



## Chronology of a Massacre

Distortion Attempts Cannot Hide Responsibility of Turkish State for Death of POWs



Some of the Turkish soldiers and police officers held as POWs by the HPG (People's Defense Forces)

The developments during the recent occupation operation of the Turkish army in the South Kurdish region Gare have caused worldwide attention. State representatives, civil rights organizations and parties have not only questioned the justification of the Turkish attack on South Kurdistan, but have especially voiced their concerns about the death of 13 Turkish Prisoners of War (POWs) who had been held by the HPG (People's Defense Forces) for several years. While the Turkish state is currently trying to cover up its defeat in Gare, Turkish state representatives and media outlets controlled by the state have started a furious campaign accusing the HPG and PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) of killing the POWs. Yet, both the overall attitude of the Turkish state towards POWs in the past as well as recently obtained information from Gare support a contrary conclusion: The Turkish state itself has killed 13 members of its own security forces that had been held als POWs by the HPG.

### Tayyip Erdoğan Ends the Peace Process

The latest Turkish occupation operation in the Gare region follows a string of uninterrupted military operations and attacks ever since July 24, 2015. On that day, more than 50 Turkish war planes bombarded the Medya Defense Zones - an area held by the guerrilla in South Kurdistan. On March 16, 2015, the Turkish president Erdoğan had abruptly ended the 2-year-long peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, by claiming: "What are you talking about? There is no such thing, there is no Kurdish question."<sup>1</sup> The war that evolved afterwards has raised international attention ever since. The Gare operation from

1 <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/erdogan-speech-may-hurt-peace-process-kurds>



February 10 - 14, 2021 represents the latest step in this deliberate escalation of violence by the Turkish state.

### **2015: Turkey Starts a New War**

Based on a plan that had been passed during a meeting of the Nation Security Council (MGK) of Turkey on October 30, 2014, Turkey has engaged in an all-out war against the Kurdish population in Turkey, Syria and Iraq ever since the summer of 2015. As a result, ten Kurdish cities in southeast of Turkey were partly raised to the ground in the winter of 2015/16, the North Syrian area Afrin was occupied in March 2018, Turkish soldiers along with Islamist proxies occupied the North Syrian cities Gire Spi and Serekaniye in October 2019 and the Turkish army carried out occupation operations in the South Kurdish areas Xakurke, Heftanin and Gare. Additionally, hundreds of military operations were carried out in the southeast of Turkey. The war policy of the AKP-MHP government has had a huge toll on the whole Turkish society. Today, hundreds of journalists and thousands of HDP members (People`s Democratic Party) find themselves imprisoned, the Turkish judiciary has lost its independence and a presidential system granting enormous power to Erdoğan keeps the country breathless.

### **Turkish Soldiers Held as POWs by the HPG**

The 13 individuals who were held as POWs by the HPG in a protected place close to the village Siyanê in the Gare region were all members of the Turkish army, police or secret service MIT. They had been arrested by the HPG on different occasions since 2015. During a press conference on February 15, 2021, the Turkish civil rights organization İHD (Human Rights Association) declared that during the past six years it had made numerous press statements, organized press conferences together with the families of the POWs and had held meetings with several state representatives. According to the İHD, the families of the POWs had additionally personally met different ministers, the Turkish prime minister and the president and had voiced their wish for a solution of the situation. Requests for a meeting by the İHD and other civil rights organizations with the Turkish president, prime minister and Interior Minister had been left unanswered<sup>2</sup>. According to the local branch of the İHD in the city Diyarbakir, the HPG had taken a total of 335 people as POWs from 1990 - 2012. All of them were released on different dates with the help of the Turkish parliament, international human rights organizations and civil rights organizations from Turkey.

### **Turkey Starts Occupation Operation in Gare**

On February 10, 2021, the Turkish army officially declared the beginning of its occupation operation in the Gare region<sup>3</sup>. More than 50 fighter jets, dozens of drones and helicopters were involved in the attack. During the 4-day-long operation, the region was bombed dozens of times<sup>4</sup>. While the Turkish state has officially only acknowledged three of its soldiers killed and has claimed to have killed dozens of guerrilla fighters, the HPG has refuted these reports and claimed to have killed dozens of Turkish soldiers.

