


PKK/YPG INSTRUMENTALIZES ISIS TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY

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Taking advantage of the Syrian war, the criminals and terrorist suspects who were released from Iraqi prisons gained a great influence on the field. They brought the pro-freedom-and-change revolution initiated by Syrian civilians to a point of criminalizing it and caused a terror wave that spread all over the world.

Since 2014, the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS and Turkey's military operations in Northern Syria have prevented ISIS from spreading in Iraq. The operations took a big blow and led to the ineffectiveness of many ISIS fighters. Many members of the organization have either been killed or gathered in camps controlled by the PYD/YPG, PKK branch in Syria; another terrorist organization who is ironically supported by the international coalition.

It is estimated that more than 50,000 men and women from different countries joined ISIS, where almost 10% of which come from European countries. Although many ISIS members have been ineffective between 2014 and 2019, recent events show that tens of thousands of them are still held as a trump card in PYD/YPG-controlled camps. Even when most of them are women and children, the PYD/YPG portrays these people as those involved in terrorism. It is seen that the PYD uses these prisoners to legitimize its own 'political existence' and to establish 'official communication' and 'diplomatic relations' internationally.

ISIS is now mostly dissolved in Syria and Iraq, but it is still allowed to operate in a limited and controlled area in the southern deserts of Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa. Because of the presence of a

small ISIS group left in these regions, the PYD/YPG has the opportunity to gain the support of the international coalition and increase its legitimacy in the international arena. The PYD/YPG, which puts pressure on Western countries using ISIS as an excuse, gains military, political and diplomatic support from the international community.

Furthermore, ISIS is not only an issue limited to Syria or its surrounding regions; it is an international security problem that closely concerns Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Therefore, it can be seen that this security sensitivity created by ISIS is used against fragile states, mostly the Balkans and Central Asia.

Moreover, legitimizing terrorist organizations like the PYD/YPG threatens the national integrity of sovereign countries like Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. These countries have been attacked by the PYD/YPG multiple times in deadly suicide bombings that killed civilians in urban areas. In short, all these developments in the region indicate that the upcoming period will be more complex between NATO allies.

The PYD/YPG, which controls more than 30% of Syria's richest oil fields, natural gas, water and agriculture, uses ISIS prisoners to gain international legitimacy. Reports made by many international human rights organizations, especially the United Nations, clearly reveal how the PYD/YPG is using ISIS for their own interest.

In a report published in July 2020 by the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs), sources from the infamous al-Hol camp in Northeast Syria confirm that the Kurdish forces are releasing ISIS terrorists in return for money. The WCA has sources who work in this camp and who are kept anonymous to protect their safety. They have learned that the Syrian ISIS prisoners there are freed for at least \$1,800 per person, whereas the foreigners are worth at least \$10,000 per person; note that in this region an average family can live with approximately \$200 per month.

Local Aramean Christians condemn this form of corruption, which also threatens the security and stability of this volatile region.¹

In 2015, the PYD/YPG provoked ISIS to attack Christian villages such as Tel Goran on the Khabur River to annex and occupy them. It is also well-known among Aramean Christians that the PYD/YPG with its divide-and-rule tactics have been paying a tiny group of Aramean puppets to promote their romanticized and misleading narrative of a democratic society in Rojava ("Western Kurdistan"). For instance, more than 90% of the "Syriac Military Council" (MFS), being the counterpart of the YPG Kurds, consists of non-Christian Arabs and former ISIS fighters who have been recruited by the PYD/YPG Kurds, who ultimately are controlling the MFS.²

In another report, the BBC has uncovered details of a 'secret deal' that let hundreds of IS fighters and their families escape from Raqqa, under the gaze of the US and British-led coalition and Kurdish-led forces who control the city. The deal to let IS fighters escape from Raqqa had been arranged by local officials. It came after four months of fighting that left the city obliterated and almost devoid of people. According to the deal, the lives of the Arab, Kurdish and other fighters opposing IS would be spared. But it also enabled hundreds of IS fighters to escape from the city. At the time, neither the US and British-led coalition, nor the SDF, which it backs, wanted to admit their part in the business. However, footage secretly filmed and passed to BBC shows lorries towing trailers crammed with armed men. Despite an agreement to take only personal weapons, IS fighters took everything they could carry. Ten trucks were loaded with weapons and ammunition.³

In December 2020, the news that Advisor to the Vice Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan Mehriddin Khairiddinov visited Northern Syria and met with PYD/YPG terrorists in order to bring back Uzbek citizens

from Syria to Uzbekistan clearly shows that the PYD/YPG has used terrorism as a ‘political tool’ for legitimacy.

Apart from the moral and humanitarian dimension of the political rent, the PYD/YPG shows that the tolerance depicted by the global actors operating intensively in the region - under

the name of combating terrorism – to PYD’s terrorist trade goes unnoticed. While the PYD tries to show itself as a legitimate actor in the international arena by using ISIS elements in this way, other countries that give political and logistical support to it also turn a blind eye to this situation.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://wca-ngo.org/wca-news/press-releases/628-pyd-security-releasing-isis-prisoners-in-syria-in-exchange-for-money>,
- ² https://wca-ngo.org/images/Syria_2020/WCA_PR_

- PYD_Security_Releases_ISIS_prisoners_in_NE_Syria_090720.pdf
- ³ https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret