

U.S. Coalition Cleansing Raqqa of Arabs to Expand Kurdish “Autonomous Region”

As U.S.-backed forces storm the Syrian city of Raqqa in their fight against Daesh (ISIS), a silent cleansing is taking place targeting the city’s Arabs. The U.S.’ Kurdish allies are set to benefit from this cleansing, as it will allow them to annex the city after the battle against Daesh winds down.

By [Mint Press](#)

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DAMASCUS (Analysis) — *Last year, U.S.-backed Kurdish militias active in northern Syria took advantage of the chaos caused by the nation’s ongoing conflict and [declared the parts of Syria under their control](#) to be a federal “autonomous region.”*

The move ignored major resistance from most of the Syrian “opposition”, as well as the Syrian government in Damascus and the government of nearby Turkey.

For much of the conflict, several Kurdish militias have become some of the U.S.-led coalition’s closest allies within Syria, receiving [massive amounts of arms](#) and [heavy weapon shipments](#) from coalition members.

The Kurdish militias also dominate the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the U.S.-backed group best known for leading the coalition-supported offensive targeting the Daesh (ISIS) stronghold of Raqqa.

The U.S.-supported push to claim Raqqa from Daesh has been months in the making. However, once the operation to take the city began, things started to move rather quickly. Now, the fight for Raqqa seems to be nearly over, with SDF forces set to capture Daesh’s “capital” in a matter of weeks.

So it begins the partition of [#Syria](#), US-Backed Forces Enter [#Raqqa](#) as Coalition Drops White Phosphorus Bombs <https://t.co/IQpHvEeBKR> [#GE2017](#)

— CounterBalanceToday (@CounterBalanceT) [June 9, 2017](#)

The SDF announced months ago that control of Raqqa following Daesh’s ouster would be given to an autonomous “council,” not the Syrian government, and that it would soon become part of the Kurdish autonomous region that it borders. [As MintPress previously reported](#), keeping Raqqa out of Syrian government control plays right into the hands of U.S. and [Israeli](#) geopolitical interests, which have [long been pushing](#) for a partitioned Syria.

However, this plan has at least one major obstacle – the population of Raqqa itself. Raqqa

has historically been populated by an Arab majority. [As journalist Andrew Korybko notes](#), it is highly unlikely that any Arab, or non-Kurd for that matter, living in Raqqa would freely choose to live in a “Kurdish-dominated statelet” as a second-class citizen instead of choosing to instead have equal standing within the Syrian Arab Republic.

The presence of Raqqa’s pre-siege population would essentially prevent the annexation of Raqqa into the Kurdish autonomous region. But if the vast majority of Raqqa’s population were forced to leave, or were killed, the whole operation would become much more feasible.

That is exactly what is happening. Just within the first week of the coalition’s operation to take Raqqa, [at least 300 civilians were killed](#), while many speculate that the actual figure is much higher. The loss of life has largely been due to the coalition’s indiscriminate bombings of the area and [its use of chemical weapons](#), particularly white phosphorus. These bombings and the coalition use of chemical weapons [have also forced 160,000 civilians](#) to flee Raqqa. Thus, in just one week, Raqqa lost the vast majority of its population, which prior to the conflict in Syria stood at around 220,000.

Harrowing massacre again.. [#BREAKING](#) 44 civilians killed mostly women & children killed in US strikes on Ratla south [#ISIS](#)-held Raqqa [#Syria](#) pic.twitter.com/8rvpHIN84b

— Rami (@RamiAlLolah) [June 19, 2017](#)

Staggering Loss of Life: 'Raqqa is not about protecting civilians'
<https://t.co/SAQhFhdDTQ> via [@YouTube](#) Ethnic Cleansing

— Teresa Wright (@TeresaTeresa133) [June 15, 2017](#)

The U.S.-led coalition’s divide and conquer strategy

The possibility that the U.S.-led coalition and its allies are seeking to remove the Arab-majority population of Raqqa becomes much more feasible when one considers that Daesh does not appear to be the intended target of these attacks.

While the effort to capture Raqqa has been expedited in part by prior coalition and SDF efforts to isolate the city, other factors that have received little media attention likely played a major role in the operation’s rapid pace. Most notable among these is the substantial evidence that both the Kurds and the U.S. [have cut deals with Daesh](#) that have allowed for the SDF’s rapid capture of major parts of the city.

Sergey Surovikin, the commander of Russia’s active forces in Syria, argued in early June that the Kurdish SDF and Daesh terrorists had created an arrangement that allowed Daesh militants to leave Raqqa and its suburbs without incident.

“According to available reliable information, in early June ISIL [Daesh] terrorists entered into collusion with the command of the Kurdish armed units, which are part of the Democratic Forces Union, [and] left the populated localities of Tadia and al-Hamam located 19 kilometers southwest of Raqqa offering no

resistance and headed toward Palmyra," Surovikin [told the Tass News Agency](#).

Ammar al-Assad, a senior Syrian lawmaker, echoed these claims, [telling Fars News](#) that the U.S. and its SDF allies had allowed over 120 Daesh members to leave Raqqa with their weapons in order to create insecurity in Palmyra and the surrounding region. He also stated that the U.S. had airlifted Western Daesh commanders out of Raqqa, sending them to unknown destinations. While some may argue that al-Assad's account is not credible, [video evidence emerged last week](#) of entire convoys of Daesh fighters leaving Raqqa entirely untouched by the U.S. military, even though the U.S. is actively bombing that exact location – essentially corroborating al-Assad's account.

Watch the U.S. coalition allow a massive convoy of Daesh fighters to leave Raqqa untouched:

<http://www.mintpressnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ISIS-convoy-leaves-Raqqa.mp4>

While the U.S. coalition apparently “missed” the hundreds of vehicles in the Daesh convoy, they had no problem shooting down a Syrian Army plane this past Sunday. [According to the Syrian military](#), the plane had been bombing Daesh forces leaving Raqqa when it was shot down.

Thus, if neither the U.S.-led coalition nor the SDF is targeting Daesh with their indiscriminate bombing, it seems increasingly likely that they are instead targeting civilians who could resist Raqqa's annexation by the U.S.-backed Kurds.

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