

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing
Safeguarding Religious Freedom in Northeast Syria

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Virtual Hearing

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Thank you for inviting me to testify today. As a scholar I appreciate that USCIRF has asked me to present some of the findings from my research. I hope my testimony will be used to inform US policy and help alleviate some of the unspeakable suffering of the Syrian people. My PhD and first book covered seven decades of US-Turkish and US-German relations, beginning in 1945, and hence I have a deep understanding and appreciation for the significance of Turkey as a NATO ally.¹ I have also carried out research in North and East Syria, where I conducted the first [survey of the Syrian Democratic Forces](#) (SDF) in all six regions under SDF control between 2015-2019.²

The list of atrocities committed by the Islamic State is long: forced religious conversion, mass displacement, kidnapping, torture, the destruction of churches and Yezidi shrines, and the sexual enslavement of Yezidi women and girls. All 82 members of the US-led Global Coalition deserve some credit for the defeat of the territorial Caliphate. It was a historic achievement of which we can be proud. But let's be honest. Who did the most, who sacrificed the most to defeat the Caliphate, and ensure the continued survival of endangered religious minorities in Syria? Without question, it was the Kurdish-led SDF. Over 10,000 young women and men in the SDF gave their lives to defeat ISIS. I have visited the many cemeteries across NE Syria where they are buried.

My research in Syria shows how the Kurdish-led SDF evolved into a multi-ethnic, multi-religious force in which all the indigenous peoples of the region were represented. Arabs from every tribe, Assyrians, Syriacs, Armenians, Yezidis, Circassians, and Syrian Turkmen fought alongside Kurds to defend their land and defeat the Caliphate. The SDF did not just defend religious minorities, they included them and promoted them within their ranks.

¹ Amy Austin Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases in Turkey and Germany since 1945*, Cambridge University Press 2014

² Amy Austin Holmes, "SDF's Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria", The Wilson Center, October 2019

For more than five years, the SDF were trained by the United States, and protected by American air cover. And then they were thrown to the wolves. After a phone call between President Trump and President Erdogan, the Turkish military launched an invasion into northern Syria in October 2019. Turkish soldiers and Islamist militias on their payroll carved out a chunk of northern Syria, displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, committed war crimes, and now occupy the second-deadliest site of the Armenian genocide in Syria.

But the SDF and the semi-autonomous region they defend survived. The same people who defeated ISIS – Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Yezidis – have also set up a local government that empowers women and minorities. Their model of self-rule represents an embryonic form of government that is more democratic and allows greater religious freedom than what is on offer in any other region of Syria. They see it as a model of decentralized government that could even extend to other parts of Syria, post-Assad. The Autonomous Administration allow people of diverse faiths to not only practice their religion, but to *choose* their religion. The Administration is still a work-in-progress and imperfect. But consider the alternatives: ethnic cleansing in regions of Syria occupied by Turkey, a resurgence of ISIS or head choppers by another name, or the return of the chemical weapons-wielding Assad regime backed by Russia and Iran. There is no question that the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is a better option.

What kind of threats do religious minorities, in particular Yezidis and Christians, currently face from Turkey and the Turkish-backed opposition, now referred to as the Syrian National Army (SNA), which occupy a large swath of northern Syria? They have been killed, disappeared, kidnapped, raped, detained, subjected to forced religious conversion, and held for ransom until their families pay exorbitant sums of money to secure their release. They have been forcibly displaced and driven from their homes. Their places of worship have been destroyed, defaced, and looted. Even their cemeteries have been demolished and vandalized. The international community has failed to take action. Indeed, the partial withdrawal of US forces in October 2019 created a vacuum, allowing these crimes to take place.

The Christian minority in North and East Syria is diverse and includes: Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Armenians, as well as Evangelical Christians. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to them as the Christian minority, although this does not imply that they are a homogenous group. On the contrary, there is diversity among the various Christian communities in Syria. I would like to highlight the voices of some of the leaders of the Yezidi and Christian communities and organizations that represent them.

Pari Ibrahim, Executive Director, Free Yezidi Foundation, June 8, 2020

“The actions of Islamist extremist groups in certain areas of Syria, including Afrin and Northeast Syria, remind us of ISIS behavior in Sinjar and other parts of Iraq. The cleansing of ethnic and religious minorities, the destruction of religious shrines and cemeteries, the abduction of women, and the use of terror and militias to create a new 'order' based on radical extremist principles and in violation of the basic rights of others. In Afrin, Yezidi women have been kidnapped in the manner that we saw in Iraq in 2014. Some of the extremists are, in fact, ISIS members who have been co-opted and rehatted by Turkey to join their militias. The Free Yezidi Foundation deplores the atrocities

committed by these militias, the support they receive from Turkey, and the inaction of the international community. At some point, the complicity of Turkey in today's crimes against humanity and the genocide committed by ISIS against our people will come to the public light. The Free Yezidi Foundation is disappointed that the United States has not taken meaningful action to deter a NATO member as it supported and continues to support violent extremists, including ISIS members, who commit atrocities with impunity in Syria.”

As mentioned above, the Christian minority in North and East Syria is heterogenous. Below are three statements, one each from a member of the Syriac, Assyrian, and Armenian communities.

