

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

N°419

FEBRUARY 2020

*The publication of this Bulletin enjoys a subsidy
from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture & City of Paris*

This bulletin is issued in French and English
Price per issue : France: 6 € — Abroad : 7,5 €
Annual subscription (12 issues) France : 60 € — Elsewhere : 75 €

Monthly review
Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN
ISBN 0761 1285

INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS
Tel. : 01-48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01-48 24 64 66

www.fikp.org
E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

- **IRAN: ELECTORAL MASQUERADE WITH HISTORICALLY LOW VOTER TURNOUT IN A CONTEXT OF APPALLING REPRESSION**
- **TURKEY: HDP SUCCEEDS IN HOLDING ITS CONGRESS DESPITE ALL-OUT REPRESSION BY THE GOVERNMENT**
- **ROJAVA: IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX SYRIAN CONTEXT, TOWARDS INTRA-KURDISH DÉTENTE?**
- **IRAQ: ALLAWI IS STRUGGLING TO FORM HIS CABINET, KURDS AND SUNNIS FEAR BEING EXCLUDED FROM POWER**
- **GEZI TRIAL: OSMAN KAVALA ACQUITTED AND IMMEDIATELY REARRESTED**
- **THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS IN IRAN WORRIES PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY AND ITS NEIGHBOURS**
- **PARIS: A COLLOQUIUM AT THE PALAIS DU LUXEMBOURG IN TRIBUTE TO ABDUL RAHMAN GHASSEMLOU**

IRAN: ELECTORAL MASQUERADE WITH HISTORICALLY LOW VOTER TURNOUT IN A CONTEXT OF APPALLING REPRESSION

The New Year is definitely not marking any pause in the repression in Iran, quite the contrary. At the beginning of February, the human rights organisation *Hengaw* counted at least 36 executions for January. In 2019, according to *Hengaw*, there were at least 52 executions in the Kurdish provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Western Azerbaijan and Khorasan.

Terrible figures, yet 26% lower than in 2018, which says a lot about the situation in the country...

While the authorities have still not given any official account of the deaths in the repression or of the arrests during the November and January demonstrations, many of the Kurdish activists arrested are still in prison and convictions abound: up to

decades in prison, sometimes with lashes, for “treason”, “propaganda against the Islamic Republic”, “undermining national security”, “insulting the Supreme Leader” or “assistance to a Kurdish opposition party”. Many convictions were handed out in trials held behind closed doors and on the sole basis of extorted “confessions”, or for simply being present at demonstrations. Injured people die in

their cells for lack of sufficient care, families are forced to night burials. Some commit suicide in prison, such as Siamak Momeni, 18 years old. Children have been imprisoned. Families do not know the fate of their imprisoned relatives. A simple open letter can be enough to receive 26 years in prison, as in the case of Abdolrasoul Mortazavi, who signed in the summer of 2019 with thirteen other activists a letter calling for the resignation of the Supreme Guide. Arrested, eight were sentenced on 1st of February to heavy prison terms, totalling 90 years. Another letter with identical contents, signed by fourteen women, also led to prison sentences.

The Kurdish region is controlled by the *Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guards) and the *Etelaat* (intelligence service), who are massively arresting to prevent further demonstrations. In a report published on 7 July, HRANA identified 138 political prisoners and detailed their conditions of detention. The spokesman for the Parliamentary Committee for National Security, Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, gave an estimate of 7.000 people arrested during the November demonstrations (CHRI). *Radio Farda* estimated the number of detainees at 8.600 at least in 22 provinces, while human rights defenders confirmed at least 500 deaths. The list, which is regularly updated, is available on *Wikipedia* in Persian. But the U.S. State Department estimates that in November there were as many as 1.500 deaths...

The Kurdish November demonstrators continue to pay a heavy price. According to HRANA, on the 10th, three Kermanshah residents were sentenced to prison terms: Sohatollah Omidi to five years (ten years according to the Kurdish Institute of Washington,

