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# Military Tactic Leads to the World's Worst Humanitarian Crisis

February 12, 2018

by Brittany Stanek

Since 2015, the [Yemeni civil war](#) has devastated the Middle East's poorest nation. The [civil war](#) has divided the country between the Houthis and those who are loyal to the current president, Abdrabuhh Mansur Hadi. The Houthis are a rebel group in Yemen and "[began as a theological movement that preached tolerance and peace in the early 1990s](#)." The Houthi rebel group opposes the current Yemeni government and is [fighting for](#) a greater share of power in the federal government and to have the north designated as its own region. In March 2015, a [Saudi-led coalition](#) intervened in the civil war, when the Houthis surrounded the presidential palace and placed the president and cabinet ministers under house arrest. The coalition has imposed a [naval blockade](#) on Yemen since the conflict began. The imposition of the blockade, however, has only exacerbated what the UN has called "[the world's worst humanitarian crisis](#)."

The coalition imposed the blockade to supposedly stop the Houthis from being supplied with [foreign made weapons](#). By attempting to restrict the flow of weapons, however, [the flow of food, fuel, and medicine to civilians](#) has been adversely affected since Yemeni citizens depend on imported food, medicine, and fuel for [eighty to ninety percent of their needs](#). In November 2017, [the coalition responded](#) to a Houthi missile strike on Saudi Arabia's Riyadh airport by imposing harsher restrictions on nearly all commercial imports, preventing aid from reaching Houthi-controlled areas.

The coalition's blocking of humanitarian assistance and aid to Yemen, coupled with its knowledge of Yemeni citizens' dependency on imported aid to survive, [violates customary international law](#). These actions specifically violate Rules [53](#) and [55](#) of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and it constitutes a war crime for "willfully impeding relief supplies as part of the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare" under the [Rome Statute](#). [Rule 53](#) bans the use of starvation of a civilian population as a method of warfare, however, it does not prohibit the imposition of a naval blockade. [The rule states](#) that a blockade is not a war crime only if the purpose of the blockade is to achieve a military objective and not to starve a civilian population.

The blockade has been [unlawfully disproportionate](#) in the harm it has created to Yemeni civilians compared to any expected military benefit of restricting weapons from entering the country. As of November 2017, "[nearly seven million people are dependent on food aid to survive and almost a million have cholera](#)." There are also an estimated [two million children that are malnourished](#), many of the country's hospitals have been closed, and an astounding sixteen million people lack the access to clean water. When the coalition does not completely prevent commercial imports from reaching their destinations, their procedures divert and delay the imports. This creates [disastrous consequences](#), including hospitals receiving expired or near-expired medicine because the items take too long to get to the hospitals.

The blockade has also impacted fuel from reaching portions of the country, which is necessary for civilian survival. [Fuel is needed to](#) power generators, generate oxygen, and run ambulances and buses for hospitals. Fuel is used to [run water treatment plants](#) which is necessary to avoid water-borne diseases, such as cholera, which has devastated Yemen's civilian population. The lack of fuel also [increases food scarcity](#) because it drives the food prices up to levels that civilians can barely afford.

The blockade has disproportionately affected civilian populations in Yemen which violates the use of a naval blockade under [Rule 53](#). The Saudi-led coalition's naval blockade is [causing starvation of civilians](#) as a tactic of war to try to end the civil unrest in the country. The [UN has already imposed sanctions](#) on five leaders within the old Houthi-Saleh alliance, but has yet to impose any on Saudi military officials who are in control of the blockade. The coalition has repeatedly violated international law, but the most pertinent violation being the obstruction of aid to innocent civilians. The most likely way to guarantee that this humanitarian crisis will not get worse and that civilians will not starve is to lift the naval blockade imposed by the Saudi-led coalition.

# Israeli Authorities Continue to Use Excessive Force in Detaining and Interrogating Palestinian Minors

February 19, 2018  
by Sahar Takshi

Israeli security forces are excessively detaining Palestinian minors and using extreme force during the arrests and imprisonment. This conduct is in violation of Israel's international commitments to preserving children's rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In 2018 alone, Israeli forces have detained fifty-two Palestinian minors and killed three others. Furthermore, in November 2017 alone, 313 Palestinian juveniles were detained by Israel Prison Services (IPS), bringing the total to over six thousand minors [detained](#) by IPS and Israel Defense Force since 2016.