Statement by the Syriac Strategic Research Center, October 20, 2019

“Our people, the Syriacs (Chaldean-Assyrian-Aramean), as well as the Armenian people are the grandchildren of the survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide that happened in 1915. On the 10th of October 2019, the Turkish army invaded our lands and attacked our people using former ISIS, Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic fighters. These fighters, which are paid by NATO ally Turkey, have committed human rights abuses, declared they will ethnically cleanse the area and support the same ideology as groups like ISIS. Despite the relative stability of the area due to the SDF and International Coalition Forces fighting to destroy and keep all radical groups out of this area of Syria, Turkey has now allowed them to enter freely and furthermore has armed and paid these radical Islamic fighters. Initially, when the Islamic State fighters attacked our homes in NE Syria they succeeded to take control of towns such as Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, the villages of Khabour and Tal Abyad. This led to a large migration of Christians and the decrease of their numbers. Whereas the population in this area east of the Euphrates was about 300,000, now there are about 100,000. We are distributed all along the very same border areas (from Derik till Kobane) that Turkey wishes to occupy and expel all the residents in order to replace them with Syrian refugees mostly from other areas inside Syria. Turkey plans to ethnically cleans our towns such as Derik, al-Qamishli, al-Hassaka and Tel Tamer villages of Khabour region. Should Turkey be allowed to do this we will see the end of Christianity in this area.”³

Madeleine, who belongs to the Khabour Guards that protect Assyrian villages

“ISIS have come back under a new name, the so-called ‘Syrian National Army’. How can you call yourselves the ‘National’ army and kill the children of this nation?”⁴

Oum Joseph, Armenian from Tel Abyad village

“There are no Armenians left in Tel Abyad. There is no help for us coming from outside, only the Civilian Council of Raqqa helps us. Jihadists have seized our home and burned our wheat and barley. What does Erdogan have against us that he attacked us in this way? We just want these attacks to end. Where are human rights? Those responsible for human rights should attend to their work.”⁵

³ “Syriac Christians on Genocide Watch”, Statement by the Syriac Strategic Research Center, October 20, 2019.

⁴ Briefing on Turkish Olive Branch operation in Afrin, prepared by the Rojava Information Center.

⁵ Briefing on Turkish Olive Branch operation in Afrin, prepared by the Rojava Information Center.

Key Takeaways

1. The Syrian conflict has had a decimating impact on religious minorities. The Islamic State committed numerous atrocities: forced religious conversion, mass displacement, kidnapping, torture, and the sexual enslavement of Yezidi women and girls. The series of Turkish interventions between 2016-2019 further threaten religious minorities. Unless Turkey withdraws from Syria, it is unlikely that religious minorities, especially Christians and Yezidis, will ever return to their homes.

- Prior to the ISIS attacks, some [20,000 Assyrian Christians](#) lived along the Khabur River. Now only an estimated 1,200 remain.⁶
- Prior to the war, an estimated [100,000 Armenians](#) lived all across Syria. An estimated 70,000 of them have left Syria; approximately 25,000 went to Armenia.⁷

2. The Turkish interventions in Syria, in particular in Afrin in February-March 2018 and the “Peace Spring” operation between Ras al-Ayn and Tel Abyad in October 2019, have forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians. Religious minorities who were impacted by these interventions include: Yezidis, Alevis, and members of the diverse Christian community: Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, and Evangelical Christians.

3. This is a continuation of the legacy of ethnic and religious cleansing that began in the late 19th century in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. Historians Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi recently [published a book](#) with Harvard University Press, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894—1924*, which described “the giant massacres perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire, and then the Turkish Republic, against their Christian minorities.” According to their [research](#):

- “Between 1894 and 1924, three waves of violence swept across Anatolia, targeting the region's Christian minorities, who had previously accounted for 20 percent of the population. By 1924, the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks had been reduced to 2 percent.”

4. Yezidis have lived in the Afrin region of Syria since at least the 13th century. Because of the Turkish intervention between January-March 2018 and subsequent occupation by Turkey and their affiliated militias, an estimated 90% of the native Yezidi population have fled.

- Approximately 20,000-30,000 Yezidis lived in Afrin prior to the Turkish Intervention. Now an estimated 2,000-3,000 Yezidis remain.
- All 23 Yezidi villages in Afrin are under now Turkish control.

⁶ “Erasing the Legacy of Khabour: Destruction of Assyrian Cultural Heritage in the Khabour Region of Syria,” Assyrian Policy Institute, 31 March 2020.

⁷Savarian, Zara. “70,000 Syrian Armenians have fled during the war, and few will return,” *WorldWatch Monitor*, 27 June 2018.

- All of the 19 Yezidi shrines in Afrin are under Turkish control. Many have been destroyed or damaged during the Turkish intervention and occupation.

5. The impact of the Turkish intervention in October 2019 during the “Peace Spring Operation” also had a decimating impact on religious minorities.

- Most of the Yezidi villages around Ras al-Ayn are now under Turkish control. By some estimates demographic change has happened in [more than 10 villages](#).⁸ By other estimates “[more than two dozen](#)” Yezidi villages have been deserted.⁹
- At least 137 Christian families were displaced when Turkey invaded during the “Peace Spring” operation. See table below.
- [Armenian families](#) living in Ras al-Ayn were evacuated when Turkey invaded.¹⁰ The Armenian embassy in Damascus provided assistance to between 16-30 families.

6. The second-deadliest site of the Armenian genocide in Syria is now under Turkish control as a result of the Peace Spring intervention in October. In 1916, an estimated 65,000 Armenians were killed in Ras al-Ayn (Serekaniye in Kurdish). This town is now under the control of Turkey and its militias. See map below.

