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The Fate of Afrin

An Island of
Democracy and
Religious Freedom

Destroyed by Turkey's
Jihadi Invasion

May 2018

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Democratic Administration in Afrin

**Can you see the
difference?**



Occupational Administration in Afrin

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The Democratic Administration of Afrin organized the education of 55,250 students, including 31,000 primary students. 1,625 teachers in 306 schools provided mother-tongue education.

Turkification of Afrin's Students



Now Turkey uses the children that remain as propaganda props.

Displaced Afrin residents in Al-Shahbaa try to return to their homes describe how they are blocked.

Turkey supported FSA units in Afrin engage in robbery, threats of forced marriage and beheadings.





Syrian Coalition and HNC members posing in Yazidi village whose people were displaced.



News > World > Middle East

Yazidis who suffered under Isis face forced conversion to Islam amid fresh persecution in Afrin

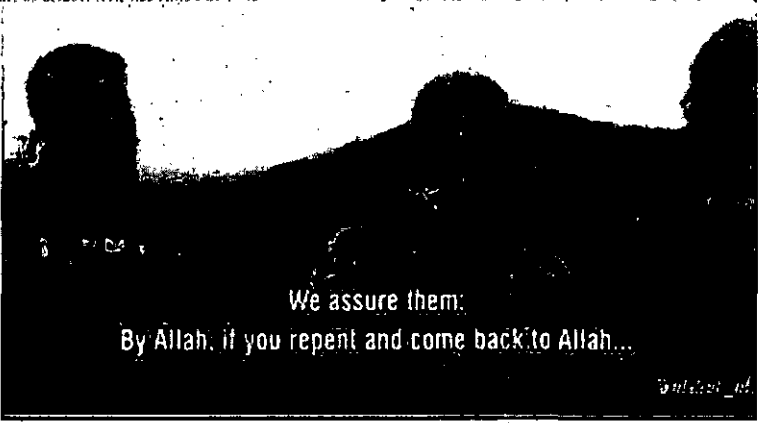
Islamist rebels allied to Turkey accused of destroying temples of those following the non-Islamic sect

Patrick Cockburn | @indyworld | Wednesday 18 April 2018 16:55 BST

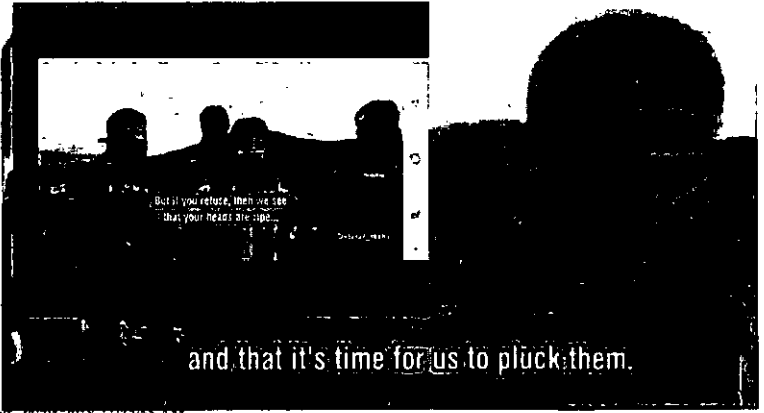
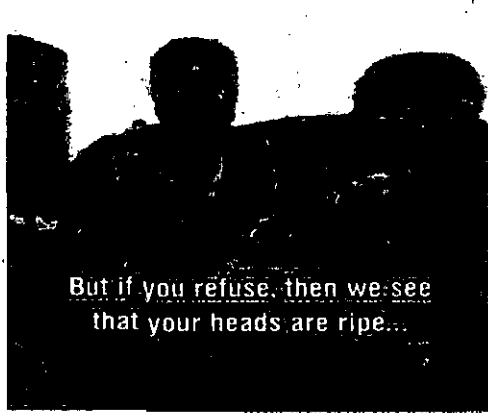
Shekh Qamber, a 63-year-old Syrian Kurdish Yazidi farmer who fled his town of Qastel Jindo in Afrin, described in an exclusive interview with *The Independent* what happened to Yazidis who refused to leave their homes. He said that some were forcibly brought to a mosque by Islamists to be converted, while others, including a 70-year-old man he knew, were being lured there by offers of food and medical attention.

Even the place names of Yazidi villages are being changed. Mr Qamber recounted a conversation he had with an Islamist militant who had arrested and questioned him near the town of Azaz when he was trying to escape. He was asked by his interrogator where he was from and he replied that he was from Qastel Jindo. The Islamist, whose groups often describe themselves as belonging to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), said: "it's no more Qastel Jindo. It's al-Quds now. We will give it the name of Palestine's capital. These areas were occupied by the infidels and now it is [going] back to their original owners and original names ... We came here to regain our lands and behead you."



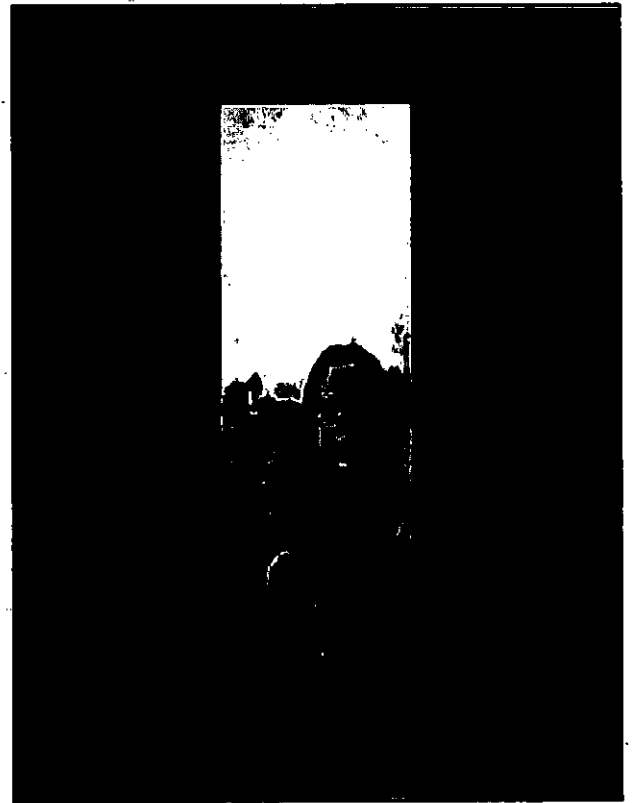


**Erdogan's jihadi
threaten to force
conversion by
sword and to
behead those
who resist.**



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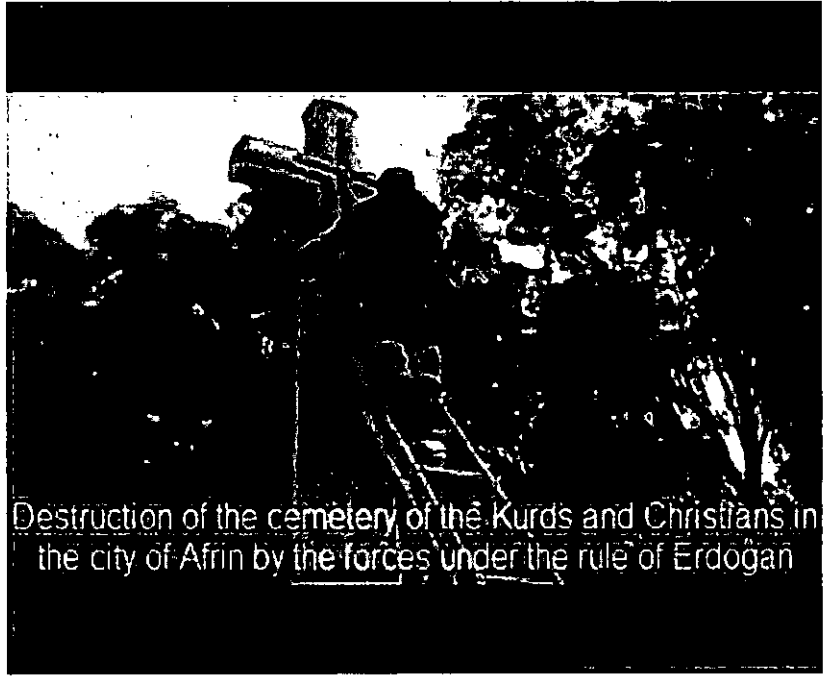
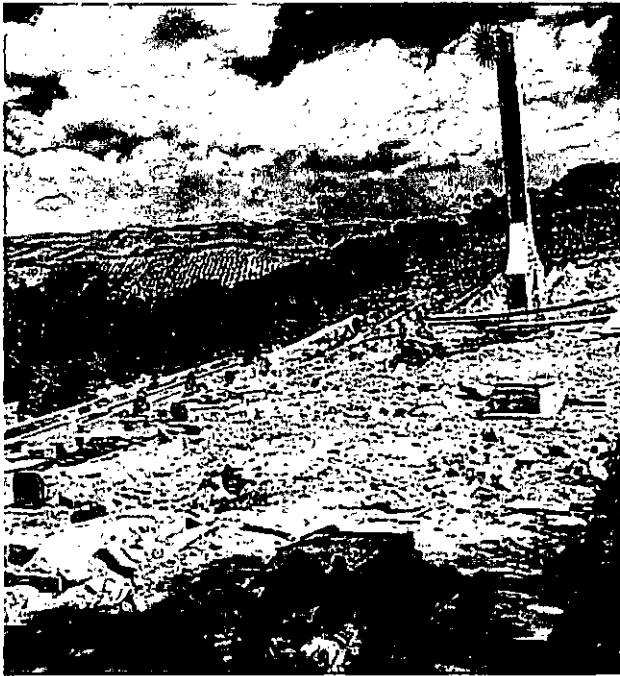
Turkey backed fighters in Afrin singing Jihadi songs and calling for death of Kurds.



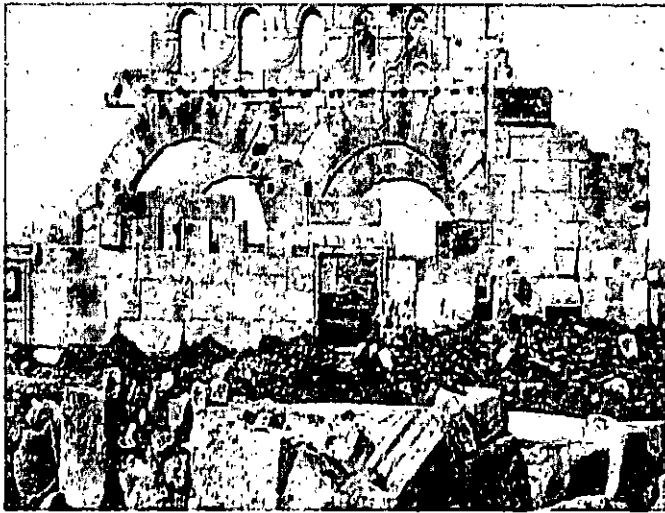
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Turkey and its Jihadis destroys Kurdish and Christian cemeteries in Afrin



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Turkish airstrikes in Afrin destroy one of the oldest Christian Churches in the world

Mar. 23 2016 - Author: Thema Newsroom

St. Maron and the Julianos Church was on the UNESCO world heritage list

Warplanes of Turkish regime destroyed the archaeological site of Brad to the south of Afrin city in northern Aleppo

General Director of Syria's Antiquities and Museums Mahmoud Hamoud told SANA that the Turkish raids on the archaeological site on Wednesday led to the destruction of many important archaeological buildings, including the tomb of St. Maron and the Julianos Church, one of the oldest Christian churches in the world which was built at the end of the 4th century AD.

