

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM R O U N D T A B L E

January 9, 2019

The Honorable Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Support, Do Not Abandon, Christians, Yazidis and Kurds in Syria's Northeast

Dear President Trump:

We greatly appreciate your Administration's commitment to international religious freedom (IRF) in the Middle East: particularly your signing the historic Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act, H.R. 390, recognizing the ISIS genocide against Christians and Yazidis, on December 11, 2018. However, this commitment has been severely undercut by your announcement, just one week later, ordering U.S. troops to leave Northeastern Syria and inviting Turkey to enter the area and create a 20 mile wide "safe zone."

Turkey's actions in Afrin over the last 12 months and its planned military actions in the NE make clear its intention to commit genocide and ethnic cleansing, devastating Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds. Its entry will destroy the precious religious freedom, human rights, and democracy these minorities created and have enjoyed since 2013 with equal rights for all faiths, ethnicities, and women (unique in the region). Opening the doors to Turkey poses an existential threat to our valiant allies, the multi-religious, multi-ethnic Syrian Democratic Forces. This breaks commitments our government made to protect the area and support its democratic aspirations when asking the SDF to go beyond their historic home territory to fight ISIS. Christians, in particular, seriously debated whether to join this broader battle in light of their already dwindling numbers.

U.S. military involvement in Syria was sparked by a public outcry over genocidal ISIS attacks on helpless Syrian Christians and Kurds in the Northeast. We helped them fend off ISIS and form the SDF. Together, we drove ISIS out of one third of Syria. Over 14,000 SDF soldiers died or were wounded in these battles, sacrificing their lives in pursuit of the same freedoms we hold dear. Amazingly, their nonsectarian, pluralistic democracy now operates in this entire area: the Self-Administration of North Eastern Syria (SANES). Aramean, the language of Jesus, is an official language, along with Kurdish and Arabic. 21,000 new Muslim converts to Christianity worship freely as do 100,000 historic ethnic Christian populations.

Turkish jihadi troops (former ISIS and Al Nusra fighters) have stood at the border of SANES for months hurling threats at its residents, promising to behead and fill its defensive trenches with the corpses of SDF soldiers. If it invades, Turkey will do to SANES what it did in Afrin: ethnic cleansing of Kurds, targeting of Christians and Yazidis for genocide, ending democratic institutions and women's rights, destroying or seizing homes, businesses, lands, and places of worship. Turkey replaced the pre-war predominantly Kurdish Afrin population (over 350,000) with radical Islamists and their families. It drove all Christians and most Yazidis out. Turkey's actions in Afrin have been documented as deliberate genocide and ethnic cleansing by well respected NGO's including

Genocide Watch and Amnesty International-UK. Even one year after the initial invasion, Turkey presides over ongoing war crimes in Afrin. Genocide Watch has issued a Genocide Warning about Turkey's planned invasion of the Northeast. Most ethnic Christians now living in SANES are descendants of people driven out of Turkey 100 years ago by the Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. They are terrified. Turkey should be required to leave Afrin and not be encouraged to despoil even more Syrian territory.

Christian and Yazidi organizations, military and political, have raised the alarm on this issue: "this is the death knell for Christianity in the Middle East;" it "opens up the gates of hell." It is an "existential threat" to Christians and Yazidis. Leading US supporters of religious freedom in the Middle East have echoed their concerns. Franklin Graham commented on December 26, 2018: "I'm sure that President Trump remembers that during the 2016 campaign he promised to protect Christians. Pulling our troops out of Syria too quickly has the potential to put many in danger." Retired Lt. Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin and Travis Weber of the Family Research Council wrote on the same day: "it stands to put Syria's Christian community—who have been a target of ISIS—in mortal danger. . . abandoning them now could deal an incalculable blow to our professed concern for Christians being slaughtered by ISIS, and to our reputation as a supporter of religious freedom worldwide."

What is to be done? First, *your Administration should not allow Turkey to invade or occupy any part of NE Syria*. A 20-mile "safe zone" inside Syria would consume all major NE cities, containing most of its Christians, Kurds, and Yazidis. We echo local requests (attached) that U.S. forces remain until ISIS is fully crushed and alternative security arrangements are in place. This means a no fly zone and replacement troops from Global Coalition or Gulf State allies that support the SDF and SANES rather than wishing to destroy them. Second, *your Administration should ensure that SANES representatives participate in Syrian peace talks and can retain their hard won freedoms in post-war Syria*.

If it becomes clear that Turkey will invade the NE, SANES will be forced to yield control to the Assad regime and its allies to avoid annihilation. The SDF will become part of the regime's army. Hopes for freedom will be shattered. Iran will have its long desired path to the Mediterranean, greater influence in Iraq where it is already squeezing out Christians and Yazidis, and the ability to set up military bases right at the Israel/Syria border, threatening the Jewish state.

The best way to deter the revival of ISIS and similar groups is to help pluralistic societies that honor religious freedom and the dignity of all men protect themselves. SANES is a small area in the greater scheme of things. But it is where ISIS was brought to its knees. There, a diverse multi-ethnic, multi-religious population found a way to live together. There, the US-led Coalition and local residents found a common cause. It offers more than a fair chance of being the place where the true antidote to ISIS (religious freedom and democracy) takes root in Syria and the Middle East. NE Syria presents the best current opportunity for our government's military and diplomatic policies to accomplish the goals of H.R. 390, allowing Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and other minorities to remain and flourish in the Middle East. This is the only realistic foundation for a lasting peace and protection of long term US national security interests.

Respectfully,

LAW AND LIBERTY TRUST
Lauren Homer, President

JUBILEE CAMPAIGN
Ann Buwalda, President

Organizations:

ADVANCE USA

ADVOCATES INTERNATIONAL

AMERICAN SYRIAC UNION

ASSOCIATION AGAINST RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

BETHNAHRIN PATRIOTIC UNION IRAQ

BETHNAHRIN WOMEN UNION

CAUCUS FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

CENTER FOR PLURALISM

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

CSW-USA (formerly Christian Solidarity Worldwide)

CSW-UK (formerly Christian Solidarity Worldwide)

COPTIC SOLIDARITY

GENOCIDE WATCH

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY, NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

ENDOWMENT FOR MIDDLE EAST TRUTH

EUROPEAN SYRIAC UNION

FEDERATION OF SYRIAC ASSOCIATIONS IN TURKEY

FREE YEZIDI FOUNDATION

HMK SWITZERLAND (HILFE FÜR MENSCH UND KIRCHE, SWITZERLAND)

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSE, USA

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

ONE WAY CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL

NORTH COAST CALVARY CHAPEL, CARLSBAD, CA

ROADS OF SUCCESS

SALLUX (ECPM FOUNDATION)

SHAI FUND

SET MY PEOPLE FREE

SURYOYE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

SYRIAC NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SYRIA

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC COUNCIL

THE WAY TO HAPPINESS FLORIDA USA

THE ASSOCIATION AGAINST RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

UNITED MACEDONIAN DIASPORA

UNIVERSAL SYRIAC UNION PARTY LEBANON

UNITED MACEDONIAN DIASPORA

VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP

YAZDA

Individuals (With Title and Organization for Identification Purposes):

