**TURKEY-BACKED JIHADISTS IN SYRIA CALL WOMEN 'WHORES,' EXECUTE PRISONERS**

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NATO member Turkey has sent hundreds of far-right extremists that it recruited under the banner of the Syrian National Army to fight in Syria. It has used them as both shock troops and canon fodder to fight mostly Kurdish forces along the border, but as a ceasefire began last week these units turned to looting attacking civilians and mutilating corpses, according to videos they posted online. The US says human rights violations may be occurring. Kurdish activists wonder why NATO stands behind religious extremists whose statements look little different than ISIS.

The first videos of jihadists being sent to fight Kurds under the banner of ‘Syrian rebel’ groups appeared in the lead-up to Turkey’s offensive on October 9. Videos showed men waving swords and chanting about “killing the kuffar” or “infidels,” terminology often used by ISIS. On October 12 a video emerged of a group executing two Kurdish detainees by the side of a road in Syria. According to reports it took place near the M4 highway inside Syria.

Another group of Turkish-backed Syrian rebels stopped a convoy of cars that included Future party leader Hevrin Khalaf. She was dragged from the car by her hair, shot and her body stomped on. Members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, one of many groups in the SNA, were accused of the attack. Video showed the cars being stopped and the aftermath with her lifeless body covered in dirt while the jihadists praise God for helping them murder an unarmed woman. Initial reports said she had been “stoned to death,” but the autopsy said she had been been beaten on the head, beaten on the leg, “dragged from her hair causing the hair to take off from the skin of the head.” Turkey, a “NATO ally,” as the US describes the country, claimed the murder was a “neutralization” of the woman, “a successful operation,” according to its leading right wing daily Yeni Safak.

On October 16 more extremists were caught on video on a bus singing about killing “infidels” before arriving in Syria. Another video on October 19 alleged to show the execution of civilians near the village of Suluk. A video from the same day shows a unit of Arab fighters backed by Turkey saying they will “behead” the infidels they encounter. The men, with small beards and long hair, say “in just a few hours we will show you the heads.” A video that circulated at that time showed men in fatigues beheading people, but it was unclear where it was from, even though it appeared to be recent and take place in Syria. That video was so graphic it was taken down by social media accounts.

A photo from October 20 shows elements of Jabha al-Shamiya in Tel Abyad, along with members of other groups such as Liwa al-Salam, Faylaq al-Majd of the “Third Legion” painting graffiti on houses belonging to Armenians and Syriac Christians, claiming them for themselves, similar to what ISIS did in Mosul in July 2014. Another photo from the same days shows civilians executed in Sere Kaniye and members of the Sultan Murad group posing with the bodies.

On October 21 a video of a group calling itself Jaish Islam, calls on its members to treat Christians as second-class citizens in areas that are conquered and to make them pay special taxes in accordance with discriminatory religious laws. More accounts that emerged on October 22 showed a man with a beard and his friends celebrating the killing of what they call “the corpses of pigs.” They claim to be from the “mujahideen of Faylaq al-Majd.” The man shows off a dead body of a woman and says “this is one of your whores whom you have sent us. This whore is under our feet.” Another video from the same day shows a member of Ahrar al-Sharqiya hitting a male civilian and calling him a “pig.”

An October 24 video shows more Turkey-backed extremists shouting and holding a woman prisoner. They claim to be fighters from the “Dar Izza regiment” and claim the woman is a “PKK member.”

The pattern of videos emerging tends to show similar incidents and rhetoric. The young men chant and dance and celebrate killing and boast of wanting to murder people who are not members of their religious extremist group. They appear to have been given free rein to do whatever they want in the area Turkey calls a “safe zone” in northern Syria, a formerly peaceful area where thousands of Kurdish and Arab civilians have now had to flee from. For instance, an October 20 video shows men looting shops in a border community. A day later a video shows a member of the umbrella Syrian National Army tell the men not to loot homes, but only political party offices.

US diplomats have refused to say if these are human rights violations by America’s NATO ally. NATO has only called for Turkey to show restraint.

Among many Kurdish activists there is anger that a western-backed military would use extremists, many expressing views similar to ISIS, to attack them, even when western governments had been asking the SDF to continue fighting ISIS. US lawmakers such as Senator Chris Van Hollen have expressed outrage that “Turkey and others have been allowed to slaughter” America’s Kurdish allies, according to a statement he made on October 23.

The behavior of the Turkey-backed groups and Turkey’s unwillingness to rein them in, monitor them or even take responsibility for their actions, appears to show that these Syrian rebel groups have been allowed to do whatever they want on the Syrian side of the border, transforming peaceful towns into centers of looting as the men glory in mutilating bodies and calling women “whores” and Kurdish men “pigs.” Little separates these groups from the videos and rhetoric of ISIS when it controlled this same area in 2014 before the SDF was able to defeat ISIS in eastern Syria. Hatred of women, hatred of non-Muslims and calling ethnic minorities “pigs”, as well as orgies of toxic male violence and mutilation of bodies, are all ISIS-like qualities. It remains to be seen if the US will investigate the alleged war crimes and if Russia’s agreement with Turkey will prevent further abuses.