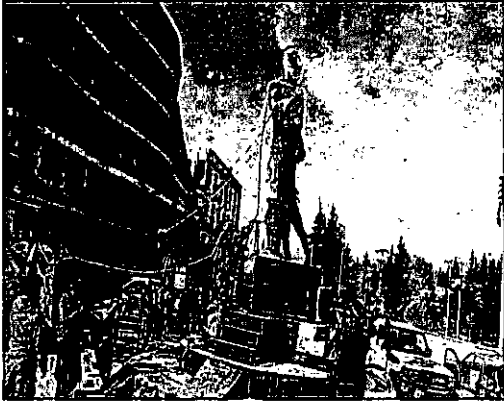
The site is home to many Byzantine churches and monasteries, as well as a temple, a bath, houses, mills and a cemetery, all dating back to the Roman era during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

Hamoud urged "the international organizations concerned which registered these sites on their lists to do their moral and human duty to condemn the Turkish aggression on the sites of the Syrian heritage and expose it to the world."

In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) listed Brad site on the World Heritage List.

Since the beginning of its assault on Afrin city, Turkish forces have vandalized a number of archaeological sites in the area

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Kawa the blacksmith statue, legendary hero of the Kurdish New Year, destroyed by Turkey backed forces occupying Afrin.



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Ain-Dara Temple
Afrin, Aleppo
Syria

Before

Before

After

Ancient Hittite
Temple Destroyed

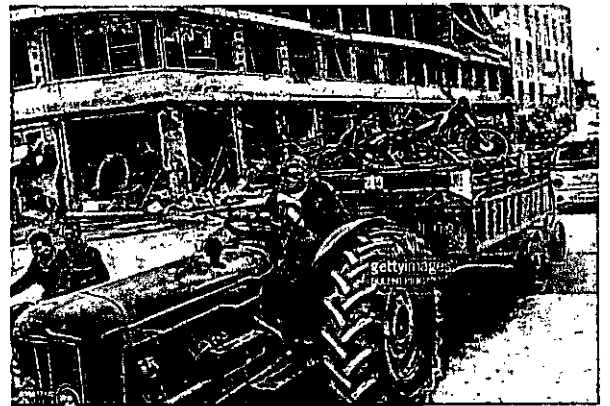
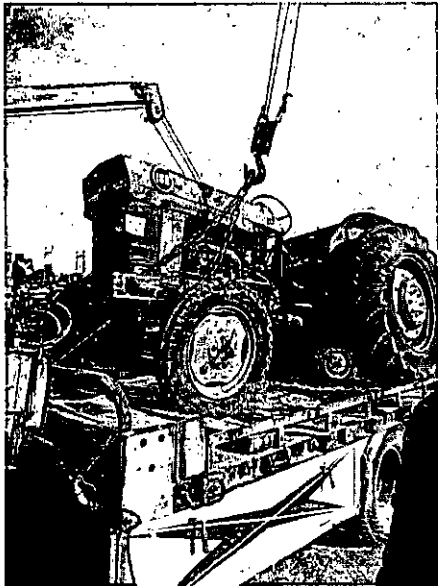
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April 8, 2018 12:57AM EDT

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

Syria: Afrin Residents Blocked from Fleeing, Aid

Turkish-Allied Groups Loot, Destroy People's Property





**Afrin after
Turkey's
Invasion**



**Afrin before
Turkey's
Invasion**

Dozens of girls missing in Afrin

A mother looking for her 14-year-old girl who was abducted in Afrin under invasion, stated that dozens of girls are held captive and raped by Turkish forces and allied gangs.



Unable to return to their homes, the displaced people of Afrin need help.

AFRIN DISPLACEMENT
Facts and Figures
Last updated: 18 April 2018



Overview:

137,070¹ people from Afrin district are estimated to have been displaced by escalating violence since 20 January 2018 and by the shift in control on 18 March 2018

150,000 people are estimated to remain in Afrin district, including 50,000 in Afrin city.

