

FACTSHEET

Factions in Turkish-backed “Free Syrian Army”



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- Fresh assault on Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) follows killing of hundreds and displacing of hundreds of thousands of civilians during Turkish-backed militias in Afrin

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What is the National Army (Turkish-backed free Syrian Army)?

INTRODUCTION



Factions belonging to the National Army

The Syrian National Army (Suriye Millî Ordusu, الوطني الجيش السوري) is more commonly known as the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army. The composite force of primarily Sunni Muslim Arab and Turkmen militias was founded in May 2017¹, and has a claimed strength of 35,000 fighters². Fighters are paid and in some cases trained by the Turkish state, and the factions form part of the Turkish chain of command.

This report will provide a brief background on the Turkish-backed National Army (TNA), and a break-down of those factions and militias whose participation in Turkey's coming assault on the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria has been announced by Turkish state-linked media. It will focus on well-sourced, evidence-based claims of war crimes and other rights violations committed by these groups.

We will provide case studies of two of the most powerful factions in the TNA, namely: the largest Turkmen militia, the Sultan Murad Brigade; Jaish-al-Islam (The Army of Islam), who Turkey recently transported into the region in their thousands from southern Syria. Both stand accused of multiple war crimes. We will also provide a general overview of rights abuses and practices among the TNA.

1 TRT World, <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/turkey-backed-rebels-to-form-new-army-in-northern-syria-367931>

2 Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-force/syrian-rebels-build-an-army-with-turkish-help-face-challenges-idUSKBN1KX05Y>

Turkish-backed National Army in north-western Syria: an overview

Since its formation in an earlier incarnation as the Hawar Kilis Operation Room in April 2016, the TNA has primarily focused on attacking and capturing areas controlled by the YPG and YPJ, or the broader Syrian Defence Forces (SDF). They have also occasionally skirmished with regime forces, and captured some towns and villages from ISIS, most notably the northern border town of Jarabalus.

Journalists and regional experts have claimed¹ that ISIS fighters reached a deal to transfer control of Jarabalus to Turkish-backed Islamist militias sharing a similar ideology rather than seeing it fall into the hands of the secular SDF who were then advancing on the city. One ISIS fighter told the Independent's Patrick Cockburn: "when the Turkish army entered Jarabulus, I talked to my friends who were there. Actually, Isis didn't leave Jarabulus; they just shaved off their beards."²

Turkish-backed militias continued to impose sharia law, kidnap, torture and execute civilians, and commit human rights violations possibly amounting to war crimes

Unlike the original Free Syrian Army established to fight against Bashar al-Assad's regime, under Turkish control the TNA's focus has shifted to an almost exclusive focus on attacking Kurdish forces and establishing a Turkish zone of influence in Northern Syria³. Commanders who have refused to attack areas under the control of the SDF have been imprisoned.

In 2018, Turkey and the TNA invaded the Canton of Afrin, a religiously diverse and tolerant region home to over 200,000⁴ ethnic Kurds and around 300,000 internally displaced people from elsewhere in Syria⁵. Prior to the invasion it had been one of the most peaceful and secure parts of Syria, virtually never seeing combat during the civil war⁶.

As a result of the war 400-500 civilians were killed⁷, and 300,000 civilians internally displaced⁸. Turkish border guards shot at refugees, beat them, and denied them medical care, per Human Rights Watch⁹.

1 See eg. Washington Post, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/erdogans-waterloo-turkey_b_11767934.html

2 The Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-to-rebuild-in-africa-if-defeated-in-syria-and-iraq-a7234456.html>

3 The National, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/under-turkish-tutelage-fsa-becomes-better-organised-but-its-mission-shifts-1.716057>

4 Syrian Census, <http://www.cbssyr.sy/General%20census/census%202004/pop-man.pdf>

5 International Middle East Peace Research Center: <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/video/ad12b384-8c46-4c4e-8de2-d7e2a555ffca>

6 See eg. Dr Thomas Schmidinger, <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/community/2016/02/24/afrin-and-the-race-for-the-azaz-corridor>

7 Estimate based on figures from Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and elsewhere, <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=107310>

8 Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=102951

9 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/03/turkey/syria-border-guards-shoot-block-fleeing-syrians>

Turkish-backed militias continued to impose sharia law, kidnap, torture and execute civilians, and commit human rights violations possibly amounting to war crimes, per Amnesty International¹⁰.

