



Report

Turkey's Involvement in Syrian Atrocities

A summary of facts, evidence and conclusions



A report by human rights organization **Jubilee Campaign**, in collaboration with the **Aramaic Movement for Human Rights (ABM)**



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Table Of Contents

Reason for report 4

1. Introduction 5

2. Summary 6

3. Background

 3.1. International interest 11

 3.2. Turkey-Syria relations 12

 3.3. Unrest in The Netherlands 13

4. Turkish involvement in Syrian atrocities

 4.1. Turkey’s enabling role for rebels 14

 4.2. Disappearance of two Syrian bishops 17

 4.3. Capture of Kessab 19

 4.4. Use of chemical weapons 20

 4.5. Leaked tapes of ‘false flag war’ 22

 4.6. Turkish arms supplies..... 23

 4.7. ECHR complaint against Turkey 25

5. Turkey and ISIS: an intimate relationship

 5.1. The growth of ISIS 26

 5.2. Turkish support of ISIS 27

6. Recommendations 29

7. Contact 30

Reason for the report



Several members of Dutch Parliament have raised questions about the probability of Turkey's involvement in Syrian atrocities. MP Pieter Omtzigt of the CDA requested at least five clarifications from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Timmermans of recent alarming reports. The Aramaic Movement for Human Rights has been working on this issue for a long time, and regularly notifies Parliament of possible new directions for Turkish interference in the Syrian crisis.



In response to Turkey possible involvement in the abduction of two Syrian bishops and with the support of Jubilee Campaign, the Movement contacted Turkish investigative journalist Erkan Metin. Metin then conducted in-depth research into Turkey's role in the abduction. CDA member Pieter Omtzigt received special permission to allow Erkan to present his findings before Parliament.

Concerning his presentation and related cases, Omtzigt suggested the following:

We are greatly concerned about Syria and the rebellious extremism; these extremist are coming mainly from outside Syria where they are being paid, armed and trained. I admire Erkan Metin, who dares to go against the current and conduct independent, difficult research in the country with the most journalists in prison.

Omtzigt role in and the CDA contribution to the development of this report have been invaluable in exposing the alleged misdeeds of Turkey.

Erkan's presentation showed that there was a need for a clear overview of the putative role of Turkey in Syrian atrocities, accompanied by supporting evidence. This report was prepared with this in mind.

1. Introduction

The role of Turkey in Syria is currently the focus of much attention. Accusations continue to increase. Turkey's involvement in the ongoing crisis includes providing shelter to Syrian rebels, delivering weapons to combatants and even attacking targets across the border of Syria. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has even pointed to possible Turkish involvement in the major poison gas attack last summer in Ghouta, near Damascus. These kinds of alert are shocking and persistent. Also, the influx of terrorists from Turkey to Syria is an international concern. Extremists gain experience in Syria, radicalize rapidly and may pose a threat to their home countries when they return. For example, a June 2014 attack by Syrian militants in Brussels killed three people.

The Dutch government and the Turkish opposition¹ informed the Turkish authorities of the extent of their involvement in the Syrian conflict, but so far they have not given satisfactory answers.

During a war, much conflicting information is published, making it difficult to discern the truth. A good decision of policy - for example, the Patriot units in Adana and the negotiations with Turkey about EU membership - should be based on accurate information. This report will therefore seek to investigate the truth in allegations against Turkey. The report will provide an overview of the accusations, followed by a review of the supporting evidence.

The research was done based on information collected from the Internet, reports, government document and newspapers. We also worked closely with the Turkish investigative journalist Erkan Metin, who has studied the involvement of Turkey in the abduction of the two Syrian bishops.

Although some allegations have been proven, it was difficult to obtain conclusive evidence for other charges due to the lack of verifiable sources. However, it is useful to know what aspects of Turkey's role have been verified. In wartime, evidence and circumstances can rapidly develop and change. This is therefore an interim report to inform readers of the latest developments.

Finally, we note that Minister of Foreign Affairs Timmermans has repeatedly indicated that there is no reason to establish a research investigation. With this report we hope to give Minister Timmermans sufficient motivation to reconsider this mindset. This report may suggest alternatives.

1 Turkey finally designates Jabhat al-Nusra a terrorist group, Al-Monitor, June 6 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/turkey-al-nusra-terrorist-organization-syria-al-qaeda.html#>

Hierna volgt eerst een beknopte samenvatting van de informatie en bewijsvoering in het rapport. Om het rapport niet onnodig uitgebreid te maken, zijn in de samenvatting geen verwijzingen en voetnoten ingevoegd. Deze vindt u wel in de daaropvolgende volledige tekst van het rapport.

2. Summary

Background (3.1.- 3.3.)

Turkey and the European Union are linked in many ways. First, Turkey is in the process of joining the European Union. Second, the Netherlands has Patriot units stationed in the Turkish city of Adana and at the military air base Incirlik. Germany and the United States (U.S.) have each sent two Patriot units as well. This assistance is provided because of Turkey membership in NATO and protects against attacks from Syria.

However, in no way does this mean that Turkey has license to support independently armed activities on Syrian soil. That would incriminate the Netherlands, Germany and the United States; their military presence on the Turkish-Syrian border can indeed prevent a Syrian military response. Turkey could also create an Article 5 case by entering into a war with Syria. Consequently, the accumulation of accusations pointing to Turkey's involvement in serious human rights violations in neighboring Syria directly concerns the Netherlands and, in a broader context, the European Union.

Also, the influx of terrorists from Turkey to Syria is an international concern. Extremists gain experience in Syria, radicalize rapidly and may pose a threat to their home countries when they return. For example, a June 2014 attack by Syrian militants in Brussels killed three people.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Timmermans said that, so far, nothing indicates the need for an investigation into the Turkish role in atrocities in Syria. The hope is that this report will give enough evidence to promote action.

The situation in Syria has long been harrowing. According to the United Nations, 5,000 people were murdered each month over the past year. There would be serious implications if Turkey was found to have directly or indirectly participated in the killings. The role of Turkey and the evidence found so far will be discussed based on the following subjects.

Turkey's facilitating role for rebels (4.1.)

First, Turkey is playing a facilitating role for both the Syrian extremist and opposition groups who are using Turkey as a gateway or base. Eyewitnesses told *Trouw* that the capture of the Armenian town of Kessab on March 22, 2014, was carried out by men who invaded from the Turkish border. The wounded combatants were brought by Turkish ambulances to Hatay, Turkey, and were treated in local hospitals. The *Trouw* article reports that the groups Ahrar al Sham, Sham Harikat al Islamiyya and others affiliated with al-Qaeda Jabhat al-Nusra are responsible.

A *New York Times* article reported that the Turkish government has overseen a large number of weapons transportation programs for Syria. Among other things, it follows trucks with military goods that enter Syria via Turkish territory. One of the methods used by the Turkish government is to stick transmitters on the truck entering Syria by ship and via land.

In the U.S. government's latest terrorism report, Turkey is described as a "transit point" for militants belonging to al-Nusra and ISIS. The U.S. Department of the Treasury reports that money and combatants are being smuggled into Syria through Turkish networks to support al-Qaeda. On its website, the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs even advises citizens not to travel to southern Turkey: "Foreign combatants are passing through this area to join al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria."

The *Al-Monitor* website also states in an article that it is no secret that Turkey provides logistical support for al-Qaeda affiliates such as Jabhat al-Nusra.

If it can't be proven that Turkey actively supports extremists, then at least it can be shown that the country is making no effort to stop criminals or punish crimes and even plays a facilitating role for potential extremists who commit crimes in Syria.

Disappearance of two Syrian bishops (4.2.)

On April 22, 2013, Syrian archbishops Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paulus Yazici were kidnapped. The alleged perpetrator was arrested by Turkey. At first, the country did not reveal the whereabouts of the suspect, Abu Banat. Turkey concealed that he was imprisoned in Istanbul.

Eventually, Abu Banat was accused for prohibited weapon possession and involvement with al-Qaeda. At hearing on May 21 in Bakırköy (Istanbul), he explained that the Turkish secret service (MIT) provided him with a car, money and weapons. His group was in constant contact with the secret service. Banat explained that Turkey helped his group personally because they fought against the soldiers of al-Assad.



Moreover, Abu Banat is guilty of decapitations and serious human rights violations, which have taken place in Syria. These can be seen on YouTube. The role of Turkey in the kidnapping of the bishops, as well as in the other crimes which Abu Banat and his group have committed in Syria, remains unclear. It is clear, however, that Turkey refuses to try him for crimes committed on Syrian soil, and further does not want to get involved with the abduction of the two bishops.

Occupation of Kessab (4.3.)

By the end of March 2014, an estimated few thousand jihadists had launched attacks from Turkish territory on Syria. They have taken several villages, among which is the Armenian village of Kessab. According to eyewitnesses, thousands of al-Qaeda-associated combatants came to the Turkish border and opened fire on several places in Kessab. Eyewitnesses also explained that ambulances in Turkey were ready for wounded jihadists, and the Turkish army even gave artillery support.

In the same area, a Syrian MiG was detected at the same time by the Turkish air force. The aircraft crashed down in Syria. While this could have been a coincidence, it could be that Turkey provided air support for the jihadists. According to newspaper reports, the Syrian plane bombed rebels in the city of Kessab. The plane burst into flames in Syrian airspace and crashed down in Syria.

In the *Radikal*, a liberal Turkish newspaper, witnesses suggested that two tanks, thirty semis and several pickup trucks with DShK machinery came over the border. According to some, the Turkish government fired on the Syrian army base in nearby Kessab.

Ibrahim Idlibi, the leader of the Lighting Brigade that took part in the offensive, proudly reported that they obtained their adversary anti-aircraft weapons and missiles from Turkey.

Use of chemical weapons (4.4.)

In May 2013, more than ten members of al-Nusra were arrested in southern Turkey with more than two kilos of sarin-gas in their possession, according to local police. Five of those arrested were released after a brief detention, and the others were released pending trial. In the meantime, the Turkish press was filled with speculations that the Erdogan government was trying to conceal that they were involved with supporting rebels. The report from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (the DIA is the American security service) saw the arrest as proof that al-Nusra had obtained more chemical weapons. According to former British spy Alastair Crooke, the Turkish government has worked often with al-Nusra.

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said in an article that he also found interesting information. The DIA and other sources showed that sarin-gas used during the poison gas attack on Ghouta on August 21, 2013, was supplied by Turkey, and that it could not have come to Ghouta without Turkish support. The Turks have also given training in the production of sarin.

The Turkish government's attack on Ghouta has crossed the "red line" Obama drew.

Moreover, Turkish journalist Erkan Metin said during a House of Commons assembly that a Turkish Dutchman who confessed that he transported sarin-gas from the Netherlands to Syria was arrested a few months ago.

Leaked tapes about the "false flag war" (4.5.)

In March 2014, tapes were leaked concerning the "false flag war" that Turkey wants to unleash against Syria. On these audiotapes, top ministers in the Erdogan administration are heard, including the Minister of the

Interior and director of the Turkish MIT Hakan Fidan. They discuss a possibility of attacking the tomb of Suleyman Shah, the grandfather of the Ottoman Empire in Syria. This tomb is on Turkish territory in Syria. This “false flag operation” at the Turkish tomb in Syria, carried out by Turkish mercenaries, would give Ankara a legitimate reason to attack Syria with the support of the international community.

Following the leaked conversations, the Erdogan administration removed the YouTube video on March 27, 2014.

The Turkish government has stated that the discussion did indeed take place, that it was recorded and published illegally, and that some parts of the recordings have been manipulated.

Arms supplies through Turkey (4.6.)

On January 1, 2014, Turkish police stopped a truck at a roadblock in the border province of Hatay. The police wanted to examine the truck, but the MIT who accompanied the car to Syria stopped them. They told them that the car was full of clothing and medicine for Turks in Syria. The question now is why such cargo had to be accompanied by the MIT. A few days later, the Turks denied having received supplies from Turkey. The prosecutor demanded life imprisonment for the staff for disclosing a “state secret.”

In November 2013, a truck with 1,200 missiles was stopped outside Adana, near the Syrian border. This was on the way to rebels in Syria, but was stopped at the police border patrol. In December 2013, local media reported that the Turkish government had sent tons of weapons to the rebels since June 47. Turkey denies this. According to an article in *Trouw*, the Turkish government supported rebels in the north of the country with weapons.

Furthermore, the United States designated the group al-Nusra as a terrorist organization a few years ago. Turkey, however, has only just done so in June 2014. This gives an indication of how Turkey viewed this terrorist group until recently.

Vali Nasr of the prestigious Johns Hopkins University in Maryland spoke about Syria during an assembly of the American Senate. Among other things, he said that Turkey supports the rebels financially and through weapons supplies in order to form an army against Assad.

Complaint against Turkey at the ECHR (4.7.)

The leader of the International Coalition Against Impunity has submitted a complaint against the Turkish prime minister and others for their role in war crimes in Syria. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) accepted the complaint against Erdogan in March 2013.

The *Syria Times* has reported the latest developments concerning the ECHR complaint. Erdogan has been involved in a number of deadly attacks in Syria, which could be seen as war crimes according to lawyers. Erdogan was also accused of supporting terrorists in Syria and having used mercenaries to rob factories in Aleppo. Furthermore, he was involved in the abductions of Lebanese and Syrian nuns from Maaloula and the two archbishops Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paulus Yazici from Aleppo.

Turkey and ISIS: an intimate relation (5.1.- 5.2.)

ISIS is now frequently in the news. This group wants to establish an Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. The chaos and the power vacuum in Syria has given this group space to flourish. Combatants from all over the world join them to wage jihad. A large part of the combatants are coming from Turkey across the border to Syria. Turkey keeps its borders wide open, as described in section 4.1., and may even support the fighters. Members of terrorist groups receive medical care in Turkish hospitals. There are even eyewitness reports of Turkish ambulances driving to places where Kurds and ISIS fight each other. Wounded ISIS fighters are brought by ambulances to Turkish hospitals for treatment. It is suspected that Turkey supports ISIS with logistics, money and weapons. Turkey may have supported many groups that combat Assad's army and the Kurds. They have no distinction between extremist and more moderate groups. An important part of the problem in Syria and Iraq, however, is now extremism in the name of Islam.

Now follows the complete text of the report.

3. Background

3.1. International interests

The conflict in Syria entered its fourth year in 2014. The government of Assad has been guilty of numerous human rights violations and war crimes. The government launched more frequent attacks with increasingly deadly weapons. Government Army units tortured prisoners and executed citizens. Rebellions were violently crushed, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The people revolted in 2011 and started a civil war that has continued into 2014. The total Dutch aid for victims of the Syrian crisis amounts to more than 61 million euros to date. This is in addition to regular contributions to UN programs.

The United Nations declared on July 13, 2013, that the death toll in Syria has risen to almost 93,000. On April 1, 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the total number of deaths as a result of the civil war has passed 150,000². A third of them are civilians. The situation has dramatically deteriorated since last year, with more than 5,000 people killed each month.

Turkey borders Syria. For this reason, two Dutch Patriot units with approximately 270 Dutch soldiers have protected the Turkish city Adana and the Incirlik Air Force base against the possible threat of Syrian missiles since January 2013. Moreover, the U.S. and Germany each supplied two Patriot units at the request of their NATO ally Turkey. The deployment of the Patriot units has been extended by one year to January 2015. The Dutch Patriot mission in Turkey costs the Dutch government 42 million euros annually.

Now that the Netherlands actively gives aid to Turkey, it is important that Turkey's role is clear and consistent with the standards to which it is expected to comply as a NATO member. Turkey must also carry out no military activities or give support that may lead to Syrian military responses. This would mean that the Dutch Patriots would no longer be used merely as a defense, but instead assume the role of an undercover weapon for Turkish illegal activities. In addition, Turkey would begin a war against Syria and thereby create an Article 5 situation.

Another relevant situation is the accession negotiations which the European Union began with Turkey in October 2005. As no entry date has been set, it is not yet certain whether Turkey will join the European Union. Possible accession depends on the Turkish government's progress in implementing reforms that cover various important aspects of Turkish society.

3.2. Relationship between Turkey and Syria

A brief explanation will first be given to show how Turkey relates to Syria:

Turkey and Syria's border spans a length of 900 kilometers. Turkey has kept its borders open to refugees during several periods and had already received 600,000 Syrian refugees in October 2013. However, the border is usually closed. There is even a wall in Qamishli that was built to prevent Kurds from crossing the border.

2 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/01/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBREA300YX20140401>

The once healthy relationship between Turkey and Syria has deteriorated since the unrest in Syria. Now Turkey is attempting to overthrow the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad; in August 2012, they consulted about this with the United States³. This has been partially caused by a series of incidents.

In June 2012, the Syrian government shot down a Turkish fighter jet as it flew over Syrian territory. A Syrian bomb killed five Turks on Turkish soil in October 2012, after which Turkish troops opened fire on Syria. There was uncertainty about the source of the bomb.

In September 2013, the Turkish Air Force shot down a Syrian helicopter, and in March 2014, Turkey brought down a Syrian fighter plane. The plane had breached Turkish airspace during an attack on a border crossing.

In 2012, the Turkish government closed its embassy in Syria due to security reasons. The *New York Times* reported that the tensions between Turkey and Syria have an extra difficult dimension because Turkey is a member of NATO. An attack on one of the members is considered as an attack on the whole group. This implies that NATO would be drawn into the conflict in the Middle East. In October 2012, the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, emphasized that NATO has already taken the necessary measures to protect Turkey and defend it when necessary.

Turkish president Erdogan explained on October 4, 2012, that Turkey is not interested in a war with Syria, but that the situation does come close.

Eighteen months later, on March 30, 2014, Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan said that Syria is at war with Turkey. In a speech he said: "Syria disturbs Turkish planes, they have killed 74 brothers, and they will pay." Hopefully Erdogan was referring to measures such as criminal prosecution.

3.3. Unrest in the Netherlands

In the House of Commons, there has been concern about the truth of various allegations against the Turkish government. Several motions were submitted:

- the motion for the earliest possible withdrawal of the Patriot mission in Turkey;
- the motion to research the possible support of Turkey in the development of jihadists' chemical weapon capacity in Syria, as well as to advocate for renewed study of guilt and the facts of the chemical attack on Ghouta in an international context;
- the motion to advocate for an independent international investigation into possible Turkish involvement in the war in Syria;

All motions have been rejected.

In addition, Member of Parliament Segers filed a motion in March 2014 requesting Member States to examine the recent developments in Turkey and reconsider their position with respect to the accession negotiations. The Dutch government was also asked to seek support from other Member States to partially stop or suspend the accession. This motion has been adopted.

³ Turkey, U.S. Officials Hold First Operational Meeting On Syria, August 23, 2012, Defense News, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120823/DEFREG04/308230005/Turkey-U-S-Officials-Hold-First-Operational-Meeting-Syria?odyssey=nav%7Chead>

This is based on the fact that there are still serious shortcomings in the field of law and human rights in Turkey and that the current situation is not in line with the required European standards and criteria.

Next in the background sketch, it is alarming that more and more evidence indicates that Turkey contributes to atrocities in Syria. The motion submitted by members Voordewind, van Bommel and Knops for further research into Turkey's role in supporting extremists was rejected. Also, the largest opposition party in Turkey, the Republican People's Party (CHP), has repeatedly requested to develop a parliamentary research commission to investigate Turkey's suspected support of al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Syria. Turkey has not responded to their requests.

Foreign Affairs Minister Timmermans has repeatedly stated that there are no indications that give a reason to appoint a research committee. With this report, we hope to provide Minister Timmermans with sufficient indications for the reconsideration of this mindset. Perhaps this report will suggest a different decision.

4. Turkish involvement in atrocities in Syria

4.1. Turkey's facilitating role for rebels

It is commonly known that Turkey plays a facilitating role in supporting opposition parties that fight against al-Assad's regime.

The *New York Times* also reports this. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have sent military supplies to the opposition via Turkey since 2012. The Turkish government gave authorization for the inflow of weapons by air. More than 160 military flights undertaken Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have landed at the Esenboga airport near Ankara and other Turkish airports. Most flights have taken place since November 2013, when Turkey's frustration about the seemingly imminent victory of Assad's well-equipped army increased, among other things.

An article by the *New York Times* described that the Turkish government controls a large part of the weapon transport program; they follow trucks with military goods that enter Turkey via ships and travel to Syria by way of Turkish territory. This confirms that the Turkish government sends trucks that enter Turkey via ships and withdraw from the country of Syria. The scale of the shipments was significant, according to officials who are familiar with the "pipeline" for weapons. This is also confirmed by an inspector who specializes in arms trafficking and has collected data on the transport aircraft involved. Hugh Griffiths of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which monitors illegal arms transactions, estimates the military goods to be 3,500 tons. The intensity and frequency of the flights indicate a thoroughly planned and coordinated military logistical operation.

Several flights by Saudi aircraft were observed by citizens who commuted to and from Ankara. Some politicians belonging to the Turkish opposition were informed about this. Atilla Kart, a member of the Turkish Parliament, stated that the use of Turkish airspace for shipping weapons for the Syria conflict has made Turkey a part of the conflict. The governments of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, however, deny transporting weapons or undertaking any other activities related to supplying weapons for activities in Syria. The Turkish government has not granted approval for military support of Syrian rebels.

Professor Daoud Khairallah of the famous Georgetown University in Washington told the television channel Russia Today that "Turkey has a long history of helping armed people from all over the world who want to fight against the Syrian regime." According to him, Turkey is helping them come across the border to Syria and train their combatants.

Armenians fled during an attack on Kessab, Syria, in late March 2014 and accused the Turks of the invasion. In the newspaper *Trouw*, eyewitnesses reported that the injured Syrian opposition fighters were continuously brought by Turkish ambulances to Hatay, Turkey, and were treated in local Turkish hospitals. The *Trouw* article reports that the groups Ahrar al-Sham, Harakat Sham al-Islamiyya and Jabhat al-Nusra are likely associated with al-Qaeda. Witnesses also stated that missiles flew directly from the Turkish border to the Syrian army post.

Abu Suhaib, the local Libyan leader of Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar⁴, and his men have repeatedly received medical care in Turkey, even during the attack on August 4, 2013, when Abu Suhaib was wounded twice.

In an October 2013 report, Human Rights Watch quotes a Western diplomat who states that several EU member countries are concerned about the flow of nationals withdrawing from Syria through Turkey.

The Human Rights Watch report also states that according to Syrian authorities, media reports, Western diplomats and direct observations, many foreign combatants gain access to northern Syria through Turkey. From there they smuggle weapons, receive money and other materials, and sometimes return for medical care.

According to a humanitarian worker in Turkey, foreign fighters come to Latakia (an area in western Syria) via Turkey; they even fly to the Hatay airport in the Turkish border province of Hatay, where they are picked up by other foreign fighters.

The former Turkish diplomat Oktay Aksoy, now an analyst at the Foreign Policy Institute in Ankara, recognizes that his government supports “some” rebels indirectly. Aksoy states that Turkey is a “safe” haven for combatants. When it becomes too hot for them in Syria, for example, during a military offensive, then they can go to Turkey.

An article in *Trouw* called “Jihadists walking freely in and out of Turkey” gives good insight into the situation on the border between Turkey and Syria.

“The Turks have known that their Syrian border is no longer what it has been. After civil war broke out in the neighboring country, anti-government fighters and refugees have always moved without too much control between the two countries. According to the Turkish opposition, the Turkish government recently entered a new phase of partiality in the Syrian war. We can no longer speak of a border between Turkey and Syria. It is as good as lifted, said one of the opposition leaders.”

On Turkish television, Haluk Koc, the vicepresident of the Republican CHP, responded to the recent situation on the Turkish-Syrian border. Koc said that Turkish prime minister Tayyip Erdogan is partly responsible for the civil war in the neighboring country. Koc suggested: “The Turkish government has blundered enormously by being so partial. Not only will Turkey pay the price for Erdogan’s support of the Syrian rebels, but the entire Syrian people. Erdogan is directly responsible for the blood that flows in Syria.” In a border town like Ceylan Pinar there is constant movement of fighters who commute back and forth between the two countries. Wounded Syrian combatants are treated in Turkish hospitals. According to reports in the Turkish press, it is also widely accepted that jihadists pass through Turkish border cities into Syria to fight against the army of President al-Assad.

In the last terrorism report of the U.S. government, Turkey is defined as a “transit port” for militants belonging to al-Nusra and ISIS. The U.S. Department of the Treasury reports that networks smuggle money and combatants into Syria via Turkey to support al-Qaeda affiliates. The British Ministry of Foreign Affairs even dissuades citizens from traveling to southern Turkey on its website: “Foreign combatants pass through this area to join al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria.”

4 According to BBC, this is a jihadist group affiliated with al-Qaeda. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-2515110>

Israeli General Aviv Kochavi also stated that al-Qaeda has bases in Turkey. Erdogan has denied this. According to Kochavi, these bases are located in Karaman, Osmaniye and Sanliurfia. They⁵ are used as homes and recruitment sites that the rebels leave to do battle in Syria.

The influx of terrorists through Turkey to Syria is an international concern. Extremists gain experience in Syria, radicalize quickly and may pose a threat to countries to which they will return. For example, in June 2014 there was an attack in Brussels where three people were killed by Syrian militants.

In addition, the *Al-Monitor* website states in an article that it is no secret that Turkey provides logistical support to al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra.

If it cannot be proven that Turkey actively supports extremists, the evidence can at least show that the country is making no effort to stop criminals and punish crimes and plays a facilitating role for potential extremists who commit crimes in Syria.

4.2. Disappearance of two Syrian bishops

On April 22, 2013, the Syrian archbishops Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paulus Yazici, respectively the Syrian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox bishops of Aleppo, were kidnapped en route to Aleppo. Their driver, Fathallah Kabud, was later found dead. According to Fuad Eliya, who was in the car during the kidnapping and survived, the abductors are from the Caucasus. Since the abduction, there has been no news of the bishops.

The website *kavkazcenter.com*, the propaganda channel of Muslim combatants from the Caucasus, reported that one Abu Banat kidnapped the two bishops. On *all4syria.info*, the site of the free Syrian army, similar reports appear.

Abu Banat is a former Dagestani police officer who joined the jihadists in Syria - his real name is Magomed Abdurrakhmanov. According to *all4syria*, Abu Banat has committed various crimes, including assassinating a VSL commander and using chemical weapons (sarin-gas) in the village of Khan al-Assal near Aleppo, besides kidnapping the two bishops.

On the website *liveleak.com*,⁶ Abu Banat is featured in a video of the beheading of two people. The Free Syrian Army wants to get rid of the bad publicity that Banat caused with his violent actions one month after the kidnapping. Banat escaped and fled to Turkey. There he was apprehended on July 4, 2013, by the Turkish police, but was released after a brief interrogation. time later, Banat was again arrested. However, the Turkish authorities responded to questions from the media by saying that Abu Banat had been expelled. Turkish criminal lawyer Erkan Metin asserts that Abu Banat was not expelled, but is probably staying in Istanbul. Metin recently made his case in The Hague for the House of Commons and has had close contact with Jubilee Campaign and the Aramaic Movement for Human Rights (ABM). Metin asked to file the case against Abu Banat and was thereby able to retrieve sensitive information.

5 Israeli general says al Qaeda's Syria fighters set up in turkey, January 29, 2014, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/29/us-syria-crisis-turkey-israel-idUSBREA0S18X20140129>

6 http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=854_1377509866

The file shows that the Turkish police recognized Abu Banat after his arrest from the video of the beheading on *liveleak.com*. Abu Banat has an address in Istanbul where authorities found weapons and grenades after investigating. The police arrested Abu Banat for illegal weapons possession and involvement with the terrorist group al-Qaeda. He is being held in the Maltepe prison in Istanbul.

