

# KURDWATCH●Report 11

## **Ethnic cleansing in Tall Abyad?**

Characteristics of YPG and PYD rule  
in the areas captured from the IS



KurdWatch is a project of the  
European Center for Kurdish Studies  
Emser Straße 26  
12051 Berlin  
Germany

Phone: +49 – 30 – 67 96 85 27  
[info@kurdwatch.org](mailto:info@kurdwatch.org)

© KurdWatch, January 2016

# Ethnic cleansing in Tall Abyad?

## Characteristics of YPG and PYD rule in the areas captured from the IS

In May and June 2015 fighters from the People's Defense Units (YPG) of the Democratic Union Party, together with the US-American Air Force and allied units of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), were successful in ousting the Islamic State (IS) from large parts of the region along the Turkish border between 'Ayn al-'Arab (Kobani) and Ra's al-'Ayn (Serê Kaniyê) that had been under IS control since the summer of 2013. On the one hand, the People's Defense Units attacked from the direction of Ra's al-'Ayn. By the end of May they had advanced to the eastern border of the province of ar-Raqqah, just fifty kilometers from Tall Abyad. On the other hand, contingents of troops encroached from the direction of 'Ayn al-'Arab and approached the city of Tall Abyad from the west. YPG fighters met little resistance both west and east of Tall Abyad.<sup>1</sup> According to eyewitness reports the IS retreated as soon as the air raids began. The city of Tall Abyad was captured between June 15 and 16, 2015 without any struggle by the IS. The latter's fighters had largely retreated in the direction of ar-Raqqah; some had fled to Turkey.<sup>2</sup> With the capture of the border city Tall Abyad the IS lost an important supply route from Turkey. Since then the city of Jarabulus and an adjoining strip to the west of approximately eighty kilometers long are the last pieces of the Syrian-Turkish border controlled by the IS. This strip is considerably further away than Tall Abyad from ar-Raqqah, the Syrian IS headquarters. For the YPG the capture of Tall Abyad and the surrounding area was strategically

**1** An Arab human-rights activist from Tall Abyad reported that a fighter of the Free Syrian Army's Tahrir Brigade, who fought together with the People's Defense Units, told him that he only fired one shot on the way between Ra's al-'Ayn and Tall Abyad. And this did not happen in battle but to find his fellow combatants he had lost; interview with Mahmud, Arab human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

**2** See Hala Kodmani, »En moins d'une heure, l'État islamique est parti«, *Libération*, June 22, 2015, <[http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2015/06/22/en-moins-d-une-heure-l-etat-islamique-est-parti\\_1334929](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2015/06/22/en-moins-d-une-heure-l-etat-islamique-est-parti_1334929)>; see also Abu Muhammad, «تل ابيض منفذ داعش إلى العالم تخرج عن سيطرته» [»Tall Abyad, the Islamic State's gate to the outside, is out of its control«], *Raqqah is Being Slaughtered Silently*, June 15, 2015, <<http://www.raqqah-sl.com/?p=1615>>. Interview with Yusuf, former member of the local coordinating committee from Tall Abyad, October 2015; interview with Mahmud,

important since the areas controlled by the YPG in the Jazirah are now directly connected to the Kobanî canton. Thus two of the three Kurdish administered enclaves could be merged.

Salih Muslim, cochairman of the PYD, announced on June 17, 2015 to the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* that the Asayiş, the PYD's security service, would take control of Tall Abyad together with a civil administration.<sup>3</sup> On October 21, 2015 the city and its surrounding regions were incorporated into the Kobanî canton.

The YPG advance led to a flight from the area, mainly by Arabic and Turkmen residents. Most Kurds had left the region already in mid-2013 for fear of the IS. The People's Defense Units have been accused of purposely displacing the Arabic and Turkmen populations from their villages, arbitrarily arresting people, ransacking their houses and burning them down. Among the accusers are Islamist rebel groups such as Ahrar ash-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.<sup>4</sup> The National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces also accused the YPG of carrying out ethnic cleansing in Tall Abyad. An investigation committee appointed by the Coalition, consisting of three Arabic and two Kurdish members, was denied entry to Tall Abyad.<sup>5</sup> On June 19, 2015, relying on information from activists, the daily paper *al-'Arabi al-Jadid* accused the People's Defense Units of killing and raping Arabic residents, ransacking and burning down houses, expelling residents, and carrying out ethnic cleansing to the east and to the west of the city of al-Hasakah as well as in Ra's al-'Ayn and in the areas southwest of it.<sup>6</sup>