Following Turkish-backed forces' capture of Afrin, Turkey now controls an area of over 3500 km² adjacent to its border in Syria's north-western corner¹¹ through these militias.

De facto Turkish control of areas under the TNA

The Turkish state continues to bankroll the scores of armed groups who have a presence on the ground in north-western Syria, while areas under its control are home to at least six Turkish military bases¹². Colonel Haitham Afisi, the TNA's head of staff and public figurehead, recently told the LA Times: "Every decision that is taken, we sit with the Turks and come to a decision."¹³

Likewise, the United Nations found that despite nominal local representation "oversight of governance structures [in Afrin] was maintained... by Turkey. Two Turkish nationals were tasked by the Wali (Governor) of the Turkish district of Hatay to perform the functions of Wali in Afrin and to report directly to him. One of the two Walis visits Afrin every second day for a few hours before returning to Hatay with a report on the situation on the ground."¹⁴

As well as a Turkish-backed police force, streets and squares have been given Turkish names or renamed after Erdogan, Turkish post offices and infrastructure have been introduced and the Turkish language has been imposed in schools. Order in areas held by these rebel groups is kept, in theory, by Turkish-trained military police who wear Turkish uniforms sometimes decorated with the Turkish flag¹⁵.

Per a report by Syria Direct¹⁶, "residents, rebels and local opposition officials suggest that Turkey's role in northern Syria has gradually expanded from the

Streets and squares have been given Turkish names or renamed, Turkish post offices and infrastructure have been introduced and the Turkish language has been imposed in

10 Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

11 Syria Direct, <https://syriadirect.org/news/what's-next-for-post-islamic-state-syria-a-primer/>

12 Syria Direct, <https://syriadirect.org/news/what's-next-for-post-islamic-state-syria-a-primer/>

13 LA Times, www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-turkey-syria-rebels-20180514-story.html

14 UN, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf

15 Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-police-idUSKB-N1582MF>

16 Syria Direct, <https://syriadirect.org/news/the-head-is-turkish-the-body-syrian-expanding-turkish-influence-in-rebel-held-north-leaves-syrians-ambivalent-about-the-future/>

security sector to encompass most aspects of political and civilian life—courts, schools and religious authorities, right down to the minutiae of service provision and civil registration. Even local councils—civilian administrative bodies that once answered directly to the Syrian opposition’s Interim Government—now operate under the authority of Turkish “walis” or governors in neighboring Turkish provinces.”

Infighting between the Turkish-backed militias in Afrin has left scores dead. Yet despite the rapid deterioration of the security situation and humanitarian conditions in Afrin, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has long proclaimed his intention to extend the occupation into the rest of Rojava.

As in Afrin, any ground assault will be carried out by the TNA, supported by Turkish air strikes, shelling and armoured troops.

A breakdown of the order of battle for the TNA “which will take part in a likely military operation east of the Euphrates” was released by the Turkish state-linked Suriye Gündemi, and as such can be regarded as a reliable indication of factions participating in the invasion (see note on sources, below). We will look at two of the factions whose participation was announced in more detail, before giving an overview of human rights violations by the Turkish-backed forces.

Sultan Murad Brigade

CASE STUDIES

AKA: Sultan Murad Division, فرقة السلطان مراد, Firqat al-Sultan Murad, Sultan Murat Tümeni

Key findings

- Found to have committed war crimes by the United Nations for participating in bombardment of a Kurdish neighbourhood in Aleppo, killing at least 83 civilians and 30 children¹
- Documented cases of illegal detention and torture of POWs and media activists, “beating men for fun” per Amnesty²
- Engaged in looting and forced displacement during occupation of Afrin³

Background

The Sultan Murad Brigade is largest and most powerful of the Turkmen groups gathered under the banner of the Syrian Turkmen Brigades, and Turkey’s number one faction on the ground in North-Western Syria.

Syrian Turkmen are Syrian citizens of Turkish origin, and not to be confused with ethnic Turkmen from the Turkmenistan region, who speak a different language and with whom Syrian Turkmen profess no shared identity.

Turkey provides the Sultan Murad Brigade with heavy weaponry in addition to training and financial support. The group was active in Aleppo City in the opening years of the war, but its base of operations is now almost exclusively in Turkish-occupied north-western Syria.

