

Amnesty report: US-backed Kurdish militias forcibly displaced thousands in northern Syria

Thomas Gaist
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US-backed Kurdish militias known as the People's Protection Units (YPG) have carried out war crimes against thousands of non-Kurdish civilians in northern Syria during the past year, including razing to the ground civilian areas and forced transfer of their populations, according to a new report by Amnesty International.

While operating along the Turkish-Syrian border, YPG units have carried out numerous violations of the Geneva conventions, including “demolition of entire villages,” “forced displacement of entire villages,” and “targeted forced displacement and destruction of homes,” according to the report, “‘We Had Nowhere Else to Go’: Forced Displacement and Demolitions in Northern Syria.”

The alleged war crimes were carried out against a string of more than a dozen villages along the border, including Abdi Koy, Asaylem, Suluk, Raneen, Ras al-Ayn, Tel Diyab, Tel Tamr, Tel Fweida, al-Maghat, and Hammam al-Turkman.

In Husseiniya village in Tel Hamees, nearly 95 percent of structures were destroyed by YPG militants between June 2014 and June 2015, satellite photographs analyzed by Amnesty show. YPG began to systematically destroy the village as early as February 2015, according to the report.

In addition to demolishing entire villages, Kurdish forces operating in the area have carried out acts of wanton torture and intimidation against residents suspected of sympathizing with Islamic State and other groups opposed by the Kurds.

In one instance documented by Amnesty, Kurdish forces dumped fuel over a home with civilians inside and threatened to burn the villagers alive, based on

rumors that the family had relations with pro-IS elements.

“They pulled us out of our homes and began burning the home,” a witness told Amnesty. “They demolished home after home until the entire village was destroyed.”

The YPG-led atrocities were carried out under the authority of the Autonomous Administration (AA), a Kurdish mini-state in northern Syria (referred to by residents as Rojava) that is made up of three enclaves along the Turkish border and is controlled politically by the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

The AA government itself “is a key ally, on the ground, of the US-led coalition,” the Amnesty report notes. The PYD-led AA government has so far declined to issue any formal response to Amnesty’s findings, which were submitted to AA authorities in September.

The majority of abuses by the YPG have been directed against ethnic Arabs and Turkmen, yet some Kurdish residents have also been forced to leave their homes by the militias, according to Amnesty.

As the report notes, such actions constitute war crimes under longstanding international statutes that prohibit the use of collective punishment by military forces.

“The circumstances of some of the instances of forced displacement documented in this report suggest that they were carried out in retaliation for people’s perceived sympathies with, or family ties to, suspected members of IS or other armed groups. This would constitute collective punishment, which is a violation of international humanitarian law,” the report reads.

The Amnesty report comes amid calls by numerous top US officials and strategists for new initiatives to

further arm Kurdish militias, including the YPG, as part of stepped up efforts to overthrow the Syrian government. In recent weeks, figures from both major parties have touted the Kurdish fighting groups as secular and “moderate” forces that can serve as a decisive US proxy force in both Syria and Iraq.

Senior Obama administration officials have claimed in recent days that last year’s Kurdish defense of Kobani has proven the viability of further US-Kurdish operations.

“Through that process [the siege of Kobani], we’ve gotten to know a lot of these fighters, a lot of the leaders—Arabs, Kurds, there are Christians there,” State Department official and Obama administration anti-ISIS coordinator Brett McGurk said last week. “We’re looking for ways to take advantage of those relationships and harness them,” McGurk said.

Amnesty’s latest report has laid bare the fact that the Kurdish forces that the Obama administration hopes to “harness” can compete in brutality with Islamic State, the Al-Nusra Front, and other militias that have been mobilized by Washington on behalf of US strategic domination of the region.

Despite their more “nationalist” and “secular” flavoring, the YPG and affiliated Kurdish formations are, just like their imperialist backers and the “extremist” forces they nominally oppose, fully prepared to commit whatever crimes are necessary in pursuit of their sectarian interests, which are essentially those of a dissident faction of the Kurdish bourgeoisie.

The Amnesty report also comes as a further exposure of the ideology of “human rights” militarism employed by the Obama administration and its international pseudo-left apologists to sell the US-NATO wars against Libya and Syria as humanitarian enterprises.

Even as the US military provides lavish support for Kurdish militants engaged in razing of Arab or Turkmen villages, the destruction of villages in Nigeria by the militant group Boko Haram has been seized on by Washington to legitimize its military buildup in West Africa. Just this week, the Pentagon announced that the US will deploy at least 300 additional troops and a contingent of surveillance drones to Cameroon, as part of an ongoing buildup of US military forces in West Africa supposedly dedicated to preventing atrocities of precisely the sort carried out by the YPG.

Reports indicate that, beyond merely providing

support, the US has directly participated in mass killing of civilians at the request of the YPG. While providing air support for Kurdish forces near Kobani in April 2015, US warplanes killed dozens of civilians, including at least nine children. Strikes carried out by US forces against the Syrian village of Bir Mahali were later revealed to have been requested by YPG militants as a terror tactic against the predominately Arab residential area, and not for military reasons related to the “war against ISIS,” the supposed purpose of the joint US-YPG operations.

The YPG maintains close ties with the PKK, a Kurdish nationalist guerrilla movement that is listed by the State Department as a “terrorist” organization. These ties further underline the utter cynicism of claims that Washington is engaged in a “war against terrorism” and that US military operations are launched to uphold human rights and democracy.

While applying the label “terrorist” arbitrarily to any group that comes into conflict with American foreign policy, the US government is by far the main fountainhead of terrorism worldwide. US forces directly carry out large-scale bombardment operations against civilian areas, and work closely with official militaries and militant groups around the world in support of their own mass terror operations. The Amnesty report on the YPG is a horrifying yet entirely predictable confirmation of this reality.



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