On Al Jazeera's website concrete incidents were named: On July 1, 2015 Ahmad Hajj Salih, an activist from Tall Abyad, was quoted as saying that the People's Defense Units had arrested 'Ammar Jalil Dada, Ziyad Yahya Dada, and Muhammad Burhan Dada one week earlier. The three Turkmen wanted to return to Tall Abyad from Turkey after the IS had been driven out from there. Ahmad Mustafa, a resident of Tall Abyad, stated that this was not an isolated case. The residents of villages in the surrounding area of Tall Abyad such as Zahlah, Qarah Sharaf, and 'Adhiyah had also been displaced. In addition, the People's Defense Units had

Arab human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

**3** Fehim Taştekin, »PYD: Türkiye rahat olsun«, *Hürriyet*, June 17, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/pyd-turkiye-rahat-olsun-29302987>>.

**4** See for example, *The Times of Israel*, June 15, 2015, »Syrian rebels accuse Kurds of ethnic cleansing«, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-rebels-accuse-kurds-of-ethnic-cleansing>>.

**5** See National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, June 27, 2015, »On the recent events in Tal Abyad, Raqqa«, <<http://en.etilaf.org/press/on-the-recent-events-in-tal-abyad-raqqa.html>>. See also *Elaph*, June 23, 2015,

«وحدات حماية الشعب الكردية تطالبه بالاعتذار: منع لجنة الائتلاف لتقصي الحقائق من دخول تل أبيض» [»Kurdish People's Defense

Units demand an apology: Coalition investigative commission prevented from entering Tall Abyad«], <<http://elaph.com/Web/News/2015/6/1018471.html>>.

**6** See *al-'Arabi al-Jadid*, June 19, 2015,

«ناشطون سوريون يوثقون

انتهاكات الوحدات الكردية»

[»Syrian activists document violations of Kurdish units«],

<<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/ناشطون-سوريون-يوثقون-انتهاكات-الوحدات-الكردية>>.

confiscated money and cars in Muhrah and had stolen livestock from the village of Wawiyah.<sup>7</sup>

In October 2015 Amnesty International also published a report in which the People's Defense Units were accused of systematically expelling Arabic as well as Turkmen villagers in the area of Tall Abyad and of destroying their homes.<sup>8</sup> Those villagers interviewed by Amnesty International stated that they had regularly been accused of having supported the IS even if there had only been one or two supporters in the village and they had long ago left the village when the People's Defense Units marched in. Moreover, the People's Defense Units had consistently claimed that the population must leave the village for security reasons even if the front had been several kilometers away and the village had not been a mined area. The People's Defense Units however spoke of isolated cases that had ended in forced displacement. According to them, the decisive factor had either been the security of the village population or that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the villagers had been connected to terrorists.<sup>9</sup>

The goal of this report is not to verify, augment or even to provide an overall picture of the human-rights violations committed by the People's Defense Units. Instead this report presents the basic structure of the rule of the PYD and its People's Defense Units in an area that differs from the other PYD-administered regions (Jazirah, 'Afrin, and Kobani) because it is mainly populated by Arabs. In the newly captured areas around Tall Abyad only ten percent of the population is Kurdish, and around fifteen percent is Turkmen.

Alongside the sources already named above, our analysis relies on eighteen interviews with people from the Tall Abyad region, carried out between June 18 and 20, 2015 and October 13 and 14, 2015. Fifteen of the interviewees are from Tall Abyad, and three from the surrounding area. Sixteen are Arabic, two Turkmen, fifteen men and three women. All interviewees were in Turkey at the time of the interview. Sixteen people were interviewed close to the Turkish-Syrian border. They had fled there due to the military conflicts. One interview partner, a former member of the local coordinating committee of Tall Abyad, had

**7** See Al Jazeera, July 1, 2015, «تل أبيض.. تجدد اتهام الكرد بتهجير للعرب» [»Tall Abyad: Kurds once again accused of forcibly displacing Arabs«], <<http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/تل-أبيض-تجدد-اتهام-الكرد-بتهجير-للعرب>>.

**8** Amnesty International, October 2015: «»We had nowhere else to go»: Forced displacement and demolitions in northern Syria«, <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2425032015ENGLISH.PDF>>.