Human rights violations

A United Nations investigation found that the Sultan Murad Brigade, along with other factions now participating in the TNA’s occupation of Afrin and projected war on the DFNS, had committed war crimes by indiscriminately shelling and killing Kurdish civilians in the Sheikh Maqsoud area of Aleppo.

These findings echo the conclusion of an earlier Amnesty investigation, which reports that at least 83 civilians and 30 children died in the bombardment⁴.

1 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/WarCrimesInAleppo.aspx>

2 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

3 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

4 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/syria-armed-opposition-group-committing-war-crimes-aleppo-new-evidence>

Turkey provides the Sultan Murad Brigade with heavy weaponry in addition to training and financial support

Amnesty also found that Sultan Murad were involved in looting and forced displacement during the ongoing occupation of Afrin, alongside other “serious human rights violations”⁵. Their report details instances of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance.

One civilian described his experiences at the hands of Sultan Murad, who imprisoned him for two months and interrogated him along with the Turkish Armed Forces on the basis of social media posts he made reporting on Turkish rights violations during the invasion.

He said: “I saw men being beaten in front of me by members of Sultan Mourad just for fun, and at night the sound of men screaming echoed through the building. I was released without seeing a judge. I thought I would never make it out of there.”

The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights has separately documented at least one case of torture at the hands of the Sultan Murad brigade, in which a media activist displaced from Ghouta whose political affiliations placed him on the side of the FSA was nonetheless captured and tortured for three days⁶. Videos and images circulated on social media show fighters alleged to belong to Sultan Murad stripping and beating prisoners of war, with the YPG reporting that captured Sultan Murad fighters later confessed to these crimes⁷.

5 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

6 <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=106544>

7 <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/010920164>

Jaysh al-Islam

AKA: Army of Islam, جيش الإسلام; formerly known as Liwa al-Islam, لواء الإسلام, Brigade of Islam

Key findings

- Carried out torture including using electrocution, detention without trial, and summary execution¹
- Paraded captured civilians in cages as a human shield²
- Transferred in their thousands from Ghouta/Damascus region to Northern Syria in Turkish-brokered deal, now expected to participate in invasion of Rojava

Background

Jaysh al-Islam was the largest and most powerful faction in the city of Douma and the region of Eastern Ghouta. Uniting fifty separate rebel groups and a claimed 17,000 fighters, it was one of the major rebel power-brokers in the Damascus region³.

The Salafist group began by calling for an Islamic State under sharia law⁴, with founder Zahran Al-loush decrying democracy and issuing sectarian threats to the effect that Syria should be “cleansed of the filth” of religious minorities like Shi’ite Muslims⁵. (In Western-facing interviews, at least, Mr Al-loush later modified his rhetoric, with a spokesperson stating that such language was intended for his fighters’ ears only⁶.)

The group held Eastern Ghouta under totalitarian rule for years, and also had active branches in Aleppo and Idlib. But as the tide of war turned in favour of the Assad regime in 2018, at least 1500 Jaysh al-Islam fighters and 3500 of their family members were transported north to Turkish-occupied Syria and installed in regions whose population had been driven out by the TNA⁷.

They are now rebuilding in Turkish-occupied Syria on the Turkish payroll, and participating in the TNA⁸.

Human rights violations

1 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/syria-torture-army-of-islam_us_56f54d0fe4b0143a9b47fc59

2 https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-say-caged-hostages-will-die-with-them-if-shelling-continues.html?_r=0

3 <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24784780.html>

4 <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-opposition's-political-demands>

5 <https://www.joshualandis.com/blog/zahran-alloush/>

6 <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24784780.html>

7 <https://www.msn.com/en-nz/news/australia/jaysh-al-islam-convoy-leaves-damascus-province-for-northern-syria/vp-AAw772r>

8 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-rebels/far-from-home-a-syrian-rebel-group-starts-over-idUSKCN1M71CO>

The Idlib branch of Jaysh al-Islam was also among the forces found to have committed war crimes by the United Nations

Multiple reports from the area under Jaysh al-Islam's rule in Eastern Ghouta point to a totalitarian regime of torture, detention and murder. Testimonies from its al-Tawba prison describe electrocution, beatings and mass detention of minors.⁹

Widely-circulated footage showed the group firing on unarmed protestors during clashes between different rebel groups in Eastern Ghouta¹⁰, and reports of abduction and murder of activists were commonplace¹¹. One video showed a summary execution of 18 alleged ISIS prisoners with a shotgun¹².

Perhaps most notoriously, the group paraded religious minorities in cages through the streets as human shields, in an attempt to deter regime airstrikes¹³.

Along with many of the other factions participating in the TNA, it co-ordinated operations with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, or Al-Qaeda in Syria.¹⁴

The Idlib branch of Jaysh al-Islam was also among the forces found to have committed war crimes by the United Nations for participating in bombardment of a Kurdish neighbourhood in Aleppo, killing at least 83 civilians and 30 children¹⁵. Jaysh al-Islam admitted to using "banned weapons" against the neighbourhood, later clarifying it was referring to modified GRAD rockets.

Since arriving in Afrin and joining the TNA, the group has made public statements declaring Kurdish people to be its enemy¹⁶. Per the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, its members have been extorting local farmers, forcing them to hand over produce for half its value, and imprisoning those who refuse to obey; expropriating land from religious minorities; and raping women¹⁷.

9 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/syria-torture-army-of-islam_us_56f54d0fe4b0143a9b47fc59

10 <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/least-120-dead-intra-rebel-fighting-enters-fifth-day-damascus-suburb-1496381352>

11 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/syria-rebel-group-accused-abduction-murder-key-activist-180815125925019.html>, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-activists-accuse-rebel-group-kidnapping-colleagues-109201255>

12 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33342943>

13 https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-say-caged-hostages-will-die-with-them-if-shelling-continues.html?_r=0

14 <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The-Free-Syrian-Army-24MAR.pdf>

15 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/WarCrimesInAleppo.aspx>

16 SOHR, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=92283>

17 SOHR, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=106133>

Violence against civilians and POWs

OVERVIEW OF RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY TNA FACTIONS

The United Nations found that civilians living areas under TNA control were being “subjected to high levels of violent crime, with civilians falling victim to robberies, harassment, abductions, and murder.”¹ Along with Sultan Murad, it singled out the **Hamza Division** and **Ahrar al-Sharqiya** as particular culprits, for example citing the execution of 10 civilian IDPs at a checkpoint set up during ongoing clashes between armed groups in Afrin.

Members of the **Hamza Division**, for example, twice invaded hospitals in the region in an apparent push for preferable treatment, physically assaulting nurses and firing bullets².

Video shows members of a TNA faction, believed to be **Liwa al-Mutaseem**, abusing, beating and trampling on captured YPG soldiers in Afrin³.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, led by Khaled Hayani, was responsible for the deaths of more than 203 civilians, including 42 children, at least 25 women, and 136 men, with more than 900 wounded, 175 of them seriously, in the city of Aleppo between July and December 2014 with hell cannons and other mortars, in addition to improvised explosive devices⁴. This brigade has now reorganised under the name of the **16th Division**, and is active in Afrin.

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Multiple groups, including **Faylaq al-Sham**, **Ferqa 55** and **Ahrar al-Sharqiya**, have been accused by Amnesty and others of participating in forced displacements and the seizure of property in Afrin, amounting to ‘serious human rights violations’⁵.

The **16th Division**’s Badr Martyr Brigade also stands accused of robbery, kidnapping, extortion and mass looting in Aleppo, with looted

1 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf

2 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf

3 <http://www.rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=242071>

4 <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=7863>

5 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

items being shipped to Turkey⁶.

Kidnapping and torture

The UN's OCHR "has documented at least 11 cases in which civilians including women and children were abducted [by factions belonging to the TNA], some of them later released after paying ransoms ranging between USD 1,000 to 3,000, while the whereabouts of others remain unknown."⁷ Local sources in Afrin told Amnesty International of at least 86 instances of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance, at the hands of groups like **Faylaq al-Sham, Ferqa 55, Ahrar al-Sharqiya**⁸.

Per the UN, fighters from **Faylaq al-Sham** raided the house of an ethnic Arab journalist in Azaz district, physically assaulted his son and nephew and arrested the journalist for the crime of posting content criticising their faction on his Facebook⁹. Other images circulated on social media also show signs of torture alleged to have been carried out by **Faylaq al-Sham**¹⁰.

