



Til Temir – A District Under Constant Attack



Til Temir

Til Temir is a small town in the Cizîrê region in North and East Syria (NES) that is with its surrounding villages of special ethnic and strategic significance. It has a population of estimated 25,000 people and lies 30km away from the Turkish border. To this day, it is administered by the Autonomous Self-Administration of North and East Syria, defying several attacks by Turkey and driving out ISIS after a very short-lived attempt by ISIS to hold the area. Til Temir is situated exactly at the southeastern corner of the zone occupied by Turkey since 2019 where important areas, namely Girê Spî and Serêkaniyê fell into the hands of Turkey. The Christian Assyrians that are still in the wider region populate foremostly the Til Temir area and connected places in the Xabûr Valley. Within the confederalism of the Autonomous Self-Administration North and East Syria, Assyrians self-organized with various civilian and military bodies, directly cooperating with all the other peoples present, of which Arabs and Kurds constitute the majority today. With the threat of another Turkish invasion, the livelihood of the people in Til Temir is under immediate threat, after this region was subjected to regular shelling all along since the occupation of Serêkaniyê despite a declared ceasefire



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The Strategic Position of Til Temir

Til Temir (“Hill of Dates”; also: Tell Tamer, Tal Tamer, Tal Tamr) lies exactly at the southeastern corner of the occupied territory between Girê Spî and Serêkaniyê, in direct vicinity of the frontline with Turkey and Turkish-backed fascist mercenaries operating from that territory. Furthermore, it is situated directly along the highway M4, which is a vital connection for transport connecting the western canton of Cizîrê with the eastern cantons of Euphrate and Shehba/Efrîn and is regarded by Erdogan to serve as the guiding line for the 30km strip Turkey wants to annex from Syria. The M4 used to connect Mosul in Iraq with Aleppo, reaching further even until Latakia and is thus a central means of transportation and infrastructure of the region.

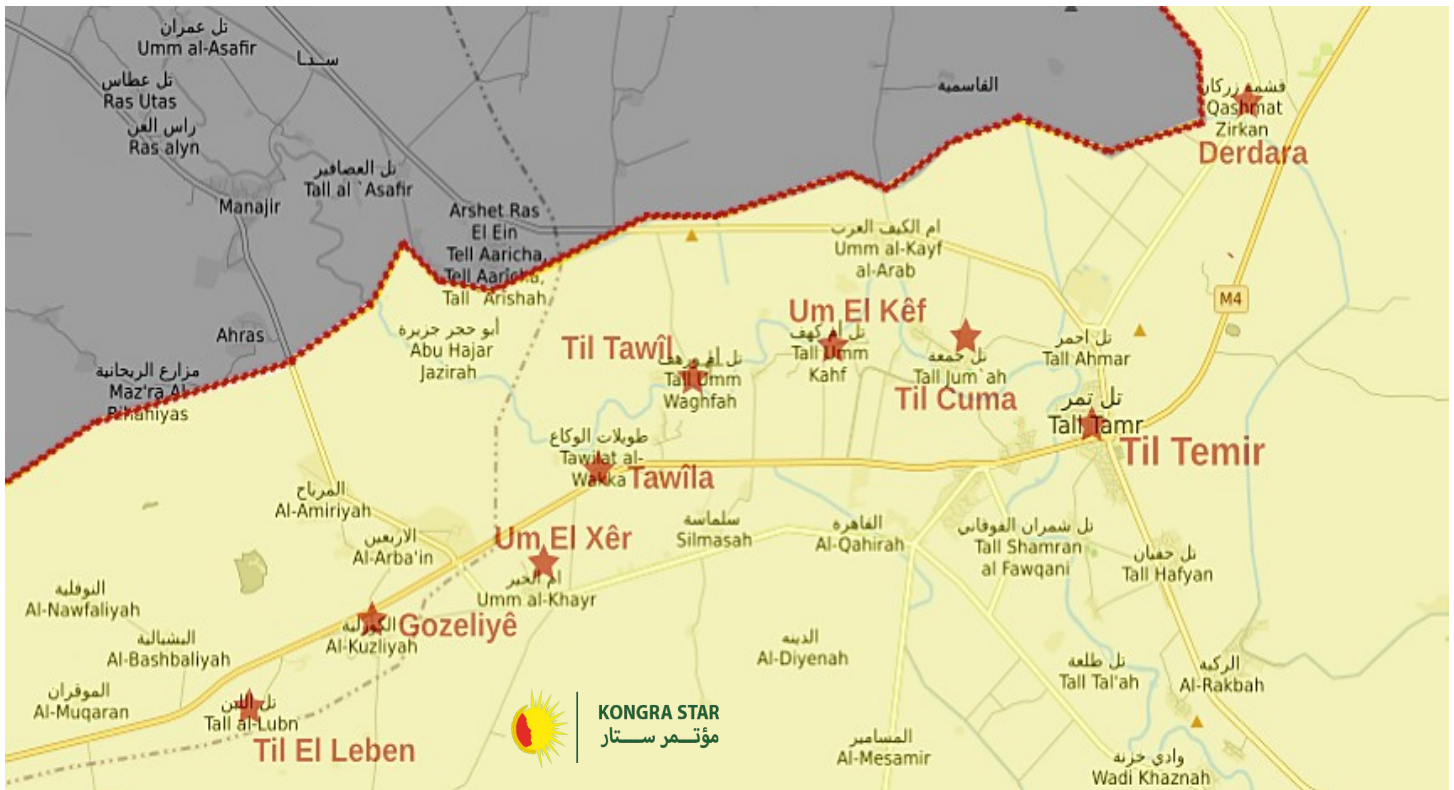
Constant Attacks On The Region

Not only in the recent days, but generally since the occupation of Serêkaniyê, the villages along the frontline in Til Temir region west of the town and all the way up to the north to the Turkish state border, have been subject to regular shelling. Thus, the area was for the last three years in a constant state of low-intensity warfare, presenting an ongoing threat to the people of the region. The Til Temir Military Council, including the Syriac Military Council and the Assyrian Xabûr Guards, is positioned all along the frontline and was able to thwart several invasion attempts. Regularly, fighters of SDF as well as civilians are martyred.

In the last 2 weeks, the villages of Til Temir and Zirgan have been shelled with at least 524 heavy artillery bombs. However, already for almost three years the region is facing constant shelling and the destruction of civilian homes, schools, and municipalities, with the aim of at scaring people and make them leave the area (maps in appendix). Some recent examples of attacks:

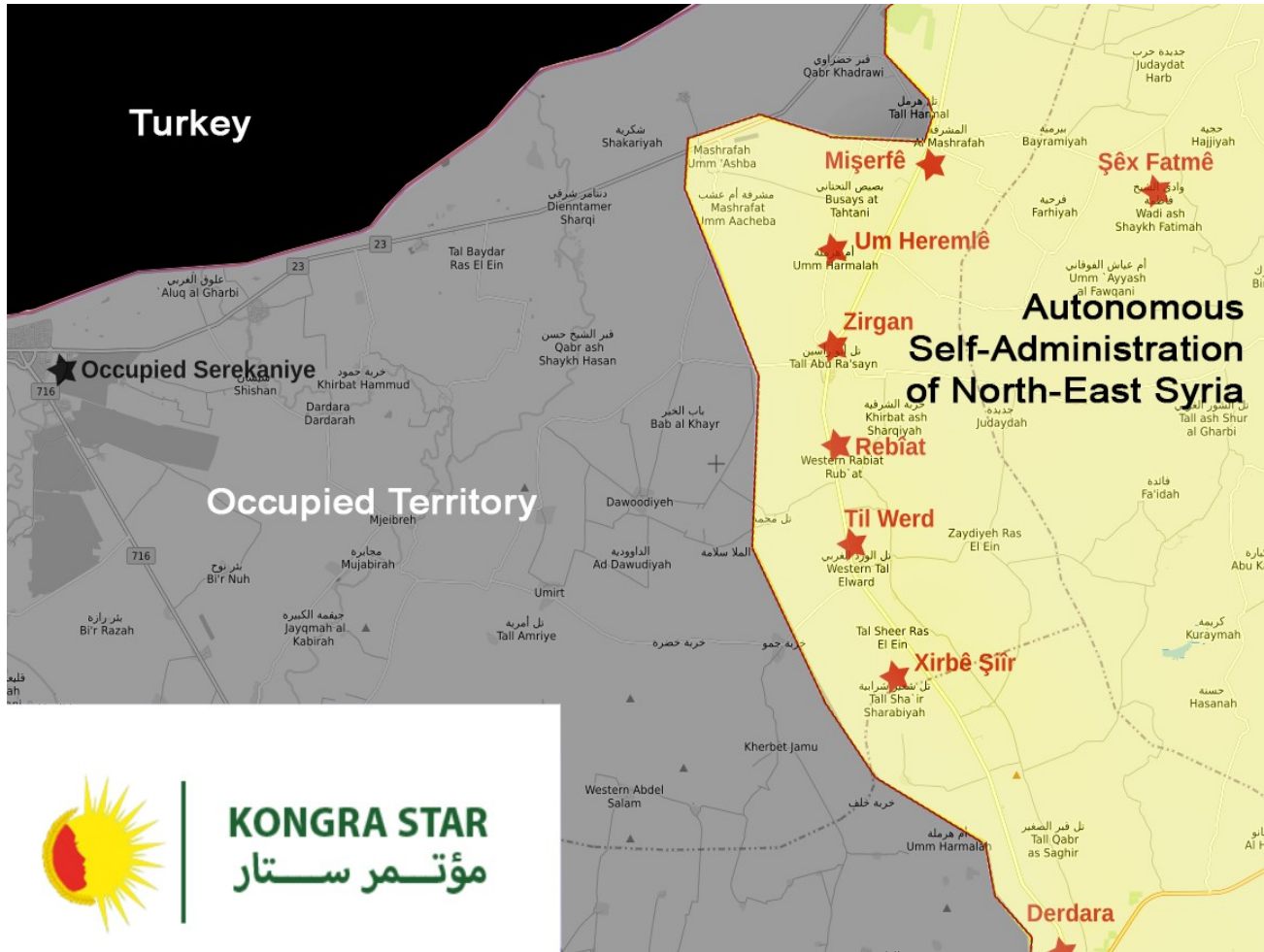
- In May 2022, the Assyrian church in the village of Tawil was directly targeted and destroyed.
- On September 30, 2022 shelling of the local high voltage lines causes the 29th power outage as a result of attacks in Til Temir and the countryside.
- On December 3, 2022 four children in the village of El-Mucibra were injured due to an explosion of an earlier Turkish shelling.
- On December 4, 2022 the municipality building of Zirgan was destroyed.
- On December 6, 2022 the only bakery in the region in the village of Rebiat was destroyed.