**9** Amnesty International 2015: 28-29.

already settled in Akçakale after fleeing from the Islamic State at the beginning of 2014. Another interview partner, a human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, lived in Gaziantep. He fled during the YPG invasion and was not allowed to return. For reasons of safety the interview partners are named using pseudonyms.

### Expulsion and the destruction of villages

According to an estimate from Mahmud, a human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, the armed conflicts between the IS and the YPG in Tall Abyad and the surrounding villages since the summer of 2013 has resulted in around one hundred thousand people having to leave their villages. He estimates that roughly sixty thousand fled to Turkey, around ten percent of which are Kurds. Many of the Kurds had already been forcibly displaced by IS fighters in the summer of 2013. When the PYD captured the IS-occupied areas around Tall Abyad in Juni 2015, most notably Arabic and Turkmen residents fled. Muhammad, an Arab civilian from Tall Abyad, said that the population had left the city out of fear of YPG fighters. However, they had neither been forced to leave Tall Abyad nor had they been forced to stay there when the border to Turkey had been opened on June 22, 2015. Other Arabic refugees stated that they had been afraid of being treated by the People's Defense Units the same way the Islamic State had treated the Kurds.

»We fled to Turkey because we were afraid. The People's Defense Units didn't demand that we leave and they didn't use force to make us leave.«<sup>10</sup>

Yusuf, a former member of a local coordinating committee in Tall Abyad, reported that the American Air Force had destroyed a number of villages:

»When the IS was attacked by the Americans, the IS fighters hid in the villages. As a result the population fled. The PYD gave the coordinates of the villages to the Americans.«

Beyond the flight movement as a result of war, the interviews conducted by us suggest that the People's Defense Units forcibly displaced villagers for strategic

**10** Interview with 'Abdussalam, Arab resident of Tall Abyad, June 2015.

reasons. The human-rights activist Mahmud reported that all two thousand five hundred residents of the village of Thamaniyat Adhar, twenty-three kilometers west of Tall Abyad had been forcibly displaced. The villagers, predominantly members of the Arabic tribe of Saramadah, had mainly been simple farmers. One week after the People's Defense Units had control of the area, they had forcibly been displaced in the direction of Turkey without any reason. The village, according to Mahmud, which is close to the Turkish border, is on YPG trafficking routes for humans, drugs, weapons, and animals.

A further example of this kind, reported by Yusuf, is the destruction of Bi'r 'Ashiq, a place four kilometers east of Tall Abyad. Most of the residents of Bi'r 'Ashiq had fled already in June. At the end of October the People's Defense Units had destroyed the village and forcibly displaced the remaining residents. The People's Defense Units had claimed that IS fighters had been hiding in the village. This justification however had only been a pretext. There had been no conflicts but only shots fired from one side. When the approximately one hundred displaced families had wanted to return to their homes, the People's Defense Units had prevented them from doing so on the grounds that the location was strategically important. According to Yusuf, in the meantime, fighters from the National Defense Army, which has close ties to the regime and which cooperates with the People's Defense Units, were stationed in Bi'r 'Ashiq.

Moreover, residents of Tall Abyad Sharqi had been forcibly displaced on June 15 on the grounds that IS fighters resided in the village:

»It was like a theater piece staged by the regime: The People's Defense Units opened fire and stormed apartments. Most people were forcibly displaced and the rest arrested«.<sup>11</sup>

Currently the village, which lies five kilometers east of Tall Abyad, is one of three places in which the People's Defense Units allow access to the city.

The cooperation of the Arabic population with the Islamic State was the main reason given by the People's

**11** Interview with Yusuf, former member of the local coordinating committee from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

Defense Units for the destruction or eviction of houses. An Arabic resident of Tall Abyad explained:

»The Kurdish forces didn't do anything to the people, they were just afraid that there were IS supporters among them. There was not one Arab arrested in the city.«<sup>12</sup>

Other interviews suggest that the accusation of co-operation with the IS is frequently used as a pretext. Yusuf, a former member of a coordination committee, reports that the village residents of al-Munbatih, two kilometers from Tall Abyad were forcibly displaced for supposedly cooperating with the IS. According to Yusuf this was not the case:

»The villagers had no other choice. [...] The IS was the ruling power there. When the IS came to a mechanic with money and wanted a car repaired, the mechanic had to do it. This is his livelihood. The village residents did not fight alongside the IS.«

The example of 'Abbas al-'Isa, a liberal member of the opposition from Qassas, six kilometers east of Tall Abyad, who has been against the regime since the start of the civil war, made it clear how absurd the People's Defense Units' allegation of IS membership is. They arrived in his village on September 1, 2015, in order to take his cars. They said to him that they knew very well he did not belong to the IS but that »his cars are IS« and any discussion about the measures undertaken would be superfluous.<sup>13</sup>

The example highlights a further aspect besides the strategic considerations that was relevant for the YPG in its forcible displacement of village residents: their own personal gain. This is made clear in the case of al-Munbatih. The People's Defense Units did not only occupy houses, according to Yusuf, but also stole furniture. The looting accusation can also be found in the Amnesty International report and in the above-quoted newspaper articles.