The **Suleimayn Shah** faction kidnapped and tortured at least one civilian¹¹, with footage provided to journalists showing an unarmed civilian being shot in an alleged ransom demand. He reportedly later died in captivity¹².

Among others, **Liwa al-Fatih** have been accused of kidnap and torture by civilians in Afrin speaking to reporters¹³.

The **Northern Storm Brigade**, formed of smugglers, previously controlled a key border crossing to Turkey. Per the OHCHR, they have engaged in torture and ill-treatment of prisoners¹⁴. They have also engaged in kidnapping and smuggling, most notoriously kidnapping a group of eleven Lebanese pilgrims and sparking a crisis across Lebanon¹⁵.

The **Hamza Division** have been captured on video identifying them-

6 <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/11/isis-hayani-badr-syria-aleppo.html>

7 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf

8 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>

9 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf

10 <https://twitter.com/nre6172/status/1020069715526418436>

11 <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/787e2385-c572-4fb7-af3e-8b1f830e093e>

12 <http://www.rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=383744>

13 <http://hawarnews.com/en/haber/continuation-of-kidnapping-torture-murder-in-afrin-h1298.html>

14 https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/.../A-HRC-25-65_en.doc

15 <https://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/azaz-northern-storm-brigade>

selves before beating and humiliating captured Kurds in Aleppo¹⁶.

Rape and crimes against women

In an incident which made headlines round the world, the body of YPJ fighter Amina Omar (Barin Kobane), was mutilated and sexually abused by TNA fighters in Afrin¹⁷.

At least one Kurdish woman in Afrin was kidnapped, held in solitary confinement, and raped by members of the **Northern Storm Brigade**¹⁸.

The head of **Ahrar al-Sharqiya**'s branch in Jarabalus was caught on video sexually abusing a 13- or 14-year-old girl¹⁹, while the commander of the **Suleimayn Shah Brigade** provoked mass protests in Afrin following accusations of repeated rape of a local woman.

A confederation of local women's organisations documented the abduction of 150 women by TNA forces during the invasion²⁰.

Global Rights have compiled a wide range of testimonies from local women and press agencies concerning crimes against women carried out by TNA soldiers²¹. These include the rape and torture of a woman in Selûrê village, the torture of a 21-year-old pregnant woman in Shiye district and the subsequent loss of her child, the rape of two and abduction of 13 women in Şîtka village and multiple abductions of women from Afrin city and environs, among other offences.

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Regular reports of crimes against women appear in the local press. For example, three members of the TNA reportedly kidnapped and raped a two-year-old girl, along with her mother²². Other news agencies have received "dozens" of reports of rape and abduction, including the reported rape of a pregnant woman and the subsequent loss of her child.²³

16 https://twitter.com/Mekut_Mallet/status/976147595679682571

17 <https://www.newsweek.com/rape-weapon-war-wielded-against-girls-women-syria-un-report-says-846887>

18 UN, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A-HRC-37-CRP-3.pdf>

19 <http://www.francesoir.fr/en-coop-matteo-puxton/syrie-ahrar-al-sharqiya-ces-anciens-dal-nosra-qui-combattent-avec-larmee?platform=hootsuite>

20 <https://icafrinresist.com/2018/04/18/lost-girls-of-afrin/>

21 <https://www.globalrights.info/2018/05/more-bad-news-from-afrin/>

22 <http://www.basnews.com/index.php/en/news/kurdistan/450179>

23 <http://www.hawarnews.com/en/haber/in-afrin--demographic-change-rape-and-arrest-h393.html>

Summary execution

The Levant Front has been accused of summary executions through its system of Sharia courts by Amnesty International²⁴.

The group **Afhad al-Rasul**, or The Grandsons of the Prophet, were shown on camera carrying out a summary execution for apostasy, per Bellingcat founder Elliot Higgins²⁵.

Per the OHCHR, the **Northern Storm Brigade** carried out at least one summary execution in the centre of Azaz²⁶.

Links to HTS and other Jihadi groups

Ahrar al-Sharqiya was formed by the al-Nusra Front's leading sharia judge in eastern Syria, and the majority of its members are former al-Nusra members from Deir al-Zor. The al-Nusra Front was the official branch of al-Qaeda in Syria, and responsible for multiple mass killings among other atrocities.

Citizens in Afrin have spoken to reporters about al-Sharqiya's attempts to impose the veil and other sharia-law measures in the previously liberal and secular region²⁷.

