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After Kobane's capture, refugees return blocked

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The fierce battle for the Syrian border town of Kobane is over, but for refugees in Turkey desperate to return home the massive destruction and ongoing fighting means they still must wait.

"We all want to go home. But go home to what?" asked one woman in tears, who like many others experienced short-lived euphoria after the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) recaptured the town Monday from Islamic State (IS) fighters.

But shortly after the shooting ended in a battle that observers say killed 1,800 fighters -- including some 1,200 from IS -- the word got back to Turkey that Kobane lay in ruins.

Proof of the intensity of the four-month battle stood everywhere Wednesday -- buildings pounded to dust by coalition airstrikes and shelling, cars torched, and unexploded explosives strewn in the street.

"Our heritage is our most valuable possession. But in the current conditions, returning home is simply impossible to imagine," said 36-year-old Cemile Hasan through sobs.

"Frankly I'd be happy if we could be home in a year. But I'm optimistic in saying that, because we're going to have to rebuild everything," she added.

The ferocious fighting sent some 200,000 people fleeing across the border into Turkey, which has been working to move hundreds of refugees from Kobane to a new camp in the southeastern border town of Suruc able to accommodate up to 35,000 people.

For now it is impossible to cross back into Syria as police and soldiers have sealed the crossing near Kobane until further notice, Turkey's border security agency said.

- 'We lost everything' -

Turkish security forces on Tuesday fired tear gas and water cannon to push back people approaching the barbed wire fence that marks the line between the two countries.

On top of the devastation in Kobane, refugees would face the prospect of a flare-up of fighting or bombing should they return.

On Wednesday, clashes with IS fighters were reported near Kobane in villages where coalition planes were bombing the jihadists.

The United States had said on Tuesday that Kurdish fighters were in control of about 90 percent of the town.

But a State Department official warned that the militants, also known as ISIL, were "adaptive and resilient" and no-one was declaring "mission accomplished" yet.

Stera Hussein, holding her two-week-old child in her arms, said she already had to flee for her life at a moment's notice.

"It was horrible. The YPG (Kurdish militia) told us for days that everything was fine, that they guaranteed our safety," she said. "And then suddenly they told us to leave within the hour without being able to take anything with us."

She added: "Our lives were saved, but we lost everything."

And even if she were allowed to go home immediately, she would think twice before crossing back into Syria.

"I don't know if I should trust the YPG any more," she said. "They misled us once and we almost paid with our lives."

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