Alongside Arabic villages, several Turkmen villages were completely or partially destroyed and the population forcibly displaced. Among other places, Mahmud named the village of Hammam at-Turkuman, where

**12** Interview with Yara, Arab resident of Tall Abyad, June 2015.

**13** Interview with Mahmud, human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

a number of houses were destroyed. One villager told KurdWatch:

»When the fighting closed in on the city of Suluk on June 13, 2015, the villagers went south in the direction of ar-Raqqah. After the Kurdish forces captured the city on June 20, most of the residents returned. On the afternoon of June 22, a car with explosives blew up in front of an Asayiş building. On the same evening, the allied forces [meaning the People's Defense Units] ordered the residents over the loudspeaker of the mosque to leave the village.«<sup>14</sup>

One day later on June 23, the People's Defense Units supposedly had instructed the villagers in Hammam at-Turkuman to leave the village within twenty-four hours since it would be bombed by the allies. Thereupon, the next day the village residents had selected four people to go to Tall Abyad to speak to YPG officials. The four people had been Khalaf Muhammad al-Ibrahim, Muhammad Imam al-Mahall, Fawwaz al-Kurdi, and 'Ali al-Bizah. The delegation had been informed by the YPG in Tall Abyad that the People's Defense Units would protect the population. The four men then had went to the PYD's People's House in Tall Abyad. There they had been suspected of cooperating with the IS, and had been informed that the residents must leave the village. Approximately two thousand eight hundred villagers subsequently had fled to the surrounding villages. Some of them had returned to Hammam at-Turkuman the next day. Around two hundred people had found refuge with family members or acquaintances in Turkey.<sup>15</sup>

Another villager from Hammam at-Turkuman, Salim, confirmed that the People's Defense Units had instructed the village residents to leave the village given that IS sleepers could still be in the village and place people in danger.<sup>16</sup> Mahmud reported further that the People's Defense Units had threatened the residents by saying they would give the Americans the location of the village and it would be destroyed within minutes if they did not cooperate.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the civilians interviewed by us learned that their relatives who had fled to Turkey could easily return to Syria.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless the human-rights activist

**14** Interview with Bassam, Turkmen resident of Hammam at-Turkuman, June 2015.

**15** Interview with Bassam, Turkmen resident of Hammam at-Turkuman, June 2015.

**16** Interview with Salim, Turkmen resident of Hammam at-Turkuman, June 2015. The Amnesty International report (2015: 17) confirms this allegation.

**17** Interview with Mahmud, human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

**18** For example, Yara, Arab resident of Tall Abyad, in June 2015.

Mahmud assumes that between six and eight thousand people are stuck in Turkey without any possibility to return. If anyone would want to return now, they would have to enter via ‘Ayn al-‘Arab and would need a declaration of commitment from a Kurd from ‘Ayn al-‘Arab or Tall Abyad.

»An Arab from Tall Abyad is not able to provide this declaration of commitment.«<sup>19</sup>

### Arbitrary arrests and abductions of political opponents

Mahmud reported of an Arabic civilian from ar-Raqqah, Ibrahim ash-Shahin, who had been abducted on June 12 during an identity check close to Tall Abyad. He had wanted to visit relatives close to Tall Abyad. His only piece of identification had been a driving license issued by the IS, as he had lost his Syrian identity card during the civil war.

»He voluntarily showed his driving license. Yet he was still detained. He is not a political person and has nothing to do with either the IS, the regime or the opposition. Nonetheless he has been held since June 12.«<sup>20</sup>

According to Mahmud, ash-Shahin is one of many PYD prisoners. He estimates that since the YPG assumed control around five thousand nine hundred people have been held by the YPG. They have been detained either for hours to some months in official YPG and PYD prisons in Ra’s al-‘Ayn, Tall Abyad, and ‘Ayn al-‘Arab or in several secret prisons, such as in al-Yabisah, eight kilometers west of Tall Abyad, al-Jurn, eighteen kilometers west of Tall Abyad, and Baghdik, forty kilometers west of Tall Abyad. At the time of the interview in mid-October roughly one thousand eight hundred people were being detained, with the majority having been denounced. They had been accused of being a member of the Islamic State and in some cases of insulting the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. The philosophy teacher Khalil Sulayman, for example, had

**19** Interview with Mahmud, human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

**20** Interview with Mahmud, human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

been held for six days for supposedly insulting Öcalan publicly in 2011.

