assad and supports FSA rebels fighting to overthrow him**



UNITED STATES: Support for Kurds has angered Turkey, creating rift between NATO allies



RUSSIA AND IRAN

Have helped Assad regain large swathes of territory from rebels and IS militants in past year. **Move by pro-regime forces to support Kurds could unravel joint diplomatic efforts by Russia, Iran and Turkey to solve conflict**