Hammad Ahmad
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA

Larry Alexander
Warren Distinguished Professor; Co-Executive Director, Institute for Law and Religion
University of San Diego School of Law

Dr. Russell Blacker
Founder, The National Caucus for the Persecuted Church (UK)

Lt. General (Ret.) William G. Boykin
Executive Vice President
Family Research Council

Paul Coyer
Iraq Haven; Professor, The Institute of World Politics; Associate Professor, L'Ecole Speciale
Militaire de Saint-Cyr

Johannes de Jong, Director
SALLUX (ECPM Foundation)

Elettra Gallo
Human Rights Lawyer, UNHCR/UNDO, United Nations

Dr. Mike Mohamed Ghouse
Center for Pluralism

Lorette Giacometti
Legal Advisor, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, Switzerland

Lindsay Griffin
Founder, Coptic Solidarity

George Gurguis
President, Coptic Solidarity

Charmaine Hedding
President, Shai Fund

Dr. Carl Herbster
President, Advance USA

Bassam Ishak
President, Syriac National Council of Syria; Representative, Syrian Democratic Council

Jason Jones
Movie to Movement
President, Human Rights Education and Relief Organization (HERO)

Carmen LaBerge
Executive Director, Common Ground Christian Network

Brent McBurney
Executive Director, Advocates International

Cameron McConnell
Founder, MGLLC

Faith J. H. McDonnell
Director, International Religious Liberty Program, IRD

Scott Morgan
Red Eagle Enterprises

Bishop Dr. Paul Murray
Chair, International Relations, One Way Churches International

Jenny Noyes
Executive Director, New Wineskins Missionary Network, Anglican Church of North America

Brian O'Connell
President, REACT Services

Robert Ozgun
American Syriac Union

Bishop Mar Awa Royel
Diocese of California - Assyrian Church of the East

Carley Sherry
Roads of Success

Gregory Stanton
Genocide Watch, Founding President

Simran Stuelpnagel
Sikh Dharma International

Becky Thompson
Founder/President, The Restoration Act, Inc.

Travis Weber, J.D., LL.M.
Vice President for Policy
Family Research Council

Kelly Yaegermann
The Way To Happiness Association of Tampa Bay

ATTACHMENTS TO LETTER TO PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP ON SYRIA

1. Listing of Informative Recent Online Articles on Impact of U.S. Syrian Troop Withdrawal on Christians, Kurds, and Yazidis.
2. Three Maps: Self-Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria (SANES), Proposed Turkey “Safe Zone,” Iranian Influence as of 9/2018.
3. 2018 12-20 European Syriac Union Appeal.
4. 2018 12-27 Syriac Military Council “Urgent Call: Syriac Christians in NE-Syria at Risk of Extinction.”
5. 2019 1-3 Appeal of Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians: “No-fly zone Over North East Syria. Stop the Ottoman Turkish invading North East Syria. Don’t let Christianity be driven out of North East Syria
6. 2019 1-4 Free Yezidi Foundation Report: Withdrawal of US Troops from Syria
7. 2019 1-11 Co-Chair of Syriac Union Party, Senhrib Barsom speaks out: Everyone Knows About Bloody History that Erdogan Tries to Bring Back.
8. 2019 1-17 Genocide Watch: Genocide Warning: Turkey is Planning Genocide in Northeast Syria

INFORMATIVE RECENT ARTICLES
IMPACT OF U.S. SYRIAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL ON CHRISTIANS, KURDS, & YAZIDIS

2018 1-24 Christians in Afrin Prayed for US & Allies Deliverance from Turkish Attacks—which never came. <https://stream.org/exclusive-video-kurdish-christian-converts-pray-for-deliverance-from-turkey-and-al-qaeda/>

2018 12-14: <https://stream.org/will-president-trump-sacrifice-israels-safety-and-thousands-of-christians-in-syria-just-to-appease-the-turks/>

2018 12-21: Kurds and Christians face choice between death at Turkey's hands or capitulation to the Assad regime, endangering Israel: <https://stream.org/this-decision-will-live-in-infamy-betraying-syrias-kurds-and-christians/>

2018 12-21 Lt. Gen. (Ret.) William G. Boykin, Executive VP, and Travis Weber, VP for Policy, at Family Research Council: "Will We Abandon Syria's Christians?" <https://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=PV19A02>

2018 12-21 Appeal from Kurdish Christian Pastor: <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/israel/2018/december/god-still-loves-the-kurds-a-plea-from-a-kurdish-pastor-to-president-trump-about-the-us-pullout-from-syria>

2018 12-26 Statement by Franklin Graham on December 26, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/2262660620456773>

2018 12-27 Contains Appeal By Head of Syriac Union Party Sanharib Barsoum. <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2018/december/the-coming-turkish-jihadist-invasion-against-christians-a-christmas-plea-from-syrians-to-us-christians2018>

2018 12-27 Open Letter from Syrian Christian's Military Leader. <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/open-letter-from-syria-christians-to-us-christians-do-not-allow-turkey-to-destroy-us.html>

2018 12-31 General Jerry Boykin of Family Research Council speaks out. <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2018/december/trump-orders-slowdown-in-syria-troop-pullout-but-christians-still-alarmed-by-deadly-dangers>

2018 12-31: <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/israel/2018/december/a-new-year-s-day-showdown-will-thousands-of-christians-and-kurds-be-caught-in-the-crossfire-of-turkey-iran-and-russia>