Furthermore, the Israeli attacks on Palestinian children are taking lethal forms. Sixteen-year-old Musaab al-Tamimi was the [first](#) Palestinian to be killed this year when he was shot in the neck by Israeli soldiers in the village of Dier Nitham during a raid. During the protests in Nabi Saleh, [fifteen-year-old](#) Mohamed Tamimi was shot point blank in the face by Israeli forces. Another 15-year-old, identified as Qassem K, was shot in the head by Israeli forces using a rubber bullet resulting in a skull fracture.

The Palestinian minors imprisoned by Israeli officials also suffer from ill treatment, which Eqtaiash, Defense for Children International – Palestine's accountability program director, described as "sometimes amounting to torture." For example, sixteen-year-old Fawzi al-Junaidi was photographed in a blindfold, being [dragged](#) by dozens of soldiers through the streets of Hebron. Perhaps the most famous Israeli prisoner is sixteen-year-old Ahed Tamimi who was [arrested](#) during a night-time raid after she was filmed slapping an Israeli soldier. Children as young as [eleven](#) are being grabbed by Israeli border police officers and taken to questioning in chokeholds.

A 2017 report entitled "Unprotected: Detention of Palestinian Teenagers in East Jerusalem" summarizes the extreme procedures that Israeli forces use when arresting minors. These [procedures](#) include pulling Palestinian teenagers from their beds in the middle of the night and subjecting the detained children to verbal and physical abuse for long periods of time, while their parents are completely excluded from law enforcement proceedings. [Affidavits](#) from formerly detained Palestinian children recount that parents were barred from accompanying their children in interrogations, that the arrested children were often forced to sign confessions in a language they do not understand, and that some arrested children were punched and kicked until they signed the confessions. One Palestinian child's recount indicated that the [Israeli border enforcement](#) threw a stun grenade and proceeded to put him in a chokehold, place a bag over his head, and kicked him on the way to the interrogation.

The horrific treatment of Palestinian minors by Israeli law enforcement during arrests, interrogations and imprisonments clearly violates the children's basic rights to physical integrity and fair proceedings. Israel ratified the [ICCPR](#) in 1991, and Article 14 of the Covenant requires courts to consider the age of defendants and the "desirability of promoting their rehabilitation." Furthermore, Israel also ratified the [CRC](#) in 1991 which provides that juvenile defendants are "not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt." This provision has been interpreted to mean juvenile defendants have a right to request that their parents be present during interrogations, and that judges are to consider the absence of a parent or lawyer during questioning in considering the reliability of children's [confessions](#). Israel's own [Youth Law](#) and military also require that law enforcement notifies parents of arrested children, to allow juvenile detainees to meet with a lawyer prior to questioning, and to allow a detained child's parents to be present during questioning. However, Israeli law enforcement, however, continues to make [exceptions](#) to these rules because they consider certain actions, such as children throwing stones, to be "security offenses."

By continuing to use deadly force against Palestinian children during arrests and barring them from having their parents present during interrogations, the Israeli forces are violating their international commitments. In light of the increased use of force against children, the international community should hold Israeli authorities accountable to these commitments and address the children's rights violations.

# Israel's Indefinite Detention of "Infiltrators"

March 1, 2018

by Matthew Reiter

On January 1, 2018, Israel's Population, Immigration and Borders Authority (PIBA) announced that the state would indefinitely detain thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese nationals—legally referred to as "[infiltrators](#)"—if they refuse to leave for Rwanda or Uganda by [March 31, 2018](#). While Israel is offering a seemingly generous package meant to incentivize [voluntary departure](#), the blatant threat to foreign nationals contravenes both domestic court orders and international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Under Israel's 1954 [Law on the Prevention of Infiltration](#), an "infiltrator" is anyone who enters Israel through an unrecognized border point of entry. Sudanese and Eritreans represent the largest group of "infiltrators," with over 50,000 streaming in through Egypt between 2006 and 2013, until a [fence](#) was erected meant to thwart illegal entry. The latest estimates from September 2017 indicate that there are roughly 38,000 persons currently identified as "infiltrators" in Israel, many of whom registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as [asylum-seekers](#). However, the path to asylum in Israel is virtually impossible.