Salim from Hammam at-Turkuman also reported that the People's Defense Units had kept village residents for no apparent reason:

»When the Kurdish forces came from the direction of Ra's al-'Ayn on June 14, they went into the house of 'Ali Musa and took him away. So far no one knows about his whereabouts.«<sup>21</sup>

Apart from these arbitrary cases, the human-rights activist Mahmud reported of targeted abductions of political opponents:

»From June 25 to June 27 the border to Turkey was open. In this time around two thousand refugees returned. A total of one hundred eighty-six were detained by the People's Defense Units. The latter had lists of names and the people were held directly at the border. Many of them are members of the opposition who actively took part in the revolution. On one list that I saw there were the names of members of a youth group from Tall Abyad. The group consisted of students and other young people who were against Assad. Several had been expelled from the university due to their regime-critical activities, and others were dismissed officials. Many people did not return to Syria from Turkey since they knew they were on a list.«

During their imprisonment, people were often tortured. Mahmud reported of an Arab prisoner from Tall Abyad:

»A hose was placed in his anus through which gas and water flowed. He was accused of working with the IS and transporting things for the IS with this car. He admitted to collecting taxes for the IS to earn a living. Even after he had confessed, he was still tortured.«

One problem is that the people the PYD assigns to conduct interrogations have no proper training:

»Sa'd ash-Shuwaysh, a lawyer from Tall Abyad, was taken prisoner. He was from the beginning a member

**21** Interview with Salim, Turkmen resident of Hammam at-Turkuman, June 2015.

of the opposition critical of the regime. He was interrogated by a twenty-nine-year-old construction worker who had no idea about the laws or human rights.«

In at least one case, an individual abducted by the PYD died while being detained: On September 28, 2015 the forty-five year old Arab activist Ayman al-Humaydi at-Tahari died in a hospital in Tall Abyad. He had been taken on September 23 together with this twenty-five year old nephew 'Adil al-Balikh at-Tahari by YPG fighters from his house in Huwayjat al-'Abd, eight kilometers south of Tall Abyad. According to KurdWatch research, the diabetic was refused his medicine in order to exert pressure on him. When he lost consciousness, he was taken to the hospital in the night of September 27 to 28 where he died hours later. According to information by the family, his body showed signs of torture on the neck and left shoulder. Ayman al-Humaydi at-Tahari was the founder and commander of a self-financed battalion of the Free Syrian Army stationed in Huwayjat al-'Abd. The unit was deployed to protect the population of at-Taharis' hometown, where they had good relations with the local Kurdish population. The conflict with the People's Defense Units arose because they rejected the presence of the battalion in its area of control.<sup>22</sup>

### Centralized administrative structures

Following the assumption of power in Tall Abyad the PYD formed a council of elders consisting of ten Arabs, three Kurds, one Armenian, and one Turkmen, whose task it is to administer the region. The ethnic composition of the council suggests a fair representation of the Arabic majority population. However, Yusuf, a former member of the local coordinating committee of Tall Abyad, explained that most members had been former regime supporters who represented no one other than themselves. This was confirmed by Mahmud, a human-rights activist from Tall Abyad:

»The chairman of the council, Mansur as-Sallum, is close to the regime. After the People's Defense Units took control of the city, they detained him in

**22** KurdWatch, October 9, 2015, »Tall Abyad: Arab activist dies after being imprisoned by the PYD«, <<http://www.kurdwatch.org/?e3624>>.

prison for six days and tortured him. Now he cooperates with them.«

This is an example how the PYD establishes suitable cooperation partners without giving them actual power. According to several interview partners, the council has nothing to say. The military and political control of Tall Abyad is entirely in the hands of the YPG and PYD.<sup>23</sup> This means that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) runs the show in Tall Abyad: Chairman of the PYD's People's House in Tall Abyad is the long-time PKK cadre Farhat Derik.<sup>24</sup> The PKK functionary 'Umar Husayn 'Allush, who is already responsible for the Kobanî Canton ('Ayn al-'Arab), is also the political official for Tall Abyad. The PKK cadre Husayn Kochari, stationed in Ra's al-'Ayn, is responsible for the military.