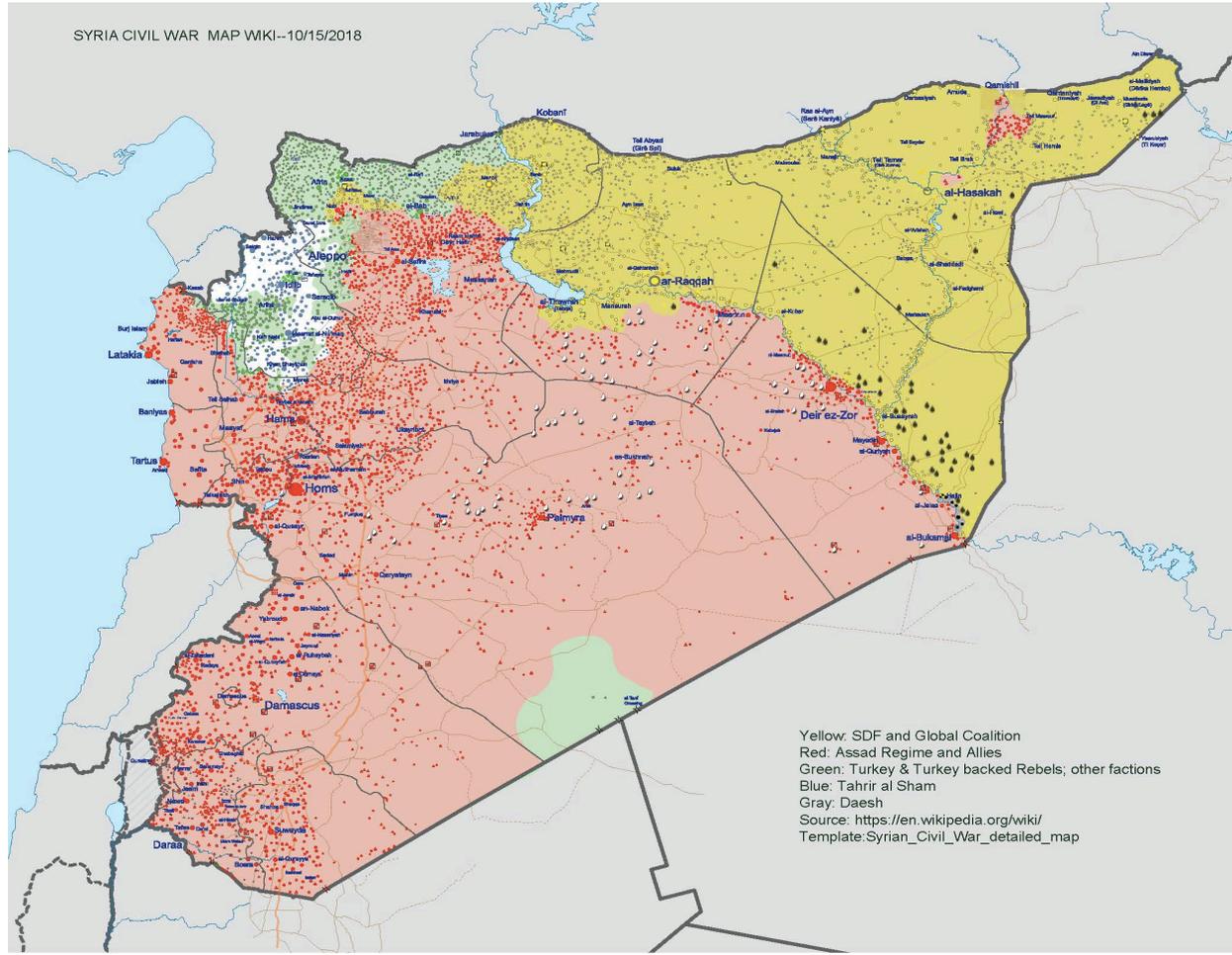
2019 1-4 Christian Refugees from Afrin Fear Another Manhunt by Turks. <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/israel/2019/january/door-to-door-searches-to-hunt-christians-these-syrians-say-us-pullout-means-it-will-happen-again>

2018 12-29 Kurds react to historic betrayal by an ally in the midst of war. <https://theregion.org/article/13320-the-civilians-northern-syria-blame-us-of-historic-betrayal>

2019 1-3 Free Yezidi Organization Report on existential threat posed by Turks and ISIS. <https://www.freeyezidi.org/wp-content/uploads/FYF-Report-US-Troop-Withdrawal-from-Syria.pdf>

2019 1-16 Impact of 21 mile "Safe Zone": <https://stream.org/a-turkish-run-safe-zone-in-syria-would-turn-into-killing-fields/>

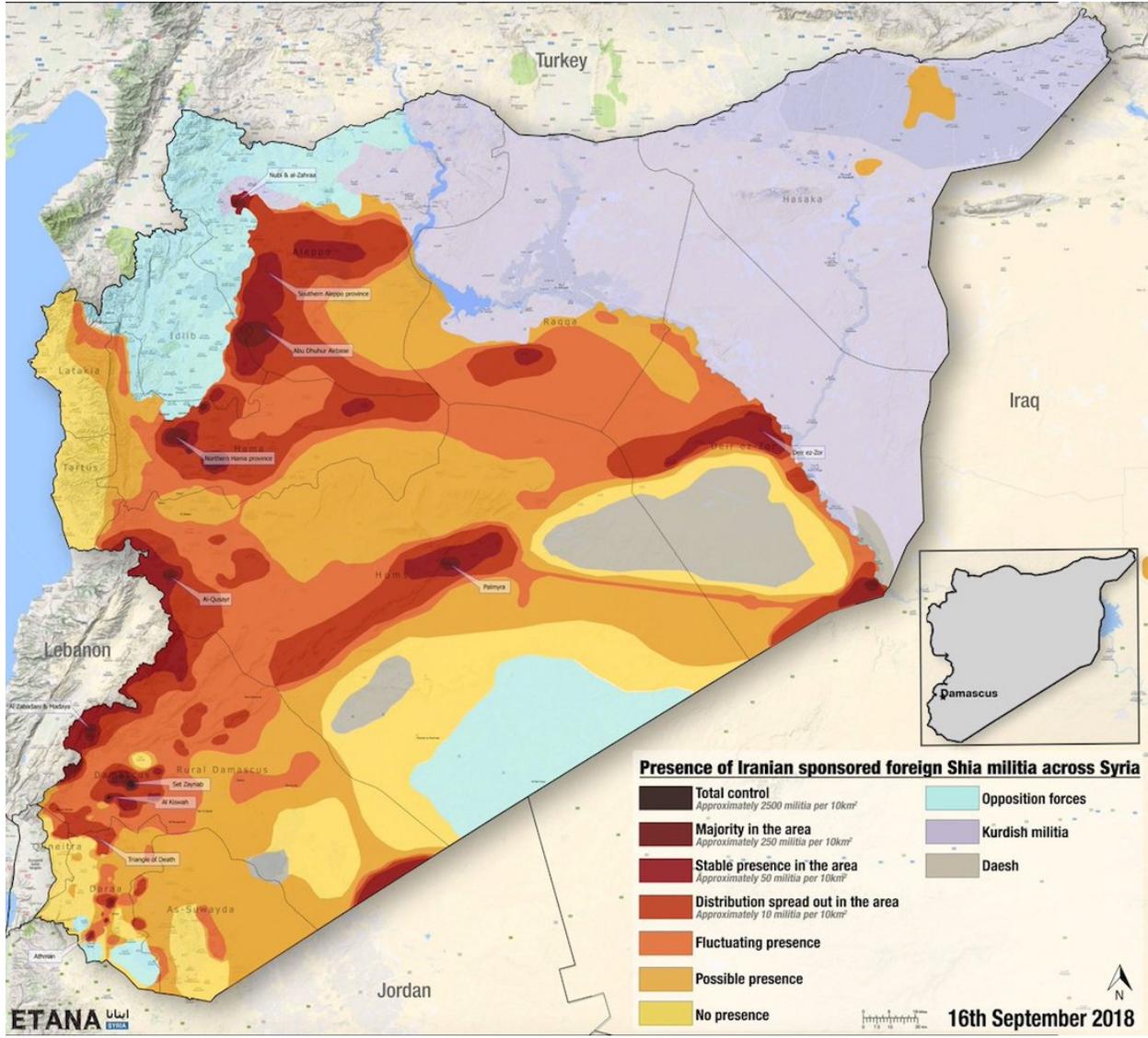
Three Maps: SANES, Proposed Turkey “Safe Zone,” Iranian Influence as of 9/2018



This “zone” includes key Syriac Christian towns such as Derik, Qamishli, Khabour Valley, and all smaller Syriac-Assyrian and Armenian villages. It also includes all the main Kurdish towns such as Manbij,

Kobane, Sere Kanye, Dirbêsiyê, Amuda, Qamishli, and Al-Maabadahas, plus many Kurdish villages. There are also Arab villages in the area.