Turkish intelligence already suspected on April 26, 2013, four days after the kidnapping of the Syrian bishops, that Banat's group was responsible. This while Abu Banat was only arrested for the first time on July 4, 2013. Since the kidnapping and decapitations were committed outside Turkish territory, he will not be prosecuted for this. In studying the investigation file, Erkan shows that the Turkish police think that the case of the decapitated people might concern the two bishops. Asked if he is the one who beheaded people in the video, Abu Banat answered: "Yes, I am the one who decapitated people. It's quite common. These things happen every Friday."

The strange thing about this case is that the Turkish authorities lied about the whereabouts of Abu Banat. They said the man was expelled, when in reality he was put in prison in Istanbul. This method is especially strange since the removal of the two bishops was a well-known case and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Davutoglu, said that Turkey would do everything possible to save the bishops. Even Prime Minister Erdogan has made such remarks. And yet they tried to conceal that Abu Banat was held in Istanbul, while he was suspected of kidnapping and decapitating the bishops...

Erkan Metin claims to have found the reason for the government's time-consuming process. The report of the case of Abu Banat states that Banat explained that his cell phones came from one Abu Jafer. According to him, Abu Jafer was from the Turkish secret service. Later, on May 21 in Bakırköy (Istanbul), Banat explained during his first case hearing that he got weapons, a car and money from Turkey when he and his group were in Syria. They were constantly in contact with the Turkish secret service. The Turkish government has personally helped them because they were fighting against Assad's soldiers. When Banat was in the "Liberated Area," he occasionally went to the border where he met with the Turkish secret service to get help from them. Banat said during his first hearing: "protected my family with every gun that I could find, but I was fighting Assad's soldiers." After his arrest, he tried to contact the Turkish government, but received no response.

Meanwhile, all policemen and prosecutors who had been involved in the investigation have been put on another case. According to Metin, who gave his report in Parliament⁷, Turkey is trying to keep the kidnapping of the bishops quiet. On May 21, 2014, Banat appeared before a judge in Istanbul. He was accused of violating the "Arms Act" and suspected involvement in extremist activities. But the bishops, who are still missing, were not mentioned. Turkey acted incorrectly, according to Minister Timmermans. In answer to parliamentary questions asked by member Omtzigt, Minister Timmermans said that Turkey has signed several treaties against terrorism. On account of that, it has the duty to try terrorism suspects within its territory or to extradite them for trial.

Erkan Metin stated: "I do not know if the kidnapping was planned in advance. Nor do I know if Turkey was or is involved. However, I know that Turkey has not authorized investigation into the person who has decapitated people and that Turkey's kidnapping of the bishops has not been closely and effectively studied.

⁷ Convo special procedure Omtzigt April 17 Turkish investigative journalist, April 4, 2014, <http://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/detail.jsp?id=2014D12180&did=2014D12180>

On the contrary, Turkey has given false information by saying that Abu Banat was expelled from the country after his arrest. Turkey is responsible at this point and owes answers to all of us.” He called for an independent investigation from the international community to discover the precise role of Turkey.

The bad thing about this situation is that because of Turkey’s passive and deceitful attitude, the case of the two bishops may never be resolved.

There are several points on this matter:

- The Turkish police has not further pursued the case of the missing bishops and Abu Banat and have considered a superficial investigation to be sufficient. No questions have been asked about the bishops.
- Abu Banat has acknowledged that he carried out the beheadings seen on YouTube.
- Abu Banat stated that he received walkie-talkies from a person named Abu Jafer of the Turkish secret service.
- Abu Banat said he had close contact with the secret service and was regularly equipped with cars, funding and weapons.
- Abu Banat and his companion were wounded, probably during fighting with the Free Syrian Army, and fled from Syria.
- Secret documents published during the investigation show that on April 26, 2013, four days after the bishops’ kidnapping, the Turkish secret service wrote a report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara. (Abu Banat was only arrested for the first time on July 4.) This report described how the bishops were kidnapped and taken to different locations. Eventually, they were brought to the village of Mashad Ruhin (also called el-Meshad) just outside Aleppo. It is suspected that this information was discovered because Abu Banat used walkie-talkies from the Turkish secret service, as he said. The secret service was able to monitor the conversations and observe the activities of the group.
- Abu Banat has acknowledged that he has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Turkish Ministry of Justice has refused to publicize this because it would be a Syrian matter.
- Conclusion: Turkey has supported the Syrian opposition by letting jihadists travel on its territory. Evidence indicates that Turkey may have known about the jihadist group led by Abu Banat and that this group kidnapped the bishops. The Turkish secret service MIT was probably in contact with the group and provided them with materials.

4.3. Capture of Kessab

By the end of March 2014, an estimated couple thousand jihadists began an attack on Syria from Turkish territory. They then captured several villages, including the Armenian village of Kessab. Eighty people were killed, churches were destroyed and the population fled. According to eyewitnesses, there are also thousands of al-Qaeda affiliated combatants crossing the Turkish border and attacking various places in Kessab. At the same time and in the same area, a Syrian MiG was shot from⁸ the air by the Turkish Air Force. The plane crashed in Syria. This may be a coincidence, or it could be that Turkey served as air support for the jihadists. According to newspaper reports, the Syrian aircraft bombed rebels in its attack on the city of Kessab; the plane burst into flames in Syrian airspace and crashed in Syria.



Eyewitnesses also stated that in Turkey, ambulances were ready for wounded jihadists and the Turkish army even supplied artillery support. The Armenian community is shocked, and rightly so. It evokes memories of the genocide in 1915. Armenia condemns Turkey publicly. It is the upteenth time that accusations are made concerning the support of jihadists, the borders which are open wide and massive weapons supplies. These are accusations by journalists, NGOs and diplomats who speak off-the-record. Israeli military intelligence and the government of Armenia confirm this.

In the *Radikal* (liberal Turkish newspaper), witnesses claimed that two tanks, thirty semis and several pickup trucks with DShK machinery came across the border. According to some, the Turkish government fired on the Syrian army base near Kessab. In Kessab, Jahbat al-Nusra raised its own flag on Turkish tanks. The prevailing opinion is that Turkey shot down the Syrian jet to prevent air operations of the Syrian government, who tried stop the opposition during the attack on Kessab. The *Daily As-Safir* wrote in an article about the role of foreign secret services during the Kessab offensive. Mainly Turkish authorities played a role in the preparation and planning of the attack. Ibrahim Idlibi, the leader of the Lighting Brigade which took part in the offensive, proudly announced that they received their anti-aircraft weapons and missiles from Turkey.

Within the framework of the research for this report, no definite answer can be given about the reliability of these sources. It is clear, however, that many Syrian and Turkish citizens are convinced of the involvement of Turkey in these and other attacks.

⁸ Fall of Kessab will be costly for Turkey, March 31, 2014, *Radikal* (Liberal Turkish daily newspaper), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/03/fall-kessab-syria-costly-turkey.html#>

On April 24, 2014, *Trouw* published a clarifying article on the attack on Kessab.