Israel's legal basis for detaining asylum-seekers and refugees stems from its 1952 [Law of Entry into Israel](#), which asserts that those deemed eligible for deportation may be detained beyond two months if they have been uncooperative and have delayed their deportation. With almost 38,000 persons currently detained and the March 31, 2018 deadline rapidly approaching, Israel will face a humanitarian crisis directly caused by the state's refusal to consider Eritreans and Sudanese as eligible for political asylum. Shockingly, fewer than 1% of asylum applicants are recognized as refugees in Israel, compared with acceptance rates in the [European Union](#) of over 90% for Eritreans and 60% for Sudanese.

Israel's January 1 announcement is unfortunately just one example of many in recent years of its policy towards asylum-seekers and refugees. As recently as September 2014, Israel's High Court of Justice intervened to close the Holot Residency Center, where thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers were held under the pretense of it being an "[open](#)" facility. In reality, persons detained at the facility were required to show up three times each day for "head counts," the facility was located far from any major towns or cities, and persons at the facility were required to be inside by 10 pm. "Let us not allow the name – 'open facility' – to lead us astray," said the Court in its ruling. The Court found the government was breaching Israel's Basic Laws. "Every person, by virtue of being a person, has a [right to human dignity](#)...and infiltrators are people."

According to the government, the matter is complicated because Israel cannot deport refugees home due to human rights abuses in Eritrea and because Israel has no diplomatic relations with Sudan (Sudan [criminalizes](#) visits to Israel by up to 10 years). This is seemingly an indication that Israel is abiding by its international obligations under the Convention Against Torture. The principal of [non-refoulement](#) under Article 3 prohibits the deportation of persons to countries where there is a credible fear that they will be tortured in that country or with the government's

acquiescence. Yet Israel's push for the Eritreans and Sudanese to leave for Uganda or Rwanda is seemingly infeasible. Currently, Rwanda and Uganda only accept people who voluntarily agree to leave Israel, leaving unanswered if these countries would accept persons deported [against their will](#).

As a party to the 1951 [Refugee Convention](#), its 1967 Protocol, and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), Israel must discontinue its practice of arbitrarily penalizing or detaining persons seeking refugee status for irregular entry or presence. The country's treatment of asylum-seekers ignores the reality that for many Eritreans and Sudanese, they are not in a position to comply with the "legal formalities" of entry as they lack necessary documentation due to the "[urgency](#) of their departure." Israel must take into account and consider the fear and desperation felt by those who choose to flee, choose to treat them humanely rather than as infiltrators, and to truly consider their asylum applications. As Israel's own High Court of Justice said in 2014, "infiltrators do not lose one ounce of their right to [human dignity](#) just because they reached the country in this way or another."

# Lebanon's Waste Crisis Causes Devastating Health Risks

March 19, 2018

by Brittany Stanek

Lebanon's [waste management crisis](#) dates back several decades but attracted global attention in 2015. The [country's waste management history](#) is replete with a pattern of poor government planning and management, inadequate support and oversight, overuse of landfills, open dumping and burning, and a lack of adequate funding from internal and external sources. Lebanon has [failed to implement](#) a national solid waste management plan that encompasses the entire country. Based on [data collected](#) by the Ministry of Environment and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) there are 941 open dumps in the country and 150 are openly burned at least once a week. [Research conducted by the American University of Beirut](#) reports that seventy-seven percent of Lebanon's waste is openly dumped or landfilled despite researchers stating that only [ten to twelve percent](#) of Lebanon's waste cannot be composted or recycled.

Lebanon's cabinet approved a draft law in 2012 that would have created a single [Solid Waste Management Board](#) that would be responsible for the national-level decision making about waste treatment. Unfortunately, [parliament has not passed the bill](#), so the country is still struggling to address its waste management crisis. The country has also [failed to protect and warn its citizens](#) about the devastating health consequences of living near openly burned dumps. Open burning of waste causes both [short-term and long-term health problems](#), especially in vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly.

A range of [scientific studies](#) have been conducted to determine the health risks associated with open burning. The emissions from open burning exposes people to "[fine particles, dioxins, volatile organic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon, and polychlorinated biphenyls](#)." The [health consequences](#) of being exposed to these pollutants include heart disease, cancer, skin diseases, asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, and respiratory illnesses among others. The health risks are exacerbated because [Lebanon rarely disposes of industrial and healthcare waste properly](#), so hazardous waste becomes mixed in with the solid waste stream and gets openly burned with other waste. The dangers of open burning are readily apparent and completely avoidable by implementing a solid waste plan that respects the environment and health laws.

Lebanon has also [failed to warn its citizens](#) about the risks associated with open burning and the safety precautions they should be taking to avoid the long-term health consequences. Lebanon is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#)), which requires them to take steps to achieve "[the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health](#)." Under [Article 12](#), "the steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve full realization of this rights shall include those necessary for: . . . (b) the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene." The lack of education provided about the health risks is also causing psychological trauma as individuals are unsure if the exposure will lead to cancer in the future. Lebanon is completely



failing to abide by their obligations under the [ICESCR](#) and is continuing to endanger the lives of its citizens.

Lebanon's failure to take appropriate steps to address their waste management crisis and to educate the population about the health risks and safety precautions is in direct violation of the [ICESCR](#). The country has discussed a [long-term solution to the crisis](#) and proposed creating incineration plants. Unfortunately, incineration plants do not solve the [overall problem](#), as public health experts have already expressed concerns about the long-term consequences of using incineration plants. The use of incineration plants does not solve the lack of an effective waste management framework, lack of monitoring and funds, and still would create [unhealthy emissions](#). Lebanon must end the open burning of waste, implement an effective plan that abides by environmental and health regulations, ensure the citizens are properly educated about the risks being exposed and ensure any health repercussions are addressed.

# Is Kurdish Statehood Finally Within Reach?

March 20, 2018

by Matthew Bienstock

The Kurds may be getting closer to achieving their century-old [quest for independence](#). With a population estimated at [thirty million](#), the Kurds are the [fourth-largest ethnic group](#) in the Middle East and one of the world's largest groups without a nation-state. Sharing a [common language](#) and a [distinct culture](#), the predominately Sunni Muslim Kurds live in the mountainous region of present-day Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. These are countries in which they represent sizable ethnic minorities but have been marginalized and persecuted. Sunni Muslim Kurds' efforts to set up an [independent state](#) have historically been suppressed.

Amid the current [instability](#) in the Middle East, however, the Iraqi Kurds may be making significant headway toward their goal. In September 2017, the [Kurdistan Regional Government](#) (KRG) held an historic referendum in which more than [ninety percent](#) of voters endorsed a proposal to declare independence from Iraq. The Iraqi federal court voided the referendum, ruling that no region could [secede under its constitution](#). Baghdad followed up by closing the airspace of land-locked, oil-rich Kurdistan and [conducting military exercises](#) along its borders. The Kurds contend that [Kurdistan's legal status](#) is enshrined in the 2005 Iraqi constitution, that the referendum was legitimate under that constitution, and [Iraq's efforts](#) to cancel the vote violate their civil rights. Indeed, since Kurdistan was established, the Kurds have been a [bastion of stability](#) and economic prosperity, tolerant of religious diversity, and protective of minority and women's rights, which Iraq finds threatening. The UN Charter recognizes the right to self-determination, and the KRG is calling on the international community to intercede on its behalf and hold Iraq accountable.

Historically, however, the Kurds have suffered [betrayals and manipulation](#) by external powers. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved at the end of World War I in 1918, but the Allies reneged on their promise for a [separate state for the Kurds](#) and parceled them out to [Turkey, Syria and Iraq](#). The Kurds have [harbored resentment](#) for a century, and various Kurdish political parties in these countries have formed to continue the [battle for independence](#). In Turkey, the [Kurdistan Workers Party](#) (PKK) has been an active adversary of the government for many years. Turkey prohibits the expression of divergent identities and Kurds have [held fast to their language and culture](#). Truces between the Kurds and the Turkish state have been short lived, and Turkey scapegoated the Kurds for a [failed coup](#) in 2016. In Syria, the Kurdish [Democratic Union Party](#) (PYD) has taken control of territory, exploiting political disorder under Assad. In Iraq, when NATO imposed a no-fly zone against Saddam Hussein in the 1990s, Kurds grabbed the land and [established Kurdistan](#), creating a separate flag and army. The Kurdistan Peshmerga military forces have been very [effective against ISIS](#), and activists in Iraq and Syria are considering joint military actions, as are the PYD and PKK.

This coalescing of Kurdish political efforts poses a dilemma for international powers, forced to choose sides against Turkey and Iraq if they support Kurdistan. Having armed Kurdish forces to fight ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the US [alarmed](#) Turkey and Iraq who view the Kurds as enemies. Indeed, Turkey views Kurdistan's self-determination as [an existential threat and has repeatedly](#)

[attacked the Kurdish forces the US has supplied](#). A long-standing NATO ally, Turkey has recently [deepened its ties](#) to Russia. This geopolitical dance is a repetition of the Kurdish past. However, the Kurds may now have significant leverage to [pursue statehood](#) given their success in repelling ISIS offensives.

Kurdistan seems to have satisfied the prerequisites for statehood established under international law by the 1933 Montevideo Convention: a defined [territory](#), a [permanent population](#), an effective [government](#), and the capacity to engage in [international relations](#). While [Article 1.2](#) of the UN Charter recognizes the principle of self-determination, Kurdistan needs supporters for its statehood argument, and the US is critical to that support. The US State Department [avoids having a clear doctrine](#) on self-determination to stay out of civil conflicts. The US, however, is already involved in the conflict, and a compelling argument can be made that an independent Kurdistan would be beneficial to the US fight against terrorism given the success of the Peshmerga forces. An independent Kurdistan would permit less involvement by the US. The time is right for the US to lead the way at the UN to make Kurdistan an independent state.

# The Yemen Civil War and Saudi Arabia's Unlawful Blockade

April 5, 2018

by Dalya Kefi

Over [22 million Yemenis](#) are in need of humanitarian aid after enduring an ongoing civil war and Saudi naval blockade for the past three years. Saudi Arabia's unlawful blockade of Yemeni ports violates the Fourth Geneva Convention and has created a humanitarian disaster.

The [Yemen Civil War began](#) after a failed political transition during the Arab Spring in 2011. In 2010, the Arab Spring was sparked after a Tunisian vegetable vendor lit himself on fire. This dramatic act sparked uprisings, and anti-government protests sprang up in many Arab countries, including Yemen. The Arab Spring uprising in Yemen forced former President Ali Abdullah Saleh to forfeit power to his deputy, current President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The [Iran-backed Houthi movement](#) took advantage of the transition of power and seized control of the northern province Saada. Support for the Houthis grew after the new government failed to meet expectations, and the group took control of the capital, Sana'a, in early 2015. [In March 2015](#), the Houthis were joined by security forces still loyal to former President Saleh in attempting to take over the entire country; President Hadi fled abroad after the attempted coup.

[Concerned](#) with the Houthis' rise in power, Saudi Arabia and eight other Sunni-majority Arab countries began an air strike campaign to put President Hadi back in power. The coalition received intelligence and logistical support from France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. [Fighting](#) between coalition forces, pro-government forces, and the Houthis has persisted for more than three years.

Saudi Arabia's actions in Yemen [violate](#) the Fourth Geneva Convention for the protection of civilians and Geneva Convention Additional Protocol I, governing international armed conflicts. For three years, a [Saudi-led coalition](#) has "hit weddings, market and schools with airstrikes." The coalition imposed an air and naval blockade since the conflict began and closed all of Yemen's ports of entry after a missile strike by the Houthi-Saleh forces on the Riyadh airport in Saudi Arabia. James Ross, [Human Rights Watch](#) legal and policy director, stated that "the Saudi-led coalition's military strategy in Yemen has been increasingly built around preventing desperately needed aid and essential goods from reaching civilians, risking millions of lives." Yemen depends heavily on imported food and medicine, and the Saudi-enforced blockade has had a disproportionate effect on civilians by preventing these staples from entering the country. The most at-risk population in Yemen are millions of malnourished children in desperate need of humanitarian food aid.

As of November 2017, seven million people were dependent on the little [food aid](#) available to survive, and nearly a million have cholera. Roughly two million children are acutely malnourished and nearly sixteen million people lack access to clean water. [Nine cities](#) have run out of clean water since the blockade began. From March 2015 to December 2017, more than [9,245 people](#) have been killed in the conflict. At least [5,558 of those killed were civilians](#), with more

than 9,065 civilians injured. Saudi-led coalition air strikes were the leading cause of overall civilian casualties. In December 2017, Saudi Arabia partially lifted the blockade after an international outcry, allowing [several aid deliveries](#) into two specific Houthi-held ports. The aid, however, wasn't nearly enough to fill the overwhelming need for supplies in Yemen.

The Fourth Convention of the 1949 Geneva Conventions establishes requirements for the protection of civilians during an international conflict. Saudi Arabia ratified the Geneva Conventions in 1968 and is bound by the obligations established in the treaty. Under [Article 23](#), states are required to allow free passage of medical supplies, food and other necessary items intended for use by civilians. Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, written in 1977, establishes the additional protections for civilians. [Articles 48](#) and [52](#) require member states to distinguish between civilian and military objectives and to prevent unnecessary suffering by civilians during conflicts. Therefore, "[a blockade is unlawful](#) if it has the sole purpose of starving the civilian population or denying the population goods indispensable for its survival." Under Additional Protocol I, article 54 (1), blockades violate international humanitarian law if the effects of the blockade disproportionately affect civilians, and the impact of the blockade on civilians outweigh the military advantage it provides. Saudi Arabia's blockade of Yemen violates international law and has led to massive civilian suffering. The international community, including President Trump, [has implored](#) Saudi Arabia to lift the blockade and allow humanitarian aid into the country.

If Saudi Arabia continues to violate international law by taking military action that disproportionately affects civilians, it is at risk of being sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. Human Rights Watch has urged the United Nations to sanction all coalition leaders responsible to the unlawful blockade, recommending a travel ban and asset freeze. "Under Security Council Resolution 2216, the [Yemen Sanctions Committee](#) can designate 'individuals or entities' for targeted sanctions" if they obstruct the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Yemen. The committee has already sanctioned several Houthi leaders; the next steps must be to sanction leaders of the Coalition for its life-threatening blockade of humanitarian aid.

# Turkey's Human Rights Beatdown

April 16, 2018

by Matthew Bienstock

The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, recently defended his country as a [state of law](#). Many, however, would describe Turkey as a state under siege. Erdogan has [purged Turkey of opponents](#) to his administration and has jailed journalists, media critics, and human rights activists in response to a [failed coup](#) against him in July 2016. An [April 2017 referendum](#), which took place under the [state of emergency](#) declared after the coup, introduced constitutional amendments to change Turkey from a [parliamentary to presidential](#) system of government that further consolidated Erdogan's executive power.

Under the amended constitution, the Turkish President would [control the budget](#), [lead his political party](#), and [appoint judges](#). If reelected in November 2019, Erdogan could [serve two additional terms](#), permitting him to govern the country until [2029](#). In principle, the [Turkish Constitution](#) guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms of thought and opinion, and clearly states that "the press is free, and shall not be censored." Turkish people have the right to a [fair trial](#) before courts, as well as the right to engage in [political activity](#). The Constitution, however, also permits the President to declare and respond to state emergencies which threaten the country or its constitution, giving him wide latitude to curtail those rights. The state of emergency Erdogan declared in 2016 provided the cover to pursue [unlawful restrictions](#) on freedoms of speech and human rights. The government's [intolerance of criticism](#) continues unabated, and Erdogan defends actions against opponents as necessary for and defense, including a purge of people having ties to [Fethullah Gulen](#), an exiled cleric living in the United States, whom Erdogan holds responsible for the coup attempt.

Founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal, Turkey focused on creating a [secular](#) and [unitary](#) state. While constitutionally secular, the country is [ninety-five percent Muslim](#). The [tension between secularism and religious fundamentalism](#) has never been reconciled. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power riding a [wave of anti-secular sentiment](#). In 2003, Erdogan became Prime Minister. He [aligned](#) with the Islamic cleric Gulen to rid the government of Kemalists. In 2011, a [power struggle](#) between the two men ensued, resulting in Erdogan ridding Turkey of Gulenist influence by declaring in May of 2016 Gulen supporters a terrorist organization. Erdogan blamed Gulen for the abortive military coup the following July.

Efforts to arrest those who participated in the coup turned into a purge of [all political opponents](#). In the eighteen months since the coup, [TurkeyPurge.com](#) reports that the Turkish government has issued thirty decrees which dismissed [151,967](#) public servants and academics, detained [132,668](#), and arrested [64,358](#). More than three thousand schools and universities have been shut down, [4,463 judges](#) and prosecutors dismissed, and [319 journalists](#) arrested. The state of emergency has been [extended in three-month intervals](#) since the coup attempt, and it allows individuals to be held in [pre-trial detention](#) for thirty days without charge. Turning the failed coup into a [power grab](#), Erdogan has called it a "gift from God."