A co-chair of the Council of Zirgan stated, that in the last three years, a third of the district, that means every third house, has been destroyed, mostly municipality buildings, schools, and other infrastructure. Additionally, 400 houses of villagers were destroyed. Turkey is aiming at emptying out the area from its indigenous population, while at the same time not causing too much public attention and therefore mostly targeting houses and infrastructure. Nevertheless, constantly civilians are losing their life due to the shelling.¹



Map of the villages of Til Temir, which are frequently being attacked

¹ <https://www.hawarnews.com/kr/haber/hevserok-meclisa-zirgan-syeka-navcey-wran-bye-h69337.html?fbclid=IwAR3ZeWf-ddFzoYgkiBYn0xkDn-FyxbWsHVgVbK06lVWU8iLiBtUNN5ho2cc>



Map of the villages of Ziran, which are frequently being attacked

In August 2021, a building of the SDF military council in the town of Til Temir was struck by a drone, leaving four dead and the building entirely destroyed.² Those martyred were precious comrades and high ranking members of the military. On this day martyred through fascist state violence were Sosin Bîrhat from Efrîn, an inspiring YPJ commander and member of the military council, who had been working for the revolution since the beginning, Egîd Girkêlegê, commander of the military council of Til Temir and two more SDF/military council fighters. The council's neighbor building is the hospital Şehîd Legerin of the local NGO Heyva Sor, the only public hospital in town. It too got heavily affected and due to this bombing only half of the hospital is usable to this day.

²<https://anfenglishmobile.com/rojjava-syria/sdf-remembers-commanders-and-fighters-martyred-in-turkish-attack-one-year-ago-61959>



Images of the destroyed building and the Şehîds

If Turkey is to expand the occupation zone eastwards, this would directly mean attacks on the villages in the Til Temir region and even the town itself, despite it laying directly beyond to the 30km line. Defeating Til Temir would mean for Turkey to occupy further vast land. Territory where now women live more free and self-organized, where they have agency to shape their own life with all the people around them. Where women are resisting the statist and patriarchal mindset and violence, at home and in institutions like the Mala Jin where women can turn to for any problems and conflicts in their lives and together with other women find good solutions. And directly at the front or in internal security forces like the Asayîş and other forces, where the women of Rojava change the image of women on a global scale as they take up arms to defend genocidal attacks after having suffered dozens of massacres and various forms of oppression in the past. A place where people with different national and religious identities cannot only live, but express themselves in their collective way of living, follow their customs, and carry on and transform their traditions, keeping history alive and dynamic.