In the night of March 21, Turkish border guards had left the border open and trucks full of Syrian rebels were on the move. There was an agreement that the Turks were responsible for the border. But at 5 o'clock in the morning, an attack began. There is no possible explanation but that the Turkish authorities permitted Syrian rebels to attack the Armenian enclave in Kessab from Turkish territory, as explained by more than ten eyewitnesses from Kessab. They tell about Turkish border patrols that spontaneously disappeared the day before the attack, and over two days of shelling from the Turkish border.

"I saw the incoming fire, which included mortars, coming from the Turkish border post," said Raffie, a farmer from Kessab whose house is 600 meters from the border. On Thursday, the day before the attack, he noticed that the Turkish patrols, which he could normally hear and see every three hours, did not appear that day. Another farmer, James, thought at first that the men he saw arriving in trucks were road workers. Only when bombs fell the next morning from the border post did he realize that it was the rebels. Raffie: "We trusted the Turkish government to monitor the border and prevent raids." A Turkish role in the attack is a problem; the NATO ally accepts Dutch soldiers and Patriot missiles just to keep the Syrian war outside the door.

The topography of the area supports the allegations of the witnesses. Kessab and neighboring villages are surrounded by the Turkish border in the north and west. south lies Latakia, where the Syrian government is in power. The only Syrian Army post, southeast of Kessab, was besieged the second day of the attack from the Turkish border, according to the residents. Afterwards, the rebels could enter Kessab and surrounding villages from Syrian territory.

"Rockets flew directly to the Syrian Army post from the Turkish border," said Hagop, a farmer who initially remained with thirty others on a piece of land overlooking the area. Saturday afternoon there were no more rebels remaining in Kessab, and Hagop is now a refugee in Lebanon. Videos put online by rebels who participated in the attack clearly show how armed rebels roam the border. It seems to be going to the groups Ahrar al-Sham, Harikat Sham al-Islamiyya and al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra. Three witnesses, including Hagop, suspect the Turks even actively took part in combat, exactly like the rocket attacks on the second day. "They were precise and were heavier missiles," said the farmer Raffie. The Syrian authorities accuse the Turkish army of firing with tanks and artillery from Turkish territory at the time of the attack. A Syrian plane was brought down by the Turks on Sunday, March 23, when the battle had been largely settled, both sides confirmed.

4.4. Use of chemical weapons

The Turkish journalist Erkan Metin told the House of Commons in a meeting that a Turkish Dutchman was arrested a few months ago who confessed that he transported sarin-gas from the Netherlands to Syria. It is important to investigate if the Turkish government had something to do with this and if the Netherlands can take steps to clarify the matter.

In addition, the famous American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh stated in a publication that Turkey would cooperate with al-Nusra to develop chemical weapons. The Turkish police have run materials for chemical weapons and drugs from Turkey to Aleppo, Syria. To top it all off, the Erdogan administration has been involved in the chemical attack on Ghouta concerning which Obama drew his “red line.”⁹ These all seem to be scenarios that defy the imagination, but there are questions to be asked.

In an article by Seymour Hersh it was mentioned that a U.S. consultant had organized a secret meeting for Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Chuck Hagel, the American Secretary of Defense. It was discussed that Turkey wanted to draw over the so-called U.S. “red line.” They argued that they would not defeat the Syrian opposition without U.S. assistance. To make it look as if the government of Assad had carried out a chemical weapons attack would force the U.S. into action.

In May 2013, more than ten members of al-Nusra were arrested in southern Turkey, according to the local police, with more than two kilos of sarin-gas in their possession¹⁰. Five of those arrested were released after a brief detention, the others were released pending trial. In the meantime, the Turkish press was full of speculation that the Erdogan government is trying to conceal the fact that it is involved with supporting the rebels. The report of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) considered the arrest as proof that al-Nusra has obtained greater access to chemical weapons.

The men were accused of trying to obtain chemicals for making sarin-gas. One of their lawyers who is a local leader of the governing AK party argued that the case was too political and that a sentence would be unfortunate for Turkey. There is still no explanation why the suspects were released or what happened to these men or their case. From a legal perspective, this case contained all the elements to conclude that the suspects would be held awaiting trial. This could be an indication that Turkey cooperates with al-Nusra. According to British former spy Alastair Croke, the Turkish government has worked often with al-Nusra in the past. This group not only fights against the army of al-Assad but also equally separates the Kurds in Syria and Turkey, which corresponds to the management of the Turkish government.

According to an article by Hersh, the DIA and other sources show that sarin-gas was used during the Ghouta attack, that it had been provided by Turkey and that only in Ghouta has it been possible to find Turkish support. The Turks also gave training in producing sarin. According to Hersh, it has become known that in the spring of 2013 the Turkish government was working directly with al-Nusra to carry out a chemical attack.

In an article by Seymour Hersh, the following evidence stands:

- In 2012, the CIA built a “rat line” to transport weapons from Libya to the Syrian opposition via Turkey.
- American use of the “rat line” ended after the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, but the Turkish government continued to use the line.
- The Turkish government had hoped that the Syrian opposition could overthrow the government of al-Assad. The MIT, the Turkish secret service, supported the Free Syrian Army but also al-Nusra. When the Syrian government took the upper hand in the war, Turkey had to use other resources.

9 The Red Line and the Rat Line, April 17, 2014, London Review of Books, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-m-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line>

10 Sarin is a nerve agent used in chemical weapons.

- Turkey trained al-Nusra for the production of sarin-gas and provided the necessary materials.
- After several incidents with sarin, Erdogan pleaded with the White House for a response to Obama's "red line" question. Obama has watched from here.
- In August 2013, chemical weapons inspectors arrived in Damascus. The Turks used the visit to plan a spectacular chemical attack in Ghouta. This incident would push Obama over the "red line" and would push the U.S. to take action against the Syrian government.
- The British government and the U.S. discovered that the sarin-gas used in Ghouta did not correspond with the sarin-gas used by the Syrian government.
- Knowing that the case was weak and that the proposed action would likely escalate in the Middle East, the U.S. decided to refrain from attacking. Obama laid down the ball in Congress and there it remains. Obama later addressed the Russian deal.

Of all the neighboring countries of Syria, Turkey has the most direct role in the conflict because it openly receives Syrian opposition leaders, as well as leaders of the Free Syrian Army who fight against the army of al-Assad. If the Syrian regime gained a victory, it would put Turkey in a dangerous position as a neighboring country.

4.5. Leaked tapes about the "false flag war"

In March 2014, tapes leaked concerning a false flag war that Turkey wanted to unleash against Syria. On these audiotapes are heard top ministers of the Erdogan government, including the Minister of the Interior and the director of the Turkish MIT¹¹, Hakan Fidan. They discuss the possibility of attacking the tomb of Suleyman Shah, the grandfather of the Ottoman Empire in Syria. The tomb stands on Turkish territory in Syria. A "false flag operation" against this tomb by Turkish mercenaries would provide Ankara with a reason to attack Syria. It would probably receive international approval and support.

Following the leaked tapes, the Erdogan administration removed the YouTube video on March 27, 2014.

It is difficult to assess the authenticity of the recordings. The Turkish government has explained that a discussion did indeed take place concerning the defense of the tomb of Süleyman Shah in Syria and the conflict in Syria. The government also stated that the discussion was illegally recorded and published, and that some parts of the recordings have been manipulated.

On April 3, 2014, Turkey lifted the Twitter blockade after the Constitutional Court ruled that it was contrary to the freedom of expression and individual rights.

On April 4, a Turkish court judged that the whole blockade of YouTube also had to be lifted because it was contrary to the freedom of expression. The Netherlands had earlier already pronounced its concern about Turkey's decision to prohibit access to Twitter and YouTube. Blockades of entire sites are not appropriate as a candidate member of the European Union.

¹¹ Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı (MIT) is an organization that deals with national security in Turkey. MIT is a secret service and falls under the jurisdiction of the Turkish government.

Gert-Jan Segers accordingly asked in his March 2014 motion to examine recent developments in Turkey, where Twitter messaging and YouTube video service was blocked temporarily, “for the Member States to reconsider their position regarding the accession negotiations.” This motion was adopted.

The lack of freedom of speech in Turkey has been often been denounced. Amnesty International reports the following:

“The freedom of expression in Turkey is under fire. Every year hundreds of journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, political activists and others must appear in court because they did something completely legitimate: give their opinion. Policemen who used violence against peaceful demonstrators only rarely appear before a judge. That is an upside down world.”

4.6. Weapons Supply by Turkey

The Turkish media reported the following:

- In November 2013, a truck with 1200 rockets stopped outside Adana, near the Syrian border. It was on the way to the rebels in Syria but was stopped at the police border post.
- In January 2014, the Turkish police stopped a truck at a roadblock in the border province of Hatay. The police began examining the truck, but the secret service MIT who accompanied the car to Syria stopped them. They said that the car was full of clothes and medicine for Turks in 12 Syria. There is a photocopy of the written instructions of the governor, in which he states that the truck belong to the MIT. He threatened legal action if the truck would not be allowed to pass. The question now is why such cargo had to be escorted by the MIT. A couple days later, the Turks denied receiving supplies from Turkey.
- In January 2014, the Turkish news outlet SANA reported that the staff of the Turkish “gendarme” inspected seven trucks in Adana with weapons that were on their way to Syria. They probably received a tip about the suspected contents of the truck. After the incident, the staff was transferred. Turkey accused 13 male staff of blocking seven trucks with weapons for the armed opposition in Syria and of revealing “official secrets.” The public prosecutor demanded life imprisonment for the staff.
- In December, local media reported that Turkey has sent tons of weapons to the rebels since June 47. The Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz denies this. He argues that only shotguns are exported to Syria.

Professor Daoud Khairallah of the famous Georgetown University in Washington told the Russia Today television channel that “Turkey has a long history of helping armed people from all over the world who want to fight against the Syrian regime.” According to him, Turkey is helping them cross the border to Syria and is training combatants.

Umit Ozdag, head of the 21st Century Turkey Institute, was interviewed and suggested the following: “Ankara officially supports the recognized Free Syrian Army and unofficially supports Salafist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda.”

Vali Nasr of the prestigious Johns Hopkins University in Maryland spoke at a meeting of the American Senate concerning Syria. He said that, among other things, Turkey supports the rebels with weapons and financial help in order to form an offensive against Assad's army.

On *presstv.ir*, an article says that Turkey supports terrorist groups that fight against the Kurdish state in Iraq. This is claimed by a retired Lebanese general named Hisham Jaber. The former general said that there is no doubt that Turkey supports al-Nusra, al-Qaeda and all the jihadist groups that fight against soldiers of al-Assad alongside the Kurds. According to Jaber, Turkey fears that the Kurds would establish a mini-state in conjunction with the Kurdish state in Iraq and nullify Turkish unity.

An article in *Trouw* quoted the British former spy Alastair Crooke. He suggests that when the Turks finally realized that the rebels could not overthrow Assad's government, the government decided to deploy extremists. Crooke also claimed that Turkey cooperates with al-Nusra, which separates the Kurds in Syria and Turkey along with the army of Assad. Crooke confirmed that Ankara fears that Kurdish fighters will invade Turkey from Syria. The *Trouw* article argues that nationalist and secular opposition parties have already accused the Islamic government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of actively supporting al-Nusra. The Turkish MIT intelligence service could, for example, facilitate weapons transport to Syria and even train rebels.

On June 3, 2014, Turkey designated al-Nusra a terrorist organization in imitation of the U.S. and the Netherlands, among others. The U.S. had already done this in December 2012. This shows that Turkey basically expressed their opinion that al-Nusra has a terrorist nature. However, it is notable that Turkey also needed a long period before it made this designation. Erdogan has not considered al-Nusra as a terrorist organization for several years.

The Syrian Prime Minister Walid Al-Moualem stated during a meeting of the UN General Assembly in October 2012 that a number of countries, including Turkey, must stop supporting armed groups in Syria. They do this by means of financial support, training and offering a safe haven for terrorist groups on their territory. Bashar Jaafari, the Syrian ambassador to the UN, said in a letter to the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, that the Turkish authorities provide systematic aid via weapons supplies to terrorists operating in Syria. They would train them on the border with Syria and then the Turkish government helps them withdraw from Syrian territory.

The last indication of weapons supplies from Turkey to Syrian extremists has been discussed earlier in this report. Abu Banat, the suspected abductor of the two bishops, said in his first hearing that he was helped by the Turkish secret service. He explained that he had received weapons, cars and money. This would have happened mainly because his group fought against Assad's soldiers, which the Turkish government supports.

The Turkish government still denies that Turkey actively supports the Syrian opposition with weapons,¹³ even though the Turkish news is full of indications that this would be so.

¹³ Arms airlift to Syria rebels expands with aid from C.I.A., March 24, 2013, The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

4.7. Complaint against Turkey at the ECHR

The leader of the International Coalition Against Impunity ¹⁴has filed a complaint against the Turkish Prime Minister and others for their role in committing war crimes in ¹⁵Syria. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) accepted the complaint against Erdogan in March 2013.

The *Syria Times* has reported the latest developments concerning the ECHR complaint. Erdogan might have been involved in a number of deadly attacks in Syria, which could be seen as war crimes according to lawyers. According to the charge, Erdogan may also have supported terrorists in Syria and used mercenaries to rob factories in Aleppo. Furthermore, he may have been involved in the kidnappings of Lebanese, as well as nuns from Maaloula and the two archbishops from Aleppo, Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paulus Yazici.

The Court called for effective action in the case. All relevant documents have been submitted to the Court as well as the personal information of those who filed the complaint.

14 International Coalition against Impunity.

15 ECHR accepts case on Erdogan, March 25, 2014, Aydinlik Daily, http://www.aydinlikdaily.com/Detail/ECHR-Accepts-Case-On-Erdo%C4%9Fan/2685#.U5GVMPI_syk

5. Turkey and ISIS: an intimate relationship

5.1. The growth of ISIS

Since early June 2014, the terrorist group ISIS has dominated the news. This group consists of Sunni Moslems who are fighting in Syria and Iraq. The group, once called ISI, dates back to 2004 and then had contact with al-Qaeda. In 2013, the group was officially called ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Syria, or abbreviated ISIL. As their name indicates, they want to establish their own Islamic state in Iraq and Syria.

