

# Man claiming to work for Turkish intelligence burned Syrian refugees to death

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Last week, human rights associations reported that three Syrian refugees were burned to death in their sleep, in a horrific murder in Izmir, Turkey, on November 16. This barbaric act is the product of the decade-long NATO war in Syria and the reactionary atmosphere incited by the Turkish ruling class against millions of Syrian refugees who have fled the war to Turkey.

Shockingly, the fact that this was a murder was covered up for over a month and came to light after one of the families contacted the Refugee Media Association (Mülteci Medyas?). Only afterwards was an investigation initiated to establish the circumstances of the fire. The attacker, Kemal Korukmaz, boasted to police of having carried out the attack after his arrest, telling them that he worked for Turkey's Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (J?TEM) agency.

Deysem Siti, the head of the Refugee Media Association, told daily Evrensel: "One of the families reached me three days ago. They said the incident was a homicide," adding, "They also said that the police had not given them information. We followed up to learn about the incident... Although it was said that there was a fire from the stove at first, a camera recording showed that there was an attack."

21-year-old Ahmed Al-Ali, 23-year-old Mamoun Al-Nabhan and 17-year-old Mohammed Al-Bish were reportedly working uninsured at the Birlik Beton cement factory in the Urla district and were trying to live on a wage below the hunger line.

Korkumaz came to the three workers' room at night, doused them in fuel and burned them to death. Al-Ali and Al-Bish died two days later, while Al-Nabhan has lost his life after a painful week in the hospital.

Other details point to a planned massacre. According to human rights associations' joint statement,

Korkumaz told another worker, "That place will burn, and those Syrians will die today."

Korukmaz was caught after stabbing two Turkish citizens ten days after the murder. In his statement, Korukmaz confessed to the murders and claimed he was working for J?TEM, according to the daily Evrensel which had access to his confession.

J?TEM was infamous for a large number of unsolved civilian murders in the Kurdish region during the Turkish state's war on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The state denied its existence for decades before Deputy Prime Minister B?lent Ecevit admitted J?TEM's activities in the aftermath of the 1996 Susurluk scandal.

In his statement, Korukmaz said that while he was doing his compulsory military service in the 2000s, he was asked by one of his commanders to join J?TEM. He accepted and participated in many operations. Korukmaz said that one day he found a note on his car saying "start your duty," and a few days later he found a second note saying "continue your duty." Claiming that he took action with the third note stating "Start the cleansing," Korukmaz said: "I understood this note as 'cleanse Turkey of Syrians.'"

Korukmaz's account raises the issue of state complicity in murders of immigrants and refugees across the NATO alliance. In Germany, where the state-infiltrated, neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) murdered at least 10 immigrants in Turkey, a neo-Nazi network planning to murder Syrian and Middle Eastern refugees, and including an individual identified as Franco A., came to light in 2017.

In the Izmir killing, a statement by Mamoun Al-Nabhan's brother, Ahmet Nabhan, shows that Turkish authorities deliberately concealed the murder.

Ahmet Nabhan said, "We came to Turkey 5 years

ago. My brother was 23 years old. While they were sleeping in the factory where they worked, he [Korukmaz] poured diesel or gasoline and then burned them. My brother remained in the hospital for a week after the incident and then died. Others of his friends died a day later. We did not tell anyone at the time because the police asked us not to tell anyone... I do not know why the Turkish sides did not inform the press. The killer was buying stones from the same factory as us.”

The Association of Lawyers for Freedom stated that the massacre, “despite taking place on November 16, 2021, was concealed by pressure on families.” It added, “It is clear that this massacre is directly related to the refugee policy of the state, and discourses that serve the purpose of deepening racism against refugees.”

Meanwhile, a report is awaited on whether Korukmaz, who was arrested and sent to prison, is mentally stable. Regardless of the direction of the report on Korukmaz’s mental health, however, the responsibility of the political establishment in this attack does not disappear.

A rotten deal between the EU, Turkey and Greece in March 2016 established Greece as the EU’s jailer of refugees and obliged President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government to ensure that refugees from war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan do not make their way to Europe. Moreover, Ankara aims to use refugees as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the NATO powers. It also oversees an estimated 3.6 million refugees in Turkey, who are exploited without insurance and with wages below even the legal minimum wage.

The bourgeois opposition, led by the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the far-right Good Party, is leading an anti-refugee campaign. They are fueling anti-refugee chauvinism, boasting that if they come to power they will send the refugees back where they came from.

Amid an economic and social crisis that has deepened with the COVID-19 pandemic, the aim of this campaign, carried out by the entire political establishment, is to divide the working class and divert growing class tensions into reactionary attacks on the most exploited layers of workers.

The developments have confirmed the warnings made by the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS). At the

end of July, we wrote, “This xenophobic lynch-mob atmosphere, especially incited by pro-bourgeois opposition parties and media, paves the way for fascistic attacks not only against refugees but against the entire working class.” Only a few days after this warning, a far-right mob of hundreds of people took to the streets in Ankara, chanting anti-Syrian slogans. They threw stones at the homes of Syrian refugees while some shops were also ransacked, and some cars burnt.

A video released by a paramilitary fascist group named Ataman Brotherhood on Tuesday indicates that the far-right danger is growing. In the video of this racist group, they are seen chasing and beating an Afghan refugee in Istanbul. The group, which broadcasts videos of the armed militia, has a flag similar to the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Members of the group make hand-signs of the far-right Grey Wolves organization.

These developments are a serious warning. The working class and youth must come to the defense of refugees, as a decisive part of defending the entire working class against state-backed, far-right violence.



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