



# ISIS Families Camps ... A Threat to Humanity

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## Introduction

The announcement of the military defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the fall of the capital of the caliphate represents a decisive blow to the terrorist organization, but this does not necessarily mean that it is the final defeat, due to the presence of three basic general challenges:

- The security challenge: The defeat of the organization militarily does not mean the end of the security challenge of the organization, on the contrary, there are indications that the organization has changed its strategy as they turned into sleeper cells.
- The “ideological” or the “intellectual” challenge: where the organization relies on a strict ideological system based on providing evidence to its supporters to justify acts of “killing, displacement and captivity of women and other practices against the laws”. Therefore, the solution lies in an intellectual confrontation as confronting ISIS in an intellectual way lacks a new discourse within an alternative national project.
- The returnees and their families: This file “returnees from ISIS to the state” is a critical security issue for many Arab and European countries, in addition to the problem of fighters returning from ISIS is their families, such as their wives and children and how to deal with them. Countries policies differed towards this category as between them who accept the return or those who reject it completely.

Despite the disappearance of ISIS from the scene militarily, its ideological strength remains. Many politicians and analysts fear that the jihadist group will remain a threat in the Middle East and beyond in light of the presence of ISIS camps - on the Iraqi and Syrian borders - as a time bomb in which ISIS families of children are located. In addition to that, women of different nationalities carry within them the seeds of extremist jihadist ideology as the nucleus of the birth of a new, more dangerous and cruel ISIS.

## Dimensions of The Problem:

Following the defeat of ISIS in March 2019, thousands of children and widows (ISIS families), were transferred to camps in northern Syria and Iraq, the most prominent of which are "Al-Hol,



Hamam Al-Alil camp, Salamiyah, Al-Jada'a and Ain Issa, in addition to camps in the city of Sabratha in Libya."

The number of ISIS families (children - women) is estimated at about 92 000 (Iraqis and Syrians), in addition to 13 000 foreigners of different nationalities, bringing the total of ISIS camps families to 124,000.

Most of the ISIS camps in Syria and Iraq are under the administration of the Kurdish authorities which are called the Syrian Democratic Forces. They do not have enough resources to control and monitor this large number of people and have repeatedly appealed to countries to help them by returning their citizens, while the ISIS camps in Libya are under the authority of the Libyan government.

The humanitarian conditions inside the camps worsened and the security situation weakened with it, and with the advent of Covid-19 pandemic and the closing of the borders, which in turn cut off vital routes for the delivery of aid to northeastern Syria, the conditions of the camps, as described by the United Nations, became "terrible" and "absolutely inhuman." Certainly, the camps are not empty of serious security incidents.

Children represent more than half of the number of ISIS camps. They are a group of orphaned children who have no shelter, they do not go to schools and do not receive any education, they just lie on the camp floors with their bodies covered in dirt and some of them die from acute diarrhea and influenza-like diseases. If they are left, they will be violated and destroyed. During the year 2020, 209 children died as a result of "poor health and living conditions", in addition to a shortage of medicines, food and severe lack of medical care.

ISIS women made dozens of attempts to escape. British women lead attempts to fund ISIS camps run by networks linked to ISIS through non-traditional financing systems such as digital currencies and money transfer applications using Bitcoin and Western Union to send money to other countries and then the amount reaches to Turkey before being transferred to Syria to be received by the person who sends money to the camps in order to pay the smugglers. Taking advantage of the security vacuum created by the Kurdish authorities, the Kurdistan region in particular suffers from a significant increase in the level of corruption and bribery during 2019, as



bribes given to Kurdish guard's amount to about 15 thousand dollars per woman to escape to Turkey or Idlib. Hundreds of them succeeded in entering Syrian opposition areas backed by Turkey then to Turkey itself and attempts are constantly increasing.

The ISIS female detainees in the ISIS camps do not show signs of remorse. Rather, some of them are trying to raise their children as “ticking bombs to build a new generation of ISIS!”. In addition, there is a major disaster, which is that the women in the immigrant section marry the boys in the camp as soon as they reach puberty because to their ideology, the state of ISIS will remain and this is a tragedy. The children of these women embody the extremist religious ideology and in the absence of programs to combat this, they will represent “ticking bombs”, as a video appeared on social media revealing a group of children and women gathered around a black flag of ISIS. Near an electric pole in al-Hol camp, the children were chanting “God is great.” As ISIS had previously published, a group of children were shooting at what the organization described as “spies” among whom was a British child and others from different Arab countries.

Press reports pointed out that they presented the story of a 16-year-old child in the camp, that child slaughtered his friend -a child like him- because his “extremist” mother asked him to do so. These children, who are known as the children of the Caliphate, carry the seeds of the extremist jihadist ideology that is expected to be the nucleus of future ISIS groups in the world during the next stage.

### The Current Situation in The ISIS Camps

<b>State</b>	<b>Camp Name</b>	<b>Camp Situation</b>	<b>Authority and Administration</b>
Syria	Al-Hol	Al-Hol camp contains no less than 62,498 people: 8,286 Iraqi families (30,694 people of Iraqi nationality), 6,270 Syrian families including 22,626 people of Syrian nationality and for the rest, 9,178 people of European, Asian, African and other nationalities within 2,677 families.  Al-Hol camp also contains the wives, widows, children and other family members of ISIS fighters - more than	Kurdish Authorities



		<p>80 percent of its 62,000 residents are women and children. The majority are Iraqis or Syrians, but about 10,000 people from 57 other countries reside in a separate, highly secured area known as the Annex. Many of them are hardcore ISIS supporters.</p> <p>The camp administration is preparing to expel all the Syrians in batches over the coming weeks, but about 16,000 of them are from the Syrian regime's areas, which constitutes a major obstacle to their expulsion, as negotiations are underway with the United Nations to secure guarantees for them so that they are not exposed to and pursued by the regime's security services especially that the vast majority of them are from the families of ISIS members.</p> <p>Since the beginning of 2020, about 30 operations and attempts to escape from the families of ISIS members took place as ISIS women have made many attempts, estimated at dozens, to escape from the camp to the Syrian opposition areas supported by Turkey and then to Turkey itself.</p> <p>Some of the dignitaries escaped a few months ago, taking advantage of the security vacuum and the administrative corruption that exists by the Kurdish authorities. Some of the women managed to escape after paying bribes to officials and guards.</p> <p>The foreign ISIS women set up their own court and Sharia police, they imposed penalties including killing Iraqi refugees and displaced Syrians on the other side of</p>	
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		<p>the camp and killing children when they disobeyed the orders of the council formed by the group's women.</p> <p>Some of the women form a group of children they call the “cubs of the caliphate” in order to train them. These extremist kids are trained to slaughter chickens and goats as a practice of beheading humans and later, they become suicide bombers.</p> <p>One of the unfortunate incidents is that most of the perpetrators came from outside the camp and sneaked in at night and killed the person who was sentenced to death by the organization's court in the camp.</p> <p>The Kurdish administration has repeatedly asked the countries of origin of the families of ISIS fighters to return all their detained citizens but received few responses from these countries. It is worth mentioning that the al-Hol camp which includes more than 60,000 displaced people, mostly women and children, has become a major center to the ISIS financial network. It helps in transferring financial reserves which are estimated at about one hundred million dollars.</p>	
Syria	Roj	<p>1800 people (children and women)</p> <p>The living conditions are difficult, but they are better than the rest of the Syrian camps. There is a great fear of the outbreak of the Corona virus.</p> <p>The response was the transfer of 76 families of foreign women and children.</p> <p>Out of a total of 395 families that will be transferred, women and children will be transferred in batches,</p>	Kurdish Authorities



		according to an agreement with the United Nations during the next phase.	
Syria	Ain Issa Turkish borders	It is about 30 km near the Turkish borders It includes about 13 thousand people including members of the families of the organization (women and children). Conflicts and battles occurred between families of ISIS members and displaced civilians which led the authorities to decide to close the camp and many trained terrorist elements fled to unknown destinations, in light of the Kurdish security vacuum. The majority of families went to the neighboring camps.	Kurdish Authorities
Libya	Misurata Shelter Center	There are 2,000 women of foreign origin held in Libyan prisons, who are the wives of ISIS fighters. Sirte was an Islamic State stronghold from 2015 until 2016 when Libyan forces backed by United States air strikes expelled the group. Hundreds of foreign militants joined the Islamic State in Sirte. Dozens of women and children who were arrested at the end of the fighting were being held in the city of Misurata from which the military campaign in Sirte was being led. These include citizens of Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Senegal, Chad and Niger.	Libyan government
Iraq		The Iraqi government announced the closure of three camps around Baghdad, one camp in Karbala to the south of the capital and another one in Diyala to the east. The Iraqi government is trying to end the camps on its territory because of the crises it causes, but the real	





		crisis is the acceptance of Iraqi communities for the remnants of ISIS (children and women).	
Iraq	Hamam al-Alil	<p>There are 1881 families, about 1250 families headed by a woman.</p> <p>Many of the camp residents are still prevented by their local communities from returning because they are affiliated with ISIS.</p> <p>It was closed and most of the families were moved to Al-Jada'a 5.</p>	Kurdish Authorities
Iraq	Al-salamiyah	<p>It was closed, the displaced people returned to their homes at the beginning of 2021 and some of them went to Al-Jada'a camp 5.</p>	Kurdish Authorities
Iraq	Al-Jada'a Camp 1	<p>Al-Jada'a Camp 1 was closed with many returning home at the end of 2020 and many others shifting to Al-Jada'a Camp 5.</p>	Kurdish Authorities
Iraq	Al-Jada'a Camp 5	<p>8800 people (men, women and children), including a group of displaced Iraqis, unlike the Iraqi families of ISIS, living in very difficult humanitarian conditions, lacking the basic requirements of life.</p> <p>The Iraqi government retracted the decision to close it because the people stranded in the camp cannot return to their homes because most of their family members are linked to ISIS.</p>	Kurdish Authorities

### The International Situation Regarding The Issue

<b>The International Situation Regarding The Issue</b>	
The United States	The Kurdish authorities handed over 8 Americans from ISIS families to the US government in 2019.



	<p>The US authorities have deported two American women and six children from the families of suspected members of ISIS to the US.</p>
Kurds	<p>The Kurds demand the countries concerned to return their citizens who are in their custody or to establish an international court to start jihadists trial, but most countries especially European countries insist not to take back their citizens.</p> <p>Kurdish authorities have begun sending hundreds of Syrian and Iraqi women and children to their cities as part of a larger effort to evacuate the Syrian population from the al-Hol camp.</p>
Russia	<p>Russia is considered the first country to demand the return of the Russian ISIS children and it became the first country to take back ISIS orphans from Iraq, after recently collecting DNA samples from the children of al-Hol camp whose nationalities are not known because they were born in Syria or were brought into it by their parents when they were aged breast feeding.</p> <p>Russia has also repatriated nearly 1,000 children and their families.</p>
Norway	<p>The Norwegian Foreign Ministry demanded a solution regarding orphaned children, and the Norwegian government succeeded in returning five Norwegian orphans to their country.</p>
France	<p>The French government has refused to return ISIS families. Women who joined ISIS are fighters who should be prosecuted for their alleged crimes, i.e., in Syria or Iraq.</p> <p>The French constitute the largest European group in ISIS with about 1,700 French citizens joining the ranks of the terrorist organization ISIS.</p> <p>The French also form the largest European group of ISIS families, with about 300 women and children in the camps.</p> <p>The French government did not respond to the desires of the citizens families to recover their relatives and some of them resorted to the judiciary.</p> <p>The French government has so far retrieved about 30 children from the ISIS camps but it refuses to return men and women.</p> <p>The government made limited efforts to return 10 stranded children of French nationality from the camps in northeastern Syria, as well as seven children under the age of 14.</p> <p>The government brought back a seven-year-old French girl who was close to death due to lack of medical care. France sent a medical plane that took her to Paris to receive appropriate</p>



	<p>treatment leaving behind her mother, two brothers and a sister which is in violation of international and humanitarian law.</p>
Tunisia	<p>The government has demanded that the wives and children of ISIS fighters who hold Tunisian citizenship to be handed over to Tunisia in the coming days after finishing the procedures for verifying their identities.</p> <p>The Tunisian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed the handover of more than 22 wives of ISIS terrorists detained in Libyan prisons and about 39 children.</p> <p>The Tunisian government tried to bring back some of the children that lost their fathers and mothers under the supervision of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee, in addition to others handed over by the Libyan Red Crescent to the Tunisian authorities at the beginning of this year.</p> <p>The Observatory of Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia called for the evacuation of more than 146 children of Tunisian ISIS militants who are in Syrian camps and Libyan areas.</p> <p>There are 110 children under the age of 13 in camps on the Turkish-Syrian border which are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces while 36 others are imprisoned in Libya.</p>
Ghana	<p>The government has deported 11 Ghanaian women who were wives of members of the terrorist organization ISIS along with their children.</p>
Algeria	<p>The Algerian authorities agreed to receive the accused wives noting that legal measures are being taken in this matter.</p>
Sudan	<p>The Sudanese government managed to receive four Sudanese children whose parents were killed in the ranks of ISIS in the Libyan city of Sirte last year. The Sudanese consul sent them back to their country.</p>
Turkey	<p>Repatriation of 100 children and women.</p> <p>However, it is shocking to say that there are thousands of Turks who have joined ISIS.</p>
Germany	<p>A Berlin court ruled that a mother and her three children should be taken back from the al-Hol camp in Syria, a decision that reversed the desire of the German government</p> <p>Parliamentary blocs are calling on the German government to take care of ISIS children of German origin.</p>



	<p>The government refuses to take back children from ISIS camps, arguing that the level of extremism among children and adolescents is high.</p> <p>Acts of actual and verbal violence increase from this group.</p>
Uzbekistan	<p>The state of Uzbekistan returned 307 of its citizens from the Syrian camps.</p> <p>Uzbekistan has also returned more than 100 of its citizens.</p>
Kazakhstan	<p>The government of Kazakhstan returned 670 ISIS families who were in the Syrian camps.</p> <p>The State of Kazakhstan has worked to return 100 children and women. In cooperation with Russia, it has returned nearly 1,000 children and their families.</p>
Iraq	<p>The Iraqi government is trying to bring back the families of ISIS. The government has negotiated with the Kurds amid fears from the Iraqis in the camp that they will pursue the Popular Mobilization and take revenge on them since some of them still carry the ideology of ISIS.</p> <p>Families are subject to strict monitoring by the Iraqi security forces and the Popular Mobilization until they are rehabilitated.</p> <p>It has brought back large numbers of Yazidis who were kidnapped by ISIS during its attacks on their areas</p> <p>The Iraqi authorities are carrying out the process of transferring ISIS families in coordination with some international organizations, amid popular rejection from the Yazidis and Christians residents of the region who were subjected to mass destruction at the hands of the organization.</p>
Canada	<p>There are 26 Canadian children stranded in northeastern Syria, most of them are six or younger, and among them is the four-year-old girl Amira, who was born to Canadian parents in Syria and then was killed in the fight against ISIS. Her uncle is trying to bring her to Canada but the Canadian government refused to allow it.</p>
United Kingdom	<p>British authorities returned one child last September and 50 British children living in areas under the control of ISIS where they arrived with their parents.</p> <p>The British government largely refuses to repatriate British adults who joined ISIS; however, it has returned a small number of children without their parents.</p>



	The effects of the British policy have left about 60 British children stranded in Syria, which has been condemned by rights groups. The rights groups state that children should not pay the price for the decisions of their parents.
Kosovo	The government managed to repatriate 738 of its citizens.
Egypt	There is a percentage of Egyptians in the camp, and others in prisons. Egypt refuses to take back children and women from ISIS.
Syria	Most of the countries whose citizens belong to ISIS. In the midst of the severe crises it has been going through since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, the state of Syria is considered unable to shelter them and there are fears that they will flee in Syria due to the continued deterioration of the political and general situation there.  300 Syrians left the al-Hol camp for Deir ez-Zor.

<b>The situation of The Organizations Regarding the Issue</b>	
Mercy Corps	It has been in Syria since 2014 to provide humanitarian aid  It has suspended its operations in northeastern Syria and deported its international staff in the region.
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	It provided many humanitarians aid in Syria, but it was forced to withdraw and suspend operations.
Relief International	It expanded humanitarian operations in al-Hol camp in 2019  It worked to provide health needs and establish additional field hospitals.  The organization stopped working at the al-Hol camp; Fearing that the Syrian government would regain control of the area.
World Food Program (WFP)	The program provided food for women and children starting from 2018 until now.  The program's operations in the region did not stop while recognizing at the same time the existence of major disturbances.
United Nations (UN)	<b>United Nations 2019:</b>



	<p>More than 18,000 kits of non-food items and winter clothes were distributed to the displaced.</p> <p>The transportation of humanitarian aid to Qamishli on board 29 trucks from the governorates of Damascus, Homs, Latakia, Qamishli and Tartus.</p> <p>Humanitarian supplies were transported by road to Qamishli on 125 trucks from the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Latakia and Tartus.</p> <p>UN agencies also transported humanitarian supplies by road to Deir ez-Zor on 28 trucks from the governorates of Homs, Latakia and Damascus.</p> <p>UN agencies work in al-Hol camp, they distribute food baskets on a monthly basis, in addition to non-food items such as blankets, sponges, kerosene heaters for the winter and fans for the summer.</p> <p><b>United Nations 2020:</b></p> <p>Providing a range of vital assistance to al-Hol camp including emergency, primary and reproductive health care, water trucking, distribution of shelter aid, non-food items, food, personal hygiene, nutrition and protection.</p> <p>Access to some basic services has been increasingly compromised in recent months including regular water supplies and emergency healthcare due to several reasons such as interruptions in the water supply from the Alouk water station and precautionary measures related to Covid-19.</p>
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	<p>Child Protection, Humanitarian Coordination, Information Management, Health, Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.</p> <p>Three medical centers, vehicles providing medical care and a school were bombed.</p>
Amnesty International	<p>Amnesty International recommended that the Kurdish authorities end arbitrary detention to guarantee the right to a fair trial for all those detained on terrorism charges.</p> <p>Urgently increase funding for humanitarian assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq to meet the basic needs of those already displaced.</p>
Save the Children	<p>It warns that the harsh conditions in al-Hol camp create the appropriate climate to push these children to extremism.</p>



World Health Organization (WHO)	<p>It has placed sufficient rations of rapid food aid in Aleppo and Idlib.</p> <p>It provided aid and medical supplies to camps in Syria and Iraq.</p>
Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)	<p>The organization provides donations and medical supplies.</p>
Kurdish Red Crescent	<p>It also provides donations and medical supplies.</p>
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	<p>It is carrying out the process of transferring families from al-Hol camp to Iraq (not in agreement with the Syrian government but through parties in coordination with the Kurdish forces in Syria).</p> <p>In 2017, it made great efforts to expand Ain Issa camp in order to receive more displaced Syrians from Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, in addition to strengthening the camps near Raqqa.</p> <p>Since 2017, the organization has sheltered more than 34,000 in the Ain Issa, Mabrouka, al-Arisha and al-Hol camps.</p> <p>UNHCR provided support to enable returning families to obtain civil documents to ensure their rights to basic services.</p> <p>UNHCR provided additional support including medical equipment and drug supplies to health centers.</p> <p>UNHCR is setting up transit centers on the border with Syria in order to ensure that new and returning refugees receive the assistance they need.</p> <p>UNHCR provides assistance to war widows in Iraq including legal support and the issuance of lost documents.</p>
Human Rights Watch	<p>It made several recommendations, calling on donor governments, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask countries to return their citizens from the Syrian camps.</li> <li>• Improving the camps health and medical conditions.</li> <li>• Coordinating a global and rapid response that supports the protection of international human rights and includes repatriation and resettlement operations.</li> </ul>



<p>Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic</p>	<p>The report of the Independent International Commission on the Syria file issued in March 2021 stated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parties to the conflict committed the most heinous violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of international human rights law.</li> <li>• These violations and abuses included acts that are likely to constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and other international crimes including genocide.</li> </ul> <p>The report called on the parties concerned to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in order to release all arbitrarily detained persons, to support families of victims and survivors and to provide compensation to victims.</li> <li>• Provide comprehensive psychosocial support particularly to children and victims of sexual violence and compile, preserve and document records of civil documents and records of housing, land and property. All of these operations should be led by representative groups of Syrians with the international community providing the required technical support.</li> </ul>
<p>The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP)</p>	<p>The Washington Institute for Near East Policy report issued in 2020 made important recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the oil infrastructure in Syria does not fall into the hands of ISIS.</li> <li>• Preventing fighters from regrouping amid increasing attacks by ISIS in Deir-ez-Zor and al-Hasakah.</li> <li>• Maintaining security in ISIS detention centers, which still hold up to 10,000 fighters.</li> </ul>
<p>Centre for Kurdish Studies</p>	<p>The Center for Kurdish Studies presented a set of recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assisting countries seeking to prevent the resurgence of ISIS</li> <li>• Assisting in the development of a rehabilitation program with a focus on educational and psychological programs targeting women and children in the camp.</li> <li>• Continuing to provide military support to the efforts of the Syrian Democratic Forces in confronting ISIS, providing the necessary financial support to them</li> </ul>





	to tighten their control over the camp and providing basic services to its residents.
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## The American Position Regarding the Issue

ISIS is the most dangerous terrorist organization that has emerged in the Arab region and confronting it was the main goal of the American strategy against terrorism. The United States of America announced the formation of an international coalition to fight ISIS in 2014. The American forces succeeded in achieving many military victories over the organization. In 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces, with the support of the international coalition led by the United States, surrounded and captured the city of Raqqa which was the de facto the “capital” of the Islamic State. This operation led to the destruction of large parts of the city and the flight of thousands of residents.

The US-led international coalition has implemented a comprehensive strategy against ISIS including:

- Cutting off the flow of foreign fighters to and from Iraq and Syria
- Confronting ISIS messages on social media
- Strengthening security in prisons and camps for the displaced
- Providing stability and humanitarian aid to the liberated areas

The main role of the United States was to assist the Syrian Democratic Forces in finding and targeting hidden ISIS leaders.

Between 2011 and 2017, at least 64 Americans joined a jihadist group in Iraq and Syria, 53 of whom joined ISIS. Many served in combat roles while others worked in logistics, finance, and management of the Islamic State.

During the month of 2019, the last stronghold of ISIS fell in the al-Baghuz area and the fate of thousands of displaced ISIS families (most of them Syrian and Iraqi citizens, along with thousands of foreigners, mostly women and children) were detained in camps under the control of the Kurdish authorities.



According to United Nations reports, the Syrian Democratic Forces have imprisoned more than ten thousand people suspected of being Islamic State fighters.

The Syrian Democratic Forces made gains against ISIS during that period but they also lost control of the region and city of Afrin, following Olive Branch Operation (another cross-border operation launched by Turkey).

The US forces will withdraw from the border area after a call between Trump and Erdogan before the start of the Turkish operation.

The US will not support the operation and Turkey alone will be responsible for all the militants of the organization in the prisons of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Trump emphasized, "We may be in the process of leaving Syria, but in no way have we abandoned the Kurds, who are special people and wonderful fighters," the US president said, adding, "likewise our relationship with Turkey, a NATO and trading partner, has been very good."

Reports described the US move as a “disaster” and in light of Turkey's exploitation of the current situation in Syria, President Trump confirmed, threatening Turkey, that he would completely destroy the Turkish economy if the latter took an “unacceptable” step.

The Syrian Democratic Forces played an effective role in the fight against ISIS in Syria, however, the US left them to face death which is a big mistake in confronting Turkey.

The US prevented Turkey from forcibly controlling the Arab-majority city of Manbij in the past while and Turkey continues to insist that the Syrian Democratic Forces withdraw from the city and hand it over to pro-Syrian groups.

Since 2019, the US has held several rounds of talks to ease tensions between stakeholders in northeastern Syria focusing on Kurdish-Arab and intra-Kurdish discussions toward the ultimate goal of facilitating engagement in talks between Turkey and the Kurds.

In light of the difficult political conditions in the region and the presence of ISIS camps, the Kurds are demanding the countries concerned to return their citizens who are being held with them or to



establish an international court to start the jihadists trials since ISIS foreign women in al-Hol camp represent well-funded time bombs and still pose a major domestic and international threat.

There were many reasons why the Kurdish authorities prompted the countries concerned to take back their citizens who were being held in their custody or to establish an international court to set trials to the jihadists, most notably:

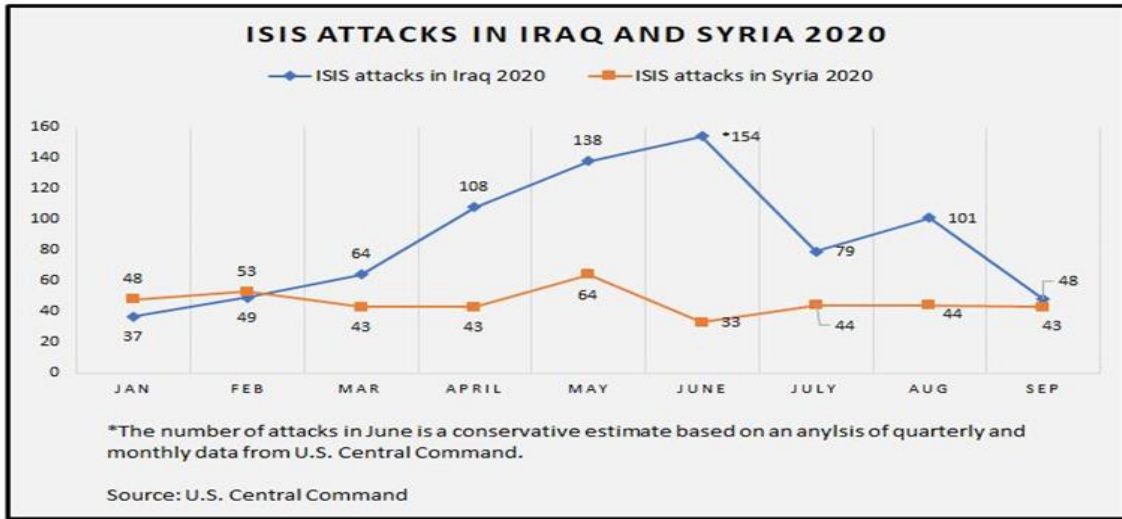
- The camps turned into ISIS hotbeds, and Hesba committees were formed inside the camps in order to punish violators of the regulation.
- The large numbers estimated at about 80,000 women and children exceed the security capabilities of the Kurdish authorities.

The military operations launched by Turkey weaken the security capabilities of the Kurds in controlling the ISIS camps, after they were forced to withdraw their forces assigned to guard the camp to counter Turkish attacks.

Increasing fears of an increase in infection with Covid-19 inside the camps.

The step of evacuating the ISIS camps will impose serious repercussions at the regional and international levels, the most prominent of which are:

- The return of ISIS forces and sleeper cells to control the area in northern Syria – gradually/ completely. The interest of international forces has begun to increase in the consequences that could result from the evacuation of ISIS camps, as reports from the German Foreign Ministry indicated, “al-Hol camp has turned into an ISIS school par excellence.”
- The emergence of a new generation for ISIS and the continuation of children inside the camps will turn them into terrorist elements and this has become abundantly clear during the recent increase in killings and violence inside the camps in Syria and Iraq. However, the majority of countries, especially European countries, insist not to take back these citizens.
- It is clear that ISIS is not over. Since the fall of ISIS in Syria and the collapse of the caliphate in March 2019, ISIS has launched hundreds of attacks primarily near the Iraqi border.



### ISIS attacks in Syria and Iraq in 2020

Nearly half of the 131 attacks in the third quarter of 2020 were in Deir ez-Zor (Governorate in the east) and 13 percent of the attacks took place in Raqqa province which includes the former capital of the caliphate in the north.

During August 2020, Kenneth McKenzie Jr., the head of US Central Command, warned that, without sustained military pressure, ISIS could gain a foothold “in a relatively short period”.

In October 2020, the Department of Homeland Security warned that these groups can adapt quickly and re-emerge and terrorists abroad will continue to look for weaknesses in US immigration and border security programs. The United States also faced the prospect of lone wolves launching homegrown attacks inspired by ISIS.

Several developments could lead to an increase in terrorism in certain parts of the world and with the United States withdrawing its forces from the Middle East, al-Qaeda, ISIS and their affiliate groups could make a new push to seize new territory and destabilize countries and regions.

Syria and Iraq are home to jihadist groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS. While the United States continues to divert resources and redeploy forces to various theaters, there may be opportunities for terrorist and insurgent groups to take advantage of the potential power vacuum.



Even as the physical ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria is destroyed, the group continues to expand through its affiliate groups and the likelihood is that these groups will intensify their operations in 2021, reminding the West that even if countries like the United States look to focus on great powers competition, counter-terrorism operations must remain a priority.

As the United States considers its next steps in northeastern Syria, it should therefore focus on the following actions:

- **Maintaining Military Influence:** The war continues to prove that the parties with military power on the ground or in the air will be the ultimate decision makers about Syria's fate. The limited but destructive US military presence in the northeast and south of the country has given Washington powerful leverage to ensure that its anti-Iran and anti-ISIS priorities are adhered to, and in the short term, the United States must continue to assist the Kurdish authorities in doing what is necessary to contain ISIS.
- **Pressuring Turkey into talks with the Syrian Kurds:** Encourage Erdogan to pursue this initiative at the highest levels as he is the only one who can persuade the Turkish people to resume talks with a group affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).
- Washington should continue its own efforts to reconcile the various Syrian stakeholders.
- Accordingly, the United States must remain committed to the “whole of Syria” approach that the “Geneva process” represents.
- The administration of President Biden should provide adequate support to the Kurdistan region of Iraq which played a key role in combating jihadist threats.
- The United States should continue to provide security support to the Kurds as an important partner.

## Turkey Position Regarding the Issue

Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution 2011, Ankara has provided support to the Syrian opposition on several levels and dimensions. Most of the opposition conferences, hosted more than two million Syrian refugees within the framework of the open-door policy on a large scale. It is believed that it supplied some military factions with weapons, especially the Free Army groups in northern Syria and the Turkmen factions although this was not authorized.



The Kurdish question, represent the “other face” of Turkey. Through its position on the Kurds, we stand on the reality of its politics, some of its deep challenges, some sources of threats, strengths and weaknesses and this explains why it was the "Achilles' heel" of politics in Turkey.

Turkish forces with the support of the Syrian National Army launched Peace Spring Operation in October 2019, capturing Syrian territory between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain along the borders.

The Turkish military operation in northeastern Syria, drawing the nature of the land on the war table and the tactic to exterminate the Kurds came through a major role in developing the game as means to improve the image before the world until it reached the level of Western and Arab criticism.

The United States announced its withdrawal from northern Syria in order to allow Erdogan to launch a military attack on the region. Turkey considers the Kurdish fighters terrorists and sees them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party which has been waging a rebellion against it on its soil for decades. As Ankara fears that the Syrian Kurds will establish an independent rule near its borders, it could support the separatist tendency of its Kurdish citizens.

Erdogan justifies this military operation as coming in the context of fighting “terrorists”, a description that Ankara used to give to the Kurdish fighters. The Turkish government wants to transfer the conflict between it and the Kurds to the inside of Syria taking advantage of the military vacuum created by Donald Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from the north. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is here following the same violent approach employed over and over against the Kurds.

The issue returned to the fore with force after the Syrian Democratic Forces took control of the last enclave (al-Baghouz) which was controlled by the Islamic State in March 2019.

Last August, the US military stated that it had reached an agreement with the Turkish army to conduct joint patrols on the border area to allay Turkish security concerns within the framework of a “security mechanism” agreed upon by the two parties.

Erdogan’s government is exploiting the absence of the national army and the state of liquidity in the border areas to establish a strategic position that allows it to maintain continuous military



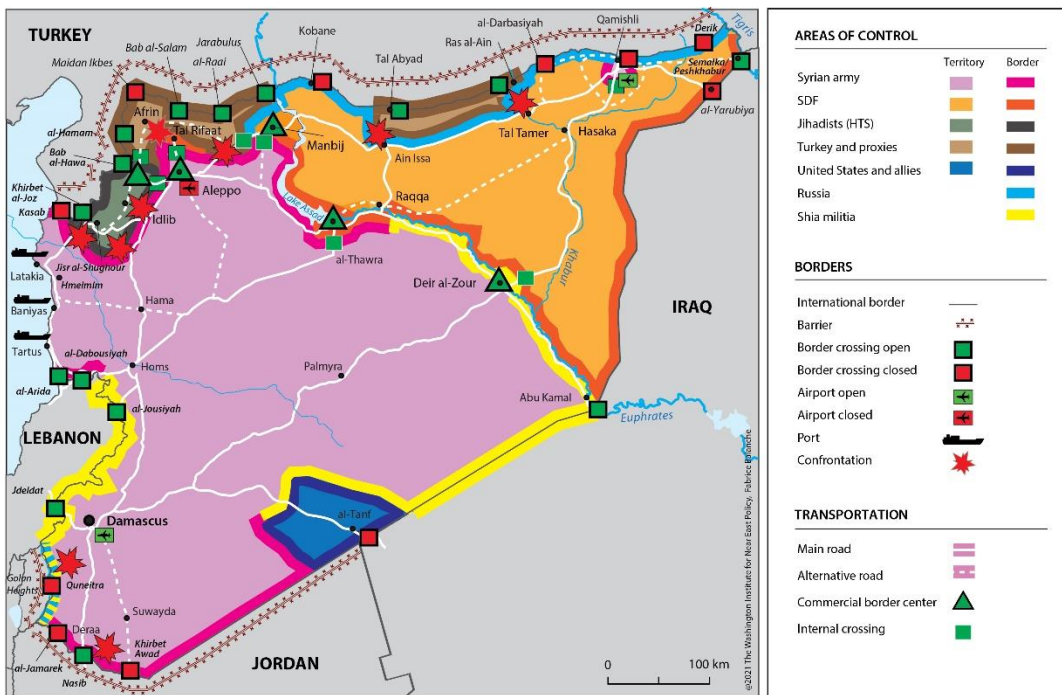
pressure on the Kurds as well as preventing cooperation between Kurdish movements in northern Syria and Kurdish organizations in eastern and southern Turkey.

Although Turkey is part of the US-led coalition against ISIS, it has strongly opposed Washington's support for the Syrian Democratic Forces and it has tried to prevent it from taking control of Syria's northern border.

It is clear that the Turkish military operations against the Kurdish authorities have greatly weakened the control of ISIS camps and prisons which give ISIS an opportunity to reorganize its ranks and regain its strength.

The strategic location of the ISIS camps, in the remote border areas, gave ISIS a golden opportunity to spread extremist ideas among the Arab tribes residing in that area. Al-Hol camp became a gathering point for the militants of ISIS fighters who were captured during the battles with the organization.

Syria's Borders Are Under External Control



Crossings for ISIS families towards the Turkish and Syrian regions





It was Turkey that pushed the terrorists towards the Syrian border to strike at the institutions and achievements that the Kurds had democratically achieved in the past eight years.

Erdogan seeks to build 10 districts and 140 villages in this area to house at least one million Syrian refugees residing in Turkey.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of the borders which cut off vital pathways for the delivery of aid to northeastern Syria, the conditions, as described by the United Nations, have become “terrible” and “inhuman”. The tightening of the security noose has also increased attempts to escape to Idlib where the last opposition strongholds while others managed to escape to Turkey.

After the defeat of ISIS, Western reports that monitored the transfer of funds from Turkey to ISIS elements in Syria were repeated in a different way, and indeed, sanctions were imposed on financial institutions in Turkey for their dealings with the organization.

### Iran Position Regarding the Issue

ISIS has threatened the entire Middle East especially after it took control of several areas in Syria and Iraq and committed bloody massacres against civilians. Therefore, failure to confront it by the countries of the region especially the forces affecting them, will have dire consequences.

Iran considered the terrorist organization ISIS to be more dangerous than the rest of the other extremist groups on its borders due to several reasons. The most important of these reasons is the progress made by ISIS and its geographical control over many areas in a short period, its recruitment of tens of thousands of fighters from all countries of the world, its accumulation of the largest number of resources as well as its hostility to the Shiites and its attempt to promote the establishment of an Islamic State in accordance with Sharia which eventually prompted Tehran to change its policy in Iraq.

The increase in the threat of ISIS in Iraq has forced Iran to change some of its fixed positions as it has constantly condemned the US interference in regional affairs but it is now satisfied with some condemnations in order to reduce the threat posed by ISIS.





With the completion of the international coalition led by Washington to fight the ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Iran, the main player in the region has been excluded from the international coalition to fight the organization.

Despite the US statements ruling out military cooperation with Iran in the war against ISIS, the two sides remained in agreement that ISIS has become a great danger to logic and it is noteworthy that Tehran remained calm when the US began, which senior Iranian officials usually describe as the “Great Satan” in bombing areas inside Iraq.

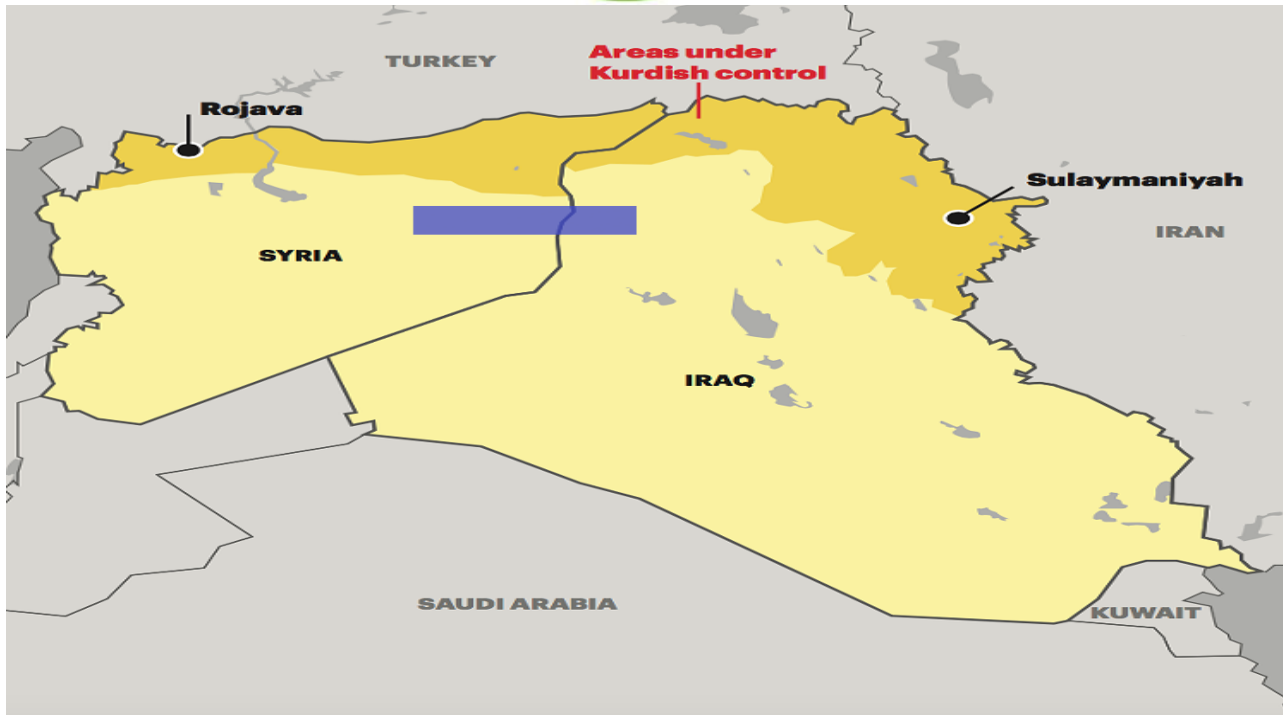
After the elimination of ISIS, the Shiite militias moved away from the Iraqi state and its goals and they implemented an agenda linked to Iranian interests. Iran is trying through its use of its Shiite militias to push the United States to withdraw its forces and diplomats from Iraq, however, the government of Iraq considers its ties to be vital. It needs the help of the international coalition against ISIS to control the security situation which is still fragile even more than three years after the organization was defeated militarily.

Divisions within the Iraqi army have made the Shiite militias, the Popular Mobilization Forces, contribute to weakening efforts to fight ISIS.

It is scheduled to reduce the American forces to 2,500 soldiers in Iraq which provides great advantages to the opponents of the United States. In Iraq, Iran has already moved to increase its influence by supporting various Shiite militias across the country.

The pro-Iranian militia groups that are now increasingly dominant in the political and security arenas in Iraq and Syria consider their role in the country to be opposed to that of the United States.

Iran has also used thousands of militia members (Iranian Quds Force, the Lebanese Hezbollah militias and the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces) that Iran has armed and trained as well as thousands of new recruits who have volunteered for this purpose to transfer hundreds of ISIS militants from Syria to Iraq, in addition to providing them with weapons and ammunition as part of an Iranian scheme to revive the terrorist organization.



### Transferring ISIS camps from Syria to Iraq

Iran has expanded its projects in the most remote and disadvantaged areas of the country particularly in the countryside around Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. These financial contributions allow Iran to increase its influence in neglected communities.

Iran used tunnels belonging to the terrorist organization ISIS in Iraq to store weapons and equipment for the Afghan Liwa Fatemiyoun militia in Syria which is the second largest Iranian force present in Syria after Hezbollah.

Iran also continues to consolidate its influence and presence in the Syrian territories by infiltrating the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, attracting militias loyal to the regime and civilians as well as recruiting them into the ranks of the militias loyal to Iran.

The Iranian expansion reached the cities of Qamishli and al-Hasakah, through the pro-Iranian Liwa Fatemiyoun militia recruiting national defense elements and civilians within the regime's areas in its ranks in return for monthly salaries of about 350 thousand Syrian pounds per element.



Iran angered the presence of US armies in Kurdistan, so, Shiite factions launched a series of missile attacks on the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Shiite militia backed by Iran rained a barrage of missiles on Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, targeting the city's international airport which includes a US base and a number of civilian neighborhoods.

In the aftermath of the fall of ISIS, while Iran does not view the Kurds as a terrorist group, it does consider them an ally, however, Tehran fears that more autonomy for the Syrian Kurds could lead to the creation of independent Kurdish states in Turkey and Iraq.

In a new political step, the Iranian-Kurdish rapprochement began with the exchange of official visits at the highest levels, trying to gain access to the ISIS camps and control them by controlling the children from ISIS families to find them within the Iranian forces. The terrorist organization ISIS in Iraq and Syria is recruiting children

The Iranian policy towards the Kurds is aimed at obtaining the ISIS camps relying on the policy of carrots and sticks and it seems that the retreat of the United States in helping its Kurdish allies may be expensive at a later time.

## Results

- There are 27,000 children stuck in al-Hol camp alone, if they left, they will be violated.
- Countries refused to take back ISIS women as children were separated from their mother in contravention of international law.
- Approximately 27,000 non-Syrian children are stranded in al-Hol camp including approximately 19,000 Iraqi children and 8,000 children from other countries.
- One of the most prominent legal obstacles that prevent these children from returning to their countries is that separating children from their mothers who are in the same camp contradicts international humanitarian law while many countries have categorically refused to take back the detained ISIS.
- Some ISIS women have given up their parental rights in order to allow their children to return to a normal life but others who remain loyal to the terrorist organization consider



their children a new generation of ISIS cadres and they do not want them to return to their countries.

- The coronavirus pandemic has reduced the already slow repatriation process, and many countries, such as France and Britain are reluctant to take back their citizens.
- Those children who have been accommodated in a psychological briefing center for children at risk.
- They had an “acceptable degree of social adjustment and the ability to integrate although some of them lived through difficult situations.”
- Years after the expulsion of ISIS militants in northern Iraq, about 400,000 civilians who fled the region are still stuck in the unknown and cannot return to their homes.
- Taking care of these foreigners is a big problem for the Kurdish administration, countries should take back and rehabilitate their citizens.

## Recommendations

- Immediate increase aid to all residents of al-Hol camp which is under the control of the Kurdish administration. The camp is holding thousands of families of ISIS fighters.
- Ask countries with nationals detained inside the camp to help secure their return home if they choose to do so.
- Ensure that detention is exercised in accordance with the law and protect the basic rights of detainees under international law including judicial review of detention.
- Intensifying integration programs for Syrian children who lived under the auspices of ISIS.
- Urgently directing efforts towards psychological and educational support services in the camp.
- Continuing to work on documenting violations that occur in the camp by civil society organizations.
- Psychological counseling for orphans of terrorist organizations, at an early age, the longer their evacuation and rehabilitation is delayed, the greater the risk that children will adopt extremist ideology and be affected by the environment that fosters terrorism.



- Society should “stay away from stigmatizing them as children of ISIS because of its negative impact on their path and be satisfied with the term children who have lived through armed conflicts.”

## Proposed Solutions

- Taking DNA samples from children to prove their nationalities.
- If the children's nationality is confirmed, the children should be rehabilitated and trained in qualified international camps (psychologically and intellectually) and then returned to their countries.
- The necessity of assisting the citizens to return and providing all necessary measures to guarantee their rights as citizens belonging to those countries.
- Improving the camps health and medical conditions.
- Coordinating a global and rapid response that supports the protection of international human rights and includes repatriation and resettlement operations.
- Socio-economic policies that target the dignity of citizens and improve their lives as well as opportunities for economic and social progress through increasing the efficiency of education, health, social care and work.

## Future questions raised by the study

The study raises the following questions:

- The extent of the Kurdish authority's ability to control the security situation in the region in light of the presence of 12 thousand prisoners (men) and 102 thousand in camps (children / women).
- The real reasons for the Turkish government to increase air strikes on the Kurdish areas at this particular time.
- The role of the Iranian militias in controlling the ISIS camps and supporting ISIS militarily and financially as well as the Iranian ISIS rapprochement.