90,250 in Tall Refaat **30,000** in Nabul & Zahraa **15,000** in Kafr Naseh and Fafin

IDP registration is progressing slowly, and all IDP numbers remain estimates. There is limited information on the humanitarian situation inside Afrin district.

Key Concerns:

- FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IS SEVERELY RESTRICTED.** IDPs are currently not permitted to move to Aleppo city or to return to Afrin district. Some 2,000 IDPs were stuck for nine days at the crossing point between Burj Elqas and Kimar when trying to return to Afrin district.
- LACK OF ACCESS:** The UN currently do not have access to Afrin district, and whilst some local partners are present in the district, they sometimes face movement restrictions at checkpoints.
- LACK OF FUNDING:** The UN and partners in Syria require at least \$73m to continue responding with life-saving assistance and protection services to those displaced from Afrin district. Additional funding is required for the response from Gaziantep.

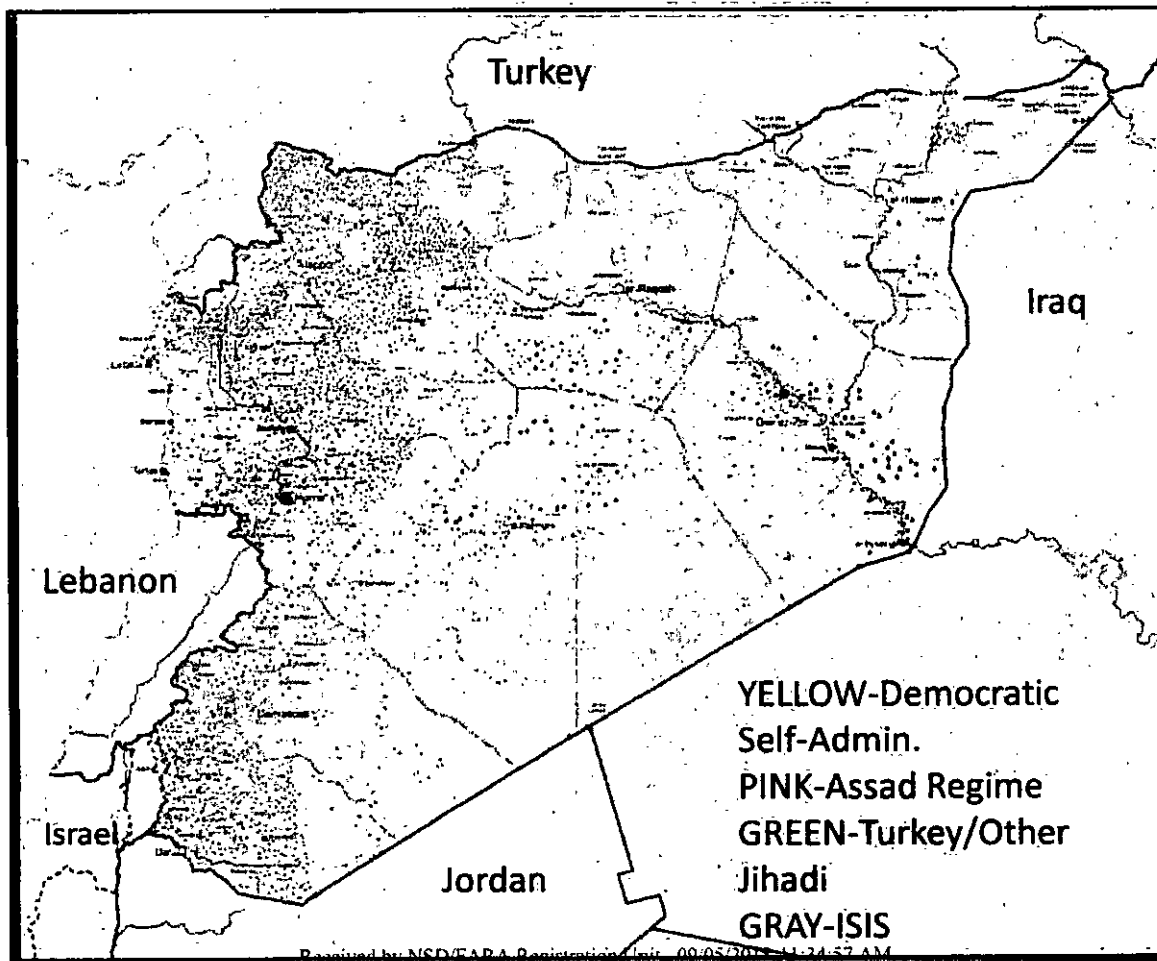


Syria: Religious Freedom at Cross Roads

Will Syrian Christians be able to sustain a meaningful presence in their country or will Christianity ends in its birth region?

Will the foreign policies of the US and other free nations support or destroy a future for religious freedom in Syria?

Syria War Map April 2018



Ground Actors

- Democratic Self-Administration—Syrian Democratic Forces; US Global Coalition support, especially airpower—defeated ISIS (almost)
- Assad Regime—Syrian/Russian/Iranian military, especially airpower—mostly regained territory
- Alternative Jihadi—Various jihadi militias; NEW Turkish military support, airpower—North near Turkey South near Jordan
- ISIS—fierce organized Islamic militia.

Compating visions for Syria of the Future

- The religious state vision political/armed groups. Opposition groups supported by Turkey
- The Nationalist state vision; Ultra Arab/Kurdish groups. Syrian Arab Baath regime, opposition Arab ultranationalist groups, and Kurdish National Council
- The pluralistic state vision groups, DSA: PYD and affiliate Kurdish parties and Syriac Unity Party

Syria of the Future Model Possibilities