**The ultra-nationalist Turkish faction
The Gray Wolves – a fascist “death
squad” responsible for massacres of
hundreds of civilians– also fought
alongside many of these factions in
Afrin**

Other groups now part of the TNA, such as **Liwa al-Fatih**²⁸ and **Afhad al-Rasoul**²⁹ were officially allied with al-Nusra during earlier campaigns.

During 2012-2013, several groups now part of the TNA co-ordinated operations with the Islamic State, for example during the siege of Menagh Air base in which **Liwa al-Fatih**, the **Northern Storm Brigade**³⁰ and other factions participated. During the course of the war these groups turned against ISIS to side with other jihadist factions.

24 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/syria-abductions-torture-and-summary-killings-at-the-hands-of-armed-groups/>

25 <http://brown-moses.blogspot.com/2012/12/video-appears-to-show-syrian-army.html>

26 https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/.../A-HRC-25-65_en.doc

27 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/culture-clash-campaign-syrias-liberal-af-rin-tells-women-cover-328145705>

28 https://books.google.de/books?id=S6eKCwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

29 https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/07/qatar-funded_syrian_rebel_brig.php

30 <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/northern-storm-brigade-history-current-status-matters-chris-looney/>

The **Levant Front** has been accused of summary executions through its system of Sharia courts by Amnesty International³¹. In 2018 it was declared a “criminal organisation of terrorist intent” and a “salafist and jihadist” group that “strives for the setting up of the caliphate” by the Dutch government, its former backers.

An ex-ISIS source has told the Independent newspaper that former ISIS members have retrained and are now fighting in the TNA³². The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights has published footage showing members of the TNA threatening to behead Kurds if they do not submit to their brand of radical islam³³.

Liwa al-Fatih has stated its intention to commit sectarian murders against members of the alawite minority³⁴.

As documented by the SOHR and others, the ultra-nationalist Turkish faction **The Gray Wolves** – a fascist “death squad”³⁵ responsible for massacres of hundreds of civilians³⁶ – also fought alongside many of these factions in Afrin³⁷.

31 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/syria-abductions-torture-and-summary-killings-at-the-hands-of-armed-groups/>

32 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-isis-afrin-syria-kurds-free-syrian-army-jihadi-video-fighters-recruits-a8199166.html>

33 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-civil-war-assad-regime-turkey-afrin-kurds-eastern-ghouta-us-allies-militia-a8252456.html>

34 <http://www.rubincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Jawad-YA-au1-PDF.pdf>

35 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/23/world-leaders-brutal-attack-kurdish-afrin-turkish-army>

36 Veli Yadirgi, The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey, https://books.google.iq/books?id=FjsqDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Veli+Yadirgi+kurds&hl=en&sa=X-&ved=0ahUKEwjU_8rR37DfAhVKxIUkHWmPAJ4Q6AEIjAA#v=onepage&q=Veli%20Yadirgi%20kurds&f=false

37 <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=84036>

Note on sources:

The order of battle for the Turkish-backed National Army was published online by Süriye Gundemi on 31 December 2018¹. Süriye Gundemi is an Ankara-based 'regional politics journal' aligned with the Turkish government.

The site is edited by Ömer Özkizilcik, and primarily publishes op-eds penned by Mr. Özkizilcik. Mr. Özkizilcik is an employee of The Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA)², a policy think tank based in Ankara, Turkey known for its close ties to the Turkish government³. SETA's founder İbrahim Kalın is a chief adviser to President Erdoğan and presidential spokesperson since 2014⁴. Apart from his work with Süriye Gundemi, Mr. Özkizilcik appears on Turkish state-funded propaganda channel TRT World and writes for other Turkish government-backed publications.

These factions' participation in Operation Olive Branch and the subsequent occupation of Afrin is well-documented elsewhere, but the order of battle as published by Süriye Gundemi is used here as a source all parties can accept as either neutral or aligned with the Turkish government.

1 <http://en.suriyegundemi.com/turkish-backed-organization-which-will-take-part-in-a-likely-military-operation-east-of-the-euphrates-the-national-army/>

2 <https://thenewturkey.org/author/omerozkizilcik>

3 <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dusluyor-dusunuyor-ve-karar-aldiriyorlar-17844234>

4 <https://www.mei.edu/experts/ibrahim-kalin>