The “zone” contains the majority of the population of SANES, as well as most administrative and education centers. Turkey would effectively destroy SANES and the SDF.





EUROPEAN SYRIAC UNION ESU
PRESS RELEASE
20-12-2018
BRUSSELS – BELGIUM

ISIS is not defeated and Europe can stop a disaster for itself and the people of North-East Syria

Since 2014 our Syriac-Assyrian people in Syria and Iraq have suffered greatly under ISIS. Today we can see that ISIS is almost defeated after intense cooperation between SDF and International Coalition. Now however we urge European countries to step in as US forces withdraw from North-East Syria. The Christian communities there fear total destruction by the hands of Turkey, Iran and even ISIS as that is not fully defeated yet. We call on European countries to join the UK and France in finalising the fight against ISIS and keeping North-East Syria stable. We and many experts believe that ISIS otherwise will return in strength.

As European Syriac Union we urge European countries to consider what will happen if there is no replacement of the US forces. Even at this moment it is clear that forces of Assad are planning to invade Idlib. The Turkish proxies that committed already many crimes will wage war against the SDF and end the stability of North-East Syria. Simultaneously these forces will clash against Assad's forces who will undoubtedly try to regain control of North-East Syria as well when Turkey and its jihadis attack the SDF. In this chaos ISIS will rise again and regain rapidly its strength and will create new havoc in the region and elsewhere. This will pose a serious risk to Europe. All that is needed is that four countries send 250 armed forces to replace the 2000 US forces. This will enable the UK and France to continue its operations and presence in North-East Syria. We are convinced that Turkey will not dare to go to war against its NATO allies. Clearly France and UK share that opinion. Europe will be able to avert a disaster for the region and for Europe itself.

In North-East Syria our Syriac-Assyrian people have achieved a special and unique solution in the face of the ISIS invasion. They allied themselves with their neighbours, Kurds and Arabs. Together they created the Syrian Democratic Forces that faced off ISIS and together they created a situation that is unique in the Middle East. They did not just defeat ISIS in cooperation with the US. They created the much-needed freedom and normal governance and created stability in one-third of Syria. Now the Self-Administration of North-East Syria (formerly Federation of Northern Syria) has brought freedom for millions of people.

A multi-ethnic and multi-religious alliance of parties and peoples established secular democracy where men and women work together and where they are equal in all respects. Kurds, Arabs and Syriac-Assyrians, Muslims, Christians and Yazidi's and people of no faith managed to create a society where all are free. They brought real freedom of religion. This freedom of religion does not only mean that the historical Syriac-Assyrian communities are



free. Uniquely for the Middle East, those who convert from Islam to Christianity are free to do so and have their own Churches in all openness. This is the freedom we wish to see for all Christians in the Middle East. This is the freedom all men and women of that tortured region need. Kurds, Arabs and Syriac-Assyrian Christians died in the fight against ISIS. They died fighting side by side with the US Army in this battle against that monstrous organisation. Together they liberated millions who were subjugated.

Now Turkey wants to destroy them. We know what Turkey wants to achieve. We know that they invaded Syria before and that they destroyed the Churches of Afrin (North-West Syria) and hunted the Christians down. They also destroyed the peaceful Yazidi's of Afrin who have never harmed anyone. The Turkish army fought side by side with jihadists and Al Qaida in Afrin. Afrin was one region that had the same governance and freedom as North-East Syria. Now it is ruled by sharia enforced by Turkish-backed jihadists.

We urge the European countries not to sit down and allow our people and the Yazidi's as well as other peoples in the region to be destroyed again simply by inaction. At this moment European countries can avert disaster by sending a small force in a transition agreement with the US as the UK and France already committed themselves to this end. The benefits of that choice will clearly outweigh the costs.

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URGENT CALL

Syriac Christians in NE – Syria Are at Risk of Extinction

The Syriac Military Council of Syria calls on our partners in the Global Coalition to ensure security and protection for religious and ethnic minorities living in North East Syria. ISIS is still a threat. Turkey's mercenary troops, who fought with al-Qaeda and ISIS, are waiting to get the green light to move into Syria, so that they can kill all "infidels" of the region. That means Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and other minorities.

Since 2013, the Syriac Military Council (MFS) has actively fought as Christian self-defense to protect the Al-Hasakah governorate from extremists. We have participated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against ISIS and lost many martyrs. We believe that it is our duty as Syriac Christians to stand together with the Kurds and Arabs to fight and resist all radical religious terrorist groups and other invaders. Our military cooperation in the SDF strengthened the partnership and coexistence between Arabs, Kurds and Syriac Christians in our region. We have committed to respect the dignity of every group regardless of religion or ethnicity.

We thank the U.S. and the Global Coalition for their support in the fight against ISIS. We plead with them not to leave abruptly before security and protection is insured for Syriac Christians, Yazidis, Armenians, Turkmens, Kurds and Arabs of the NE. The outcome of the invasion of Afrin makes visible what will happen to us. Churches will be destroyed. Christians and Yazidis, designated "infidels" by Turkey's mercenaries, will be killed and massacred. Turkey threatens to kill all SDF troops, allies of the Global Coalition. Women of all ethnicities, now free, will be raped, enslaved and veiled. Do not abandon us on the battlefield and allow our people to be crushed by Turkey.

They are still more than 100 000 Syriac Christians living in NE – Syria. There is a serious risk of the end of the presence of Christianity in this region if we do not have security in place when the U.S. leaves. Yesterday, we freely celebrated Christmas. If Turkey invades, our churches and our people will be gone.

In spite of the fighting power of our SDF-forces, we don't have the military equipment needed to defend our people from Turkish airstrikes. We need the presence and support of Global Coalition forces, EU- member states or UN-Forces to to avoid another war and massacres like those Turkey committed in Afrin. And to finally eliminate ISIS in our region.



MFS
Syriac Military Council

We also ask the Global Coalition and NATO to reject the plans of Turkey or any other foreign country of the region, to enter the borders of NE - Syria, which are already secured against terrorists. Our SDF forces area are already stationed on the front lines and together with the Global Coalition forces, such as France and the UK, we will be able to put an end to fascism, radicalism and dictatorship.