7. There are 35 Assyrian villages in the Khabur region, which are just a few miles away from the area that Turkey and its militias control. Tel Tamer, which is the main population center, is only six miles from the frontlines. Some villages are even closer, however, while others are somewhat farther away. See [map](#) showing proximity of Christian communities to the Turkish occupation as a result of the “Peace Spring” operation.

8. The [White House statement](#) announcing the October 19 Ceasefire Agreement declared: “Turkey is implementing a Ceasefire. The two governments committed to safeguard religious and ethnic minorities.” However, Turkey [violated](#) the terms of the Agreement negotiated by Vice President Pence less than one day after it was negotiated. Turkey has continued to violate the Ceasefire Agreement since then, as militias continue to push farther east and west, expanding the areas under its control. See map from the Inspector General Report.

9. In areas that they occupy, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) is attempting to dismantle the laws that guarantee religious and gender equality that were created by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

⁸ SOHR, “Demographic change in rural Ras al-Ain: Yazidi community face systematic violations by Turkish-backed factions in more than ten villages,” April 20, 2020

⁹ Elizabeth Hagedorn, “Now we await our fate: Displaced Yezidis fear loss of land in Syria”, The New Arab, November 2019

¹⁰ Amy Austin Holmes and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu. “Armenian Genocide Descendants Face Another Turkish Onslaught, One Century Later.” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, November 25, 2019.

Report on [forced religious conversion](#):

- “According to media reports, displaced Yezidis said FSA forces in Afrin rounded up Yezidis and forced them to convert to Islam and destroyed Yezidi places of worship. In the aftermath of the conflict, Turkish forces implemented a resettlement policy by moving displaced Sunni opposition forces and their families into the empty homes that belonged to displaced people, comprised mostly of religious minorities.”¹¹

Report on [dismantling gender-egalitarian structures](#)

- “Women, in particular those belonging to certain religious and ethnic communities, have been adversely affected by the conflict. Within the Kurdish administration, efforts have been made to advance women’s rights and their roles in decision-making processes. Each administrative institution is co-led by a woman and, in addition to all-female councils, a 40 per cent quota reinforces female representation and participation in economic initiatives and civil society organizations.

Recent gender-based violations committed against Kurdish women by armed groups with extremist ideologies have, however, demonstrated an attempt to dismantle these efforts. By targeting almost every aspect of Kurdish women’s lives in the Afrin District, and – progressively – in areas affected by Operation Peace Spring – armed groups generated a palpable fear of violence and duress among the female Kurdish population. This resulted in an undermining of women’s ability to meaningfully participate and contribute to their community. Indeed, to avoid being harassed, women described opting to remain at home, relinquish their jobs, or wear a headscarf if venturing outside without a male relative. One interviewee described being sexually harassed and referred to as *kafir* for not wearing a headscarf by members of armed groups at a checkpoint in the Afrin District. Yazidi women in the Afrin District described similar fears.”¹²

10. There are reports that Turkey or Turkish-backed armed groups are imposing a behavioral code for women that is similar to that imposed by the Islamic State:

- Turkish-backed armed groups have arrested women who travel without a male relative – enforcing the same kind of behavioral code as ISIS that required women to travel with a male guardian (*mahram*).
- In Afrin, Ahrar al-Sharqiya put up numerous signs [instructing women to wear the veil](#) and abide by a conservative dress code.

¹¹ Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, “2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria” page 15. See also Patrick Cockburn “Yazidis who suffered under ISIS face forced conversion to Islam amid fresh persecution in Afrin” The Independent, April 18, 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-yazidis-isis-islam-conversion-afrin-persecution-kurdish-a8310696.html>

¹² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Human Rights Council, 24 February-20 March 2020

11. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is the only armed group in Syria that has a policy of not discriminating on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or gender. The SDF allow women and men of all religions and ethnic groups to enlist. My research shows how the SDF has succeeded in making progress toward overcoming at least some forms of sectarianism propagated by the Pan-Arab ideology of the Baathist regime in Damascus, and the religious hatred propagated by the Islamic State. Three examples from my [SDF survey](#) data include:

- My survey data shows that the SDF has incorporated members of all religions (Christians, Yezidis, and Muslims).¹³
- My survey data shows that the SDF has incorporated members of all ethnic groups (Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians).¹⁴
- My survey data shows that the SDF has incorporated Arabs from virtually all of the major and minor tribes in Syria, including tribes that were used in the past by the Syrian regime to suppress the Kurdish minority.¹⁵

13. Throughout the course of the Syrian conflict, with few exceptions, the SDF have been the most consistent protector of religious minorities.¹⁶

14. The partial withdrawal of American troops in October 2019 endangered civilians including religious minority groups and allowed Turkey and Turkish-backed armed groups to forcibly displace hundreds of thousands of people.

15. When Erdogan announced the invasion of Afrin, he gave false demographic statistics, denied that Kurds represented the majority of inhabitants, and denied the existence of the Alevi and Yezidi populations. In a [speech](#) in January 2018, Erdogan falsely claimed that Arabs made up 55% of Afrin and were its “true owners” in order to justify illegally deporting Syrian Arab refugees in Turkey to a region of Syria they are not even from. This would seem to indicate intent at the highest levels to dispossess non-Sunnis and non-Arabs, in particular religious minorities.

