

Middle East

Islamic State fighters kill dozens of Yazidi villagers

By [Liz Sly](#)

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DAHUK, Iraq — Extremist fighters have killed more than 80 men and detained hundreds of women in a Yazidi village, Yazidis and Kurdish officials said Saturday, offering a reminder that the ancient minority sect is still at risk despite President Obama's conclusion that the threat had passed for those stranded on Mount Sinjar.

Islamic State militants drove into the village of Kocho, about 15 miles southwest of the town of Sinjar, on Friday, following a week-long siege in which the al-Qaeda inspired group demanded that residents convert to Islam or face death, said the reports, which could not be independently verified.

The men were rounded up and executed, while the women were taken to an undisclosed location, according to Ziad Sinjar, a pesh merga commander based on the edge of Mount Sinjar, citing the accounts of villagers nearby. Six men were injured but survived, and managed to escape to a nearby village where they are being sheltered by sympathetic local Sunni Iraqis, he said. One of them told him that 84 Yazidi men were lined up and shot and that more than 300 women were taken away.

Yazidi activists and Kurdish officials said at least 80 men were killed and hundreds of women taken away after the fighters entered the village shortly after 1 pm on Friday.

"The villagers had received local assurances that they were safe," said Hoshyar Zebari, Iraq's former foreign minister who is now working closely with the Kurdistan Regional Government. "Maybe they killed them in revenge for the setbacks they have suffered from the air strikes."

The accounts could not be independently confirmed nor the conflicting numbers reconciled, but fears had been growing for the welfare of Yazidis in the village since the Islamic State siege began on Aug. 7.

The U.S. Central Command said Friday that it had carried out a drone attack south of the town of Sinjar after receiving reports of an attack in the area. The drone "struck and destroyed two vehicles," it said.

The alleged killings came a day after Obama called off plans for a military evacuation of Yazidis trapped on Mount Sinjar, saying they were no longer at risk. If confirmed, the events in Kocho would constitute the worst single atrocity committed against the Yazidis since the Aug. 3 assault on Sinjar triggered a humanitarian crisis and contributed to the Obama administration's decision to intervene.

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At least 10 U.S. airstrikes and drops of food and medicine have since helped tens of thousands of Yazidis reach safety after they sought refuge on the mountain nearly two weeks ago, then got stranded in the barren terrain without water or food.

Obama declared Thursday that the U.S. effort “broke the ISIL siege of Mount Sinjar.” A team of U.S. Special Forces and aid officials dispatched to the mountain Wednesday concluded that the intervention had dispelled the imminent threat to the lives of Yazidis, he said.

But although the airstrikes appear to have helped those trapped on the mountain [reach safety](#), people who did not join the initial exodus are still at risk, Yazidis say.

“The sole mission of the airstrikes was to protect the people on the mountain, not to free anyone outside the mountain,” said Murad Ismael, a Yazidi activist based in Washington.

Kocho is south of the town of Sinjar, from which the [exodus took place](#), and many residents were unable to join the flight because they were cut off by the Islamic State advance, according to Yazidi refugees in northern Iraq.

After the Islamic State fighters surrounded the village last week, they issued a deadline of Sunday, which was extended to Monday, then extended again several times as the week wore on.

On Friday, the fighters moved in, apparently unopposed.

Ismael said he believed the Islamic State was emboldened to strike against the village after Obama called off the evacuation plan. The Islamic State fighters “did not kill [the people in Kocho] when there was air coverage,” he said. “They started killing only after Obama said the siege is over. They got the message and decided to kill these people.”

Obama has said the airstrikes will continue, even though the plan to evacuate Yazidis from the mountain has been dropped, and stressed that Iraqis still face a “dire” threat from the Islamic State.

The administration also has said it will send arms directly to Kurdish forces, with the approval of Iraq’s central government.

On Friday, the effort to arm the Kurds against the Islamic State received a boost when the European Union gave its blessing to individual European nations sending weapons. The E.U. also said it would look for ways to prevent Islamic State jihadists from benefiting from oil sales.

So far, France and the Czech Republic have said they will supply arms, and other countries, including Germany and the Netherlands, have indicated they are open to the possibility. British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said Britain would “consider favorably” any Kurdish request for weapons.

At the United Nations, Iraqi Ambassador Mohammed Alhakim said his government has asked the United States to increase its airstrikes against the Islamic State in Iraq beyond the limits set by Obama of targets related to humanitarian missions and protection of U.S. personnel. “We are working with the United States on this,” Alhakim said.

His remarks followed the U.N. Security Council’s unanimous adoption of a resolution condemning the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, or the al-Nusra Front, and ordering all U.N. member states to take action to prevent terrorist recruits from traveling to the region and to stop efforts to finance them.

In a release Friday by the U.S.-backed Syrian Opposition Coalition, Syrian rebels fighting against the Islamic State and the al-Nusra Front, as well as government forces, said they were in desperate straits in the northwestern area near the Turkish border and pleaded for supplies from the West that have been withheld from them but are flooding into Iraq.

“We have limited time to face this danger,” rebel commander Abdallah Awda said. “All of Syria’s neighbors will be threatened by ISIS.” ISIS and ISIL are acronyms for alternative names for the Islamic State.

Karla Adam in London and Karen DeYoung in Washington contributed to this report.

 **200 Comments**

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Liz Sly is The Washington Post’s Beirut bureau chief, covering Lebanon, Syria and the wider region. She has spent more than 17 years covering the Middle East, including the first and second Iraq wars. Other postings include Washington, Africa, China, Afghanistan and Italy. [Follow](#) 

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