## Conclusion

None of KurdWatch's Arab or Turkmen interview partners reported of ethnically motivated mass expulsions from Tall Abyad and the surrounding areas. In fact, we can assume that there have been no large-scale ethnically motivated expulsions in the region. For demographic reasons alone a »Kurdification« of the area is out of the question. The proportion of around ten percent Kurds is simply too low. At the same time, regulations such as only Kurds from 'Ayn al-'Arab or Tall Abyad can act as a guarantor for refugees so that they can return to Tall Abyad from Turkey clearly discriminate on the basis of ethnicity.

Furthermore, the absence of targeted ethnic expulsions does not mean that grave human-rights violations are not being committed. It is clearly not about isolated cases or as Marwan, an interview partner from Tall Abyad supposes, »personal conflicts« between a few YPG commanders from Tall Abyad and their Arab neighbors.<sup>25</sup> Rather our interviews point to the fact that the PYD and its People's Defense Units resort to exactly the mechanisms of repression that they already successfully used in the Kurdish areas. These include

- the targeted kidnapping of political opponents, particularly activists critical of the regime (in the

**23** Interview with Yusuf, former member of the local coordinating committee of Tall Abyad, October 2015; interview with Mahmud, Arab human-rights activist from Tall Abyad, October 2015.

**24** See Allan Kaval, »Dans le Kurdistan syrien, Tal Abyad veut oublier l'EI«, *Le Monde*, September 28, 2015, <[http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2015/09/28/dans-le-kurdistan-syrien-tal-abyad-veut-oublier-l-ei\\_4774984\\_3218.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2015/09/28/dans-le-kurdistan-syrien-tal-abyad-veut-oublier-l-ei_4774984_3218.html)>.

**25** Interview with Marwan, Arab resident of Tall Abyad, June 2015.

Kurdish areas this includes the members of competing Kurdish parties);

- the prevention of the entry or the return of critics;
- cooperation with groups and individuals close to the regime;
- the deployment of personnel in sensitive positions (be it as head interrogator or, as in the Kurdish areas, as judges) whose only qualification is loyalty to the PYD;
- the creation of institutions that seemingly represent the population but in fact only integrate groups or people who are subordinate to the PYD;<sup>26</sup>
- the preservation of all power and decision-making authority inside the PYD and its People's Defense Units<sup>27</sup> and thus the PKK;<sup>28</sup>
- the accusation that people are having close ties to the IS or are cooperating with the IS as a sweeping justification for repressive measures.

The last aspect is particularly relevant with respect to the destruction of villages and the forced displacement of village residents. In the cases we researched, strategic or economic reasons were indeed central when measures such as the eviction of villages were justified by saying it is about combating the IS. Given that, according to Amnesty International, the affected population is never offered reparations or alternative housing, it must be assumed that the People's Defense Units accept the homelessness caused by their actions. The report by Amnesty International represents a first attempt to process when and where houses or entire villages of the Arabic or Turkmen populations in the region of Tall Abyad were destroyed and where people were forcibly displaced. Several villages mentioned in this context by Amnesty International were also mentioned by our interview partners. Alongside Hammam at-Turkuman, this included Mullah Barhu, 'Abdi Kuy, and Ranin. This report, however, was less about the details of concrete persecution as it was about the depiction of the fundamental features of the PYD and its People's Defense Units' rule in Tall Abyad, a rule that in many respects corresponds to the features observed in the Kurdish areas.

**26** In the interim administration of the PYD, for example, the Kurdish National Council, a grouping of thirteen PYD-critical parties, is not involved.

**27** These include, in particular, the demand to military control solely exercised by the YPG. An action mentioned above against the leader of a FSA brigade in Tall Abyad finds its correlation in the Kurdish areas where the YPG repeatedly attacked Kurdish FSA units and the military units of other Kurdish parties; see KurdWatch, September 2013, »What does the Syrian-Kurdish Opposition want? Politics between Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Damascus, and Qandil«, <[http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch\\_A009\\_en\\_Parteien2.pdf](http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_A009_en_Parteien2.pdf)>: 20, 21-22.

**28** Numerous examples for PKK cadres who now act in the name of the PYD can be found in KurdWatch, September 2013: 16.