- “Now, the main objective is to hand Afrin over to its true owners. What is our goal? Do we have 3.5 million Syrian refugees living on our lands? Yes, we do. Our target is to repatriate these Syrian brothers and sisters as soon as possible.”¹⁷

Furthermore, the attacks against religious minorities in Turkish-occupied regions of Syria should be seen in the context of prominent examples of hate speech and discriminatory language used

¹³ Amy Austin Holmes, “SDF’s Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria”, The Wilson Center, October 2019. See pages 8-9 of my report.

¹⁴ Ibid, see pages 8-9 of my report.

¹⁵ Ibid. See pages 10-12 of my report for a description and list of Arab tribal affiliations of survey respondents.

¹⁶ In April 2015, David Jendo, the leader of the Khabur Guards, was killed after he spoke out about looting in Assyrian villages. Elias Nasser, who survived, reported that several YPG fighters were responsible for killing Jendo. The YPG fighters were subsequently arrested and imprisoned. “Assyrians under Kurdish Rule: the Situation in Northeastern Syria”, January 2017 <http://www.aina.org/reports/ace201701.pdf>

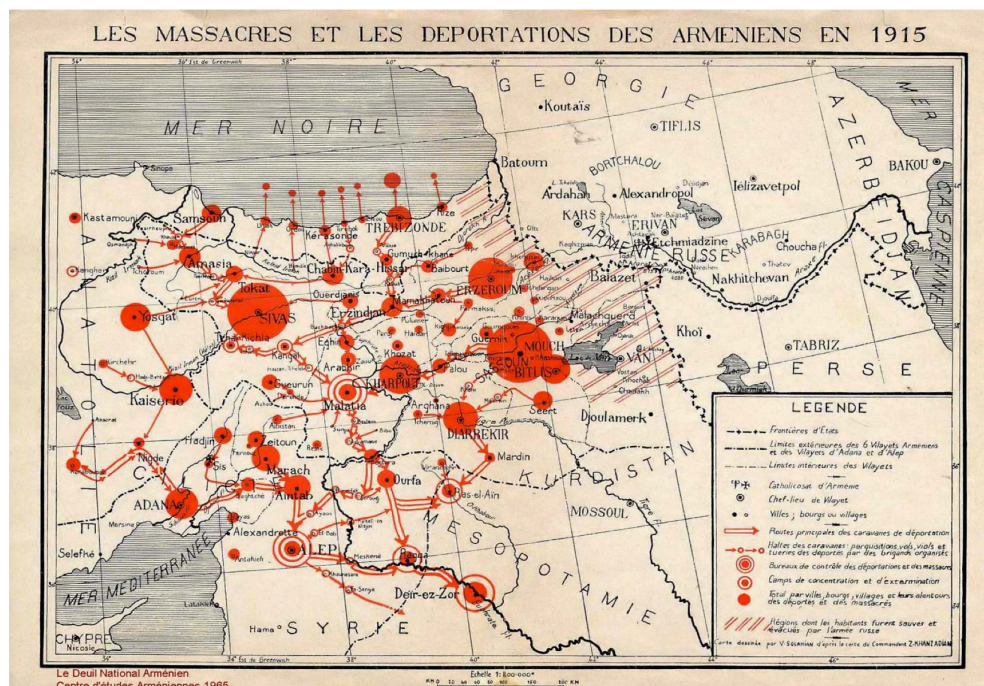
¹⁷ “The Main Objective is to Hand Afrin over to its True Owners”, Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, January 21, 2018

by high-level Turkish officials. In public speeches, Turkish President Erdogan has spoken about Christians and Yezidis using very derogatory language.

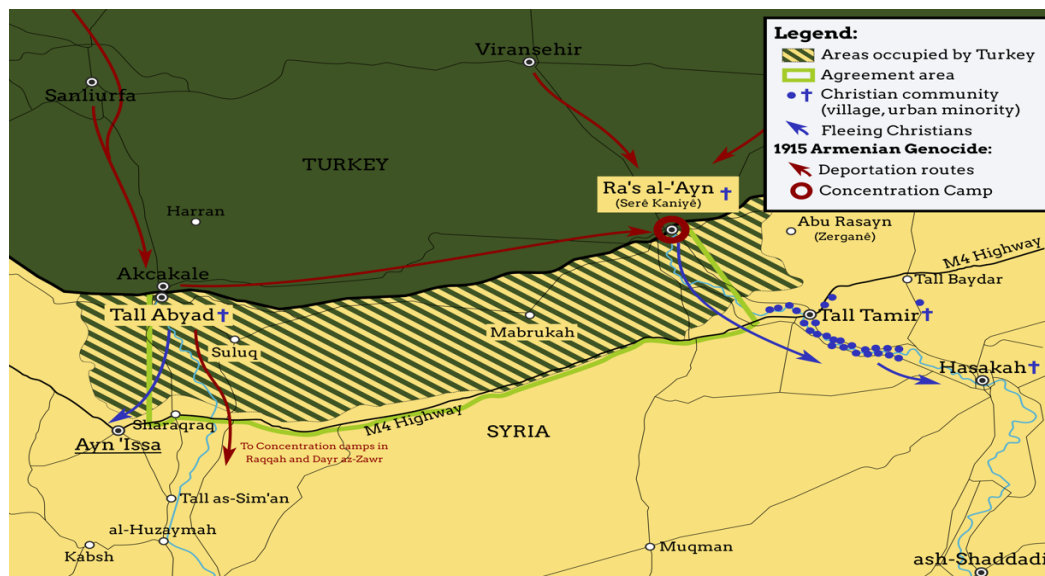
- In a speech on May 4, 2020 President Erdogan used the term “kılıç artığı” which means “remnants of the sword”, or “leftovers of the sword.” President Erdogan said: "We do not allow terrorist leftovers of the sword in our country," he said, "to attempt to carry out [terrorist] activities. Their number has decreased a lot but they still exist." "Leftover of the sword" (kılıç artığı) is a commonly used insult in Turkey that often refers to the survivors of the Christian massacres that mainly targeted Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire and its successor, Turkey.
- In a speech on October 16, 2016, President Erdogan warned Yezidis that cooperating with “terrorists” would cause them harm. He further claimed that Turkey accepted Yezidis as refugees although they were not Muslims, and that they “did not call them Christians.” Here is a link to his original speech in Turkish. “Teröristlerle iş birliği yapmayın. Şu anda ülkemde bu kadar Ezidiyi kamplarda biz besliyoruz, kapılarımızı biz size açtık. Hristiyan demedik, ayırım yapmadık, kapımızı açtık. Ama şimdi bazı yanlış oyunların içine giriyorsunuz. Bu yanlış oyunlar size kâr getirmez, zarar getirir.”