Erdogan's aggressive response to the coup has [alarmed](#) the international community. The community is now faced with a geopolitical dilemma of balancing Turkey's strategic location in the Middle East in the fight against ISIS with antipathy to Turkey's domestic human rights violations. In February 2018, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, reaffirmed the deep and important relationship between the US and Turkey as a "[time-tested alliance](#)" built on common interest and respect. As a member of NATO, Turkey ascribes to the alliance's founding treaty which requires all members to [safeguard the freedom, common heritage, and civilization](#) of their people" based on democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. [NATO, however, has no process](#) to hold members accountable to that rule of law. NATO members also reaffirm their [commitment](#) to the [UN Charter](#). The UN Human Rights Council has expressed concern about civil and human rights violations in Turkey, as well as the use of power in ways that are "[inconsistent](#)" with obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and the European Convention on Human Rights. Turkey justifiably earned Amnesty International's 2017 ranking as [one of the top ten](#) global hotspots for major human rights violations based on the government's crackdown on journalists, political and human rights activists. Words are not actions.

In a study published in February 2018, the Brookings Institute concluded that there are no solutions readily available to solve the conundrum and warned the west to "buckle up" for the bumpy ride ahead. Urging constructive engagement, cooperation, and candid discourse on governance concerns, the [Institute held out](#) the possibility of better relations in the future.



# Pakistan on United States Watch List for Violations of Religious Freedom

April 24, 2018  
by Abbey Reynolds

[Religious minorities](#), such as Christians, Hindus, and atheists, are in more danger than ever within the borders of Pakistan. The country has been placed on a United States watch list for countries of concern over “[severe violations of religious freedom](#).” The purpose of the [watch list](#) is to improve the respect for religious freedom in the designated countries. The radical Islamic political party, Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) has overtaken the capital city, Islamabad, and openly made death threats against the [Ahmadiyya community](#). The Ahmadis are an Islamic sect that was excommunicated by an amendment to Pakistan’s Constitution, and, under Pakistani Penal Code, an Ahmadi can be jailed for arbitrary actions such as reading the Koran or using Islamic titles. [In December 2017](#), suicide bombers killed nine Christians inside Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta and injured around sixty others. Hundreds of religious minorities await trial under [Pakistan’s blasphemy law](#), with at least 19 on death row. In [March 2017](#), the interior minister described minorities as “enemies of humanity” and vowed to carry out the issue to its “logical conclusion.” These actions by the government are violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

On [March 9, 2018](#), a Pakistani court ruled that citizens are required to declare their religion when applying for identity documents. The high court in Islamabad declared that citizens who disguise their religious affiliation were guilty of betraying the state. This ruling piles further pressure on the Ahmadi community, a group that has already fallen victim to mob violence and attacks since the sect was declared non-Muslim in 1974.

[In the past year](#), Pakistan has seen an increase in violence related to blasphemy. This increase has followed encouragement of discriminatory prosecution by the government, as seen in the government’s failure to repeal discriminatory laws and dangerous rhetoric inciting hatred against minority groups. The government of Pakistan currently has no adequate protections in place to combat the persecution of women, religious minorities, and transgender groups and has no system to hold violent criminals accountable. For instance, [in April 2017](#), a mob dragged a 23-year-old university student from his dormitory and shot him over accusations of blasphemous remarks. In [May 2017](#), a 10-year-old was killed when a mob attempted to storm a police station where a man accused of blasphemy was being held.

[In 2008](#), Pakistan ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). [Article 12](#) of the ICESCR provides that states party to the Covenant recognize the right of all people to enjoy the highest standard of physical and mental health. Pakistan is violating this right by continuing to encourage violence against religious minorities. [Article 2](#) of the ICCPR provides that each state party to the Covenant “undertakes to respect and ensure to all individuals” the rights recognized in the Covenant “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language,



religion, political or other opinion.” The same article also provides that each state party to the Covenant endeavor to take the necessary steps to adopt laws that give effect to the rights recognized in the Covenant. Pakistan has not upheld its commitment to providing protection of basic human rights to all people in its jurisdiction. The government has gone beyond simply making life difficult for religious minorities to actively and purposefully endangering their lives.