Do not abandon the hundred of thousand IDP's, who found refugee in NE – Syria. Do not abandon our people, who united to stand for democracy, equality and tolerance in the midst of sectarianism and dictatorship. A debt is owed to all of our martyrs, who gave their lives to preserve the Syrian religions and cultures that have suffered for millennia and to remove the scourge of ISIS from the world, including your countries.

Now is the time for Christian, Western countries, and for Christian churches and believers worldwide, to protect our Christian people in NE Syria from falling victim to brutal war, dictatorship, fascism, and radicalism.

Syriac Military Council
Commanding General
27.12.2018



CONTACT: syriacmilitary@gmail.com



No-fly zone Over North East Syria Stop the Ottoman Turkish invading North East Syria Don't let Christianity be driven out of North East Syria

We appeal to world leaders and to Christians throughout the world to support us, as Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians living in Syria's North East region: as indigenous people of the Middle East. We urgently need protection from Turkey's threats to invade and "cleanse" our territory from Christianity, religious freedom, and democracy. US President Donald Trump's sudden decision to withdraw US troops, leaves us powerless and open to be destroyed by either Turkey, or other regimes scrambling to see our demise in the vacuum this will create.

Turkey is threatening us daily in the local media to invade, and kill us. They are calling us "infidels." When Turkey was allowed to enter Afrin by the West, Turkey committed war crimes and ethnic cleansing against the religious minorities. All the Christians had to flee the area as Turkey's jihadi troops conducted door to door searches to hunt the Christians down, to kill them and destroyed all of Afrin's churches. They had to flee with nothing, and take refuge in the area that Turkey is now threatening to invade; north and east Syria. When President Trump gave Turkey's Recep Erdogan the permission to replace the US forces this means Turkey will crush the multi-religious democracy that is happening in north and east Syria. It alone is an island of religious freedom, decentralized and representative government, and is the only hope for our long term survival as Middle Eastern Christians.

As Christians, we know what it means to live under the Ottoman Empire's Caliphate. We carry a collective memory of the Ottoman's "special treatment" of Christians: demeaning laws as second class citizens, extortion taxes for being Christian (jizya), oppression, persecution, ethnic cleansing and genocide. We do not want to live again as second-class citizens under Turkish rule should Turkey occupy our land in Syria. The memory of the genocide of 1915 still lives vividly in our daily lives. It was our great grandparents that fled Turkey due to the 1915 genocide to Syria's North East region. We, the descendents of the survivors are at risk of reliving a genocide of the proportions our ancestors told us about, and by the same oppressor: Turkey.

From the beginning of the civil war in Syria until now, we Christians have worked actively as a bridge between the communities in north and east Syria working for pluralism and democratic values in the alliances we have promoted, both politically and to defend all people of north and east Syria. We Christians have played a significant role in local government and have freedoms that we haven't experienced for centuries in Syria: like the right to use our native language, Aramaic, the language of Jesus. We took a leading role in creating the Syrian Democratic Forces. Our people have fought and died side by side with our allies: Kurds, Arabs, and the US-led Global Coalition in the war against the Islamic State (IS). We had hoped we, who have given everything for the same freedoms of the west would be supported to secure our democratic institutions in post-war negotiations.

An abrupt American withdrawal would mean chaos and war throughout the region. We need time to develop alternative and lasting security arrangements that keep north and east Syria free to follow a model of democracy and freedom for all.

Without protection, Christians will be the first target of Turkey's jihadist groups—just as we were in Afrin. We hope you can join us in our appeal to the International Coalition not to leave us unprotected and without guarantees. Without your support we fear that when Turkey invades we will see the end of Christianity in north and east Syria.

It is urgent to establish, as soon as possible, a no-fly zone for North East Syria to protect us against Turkey. Turkish air power overwhelmed the defenders of Afrin and even our brave Syriac Defence Forces forces cannot defend against this powerful NATO army. It is urgent to stop the invasion and occupation of Syria. This would give us back hope and trust in our Christian sisters and brothers in the US and other Western countries. It is time to stand together for our Christian values. Together, we need to defend and preserve Christianity so it is not wiped out from the Middle East.

To contact us:

Syriac National Council of Syria

Bassam Ishak: bsishak@yahoo.com; 001 (202) 344 7544

American Syriac Union

Robert Ozgun: robertozgun@hotmail.com; 001 (201) 916 9481

European Syriac Union

Metin Rhawi: metin.rhawi@european-syriac-union.org; 0046 70 560 444

fighters terrorism, but he and the Turkish regime have played a negative role in the Syrian crisis, starting with supporting the terrorists, passing them through Turkey and sending them to Syria in order to cause devastation , destruction and murder. Today, Erdogan also wants to play this role, but this time through the Turkish army directly and not through his tools."

Barsom explained that they as the Syriac Union Party issued several statements that the Turkish threat is a threat to the Syriacs and all the Christians, and that they are primarily affected as the Turkish state will depend on its mercenaries. He added, "Those are IS and al-Nusra that have extremist ideology, cannot accept the people of the region and work to exterminate them and replace them with other people who accept their thought. Therefore, any Turkish intervention in northern Syria is a threat to the Syriacs, the Kurds, the Yazidis, the Arabs and everybody lives on this land."

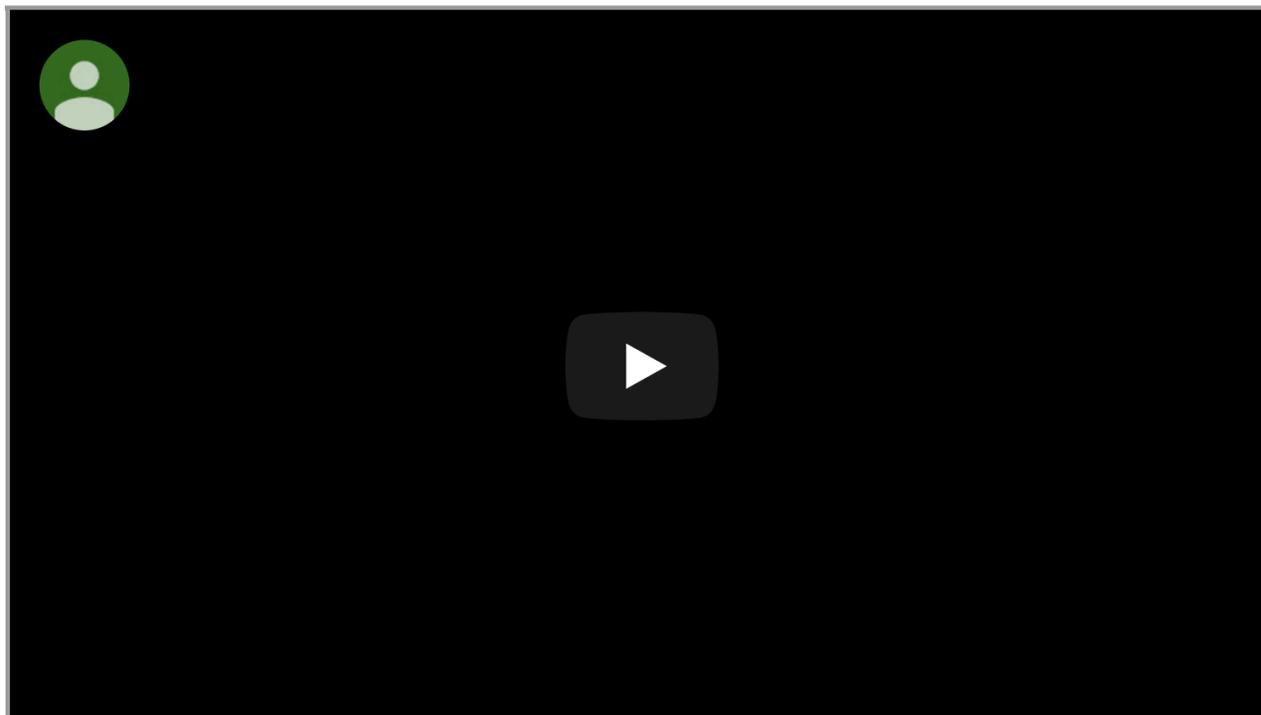
Barsom touched upon Erdogan's statements to liberate the people and spread stability and security in the area, and said in this context, "We saw what the Turkish occupation did in Afrin. It targeted all the components that live there; the Kurds, Arabs, Christians and Yezidis. Everybody displaced and they are living in the camps, and other people from al-Ghotta have been settled in the area, that is, it made a demographic change. This is its policy in the region, and from here, the truth of what Erdogan wants to do in the region is clear. His goal is to repeat what he did in Afrin."