Map of the Armenian Genocide showing sites of massacres and deportation routes.

Rapport sur l'Unité Géographique de l'Arménie. Atlas Historique," Facsimilé Héliographique des 25 Cartes de l'Antiquité, du Moyen Âge, des Temps Modernes et Contemporains, Paris : s.n., 1919, carte n°24.

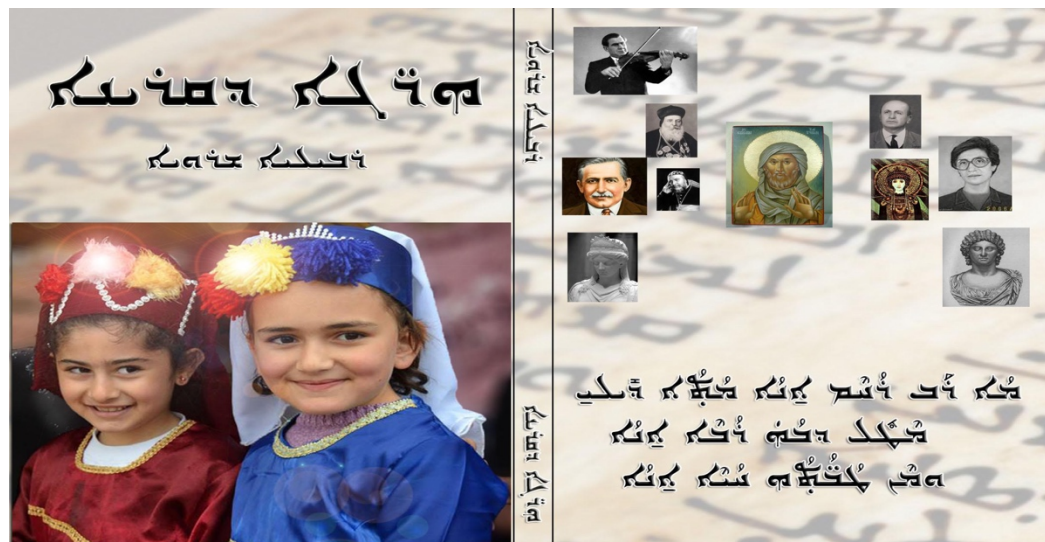


Map showing how a site of the Armenian genocide is now occupied by Turkey, and the proximity of Christian communities to the Turkish occupation as a result of the “Peace Spring” operation.¹⁸



Preserving the Syriac-Aramaic Language in NE Syria

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria has introduced both the Kurdish and the Syriac-Aramaic language. Historians believe Aramaic was the language spoken by Jesus. The language is still spoken today by the Syriac-Assyrian Christian community in Syria, yet teetering on the brink of extinction. UNESCO ranks it as an endangered language. This is the cover of the Fourth Grade Reading Book.



¹⁸ Original Map created by Gargari for the article: Amy Austin Holmes and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu. “Armenian Genocide Descendants Face Another Turkish Onslaught, One Century Later.” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, November 25, 2019.

Recommendations for US Policy

Larger Syrian Conflict

1. The most recent United States National Defense Strategy (2018) has two main goals:
 - a. To restore America's competitive edge by blocking global rivals Russia and China from challenging the U.S. and our allies.
 - b. To keep those rivals from throwing the current international order out of balance.The partial withdrawal of US forces from Syria in October 2019 made it more difficult to achieve these two goals. It allowed Russia and Iran to expand their area of influence inside Syria. It also endangered and forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, including Christians and Yezidis who live along the Syrian-Turkish border. Furthermore, the withdrawal happened without consulting our partners in the SDF, who we relied on to defeat ISIS. Based on a survey I conducted of the SDF in spring and summer of 2019, 92.5% of my SDF survey respondents did not want the US to withdraw from Syria. The United States should consult the SDF and leaders of religious minority groups *before* any other major redeployment of US forces in Syria.
2. The United States should advocate for the Autonomous Administration of NE Syria to have a seat at the negotiating table in Geneva during the talks over the future of Syria. To exclude one-third of the country from talks that may decide the future of Syria is unacceptable.
3. Areas of Syria controlled by the Autonomous Administration must be exempted from Caesar Act sanctions. The devaluation of the Syrian pound is harming ordinary Syrians and making it difficult for people to buy basic necessities including food.