Image of the Green House in Til Temir and a meeting to set up a women's cooperative

Historical Background and Demography

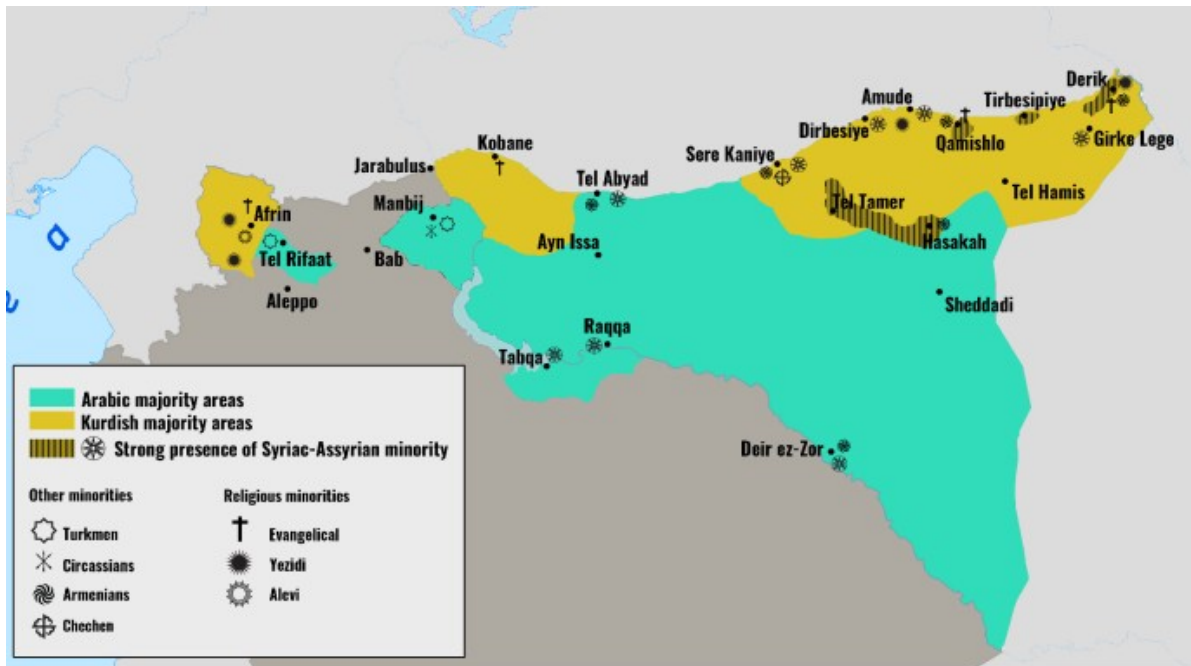
Til Temir – Home of The Largest Concentration of Assyrians Remaining In Syria



Fotos from 1939

The town of Til Temir and many surrounding villages in the province of Heseke were founded in the 1930's by Assyrian refugees, the area in which until today the largest concentration of Assyrians in Syria are living, still making up a considerable minority of the population alongside Kurds and Arabs. In the district of Til Temir are 33 Assyrian villages situated, 5 of them have been emptied due to the attacks by ISIS and Turkey in the last years.³

³ <https://npasyria.com/en/38311/>



Map of ethnic majorities by the Rojava Information Center

In the face of the attacks by the fascist gangs of the so-called Syrian National Army (SNA, also called ‘Free Syrian Army’) that started 2012 in the region, many of the Assyrians in the area fled their villages out of fear of another genocide. In 2013, the Assyrians who stayed took part in the Syriac Military Council and called the People’s Defense Units YPG for help in order to defend the area against the fascist gangs. For example in the case of the village of Al-Tawîla, YPG successfully managed to protect the village. ISIS managed to capture the villages on the south bank of the Xabûr river for a short time in February 2015 in their so called Heseke operation, and kidnapped 350 Assyrians, killing many of them while others were let go after a ransom was paid.⁴ Before the ISIS attack, there were about 20 thousand Assyrians in Til Temir and the Xabûr Basin.⁵ Turkey aims at emptying the areas from all minorities not fitting into the Turkish imperial plans and uses ISIS for this end.

Shamoun Kaku, official of the Assyrian Democratic Party in Til Temir describes the threat of a Turkish invasion as “The Devastation Spring for the Assyrians”.⁶ Referring to his people in the region, he states: “They live in panic and fear because of the constant threat of another displacement and

4 <https://npasyria.com/en/54910/> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/world/middleeast/more-assyrian-christians-captured-as-isis-attacks-villages-in-syria.html>

5 <https://npasyria.com/en/54910/>

6 <https://npasyria.com/en/38311/>



genocide.”⁷ Co-chair of Til Temir council Ciwan Ayoub expresses that Turkish occupation is directed deliberately against Syriac-Assyrian villages, pointing out to bombings that hit the town specifically during the hour of the Sunday Liturgy.⁸ Churches and graveyards have been targeted specifically by the fascist gangs in their attacks. In May 2022, the church of El Tawîla, an Assyrian village, got destroyed by shelling. The Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Cizîrê and Euphrates, Mar Maurice Amseeh stated that Turkey is showing its clear goal of emptying the area of North and East Syria from Christian minorities.



