

UN investigation delves into Daesh's crimes against Yazidis

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-13 22:43

LONDON: A UN investigation into atrocities committed against Yazidis and others in Iraq will do more than simply gather information that will molder in an archive, the probe's leader said on Wednesday, it will help bring perpetrators to justice.

The team, led by British lawyer Karim Asad Ahmad Khan began its work in August, a year after it was approved the UN Security Council.

Speaking on the sidelines of a London event celebrating Yazidi activist Nadia Murad – who won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize – Khan said the investigation will get into full gear in 2019.

“We will be pushing forward with greater capacity next year once we have a budget from the United Nations,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The investigation aims to collect and preserve evidence of acts by Daesh in Iraq that may be war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. In September 2017 – after a year of talks with Iraq – the UN council adopted a resolution asking UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to create the team “to support domestic efforts” to hold the militants accountable.

The evidence gathered is primarily for use by Iraqi authorities.

Whether that evidence will then be shared with international courts, will “be determined in agreement with the Government of Iraq on a case-by-case basis,” according to the resolution.

“This mandate was not created to create simply an archive that would gather dust,” said Khan.

“Our bid is ... to ensure that the best possible evidence is presented, is preserved, is collected. The necessary investigations are committed so that those who committed these horrendous acts are subjected to the vigour of the law.”

UN experts warned in June 2016 that Daesh was committing genocide against the Yazidis in Syria and Iraq, destroying the minority religious community through killings, sexual slavery and other crimes.

Supporters of the Yazidi cause have expressed irritation at delays the probe has faced.

“Four years have passed since the crimes of genocide committed against Yazidis but we have seen no justice as yet for the victims and survivors,” Karwan Tahir, the Kurdish regional government's representative in Britain

told the London event.

About 7,000 women and girls were captured in northwest Iraq in August 2014 and held by Daesh in Mosul where they were tortured and raped.

Murad, a young Yazidi woman who was enslaved and raped by Islamic State fighters in Mosul in 2014, and international human rights lawyer Amal Clooney have long pushed Iraq to allow UN investigators to help.



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Iraqi Yazidis celebrate restoration of temple destroyed by Daesh
Yazidis caught in “political football” between Baghdad, Iraqi Kurds

[Israel to approve thousands of unauthorized West Bank settler homes](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Thu, 2018-12-13 18:40

JERUSALEM: Israel is to authorize thousands of the settler homes built illegally in the occupied West Bank, some of them decades ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday.

The move is likely to please pro-settler members of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition while angering Palestinians, who want the West Bank as part of a future state.

"Arranging the rights for the homes allows thousands of residents to be provided with infrastructure of public buildings, educational and religious buildings," Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

It did not give a specific number of homes but Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked tweeted that more than 2,000 homes would be getting permits.

Some 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas that are also home to more than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Settlements are one of the most heated issues in efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, frozen since 2014.

In August, an Israeli court broke new ground, and infuriated Palestinians, by giving legal recognition to the Jewish outpost of Mitzpe Kramim, built without government authorization on privately owned Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Palestinians want the West Bank for a future state, along with East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Most countries consider all settlements that Israel has built in territory it captured in the 1967 Middle East war to be illegal. Israel disputes this and says their future should be determined in peace talks with the Palestinians. Netanyahu also said he would try to advance plans for 82 new housing units in the Jewish settlement of Ofra and two West Bank industrial zones.

Netanyahu last month faced a challenge from the far-right after his defense minister resigned and lashed out at the government's acceptance of a cease-fire with the Palestinian militant group Hamas amid a surge in Gaza violence. Other far-right ministers had threatened to quit, but later backed down.



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Israeli forces kill Palestinian suspected over West Bank shooting
Airbnb to remove listings in West Bank settlements

[Pentagon cautions Turkey over new operation against Syria Kurds](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-13 21:51

Any unilateral military action in northern Syria would be “unacceptable,” the Pentagon said Wednesday after Turkey announced it would launch an operation against a US-backed Kurdish militia.

The warning came after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would soon begin a mission targeting the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara considers a “terrorist” group.

"We will start an operation to free the east of the Euphrates from the separatist terrorist organization in the next few days," Erdogan said during a speech in Ankara, referring to territory held by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

American forces have worked closely with the YPG under the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance, which has played a key role in the war against the Daesh extremist group

The Pentagon has repeatedly warned that any fighting between the Turks and the SDF is a dangerous distraction from the core US mission in Syria of fighting Daesh.

Pentagon spokesman Commander Sean Robertson said any unilateral military action in northeast Syria would be a "grave concern," as it could potentially jeopardize US troops working with the SDF in the region.

"We would find any such actions unacceptable," he said in a statement.

Turkey says the YPG is a "terrorist offshoot" of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

PKK is blacklisted as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies.

"The target is never American soldiers but terrorist organization members active in the region," Erdogan told the audience at a defense industry summit.

Flashpoint

American forces are with the SDF east of the Euphrates as well as in the flashpoint city of Manbij, which is west of the river.

"We should not and cannot allow Daesh to breathe at this critical point or we will jeopardize the significant gains we have made alongside our coalition partners and risk allowing Daesh to resurge," Robertson said.

The YPG also said a Turkish offensive would be to the benefit of Daesh.

"The (Turkish) threats coincide with the advance of our forces against the terrorists, this time with the entrance into the town of Hajjin," YPG spokesman Nuri Mahmud said.

The SDF launched an offensive on September 10 to expel IS from the Hajjin pocket, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River close to the Iraqi border.

"Any attack on the north of Syria will have a direct impact on the battle of Hajjin. The forces who are fighting (there) will return to defend their areas and their families," Mahmud said.

Washington's relationship with the YPG, seen as a key ally, is one of the main sources of tensions between the United States and NATO member Turkey.

Ankara has repeatedly lambasted Washington for providing military support to the Kurdish militia.

Erdogan has previously threatened to attack areas held by the YPG. In a bid to avoid any clash, the NATO allies agreed a "roadmap" for Manbij in June.

Erdogan's comments came a day after the Pentagon announced the setting up of US observation posts on the northeast Syria border region intended to prevent altercations between the Turkish army and the YPG despite calls from Ankara not to go ahead with the move.

Erdogan claimed Turkey was not being protected from terrorists but "terrorists were being protected" from possible action by Turkey.

Elizabeth Teoman, analyst at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), said Erdogan may be threatening the attacks "to compel a change in US policy regarding the US observation posts along the Syrian-Turkish border."

She added that "Turkey may attempt to target YPG rear areas without a definitive US presence in the form of an observation posts."

Turkey has previously launched two operations in northern Syria. The first offensive began in August 2016 with Turkish forces supporting Syrian opposition fighters against IS and was completed by March 2017.

Then in January 2018, Turkish military forces backed Syrian rebels to clear the YPG from its northwestern enclave of Afrin.

In March, the operation was completed with the capture of Afrin city.



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Erdogan threatens to launch military operation against Syria Kurd militia 'within days' Washington says observation posts in place on Syria-Turkey border

[2 babies die at camp for displaced in Jordan](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-13 21:37

AMMAN: Two babies have died of illness in the past week at a camp for displaced people on the Syrian border with Jordan, the UN children's agency UNICEF said Thursday.

The deaths prompted UNICEF to reiterate calls for humanitarian access for the thousands of people at Rukban camp, which lies in an inhospitable stretch of desert.

"Another sad week for children and families in Rukban. Two sick babies under six months old died in Rukban," said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Freezing temperatures and lack of supplies including of basic commodities, threaten the lives of nearly 45,000 people – among them many children, leaving them at the risk of disease and death," he said in a statement.

Last month the UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent announced the first delivery of humanitarian aid at Rukban in 10 months.

Civilians trapped at the camp face the risk of starvation amid a deteriorating humanitarian situation after Jordan sealed its border following a Daesh attack on its soldiers.

Soon afterwards, the army declared Jordan's desert regions that stretch northeast to Syria and east to Iraq "closed military zones."

Amman believes the responsibility of the camp lies with Damascus since it is inside Syrian territory.

Syria has been embroiled in a civil war that killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since it started with the brutal repression of anti-government protests in 2011.



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US-backed Syrian forces smash Daesh defenses in east Syrian state seizes opponents' property, rights activists say

[Jordan braces for more anti-austerity protests](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Thu, 2018-12-13 16:34

AMMAN: Jordanian authorities deployed hundreds of riot police in the capital and warned activists to stay within the law on Thursday ahead of another protest against the government's tough austerity measures backed by the International Monetary Fund.

Large demonstrations in the summer managed to bring down the previous government over an unpopular IMF-backed tax bill.

Protesters have held sporadic protests over the past two weeks and a judicial source said authorities had detained several people for chanting slogans

critical of King Abdullah as well as the government.

“(For) anyone who breaches the law there will be punishment,” government spokeswoman Jumana Ghunaimat told reporters on Thursday.

“There are those who want to sow destruction... We must safeguard Jordan’s stability and security,” she said, adding that the government wanted dialogue.

The latest protests erupted after a largely pliant parliament last month approved a tax bill widely seen as making few changes to the unpopular law scrapped after the summer demonstrations.

Many Jordanians say the government, which faces a record public debt of around \$40 billion and desperately needs to raise revenue, is eroding the disposable incomes of poorer and middle class Jordanians while letting the wealthy off the hook.

The protesters complain that Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, appointed by King Abdullah after the summer protests, has not delivered on promises to jail corrupt officials and businessmen.

They also say he has sought public support for tough economic measures while failing to curb lavish public expenditure and improve public services, and that he should resign.

Jordan suffers from high unemployment, with regional conflicts weighing on business confidence. Poor economic growth has reduced tax revenues, forcing Jordan to borrow heavily abroad and also to resort to more domestic financing.



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