The Turkish-Syrian Border and the Turkish-Kurdish Conflict

4. If allowed to continue, the Turkish occupation of northern Syria will:
 - a. Prolong the suffering of religious minorities, in particular Yezidis and Christians.
 - b. Prolong the larger Syrian conflict and civil war inside Syria.
 - c. Prolong the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds inside Turkey, including civilian Kurds and those affiliated with the PKK.The United States must set a clear timeline for Turkey to withdraw from all of the areas it occupied in northern Syria. Turkey has violated the October 17 Ceasefire Agreement that governs the regions it occupied during the "Peace Spring" operation. The United States should take a firm stance and demand that Turkey uphold its obligations as per the October 17 Ceasefire Agreement until it withdraws, similar to the firm stance taken regarding Turkey's acquisition of S-400s. A political resolution is needed to end both the Syrian conflict and the Turkey-PKK conflict.

5. The USCIRF or members of Congress should host a high-level fact-finding mission and visit the areas in Syria under Turkish control. The purpose of the independent bipartisan delegation would be to witness and oversee an investigation about the impact of the Turkish-led intervention and occupation on the people of the region. This should include conducting a census and a survey of the displaced population and current inhabitants of the occupied regions. The findings should be compiled in a report that should be made available to the public and used to inform US policy.
6. Find an alternative arrangement for border security between Syria and Turkey, which is acceptable to both sides. Consider a model similar to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) that has successfully guarded the border between Egypt and Israel since 1981. Approximately a dozen different countries contribute troops to the MFO who rotate in and out of the Sinai. According to the [MFO website](#): “The MFO has successfully carried out its mission of peace in support of Egypt and Israel, at the same time establishing a reputation as a cost-effective and innovative public agency.”

Unity Talks among Kurds, Christians, Yezidis

7. Support Kurdish unity talks between ENKS and PYD. Pressure PYD to allow opposition parties and media more freedom, but do not allow ENKS or Roj Peshmerga to set up a competing armed group inside Syria. Allowing competing armed groups to operate in NE Syria would only endanger the civilian population and lead to more instability. For the safety of civilians, it is necessary to maintain the command structure of the SDF. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, each of the major parties (PUK and KDP) has its own Peshmerga forces, which led to a civil war in the 1990s and repeated conflicts until now. US officials should not allow the emergence of competing armed groups in NE Syria.
8. Support unity talks between Kurds, Christians, and Yezidis. This should include Kurds from all parties, Christians from all parties, Yezidis from all parties.

ISIS Detainees

9. The victims of ISIS atrocities deserve to see justice. The United States and our partners in the Global Coalition should support the establishment of a tribunal in NE Syria to put ISIS fighters on trial. This should include training local lawyers and judges in human rights law.
10. Increase pressure on other countries to take back their citizens who joined ISIS. The SDF is now forced to feed and house approximately 10,000 fighters, including some 2,000 Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF).
11. Increase funding to support research on women who support ISIS. Women continue to spread ISIS propaganda in Al Hol and other detention facilities and camps. It is often women who now enforce ISIS ideology through the *Hisbah* morality police.

Stabilization Efforts and De-Radicalization

12. The current stabilization efforts in NE Syria are insufficient. If homes and schools are not rebuilt, grievances will emerge which ISIS or other extremists could exploit to their advantage. Some level of reconstruction is necessary.
 - a. The Christian region around Tel Tamer and the Khabour area lacks basic necessities, including electricity and adequate roads. The two main issues that prevent Christians who fled the area from returning are: The constant threat from Turkey and their allied militias that occupy their land, or are encroaching on their land, and the lack of basic services.
13. Invest in education that supports de-radicalization. In the past, the establishment of universities that promote critical thinking and academic freedom have contributed to de-radicalization in post-authoritarian systems. Two examples include:
 - a. De-Nazification in Germany → Free University of Berlin established in 1948.
 - b. De-Baathification in Iraq → American University of Iraq Suleimani in Kurdistan Region of Iraq established in 2006.
14. Support the accreditation of schools in NE Syria. The lack of accredited schools is a major impediment for refugees to return to Syria.
 - a. Encourage universities in the US, Europe, and Middle East to accept students from NE Syria.
15. Open an additional border crossing into Northeast Syria from Iraq. Pressure Iraq/KRG and Turkey to allow better access to NE Syria.

COVID-19

16. The health infrastructure in NE Syria is very fragile. The Turkish intervention in October and subsequent occupation of Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn threatens over half a million residents of NE Syria because the Alouk water plant near Ras al-Ayn is the major source of water for over 500,000 residents of Hasakah province. This includes Hasakeh City, Al Hol Camp, and the Senaa and Ghwiran prisons in Hasakeh that hold ISIS fighters, in addition to many religious minority groups, who are all dependent on this water supply.

Kidnappings of Yazidis since the Turkish Occupation of Afrin
(Partial list, a comprehensive account would require a larger investigation.)

Name	Gender	Age	Date Kidnapped	Village and District	Faction	Notes
Kuli Hassan ¹⁹	Female	Unknown	3/9/20	Burj Abdallah, Afrin	Hamza Division	Released after several weeks, daughter Ghazala Battal also kidnapped. Had been kidnapped once before.
Ghazala Battal ²⁰	Female	20	3/5/20	Burj Abdallah, Afrin	Hamza Division	Released after several weeks; mother Kuli Hassan also kidnapped. Had been kidnapped once before.
Arin Dali Hassan ²¹	Female	21	2/27/20	Kimar, Afrin	Hamza Division	Discovered in Hamza Division prison in late May.
Laura Hassan ²²	Female	19	2/6/20	Qara Bash, Afrin	Unknown	Tortured in custody; forced to renounce religion.
Roya Hanano Mustafa ²³	Female	15	11/15/19	Ghazawiya, Afrin	Sham Legion	Held for ransom
Jehan Fakhri Ali ²⁴	Female		10/11/19	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Kidnapped at Faisal Ahrar Eastern checkpoint
Saeed Gharib Hesso ²⁵	Male	58	9/28/19	Afrin	Military Police	Military Police demanded their daughters turn themselves in for their freedom + seized their property.
Ghalia Hussein ²⁶	Female	51	9/28/19	Afrin	Military Police	Military Police demanded their daughters turn

¹⁹ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/01042020>

²⁰ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/01042020>

²¹ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/01042020>

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyWnokTFVYs&feature=emb_title

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/584631289022699>

²⁴ Information provided by Yazidi leader in Syria

²⁵ <http://afrinpost.net/en/2019/09/the-occupation-police-kidnaps-a-yazidi-kurdish-man-and-woman/>

²⁶ <http://afrinpost.net/en/2019/09/the-occupation-police-kidnaps-a-yazidi-kurdish-man-and-woman/>

						themselves in for their freedom + seized their property.
Ezdakhan Aref Esau ²⁷	Male	32	9/13/2019	Qara Bash, Afrin	Hamza Division	Released on ransom of 15 million Syrian pounds.
Hanan Ali ²⁸	Male		10/5/2018	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	
Nouri Mohammad Najjar ²⁹	Male		September 2018	Ain Dara, Afrin	Unknown	
Jamal Mohammad Najjar ³⁰	Male		September 2018	Ain Dara, Afrin	Unknown	
Dalgash Nouri Najjar ³¹	Male		September 2018	Ain Dara, Afrin	Unknown	
Kuli Hassan ³²	Female	Unknown	September 2018	Burj Abdallah	Hamza Division	Reported released on ransom in early October 2018.
Ghazala Battal ³³	Female	18	September 2018	Burj Abdallah	Hamza Division	Reported released on ransom in early October 2018.
Barim Hamki ³⁴	Male	60	8/30/2018	Turandah, Afrin		
Abdo Hamki ³⁵	Male	64	8/30/2018	Turandah, Afrin		
Abd al-Rahman Qazqali Husu ³⁶	Male		May 2018	Çeçelê Cûmê, Jinderes	Unknown	Tortured in custody.
Hassan Darwish Shomo ³⁷	Male	75	4/28/2018	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	
Orfou family	Six people, genders and ages unknown	Six people, genders and ages unknown.		Qibar, Afrin		Released on ransom
Ayman Hamadeh ³⁸	Male		Unknown	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	Subjected to severe torture while detained,

²⁷ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2372913466156663&id=1633152846799399

²⁸ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/afrinactivists/status/1039116103434350598>

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/afrinactivists/status/1039116103434350598>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/afrinactivists/status/1039116103434350598>

³² <https://anfenglishmobile.com/rojava-syria/invaders-increase-barbaric-practices-in-afrin-30084>

³³ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/rojava-syria/invaders-increase-barbaric-practices-in-afrin-30084>

³⁴ <http://hawarnews.com/en/haber/mercenarys-of-jaish-al-islam-kidnapped-2-yazidi-brothers-in-afrin-h3519.html>

³⁵ <http://hawarnews.com/en/haber/mercenarys-of-jaish-al-islam-kidnapped-2-yazidi-brothers-in-afrin-h3519.html>

³⁶ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

³⁷ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

³⁸ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

						demand for \$25,000 ransom for 4 people*
Sido Bashar ³⁹ Omerico	Male	24	Unknown	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Fate unknown
Ali Alo Ibo ⁴⁰	Male	75	Unknown	Qestel Jindo, Bulbul	Unknown	
Nowruz Khlo ⁴¹	Female	19	Unknown		Unknown	19 years old
Fatima Fouad Nasser ⁴²	Female	65	Unknown	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	
Sheikha Juma ⁴³			Unknown	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	Subjected to severe torture while detained, demand for \$25,000 ransom for 4 people*
Hanan Hassan Barim ⁴⁴	Male		Unknown	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	Subjected to severe torture while detained, demand for \$25,000 ransom for 4 people*
Azad Barim ⁴⁵	Male		Unknown	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	Subjected to severe torture while detained, demand for \$25,000 ransom for 4 people*
Haj Ahmad ⁴⁶	Male	70	April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Hussein Ibo ⁴⁷	Male	70	April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Hamid Qasim ⁴⁸	Male		April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Adnan Qasim ⁴⁹	Male		April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Fawzi Muhammad Shamo ⁵⁰	Male		April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	

³⁹ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴⁰ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴¹ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴² Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴³ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴⁴ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴⁵ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁴⁶ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁴⁷ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁴⁸ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁴⁹ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁵⁰ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

Nidal Qasim ⁵¹	Male		April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Hamdosh Qasim ⁵²	Male	15	April 2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	
Adula Hamid Safar	Female	63	Unknown	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Held for 6 months in prison; 63 years old
Joan Said Rush ⁵³	Male	22	Unknown	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	
Hasso Nasser ⁵⁴	Male		Unknown	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Tortured in custody.

Yezidis killed since the Turkish Occupation of Afrin
(Partial list, a comprehensive account would require a larger investigation.)