The *Washington Post* has written an extensive article about ISIS. It states that ISIS owes its renewed popularity to the chaos in Syria. The largest growth of ISIS was in 2013. The leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, made known the new mission in Syria and started recruiting fighters in the north and east of the country, which was under the control of rebels. The power vacuum in these areas provided space for ISIS. ISIS has recruited and brought in many new combatants from among thousands of foreign volunteers, some from Europe and the United States, who have streamed into Syria to carry out jihad, according to the *Washington Post* article.

The fact that ISIS can uninhibitedly keep house in Syria is even more alarming, especially now that it has come to light that they are much larger and more powerful than expected and quickly took over parts of Iraq. They did this independently of al-Qaeda at the time. Instead of spreading terror and disruption, ISIS wants to create a new state according to the rules of an extremist form of Islam, and they will systematically do so in the occupied territories. In the captured Syrian city of Raqqa, which ISIS has designated the capital of its self-proclaimed state, the group has provided schools, courts and other social services.

The group also has substantial resources to strengthen its army. In eastern Syria it has taken control of oil fields, with which they earn money. Moreover, they use a widespread system of extortion targeting people in Mosul, all of which began before the U.S. withdrew from Iraq. ISIS is also supported by large private donations from sponsors in Sunni countries of the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, has accused Saudi Arabia and Qatar of openly financing ISIS.

In the occupied areas, ISIS uses strict rules and harsh punishments. Beheadings and amputations are frequent. Other rebel groups have turned against ISIS. Al-Qaeda has distanced itself from ISIS because the group is too extreme.

In 2013, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that ISIS was the strongest group in Syria. In June 2014, ISIS occupied Mosul, Iraq, in the province of Nineveh. 500,000 residents fled Mosul, including many Aramaic Christians who composed a relatively large portion of the population in the province of Nineveh and even formed the majority in some parts. Among them were many Christians who had already fled violence in other parts of Iraq. Before ISIS carried out this action, it was severely underestimated how large the group really was. It was thought that ISIS was approximately 2000 to 3000 men strong. It now appears to be much greater. Definite numbers have not been given. *Fox News* says that ISIS has approximately 10,000 fighters.

5.2. Turkey's support of ISIS

ISIS has grown with the many combatants who travel to Syria and Iraq from different countries, including the Netherlands¹⁶, to conduct jihad. A large part of the combatants enter Syria through the Turkish border. As described in section 4.1. of this report, Turkey has kept its borders wide open and is suspected of supporting the fighters.

A good example of this is the Hatay airport in Turkey, near the border with Syria. This is still a notorious arrival spot for combatants who are picked up there by extremist groups such as ISIS. It is extremely worrisome that Turkey has taken no steps to reduce "bordercrossings" of these extremists. In addition, section 4.1. explains how extremists can move freely in Turkey and furthermore have "safe havens" from which they can plan their terrorist activities in Syria and rest. ISIS fighters are also treated in hospitals in Turkey when they incur wounds during combat.

Fox News has published an article that explains Turkey's support of ISIS. It states that their support has been essential for jihadists to come in and out of Syria. The operating bases of ISIS are not near the Turkish border by chance.

Academic experts, Kurds and the Syrian opposition agree that Syrians, Turks and foreign brawlers frequently cross the open border between Turkey and Syria to join ISIS. There they sometimes receive active support from the Turkish security services. *Fox News* says that the Turkish government has also granted ISIS support by providing money, logistical resources, training and weapons.

Turkish citizens tell of Turkish ambulances that go to combat zones where there is fighting between the Kurds and ISIS. These ambulances bring injured ISIS militants to Turkish hospitals. A sensational photograph that appeared on the Internet shows the ISIS commander Abu Muhammad in the "Hatay State Hospital" in April 2014.

In a *Fox News* article, a Turkish politician of the opposition estimated that Turkey has paid 800 million dollars to ISIS for shipping oil. Another politician has published information on Turkish soldiers who give training to members of ISIS. Critics argue that the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan met three times with someone named Yasin al-Qadi who has close links with ISIS and also funds the group.

Section 4.6. of this report also indicates that Turkey supports suspected extremists by supplying weapons. Also, ISIS is part of the groups that have received support.

Turkey provides this support to extremists because Ankara wants to see the Assad regime fall as well as the Kurdish Alliance-controlled area in the northeast of Syria. Analyst Mustafa Akyol says that Ankara approved everyone who fought against the Assad regime, including ISIS. The government accepted that Muslims could commit terrible actions. This has led to blindness regarding violent jihadists. ISIS is also popular in Turkey.

The online newspaper *Al-Monitor* calls on Turkey to close the borders to ISIS. The Kurds in northeast Syria threaten action if Turkey does not stop supporting extremists.

¹⁶ Timmermans: Many Dutch jihadists at ISIS, June 16, 2014, NRC, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/06/16/timmermans-veel-nederlandse-jihadstrijders-bij-isis/#>

The Lebanese online newspaper Al-Akhbar reports that it is regularly seen how the Turkish army monitors the movement of al-Qaeda militants across the border into the Kurdish area. Recently, the Turkish army allowed 150 fighters of ISIS and other Islamic brigades to come to the village of Alouk with six tanks and pickup trucks loaded with weapons.

Turkey has closed its eyes to the disadvantages of extremist groups. As long as they fought against the army of Assad and the Kurds, the Turkish authorities turned a blind eye. We now see the results. An important part of the problem in Syria and Iraq is extremism in the name of Islam.

6. Recommendations

Many people in Turkey and Syria are convinced that Turkey supports extremists who commit (serious) human rights violations in Syria. There are a number of allegations to which Turkey has not responded adequately and/or provided a well-founded defense.

The question now is what will the international community undertake to call on Turkey's responsibility to determine if these charges are correct. The Netherlands is additionally involved given its active support of Turkey through Patriot units. There is a risk that involvement in the military conflict would affect the Netherlands. Given the support that the Netherlands provides to Turkey, there is a right to clarification from the Turkish government. Additional factors are Turkey's NATO alliance as well as the candidacy for membership in the European Union.

Several Dutch Members of Parliament have tried to take action by filing motions in March and April on the issues discussed in this report, among other actions. Based partly on these motions, the following recommendations have been made:

- To advocate at the international level for an independent study into possible Turkish involvement in the war in Syria;
- To advocate at the international level for investigation into the possible involvement of Turkey in the kidnapping of the two bishops and for punishment of the suspected perpetrator, Abu Banat, for his part in these and other human rights violations;
- To study and clarify the exact events during the capture of Kessab, while investigating the role of Turkey;
- To advocate at the international level for investigation into Turkey's possible support of the development of the chemical weapons capacity of jihadists in Syria, as well as for renewed study into the responsibility and the facts of the chemical attack on Ghouta;
- In light of recent events in Iraq where the ISIS terrorist movement is gaining ground, to force Turkey to immediately close their borders to jihadists and end all support for the jihadist group;
- To enforce Turkish cooperation in the investigations by using as leverage the withdrawal of Patriot units;
- To seek rapprochement from the ECHR for cooperation in the clarification of Turkey's role in atrocities in Syria.

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