

Disillusioned jihadist Ahrar al-Sharqiya members defect to SDF-backed council

by Wladimir van Wilgenburg - 04/02/2018 19:23



ERBIL – The Manbij Military Council (MMC) on Sunday said six members and their families of the Jihadist Ahrar al-Sharqiya group defected to the MMC on Sunday after they took necessary precautions. The group was involved in abuses in Afrin, such as destroying a liquor store in Afrin’s Bulbul and singing [Jihadist songs](#) to provoke the local population.

“Amid the resentment on the part of many members deceived into joining the factions affiliated with the mercenary gang of Euphrates Shield at the bloody campaign undertaken by the Turkish aggression against the Afrin canton, another contingent of members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya whose conscience induced them to reject joining the campaign undertaken by the Turkish occupation with the support of factions and battalions affiliated with it,” the Manbij Military Council (MMC) said in a [statement](#).

“And in a statement circulated by them, they showed that they are not prepared to

wage war on their Kurdish brothers and all the components present in the safe Afrin canton, despite the pressures they faced from the Turkish army and its leadership, and they mentioned that they were received by forces of the Manbij Military Council, not those about which the mercenary gang factions spoke about in their circulated counter-propaganda,” the MMC, which is linked to the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

“But after taking the necessary security procedures and considering their needs, matters were facilitated for them by the parties concerned with the affair,” the MMC Media Centre said.

“Most of them came from Deir ar Zour’s countryside and they were connected to jihadists in Deir ar-Zour,” Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, a fellow at the Middle East Forum, told the Region about the Ahrar al-Sharqiya group.

"This doesn't necessarily mean they were affiliated with al-Qaeda, but there were links as Abu Mariya Qahtani established cooperation between Jabhat al-Nusra and a variety of groups in Deir az-Zor,” "

This was also confirmed by Israeli researcher Elizabeth Tsurkov on Twitter.

“A series of disturbing videos emerged from the Afrin operation. According to opposition activists & a rebel participating in the operation, all videos are of the Ahrar a-Sharqiya group, largely made up of displaced fighters from Deir Ezzor now residing in northern Aleppo,” [she](#) said.

Moreover, he added the group released controversial video’s from Afrin, such as one destroying liquor stores and calling Kurdish fighters pigs and infidels. “They are the ones in the video destroying the liquor store, it’s almost sure it’s them,” he said.

Furthermore, the group was [involved](#) in threatening US troops in the border town of al-Rai in September 2016. “Down with America and all the countries that side with America!” “Pigs!,” they shouted. Following the threats, US troops left the territories controlled by Turkish-backed rebels.

“They are anti-American,” Tamimi told the Region. “Both for the US supporting the SDF, but also because they are against the West in general,” he added.