Name	Gender	Age	Date	Location	Faction	Notes
Nergiz Dawood ⁵⁵	Female	24	11/17/2019	Kimar, Afrin	Sultan Murad	
Fatimah Hamki ⁵⁶	Female	66	7/27/2018	Qatmah, Sharran	Unknown	Killed by armed groups attempting to steal her house.
Omar Shamo Mamo ⁵⁷	Male	66	5/10/2018	Qibar, Afrin	Free Syrian Army	Killed for refusing to convert to Islam. Buried within 2 hours with no investigation.
Vedana Rashid Bint Khalil ⁵⁸	Female	60	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Sherine Bint Hamdo ⁵⁹	Female	26	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Rohen Abdo bint	Female	7 months	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing

⁵¹ <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁵² <http://www.rupelanu.com/efrin-11-kurden-ezidi-hatin-revandin-2435h.htm>

⁵³ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁵⁴ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/583822505770244;>

<https://twitter.com/RojavaIC/status/1196705670432735233>

⁵⁶ <https://twitter.com/afrinactivists/status/1037693044626219008> and

<https://twitter.com/AzadiRojava/status/1078387228332703755?s=20>

⁵⁷ <https://twitter.com/afrinactivists/status/1037693044626219008> and

<https://twitter.com/AzadiRojava/status/1078393417737125893?s=20>

⁵⁸ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁵⁹ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

Yasser ⁶⁰						Afrin.
Hamida Hassu bint Khalil ⁶¹	Female	22	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Yasser Abdo bin Hassan ⁶²	Male	32	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Kudrat Suleiman bint Musa ⁶³	Female	65	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Hassan Abdo ⁶⁴	Male	90	4/11/2018	Tel Jibeen	Unknown	Killed by landmine fleeing Afrin.
Fuad bin Hasso Abdo Nasser ⁶⁵	Male		3/24/2018	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Killed by landmine.
Abdo Bin Hamo Fuad Nasser ⁶⁶	Male		3/24/2018	Qibar, Afrin	Unknown	Killed by landmine.

Christian Families Displaced as a Result of the Turkish “Peace Spring” Intervention and Partial Withdrawal of US Forces in October 2019⁶⁷
(Partial list, a comprehensive account would require a larger investigation.)

	Village	Belongs to the city or town	Number of displaced families
1	Gesir (Pirekeh)	City of Derik	18 families
2	Bra Beta	City of Derik	12 families
3	Saramsrakh	City of Derik	10 families
4	Hiaka	City of Derik	8 families
5	Kzrjeb	City of Derik	9 families
6	Tel Jehan	Qabre Hiwore	12 families
7	Gershamo	Qabre Hiwore	9 families
8	Khwetla	Qabre Hiwore	16 families
9	Rotan	Qabre Hiwore	16 families
10	Mharkan	Qabre Hiwore	22 families
11	Mla Abas	Qabre Hiwore	9 families
12	Zorava	Qabre Hiwore	7 families
13	Shalthomia	Qabre Hiwore	8 families

⁶⁰ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁶¹ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁶² https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁶³ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁶⁴ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Afrin-media-center-1973304852988634/posts/?ref=page_internal.

⁶⁵ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁶⁶ Information provided by Yezidi leader in Syria

⁶⁷ “Syriac Christians on Genocide Watch”, Statement by the Syriac Strategic Research Center, October 20, 2019.

Additional Video Documentation

While conducting research in Syria, I made approximately 40 short videos that I posted to my Twitter @AmyAustinHolmes. Below are eight videos about the Christian and Yezidi minorities.

<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1103193736668958721?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1106259142090649601?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1117426089004011520?s=20>



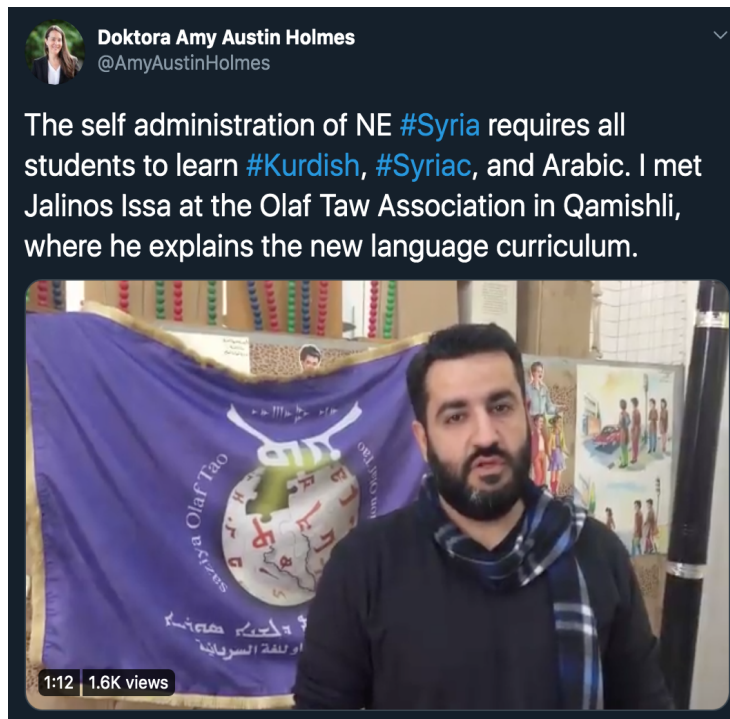
<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1117426089004011520?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1152165434898210816?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1103016487911129091?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1154990221374689282?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/AmyAustinHolmes/status/1148237129371308035?s=20>

