



Genocide Watch
Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Warning: Turkey Is Planning Genocide in Northeast Syria
Gregory H. Stanton, President, Genocide Watch 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 opposition supporters. 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.