Barsom added, "It is well known that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its Sultan Erdogan openly say that they seek restore the days of the Ottoman Sultanate. This is a real tragedy for the peoples of the Middle East because we know the bloody history of the Ottoman Empire that committed terrible massacres against all the components and peoples in the area; Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, Roms and Yezidis. All the peoples were the target of this policy, and millions of people were the victims of this thought and this policy that Erdogan attempts to restore by force."

The co-chair of the Syriac Union Party Senhrib Barsom concluded his speech saying, "The peoples are stronger than these authoritarian and dictatorial regimes that want to exterminate the peoples. History always proves that the peoples remain and such regimes fall."

D.H

ANHA





Free Yezidi Foundation Report: Withdrawal of US Troops from Syria

Implications for Minorities in Syria and Iraq

4 January 2019

The Free Yezidi Foundation is grateful to the United States of America, especially the armed forces, for the intervention to combat and degrade Daesh (ISIS, ISIL) after its genocidal attacks against our people.

Further, we are grateful to the United States for expressions of solidarity and support with religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, including Yezidis, Christians, and others. After targeted attacks and atrocities perpetrated against our civilians, based on our religion, it was and remains necessary for the international community to come to our side as we attempt to rebuild and recover. We applaud the United States for leading this effort.

At this stage, it is timely and appropriate to outline the impact that the withdrawal of the United States armed forces from Syria may have on religious minorities, to assess how recovery efforts should be recalibrated, and to examine how minorities should consider future in the short and medium term both in Syria and in Iraq.

Withdrawal of US Forces from Syria, Security Vacuum, Resulting Threat to Minorities

Syria

Conservative estimates currently assess the number of Daesh members in Syria at 14,500 fighters¹, while others place the figure at 20,000 to 30,000². From the experience in Iraq, it should be noted that a large number of individuals who joined Daesh or participate in various crimes, including the enslavement and rape of Yezidi women, later melted back into the local population. It should therefore be understood that a significant number of Daesh adherents or sympathizers exist both in Iraq and Syria, beyond the number of actual fighters or members, and this is a serious danger that must not be understated³.

At the same time, Turkey has scarcely concealed its tactical support for Daesh⁴. In some cases, this has been direct, such as facilitation of easy passage for Jihadists from abroad, through Turkey, to Syria and to Daesh-held land. But in its incessant attack against the SDF and YPG, especially in areas such as Afrin and Manbij⁵, Turkey has battled against the coalition's allies on the ground. This has been a crucial source of indirect support to Daesh in the past years. With the removal of

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/us-troops-syria-withdrawal-trump>

² <http://undocs.org/S/2018/705>

³ <https://sites.duke.edu/lawfire/2018/08/18/are-body-counts-really-the-right-measure-of-success-or-failure-in-the-fight-against-isis/>

⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/12/turkeys-double-isis-standard/>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/28/syrian-kurdish-militia-manbij-turkey>

US forces and potentially the cessation of US air strikes, Turkish support will further diminish SDF's strength on the ground. These areas will then be ripe for return to ISIS control⁶.

Sadly and tragically, we have seen this occur already. Afrin, in the northwestern corner of Syria, was a safe haven that was often spared the worst of the Syrian civil war. In this area, members of various religions and ethnicities coexisted peacefully. Notably, this included Christians and Yezidis, minorities at extreme risk in other parts of Syria and Iraq⁷. Turkey then took the action to invade Afrin, claiming a necessity for its own national security. Teaming up with a number of terrorist outfits that operate in Syria, including Al-Qaeda offshoots, Afrin was eventually completely overtaken⁸. Many Yezidis have fled, which we know from the information from our own community and has also been reported⁹. Our holy places were desecrated, many individuals from Afrin were persecuted¹⁰. The threat from Turkey¹¹ and its extremist allies are therefore genuinely existential threats to religious minorities¹².

It is important to recall that prior to the attacks in the summer of 2014, Daesh (at that time AQI) was limited in numbers of fighters¹³. Many of the members were from Iraq, but the movement gathered steam in a security vacuum in Eastern Syria. Daesh overtook Mosul with only a few hundred fighters¹⁴. With the absence of another force to prevent such a resurgence, there is no doubt that 'Daesh 2.0' will be born upon the withdrawal of US forces and the reduction of SDF strength. Once Turkey engages in battle for Syrian territory from the West and the North, SDF will face a dual threat from Turkey and Daesh¹⁵. Absent international support, this will be catastrophic for Syria, Iraq, and the whole world. At the same time, the acute and existential threat to religious minorities, as illustrated through the sad example from Afrin, cannot be overstated.