### **HPG Statement for Safety of POWs**

On February 11, 2021, the HPG released a statement warning that the Turkish army had carried

<sup>2</sup> <https://anfturkce.com/guncel/Ihd-genelkurmay-13-kisinin-olumunden-sorumlu-152278>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/three-turkish-soldiers-killed-in-clashes-in-northern-iraq-against-pkk-elements-1.1163551>

<sup>4</sup> <https://anfturkce.com/kurdistan/gare-152240>



out heavy bombardments against a location where Turkish POWs were being held<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the public was informed about the danger to the lives of the POWs. Yet, the Turkish army continued its heavy attacks against the location for three more days. On February 14, 2021, the HPG also published videos showing the Turkish bombardment of the location where the POWs had been held<sup>6</sup>.

### **Civil Rights Organizations and Parties Condemn Killing of POWs**

During its press conference on February 15, 2021, the IHD held the Turkish state responsible for the death of the 13 POWs stating that the killing of them constituted “not only a violation of humanitarian law but a war crime”. The IHD continued by saying that the Turkish chief of staff was “responsible for the results of the operation”. The former Turkish soldier Yannis Vasilis Yaylalı - captured by the Kurdish guerrilla in 1994 and later released - on February 14, 2021 accused the Turkish army of having murdered the 13 POWs and called for the conviction of those responsible by international courts<sup>7</sup>. The co-Chair of the Turkish opposition party HDP, Mithat Sancar, said on February 16, 2021 that the Turkish state had failed to listen to the calls of the families of those POWs killed in Gare. He also held the Turkish state responsible for the killing of the 13 POWs<sup>8</sup>. In its initial statement on the events in Gare, the US State Department also voiced doubts about the Turkish account of the killing of the 13 POWs stating: “If reports of the death of Turkish civilians at the hands of the PKK, [...], are confirmed, we condemn this action in the strongest possible terms”<sup>9</sup> thus sending a clear message to its ally.

### **Latest Development: Turkish Army Used Chemical Weapons in Gare**

As an immediate response to the withdrawal of all Turkish troops from the Gare region on February 14, 2021, the HPG promised to publish further details about the Turkish occupation operation and especially the events that led to the killing of 13 POWs by the Turkish army. In its latest statement on February 16, 2021, the HPG declared that the Turkish army had used chemical weapons during its attack on the POW camp: “Our forces have reached this camp in order to understand clearly and concretely what happened in the camp where the [Turkish soldier] prisoners were held in the Siyanê area. However, although three days have passed, there is still a heavy smell of gas and chemicals in and around the prison camp. Since chemical weapons, which are banned within the scope of war crimes, were used by the fascist Turkish army, you cannot enter the camp. Probably everyone in this camp was shot after being killed by chemical gas. These are the first information we gathered. Efforts to establish what exactly happened in the massacre carried out by the Turkish state against the prison camp continue. The clear and final results and the 4-day Gare clashes will be revealed to our patriotic people and the public in detail.”<sup>10</sup> This raises serious questions about the statements of Turkish state representatives including the president Erdoğan. The use of chemical weapons constitutes a clear war crime. Those responsible for the military attack on Gare will therefore have to be held accountable by international courts.

5 <https://anfTurkce.com/kurdistan/gare-eyalet-komutanligi-Catismalar-guclerimizin-inisiyati-finde-152031>

6 <https://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/footage-from-turkish-attack-on-the-detention-center-of-turkish-prisoners-in-hpg-custody-50016>

7 <https://anfenglish.com/news/the-fate-of-the-prisoners-was-clear-since-the-beginning-of-the-invasion-50017>

8 <https://anfTurkce.com/guncel/sancar-gare-de-yasananlarin-sorumlusu-iktidardir-152340>

9 <https://www.state.gov/turkish-citizens-killed-in-iraq/>

10 <https://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/x-50067>