- Democratic Self-Administration: model for all of Syria, FULL religious freedom, conversion allowed, civil and political rights for all. Strong women's rights; no death penalty
- Assad Regime: authoritarian neo-democracy
- Jihadi + ISIS + Turkey: authoritarian Sunni Islamist state; minimal to no rights for other religions or ethnicities
- Iran + Hezbollah: Shiite territory; path to Mediterranean: Shia preference; dominate Sunnis

Threats in the Neighborhood

- Turkey: new Jihad army; aid to ISIS; invasion of Syria, particularly Democratic Self-Administration; threats to region and Europe
- Iran/Hezbollah: Shiite dictatorship
- Russia: support Assad; permanent bases

What is Next for the DSA/SDF?

- Possible DSA participation in peace talks with US backing; keep territory on negotiated basis with current governance model.
- Announced US withdrawal from DSA, time frame unclear
- Without airpower, SDF cannot defend the DSA

Challenges to Religious Freedom

- Turkey; Ambitious northern neighbor seek influence through Syrian Islamist extremists groups
- Regime; tolerates worship freedom but courts majority at expense of religious minority
- Iran; Ambitious regional power seeks political influence and spreading Shiaa

Affiliation among Syrians

- ISIS; Islamic extremist militia keen on implementing religious Islamic authoritarian rule.
- West; historically courted majority groups in Middle East at expense of religious/ethnic minorities. Fear US abandon DSA model

Opportunities to Religious Freedom

- The possibility of including Syrian Christians into Geneva Syrian Peace talks who could advocate for the interests of identity based Syrian minorities
- The possibility of negotiating a new decentralized political system for Syria that allows religious/ethnic local minorities rule and freedoms in their living regions.

How Can You help?

- US advocacy needed to convince Trump administration not to abandon DSA pluralistic model
- US advocacy needed to counter Turkey and Syrian opposition anti DSA campaign in Washington
- Legislative: resolutions; laws; sanctions
- Encourage US Christian leaders to support DSA
- Publicity/mass media
- **Time is short—Four month time frame.**