Image of Destroyed Church

Since 2015, those remaining are determined to stay and withhold Turkish threats. Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs, and other people are determined to defend their city, their livelihood, their survival, the common self-administration and co-existence that they have built up.

Assyrian and Syriac Self-Organization Within The Autonomous Self-Administration

Today, the Syriacs and Assyrians living in the region have established their own self-defense forces as well as political structures inside the system of democratic confederalism established as the Autonomous Self-Administration of North and East Syria. They built up the Syriac Military Council,

⁷ <https://npasyria.com/en/38311/>

⁸ <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2021/08/24/residents-of-tel-tamr-in-north-and-east-syria-stay-put-despite-turkish-aggression/>

the Assyrian Xabûr Guards, and their own security forces, the Sutoro Police, having also a women-only unit, the Bethnahrain Women's Protection Forces.⁹



Representatives from the Bethnahrain Women's Protection Forces, the Syriac Military Council and the Til Temir military council.

On January 9, 2022, the Syriac Military Council on its ninth anniversary expressed that, “We have united with our brothers and comrades from Kurds, Arabs, and other components in northern and eastern Syria, and we have made great sacrifices together in defeating Daesh (ISIS) terrorism that poses a major threat to our people and the world at large.” As in the other components of the SDF, also in the Assyrian-Syriac-Chaldean military forces a women-only unit exists. “Our forces continue to deploy in the frontlines in a way that ensures the protection of civilians and responds to sources of fire within the framework of legitimate defense, and at the same time our forces are participating in various security operations targeting Daesh terrorist cells and in securing Daesh-detainees prisons and camps”, the statement continued. The Syriac Military Council noted in the beginning of 2022 that in its next year-strategy the focus will be on “boosting the qualitative level of our forces, continuing our participation in the fight against terrorism and sleeper cells, and supporting the efforts of the Democratic Autonomous Administration to achieve a national political solution, which guarantees the rights and national demands of our people.”¹⁰

⁹ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/rojava-syria/sutoro-spokesperson-akad-hena-attacks-only-bolster-our-resolve-63200>

¹⁰ <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2022/01/11/syriac-military-council-of-north-and-east-syria-commemorates-9th-anniversary-of-its-founding-at-martyrs-shrine-in-hasakah/>



Syrian Union Party in a commemoration of Şehids

Infobox: The Assyrians

“The Christian Assyrians of North and East Syria are organized around the Assyrian Church of the East (whose followers are also known as Nestorians). Their members lived in Hakkari (in present-day Turkey) until they were killed and driven out of that region during the 1915 genocide. They were resettled across 64 towns in Iraq, but in 1933 they became victims of the Simele massacre committed by the newly-formed Iraqi Army, in which at least 10,000 Assyrians were murdered. About 30,000 survivors fled to the French Syrian protectorate. They established the towns of Heseke and Til Temir and around 35 villages between those two cities, along the Xabûr Valley. This region was home to around 25,000 Syriac-Assyrian people. However, many of them left when ISIS attacked their villages in spring 2015. There is a huge diaspora of Assyrian people all around the world. In the US, the largest community resides, with about half a million members. The Assyrian Church of the East also has a Catholic branch, the Chaldean Church. Today it is the largest church in Iraq and has some parishes in North and East Syria as well. They belong to the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Aleppo that had about 30,000 believers before.”¹¹

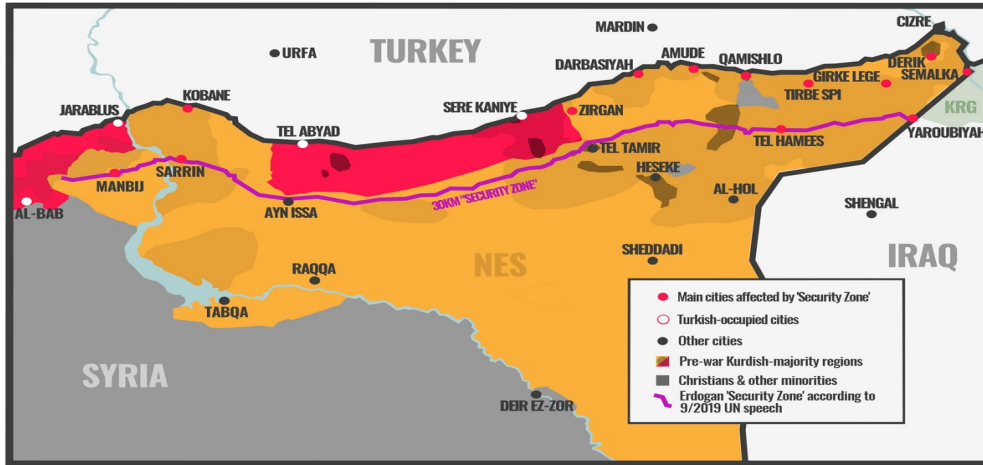
¹¹ <https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/09/after-isis-ensuring-a-future-for-christians-and-other-minorities-in-north-and-east-syria/>



Geopolitical Importance of Til Temir – On the edge of the ‘30km’ zone, directly at the M4

Turkey’s “30km”-Plan To Destabilize The Region

ERDOĞAN'S PROPOSED 'SECURITY ZONE'



RIC ROJAVA
INFORMATION
CENTER

In 2019, Turkey announced its plan to invade a strip of territory reaching 30 km across the Syrian border to create a so-called ‘security zone’. Behind this is a continuation of colonialist and genocidal policies directed against Kurds and other minorities, wanting to empty out the area of them. In the map below, it shows clearly that most big cities with Kurdish majorities or large Christian minorities would be eradicated with this endeavor. Moreover, Turkey and the international forces supporting the plan of an invasion are attacking the self-organized form of life that has been built up within the framework of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, a shining example of democracy and women’s liberation for the whole Middle East. Additionally, Turkey does not want to care for the one million Syrian refugees on its ground. In compliance and with the support of the EU, Erdogan claims to ‘resettle refugees’ in the occupied areas. In reality, Turkey is focusing on ‘demographic engineering’, killing or expelling the Kurdish population and other minorities and ‘resettling’ refugees from different areas of Syria, who fled to Turkey as a result to the civil war after 2011. In the occupied areas, Turkey is destroying the original culture, for instance cutting down millions of trees, especially olive trees, in the occupied areas of Efrîn or destroying old archaeological sites of humanity like Til Xalaf.¹² At the same time, with funds from the US and UK among others, the Turkish state is building new houses to which it is deporting Arab and Turkmen refugees. By now, around 300,000 people have been in this way ‘resettled’ across the occupied Efrîn canton. About 65% of them are the families of SNA and ISIS

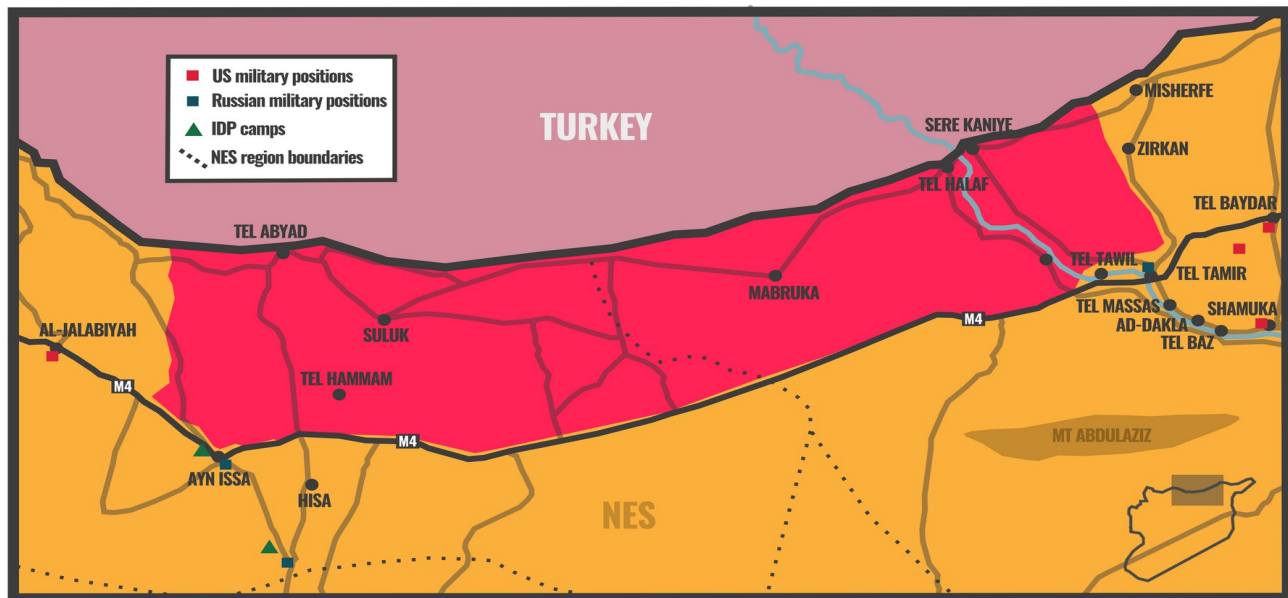
¹²<https://stockholmcf.org/turkish-backed-militias-cut-down-nearly-1-5-mln-trees-in-afirin-report/>



