

War crimes by Israel and Turkey

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The Kurdish regions are rarely mainstream news, and at the moment all eyes are on the genocide in Gaza. Among last week's Israeli war crimes, two stood out in particular, not only for the insight they give into the dystopian nature of the Israeli government, but also because they echo examples from the oppression of the Kurds.

The first was the [assassination](#) on Tuesday of three men, as they lay sleeping in a Jenin hospital, by Israeli forces disguised as doctors and nurses and other civilians. One of the men was a patient being treated for serious injuries, and the others were his brother and a friend. No one is denying that all three were members of militant organisations, but the Geneva Convention is [absolutely clear](#) that the “wounded or sick, shall be respected and protected in all circumstances” and “[a]ny attempts upon their lives, or violence to their persons, shall be strictly prohibited”. If Israel believed the men were planning an attack, as they claim, all three could have been arrested and tried in court. They should not have been killed in an extra-judicial killing, and especially not in the sanctuary of a hospital.

In May 1997, in what has become known as the [Hewlêr Massacre](#), the Peşmerga of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) entered a hospital in Erbil (Hewlêr), rounded up eighty wounded Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) soldiers, and murdered them. This was just a few days after the KDP had welcomed a major Turkish cross-border operation to attack PKK bases in the mountains, and co-operation between the KDP and Turkey is even stronger today.

I am not attempting to draw an equivalence between the PKK and Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Rather, I am pointing out similarities between the illegal actions of those fighting against them: Israel and Turkey and their allies.

I am also reminded of the [hospital lynchings of the Şenyaşar family](#) in 2018, which left the father and two sons dead and three other sons severely injured. This was not technically a war crime, but was part of the perpetual war waged by the Turkish state against the Kurdish population. The men – ordinary citizens, not militants – were in hospital following an attack on them in their shop by the entourage of former Justice and Welfare Party (AKP) MP, İbrahim Halil Yıldız, who visited the shop during his election campaign and was asked to leave. While they were being murdered, leading AKP figures and the local police chief were in the hospital garden.

The other Israeli war crime I want to highlight – or rather announcement of planned war crimes – is the massive and ecstatic [settler conference](#) held in Jerusalem last Sunday, where speakers included Israel’s National Security

Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. There were twelve government ministers at the conference in total, and fifteen other members of the Knesset. Thousands of attendees were greeted with a map of proposed settlements in Gaza on land where everything Palestinian is currently being destroyed, including the possibility of life. The conference also talked about expanding settlements in the West Bank.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may currently be saying that Israel will not remain in Gaza, but two weeks before the Hamas attack, he was [brandishing a map](#) of the Middle East at the United Nations General Assembly where the shape marked Israel encompassed the Gaza Strip and West Bank and the illegally annexed Golan Heights, and there was no mention of Palestine.

Almost exactly four years earlier, and shortly before he ordered the invasion of Serêkanyê and Girê Spî, Turkey's President Erdoğan had [held up a map of Syria](#) in front of UN delegates, with a red line cutting off a 30km deep and 480km long strip of land along the northern border. This land, which he dubbed a "peace corridor", is part of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, and Erdoğan claimed that Turkey would turn it into a "safe zone" and use it to settle two million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey. As can be seen in the part of that strip that Turkey subsequently occupied, and also in Turkish-occupied Afrîn, life under Turkish occupation is very far from safe.

The occupied areas have been put under the day-to-day control of the Islamist militias supported by Turkey, who treat them as their own fiefdoms. Many former inhabitants have fled to escape the tyranny of the occupying forces. Those that remain are subjected to [a hell on earth](#) of extortions, kidnappings, pillage, and extreme gratuitous violence. This hasn't prevented the forced "repatriation" of thousands of Syrian refugee families from Turkey, and Turkey has also encouraged settlement by the families of their Islamist mercenaries. Charities from Turkey's friends in Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Palestine, as well as from Turkey itself, have [funded settlements](#) to help with this deliberate

plan for demographic change, which has seen the Kurdish population of Afrîn drop from over 95% to less than a quarter.

Linking all these examples is the support of the United States and its friends. America bankrolls Israel – and could withdraw vital support tomorrow if they wanted – as well as vetoing all criticism of Israel in the UN Security Council. And America has always supported their NATO ally Turkey against the PKK, and turned a blind eye to their attacks on the Kurdish population in general. Despite partnering with North and East Syria's Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against ISIS, the United States has allowed Turkey to attack North and East Syria with impunity.

Turkey's attacks against the Kurds have not reached the horrific intensity of the genocide in Gaza, but every atrocity that the world allows to happen in one place emboldens the perpetrators of attacks in others.

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