Iraq

Due to disagreements between Baghdad and Erbil relating to Article 140 and the administration of 'disputed' territories, the areas largely inhabited by religious minorities have been the subject of territorial disputes for years¹⁶. This is a complex matter with many facets, but for the purposes of security, sufficient to note that the security of these areas has changed hands several times over the past five years. As such, there is not a well-established and entrenched security mechanism in place. Encouragingly for Shingalis, Yezidi-led and Yezidi-dedicated security forces are currently in place, which is perhaps the best chance to maintain stability and community-trusted security

⁶ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/28/turkey-is-lying-about-fighting-isis/>

⁷ <https://www.gfbv.de/en/news/northern-syria-promising-first-steps-towards-peaceful-coexistence-of-all-population-groups-8074-1/>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/07/too-many-strange-faces-kurds-fear-forced-demographic-shift-in-afrin>

⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-yazidis-isis-islam-conversion-afrin-persecution-kurdish-a8310696.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-afrin-yazidis-idps-fafin-896855921>

¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

¹² <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/in-afrin-turkey-seeks-ethnic-cleansing-not-terror-eradication>

¹³ <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/19/isis-thousands-fighters.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27778112>

¹⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/e2f8f4d0-0465-11e9-99df-6183d3002ee1>

¹⁶ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-and-kurds-trouble-along-trigger-line>

mechanisms¹⁷. The same is true in some Christian towns and the locations of other religious minorities¹⁸. At the same time, as for all security forces throughout Iraq, weapons, supplies, and support are necessary to maintain local defense and confidence in security. A resurgence of Daesh just across the border in Syria poses the same danger as the summer of 2014. Are the local units prepared to defend territory against future Daesh incursions in Iraq? Will the Iraqi air force and security forces be capable of defense against Daesh from Syria and Daesh combined with sympathizers inside Iraq? Will the United States continue to assist and lead with air strikes and guidance in such a fight, or also withdraw from Iraq?

It should be noted in this regard that both the Iraqi Security Forces and KRG Peshmerga experience regular attacks from Daesh sleeper cells throughout the ‘disputed’ areas¹⁹, and few could reasonably argue that Daesh is permanently defeated in Iraq or Syria, even if the terrorists do not hold territory as before. Fortunately, the current arrangement in Iraq has prevented such attacks from exploding in the way we saw in 2014. With the absence of US forces in Eastern Syria, the past may be prologue, and we hope this can be prevented.

Humanitarian Assistance, Dignified Return of Minority IDPs, Associated Security Dangers

The international community is rightly and justly dedicated to facilitating the dignified return of IDPs to their homes, including in these areas²⁰. But without studious analysis of the current security situation in these areas, the impact of a stronger and expanding ISIS in Eastern Syria, and the ability of these civilians to guarantee safety and security, any effort toward humanitarian settlements can be dangerous. **The need for accurate, robust early warning systems and security assurances must be the first and most important aspect of any effort to prompt return of civilians to any part of Ninevah, including Shingal.** If humanitarian assistance and rebuilding efforts promote return of our people to the homeland, we hope it will not culminate in the next genocidal attack from Daesh in coming years. This sort of unintended consequence cannot be permitted. All donors and funders of Shingal and Ninevah plains resettlement must consider the security of the area and the absolute guarantee that we are not inadvertently moving IDPs into the crosshairs for future attacks. The international aid and political commitment to religious minorities such as Yezidis and Christians is admirable and clearly heartfelt. The implementation of this commitment must also be intelligent and well-planned.

The Free Yezidi Foundation strongly supports and has advocated for a safe, dignified return of all IDPs in these areas, especially religious minorities, and the importance of freedom of movement. Equally important for a sustainable future, however, will be genuine local political representation and local security arrangements with dedication and capacity for local protection. We cannot use aid funding and enthusiasm to rush vulnerable populations back to their homelands unless there are security forces trusted by the local population and equipped to handle possible future attacks. It is no secret that religious minorities in Iraq have all sought a permanent presence of American troops or international peacekeepers in the Ninevah and Shingal areas. Sadly, we know that this is

¹⁷ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/183-winning-post-isis-battle-iraq-sinjar>

¹⁸ <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/after-isis-whats-next-iraqi-christians-18895>

¹⁹ <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-military-islamic-state-still-poses-threat-in-iraq-syria/4628365.html>

²⁰ <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2018/10/23/en/us-assistance-enabling-iraq-s-yezidis-return-safely-their-ancestral-homelands>



not a likely prospect, and never has been. Absent such an external guarantee of safety, what can be provided to ensure returning families that Daesh 2.0 will not destroy their villages again?

Any premature withdrawal of the United States forces from Syria not only endangers religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, it vastly increases the likelihood of a resurgent Daesh militant power. This is an existential threat to minorities like the Yezidis.

Governments and organizations have expressed, through good will and fraternity, the importance of religious minorities returning to their homes. This must be done with all due concern for safety of civilians as a first priority, rather than creation of physical buildings or centers. The international community must not be in such haste to facilitate return that it ignores the danger posed by extremists and sets the stage for Yezidi genocide⁷⁵. The Free Yezidi Foundation applauds the US government, and in particular, USAID for effort, attention, and political will to promote return of Yezidi families to their homes²¹. But in the event of a future Daesh storm gathering steam in Syria, with tacit or indirect support from Turkey, Yezidi families cannot be left again as sitting ducks to be attacked, slaughtered, and raped²².

Daesh is Global Threat

The Free Yezidi Foundation has specific and particular attention to the situation facing Yezidis. In many cases, this threat also applies to other religious minorities living in the same areas, including Christians, Shabak, Kakayees, and others²³.

But the danger of Daesh abroad is not insignificant. If the strongest force containing and eliminating the Daesh threat, the SDF, cannot succeed, Daesh will grow back²⁴. The attacks on Western cities will continue, with Syria and/or parts of Iraq as the operational and ideological base. Although this may not be an existential threat to other people the way it is to Yezidis, the danger to international peace and security is real and substantial.

This is why we all must underscore the importance of continued solidarity of the entire international community with those who contain and combat Daesh, such as the SDF, rather than leave a vacuum and set the stage for Daesh 2.0²⁵.

Furthermore, victims of direct or inspired Daesh attacks in Paris, Orlando, San Bernardino, Manchester, Nice, Berlin, and other cities have good judicial and security reasons for seeking the capture and eventual trials for Daesh leaders, including Al-Baghdadi. At the very least, if Daesh perpetrators are not apprehended to face justice in courts of law, they should be defeated on the battlefield. It is folly to suppose that thousands of Daesh adherents will simply stop fighting or

²¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/help-is-on-the-way-at-last-for-religious-minorities-in-iraq/2018/07/26/e6d58265-76f5-4d26-abcc-a76ce7e1aeca_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4bc6ffa266d2

²² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/08/01/they-came-they-killed-they-destroyed-and-it-will-happen-again/#2399493e6844>

²³ <https://minorityrights.org/publications/no-way-home-iraqs-minorities-on-the-verge-of-disappearance/>

²⁴ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/key-us-lawmaker-calls-senate-hearing-syria-withdrawal-1155856845>

²⁵ <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/423085-bret-stephens-pulling-us-troops-in-syria-will-create-a-vacuum>

change their ideology. And it is impossible to imagine that Turkey, of all countries, would be a force to contain Islamic extremism²⁶.

If the United States withdraws its troops from the fight, it is essential that other coalition members maintain a strong firewall against Daesh, even bearing the considerable cost, rather than ever again cede territory, momentum, land, power, and a quasi-functioning state to such a terrorist group.

Recommendations

US Department of Defense and CENTCOM: Make every effort to maintain capacity to conduct air strikes in Syria, and delay withdrawal of forces as long as possible. Maintain capacity to conduct air strikes in Iraq and continue providing ground support and assistance to Iraqi security forces.

US Department of State & USAID: Ensure that every effort to prompt return of religious minorities to homes is accompanied with robust and effective planning for emergency evacuation. Consider the security impact of all associated aid projects and ensure that such incentives for minority IDPs do not unintentionally lead minority communities into dangerous, life-threatening situations. Include safety and security considerations of our communities ahead of or along with urgency for project implementation. Consider all aid efforts with the associated risks from a potential resurgent Daesh across the border in Syria.

Coalition Partners: To the greatest extent possible, maintain capacity to conduct air strikes against Daesh in Syria. To the greatest extent possible, support the SDF anti-Daesh alliance on the ground in Syria.

Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government: Ensure sufficient level of preparedness and coordination in case of future incursions by Daesh/Turkey on Iraqi soil, including Shingal and Ninevah plains. Conduct or conceive of preparedness exercises and contingency planning on the immediate evacuation of civilians from danger zones in the event of any future attacks.

United Nations: Prepare for next wave of refugees fleeing Eastern Syria into Iraq. Pay special attention to possible attacks in Syria against minorities, especially Christians, and the possibility of renewed atrocities and ethnic cleansing efforts by Daesh in parts of Iraq, including against Yezidis and other minorities, or an upswing of violence and armed conflict among ethnic and/or religious groups in Ninevah province and beyond.

##

Comments or questions can be addressed to info@freeyezidi.org

²⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-isis-afrin-syria-kurds-free-syrian-army-jihadi-video-fighters-recruits-a8199166.html>



Genocide Warning: Turkey Is Planning Genocide in Northeast Syria
January 17, 2018

Kurds, Christians, and Yezidis in Northeast Syria are at grave risk of genocide by the armies of Turkey and Syria. The genocide will be supported by Russia and Iran. Turkey and Iran have sizable Kurdish minority populations, which they consider threats to ethnic and national unity. 100,000 Christians live in the area Turkey will invade. Turkey and its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, have a century old history of genocide against Christians.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has announced his intention to create a "twenty-mile buffer zone" in northeastern Syria, an area now controlled by the Kurdish and Arab Syrian Democratic Forces. He has conducted a diplomatic offensive to get promises of non-interference from Russia, Iran, and the US for his invasion of Syria. Turkey has already stationed tens of thousands of troops, tanks, and heavy artillery along the Syrian border. When President Trump announced that US troops would withdraw from Syria, he did so after a call from Erdoğan.

Turkey began its invasion of Syrian Kurdish territory a year ago on January 20, 2018 when the Turkish Army launched cross-border military operations into Afrin in northwestern Syria with the code name "Operation Olive Branch." The mission aimed to oust Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (or YPG) from the district of Afrin.

Turkey considers the YPG to be an extension of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency within Turkey since 1984 to achieve Kurdish human rights and regional autonomy. The YPG denies being an extension of the PKK and has been allied with the United States and other countries in the fight against the Islamic State/Da'esh since 2014.

The Turkish Armed Forces conducted their invasion of Afrin with no concern for the laws of war, dropping bombs and shelling towns indiscriminately. Hundreds of civilians around Afrin, including Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities displaced by the Syrian war and by Da'esh, were killed. Turkish forces intentionally targeted civilians, a war crime, and forcibly displaced most of Afrin's population, a crime against humanity.

The Turkish government has characterized the YPG as a "terrorist organization," casting its invasion of Syria as an anti-terror operation. It has also referred to its aggression against Syria as "jihad," echoing language used by ISIS. The term "terrorist" is used in Turkey as a term to dehumanize Erdoğan opponents and legitimize the suppression of human rights and freedoms.

Turkey has become a police state. Since the attempted coup of 2015, the Turkish government has dismissed over 100,000 civil servants and jailed thousands of teachers, professors, journalists, politicians, and civil society leaders for being suspected supporters of "the coup." Many of these detainees have been charged with terrorism. The term "terrorist" has been used to justify torture and murder of Erdoğan opponents.

The Afrin operation is similar to "anti-terror" operations conducted in Kurdish towns in Southeast Turkey for many years. In towns like Cizre, Turkish troops displaced the population, imposed harsh curfews, cut off water and electricity supplies, killed thousands of civilians, destroyed churches and mosques, pillaged homes, and bombed towns into rubble. In Cizre -- as in Afrin -- the bodies of killed female fighters were mutilated, videotaped, and shared widely on social media by Turkish soldiers.

The Turkish military and the other forces under its leadership, including Al Qaeda and Da'esh fighters, declared total control of Afrin on March 25, 2018. They have pursued a policy of "demographic change" in Afrin by settling villages with Turkmen and Arab families originally from outside of the area. Reports from occupied Afrin tell of dozens of girls and young women being kidnapped by Turkish and jihadi forces and subjected to systematic rape.

Erdoğan has vowed to continue the Turkish invasion further east to Manbij and Kobane in Syria as well as to the Sinjar and Nineveh regions of Iraq, ostensibly to destroy the PKK, but actually to drive Kurds out of all Syrian border areas with Turkey. Turkey's aggression into neighboring states threatens the long-term security of all Kurdish, Christian, and Yezidi populations in the region. Turkey's intention is genocide.

GENOCIDE WATCH is the founder and coordinator of the Alliance Against Genocide
George Mason University, S-CAR, 3351 N Fairfax Dr, MS4D3, Arlington, VA, USA 22201.
Phone: 1-703-993-8749 Fax: 1-703-993-1302

E-mail: president@genocidewatch.org Website: www.genocidewatch.com Tax exempt EIN: 26-1672589

POLITICS

Barsom: Everyone knows history that Erdogan tries to bring back

Senhrib Barsom pointed out that everyone knows the bloody history of the Ottoman Empire which committed terrible massacres against all the peoples in the area, noting that everyone was the target of this policy that Erdogan is trying to bring back by force, asserting that the peoples are stronger than these authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.



11 Jan 2019, Fri - 10:10



AHMED SAMIR - MORADA KENDA / QAMISHLO

Officials in the Turkish state among them their leader Recep Teyyip Erdogan have repeatedly issued statements threatening to launch a military attack on the areas of northern and eastern Syria to occupy them with the aim of expanding their colonial Ottoman ambitions on the Syrian territories again.

The Turkish President Recep Teyyip Erdogan said a few days ago that he is not an enemy of the peoples of the area, especially the Kurdish people, and said that he is a friend and ally of them. Commenting on this subject, ANHA conducted a meeting with the co-chair of the Syriac Union Party Senhrib Barsom who stressed that Erdogan's target is not only the Kurdish people, but to undermine the free thought and will of the peoples of the area and to strike their democratic project.

Barsom said, "Erdogan as usual attempts to deceive the world as being a peace maker in the area and that he



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