militia men though. The Turkish occupied areas are mostly controlled by fascist groups of the so-called Syrian National Army which are mostly offspring of Al-Qaeda. Until November, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS, former Al-Nusra) was in full control of occupied Efrîn, but was now, at least officially, sent away by Turkey to control the areas of Idlib. This can be traced to its international reputation as a terrorist group and Turkey preparing to get international support for its further invasions of North and East Syria. Representatives of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham remained in the military structures of occupied Efrîn. The Turkish army itself is also setting up military posts throughout all the occupied territory, where Turkish was declared as the official language and Turkish Lira introduced as the official currency.

The Occupation of Serêkaniyê: Violence Against Women, Drug Production and Trafficking, and Hostage Taking

M4 STRIP JUNE 2022



On October 9, 2019 as part of its project of occupation, Turkey invaded territory of North and East Syria which led to the war of Serêkaniyê and Girê Spî where various SDF groups fought to defend not only their homeland but a worldview that builds freedom and peaceful coexistence. After two weeks of fighting, SDF made an agreement with international forces in order to avoid further advances of the



Turkish mercenaries, thus the SDF fighters had to withdraw. The result was that an area of 5,000km² along the border of Turkey including the cities Serêkaniyê and Girê Spî was occupied, reaching 30 km into the territory of North and East Syria, in most parts until the international M4 highway. Today in the occupied area, several divisions of the so-called Syrian National Army hold the areas, engaging in a lot of infighting over control of the territory. Rape, killings, drug production and trafficking are very present in the areas that have been occupied by these fascist gangs.¹³ Turkish forces allowed so-called Syrian National Army militias to profit from the local drug production and distribution, in particular of Captagon pills.¹⁴ There has been countless reports that not only the Kurdish, Yezidi, and Christian population had to face brutal assaults, but also Arab tribal leaders were specifically targeted. In addition to the establishment of areas of control by the various SNA factions, presence of ISIS members has been observed in the region. The International Coalition targeted with deliberate drone strikes former ISIS leaders and commanders, who have sought refuge in Turkish occupied areas, while escapees from Al-Hol camp (a camp with over 50,000 ISIS families) and the ISIS prison escape attempt in Heseke are said to have been smuggled to Serêkaniyê and other parts of the territory occupied by the Turkish state.¹⁵

Serêkaniyê, which is just 40km away from Til Temir, shows the gloomy future in case Turkey manages to invade further territory. At the moment, the two largest factions of the so-called Syrian National Army which are present there and control the frontline together with the Turkish army are the Hamza Division and the Sultan Murad Division together with the Mu'Tasim Division. Especially the control of the border crossing into Turkey is a constant object of conflict between the factions, since the gangs are taking high fees from smugglers trafficking humans, drugs, and goods northbound. The Hamza division is involved in the Captagon production and export and is also controlling parts of the occupied Efrîn area. It is built on committing crimes against humanity, kidnapping and torturing civilians, among them many reported rapes of women. Especially, potential activists or journalists are subject to killings. In a reported case, speaking Kurdish was enough to be killed. For example on October 9, the media activist Muhammad Abdullatif was assassinated together with his wife by the Hamza Division in the occupied city of Al-Bab. SNA factions are deployed in frontlines in northern Syria. Recently, the Hamza division has been merged with other factions into the Second Division of the SNA. North of Til Temir operate Sultan Murad Division, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, and Sham Legion, formerly part of the so called Third Division together with the Suqour al-Sham Brigades, Jaysh al-Islam and Mu'tasim Division. The Sultan Murad Division has been involved in destroying archaeological sites in Efrîn.¹⁶

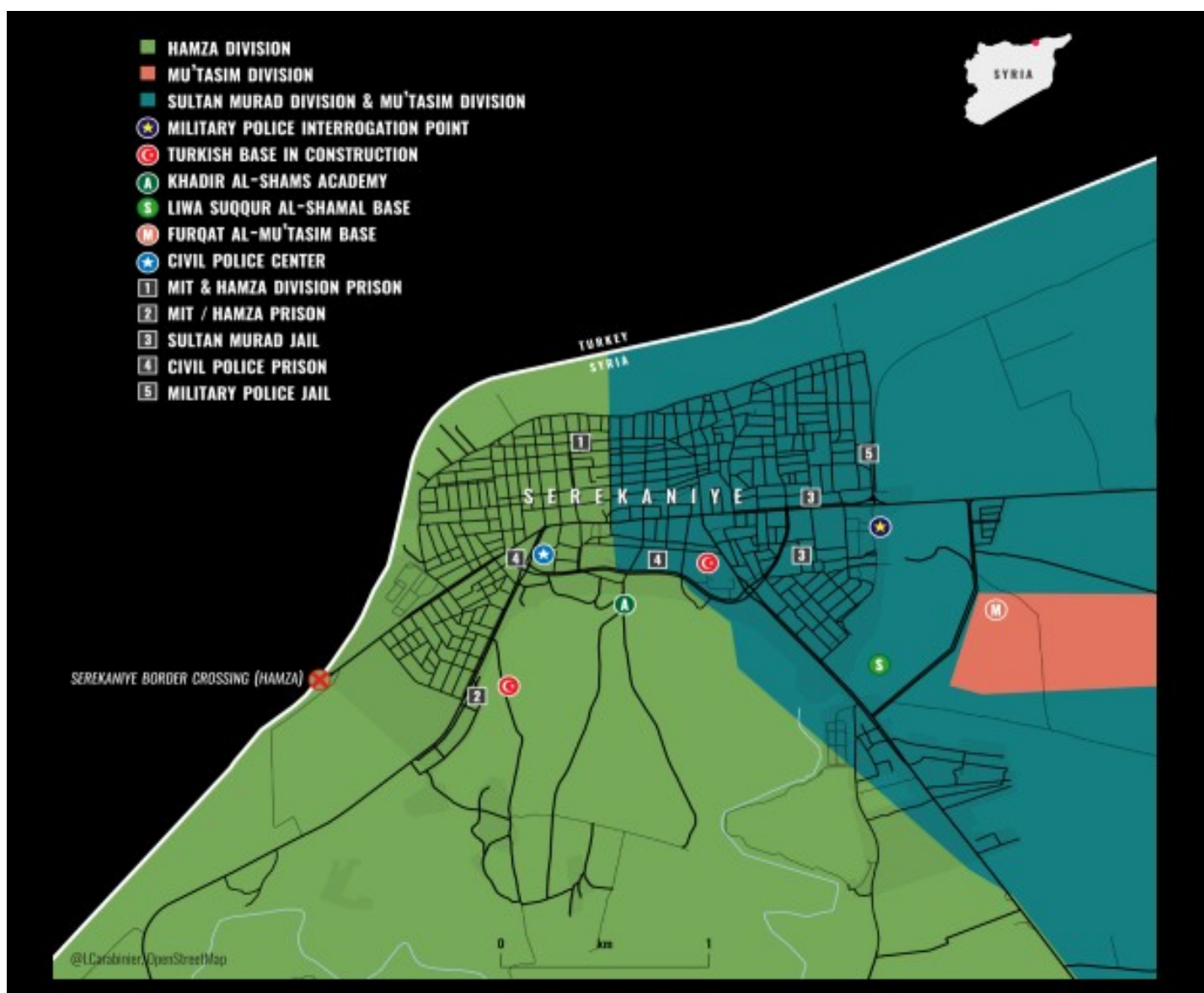
All in all, we can say that, what Turkey wants to establish are not 'security zones', but in reality 'insecurity zones', threatening humanity and cultural heritage.

¹³<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/storage/2022/07/Q4-Occupation-Report.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ <https://npasyria.com/en/57036/>

¹⁶<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/storage/2022/07/Q4-Occupation-Report.pdf>:
<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2022/12/turkeys-attacks-in-north-and-east-syria-al-hol-camp-and-the-battle-against-isis/>



Map of occupied Serêkaniyê with SNA fractions¹⁷

¹⁷<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/storage/2022/07/Q4-Occupation-Report.pdf>



Conclusion

If the Til Temir region is to be taken by force under Turkish control, the people in the region face high repression, oppression and assimilation and even have to fear for their lives. Besides the violence of the Turkish state, the people will be subjected to large scale presence of ISIS and other Islamist and fascist groups not only tolerated, but armed and paid by the Turkish state whose ideology puts especially women, children and everybody seen as non-believers at high risk and under huge pressure and violence. In Turkish Islamist neo-Ottoman ideology, there is no place for Kurds, nor for Assyrians and many other minorities. North and East Syria in contrast, can in this regard be seen as an oasis where life can thrive in various forms whence in conversation, cooperation and respect with all the other ones around.

Kongra Star Information Center
December 9, 2022



Resources

<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/09/after-isis-ensuring-a-future-for-christians-and-other-minorities-in-north-and-east-syria/>
<https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2022/07/10-years-of-the-rojava-revolution-much-achieved-still-much-to-come/>
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