WKI), Khalil Asadi Bouzhani to three and a half years (six years according to WKI), Mehdi Ebdali to one year, a fourth, Mohieldin Asghari, having been acquitted. Also in Kermanshah, Kurdish feminist Farzana Jalali was given one year in prison. In Marivan, where there is still no news of imprisoned doctor Omed Modarasi, environmental activist Goran Qurbani was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, and November demonstrator Pishtiwan Afsari received nine years for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic". In Sanandadj, according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Association (KMMK), Kurdish activist Chia Mohammadai received five years in prison for "assisting a Kurdish opposition party", and in Bokan, trade unionist Hadi Tanumendi was sentenced to three years. In Sanandadj, unionised teacher Iskander Lutfi was given two years, and in Mahabad, according to the KMMK, trade unionist Hadi Tenomand from Bokan was given three and a half years for "membership in an organisation spreading propaganda". At the end of the month, Zainap Ismaeli, one of the "Mothers of Peace" in Dehgan (Dewelan), whose son was killed by Daech in Rojava in 2014 after joining the YPG, was arrested and held incommunicado. In February alone, 19 Kurdish activists were convicted, while hundreds of others remain in prison (WKI).

There have also been death sentences, such as those imposed on November 26th in Tehran on November demonstrators Amir Hossein Moradi, Saeed Tamjidi and Mohammad Rajabi. They were handed down on the basis of confessions extracted under torture or blackmail. Tamjidi and Rajabi, who had taken refuge in an unspecified neighbouring country, were returned to Iran at

the end of December at Tehran's request .

It is in this appalling context that legislative elections were held on 21 February without any real stakes: nine thousand candidates, and almost all the "reformists", had in fact been eliminated from the outset by the Council of Guardians of the Constitution, controlled by the Supreme Guide, which ensured the victory of the conservatives – to the extent that President Rouhani declared on 15 January on television: "This is not an election. It's like having a shop with 2.000 copies of a single article". Several reformist groups had decided not to field candidates, and according to a poll by the public channel *News Network* on the *Telegram* application, more than 78 per cent of viewers polled said they would not vote. (*Radio Farda*) Before the vote, the *Etelaat* tried to silence journalists, summoning them to threaten them or raiding their homes to confiscate their computer equipment. Any message too critical could lead to legal charges.

The authorities wanted a high level of participation, which would have allowed them to declare abroad that Iranians support the institutions. One journalist even speculated that if the government had chosen the Wednesday before the vote to start talking about the coronavirus outbreak, it might be to give a very good reason for the low turnout (*Radio Farda*). In Iranian Kurdistan, a journalist from *Rudaw* found that the polling stations were almost empty – but it was forbidden to photograph them. The hours were extended up to five hours overtime because of a so-called "rush of voters" to the polling stations, according to state television (*Reuters*). At the end of the day, officials gave contradictory

statements about the turnout. On the basis of figures compiled at 6 p.m., the Fars agency estimated it at 39-40% nationally and 30% for Tehran. In the 2016 legislative elections it had been 62%. Participation seems to have been lower in the cities, and later the national rate was officially set at 42.57%, but only 25% for the capital. This is the lowest participation since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. That same evening, the Supreme Leader conveniently attributed it to propaganda from abroad about the coronavirus epidemic. Moreover, the lack of transparency makes the official figures unverifiable: according to the social networks, the real participation has been 20%...

The lowest turnout was in Kurdistan of Iran; the Kurdish opposition parties in exile had all called the Kurds to boycott the election.

At the same time, Kurdish porters, or *kolbars*, continued to pay a heavy price to the repression. At the beginning of February, there were already three dead and twenty wounded for 2020. While one of them, from Saqqez, died of cold near Baneh at the beginning of the month when his group lost its way in a snowstorm, others were injured or shot dead by Iranian border guards, sometimes by the Turkish military. On the 5th, also in Baneh, a porter was injured in a fall while fleeing the security forces, and another from Oshnavieh (Shino) risked execution for "rebellion" while carrying alcohol (WKI). On the 16th, the Iraqi Kurdish channel *Rûdaw* reported that in Nowsud at least one *kolbar* had been killed (four according to other testimonies) and six others wounded. On the same day, two others were wounded near Piranshahr and

Marivan. On the 22nd and 25th in Hawraman, one and then two more *kolbars* were seriously injured in falls (WKI).

Persecution against religious minorities also continues. On the 14th, HRANA published a report on the fate of a Tehran student whose only wrong had been to convert to Christianity, Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi. Banned from studying and imprisoned in the sinister Evin Prison after her initial release, she was reincarcerated after being assaulted and injured in the face on a bus by another woman who accused her of not wearing her veil properly. When she went to the police station to file a complaint against her, she was herself arrested instead. Released on bail, re-arrested during the January demonstrations, severely beaten and abused in prison, she is now awaiting trial on charges of "disturbing public order by participating in an illegal demonstration". The prosecutor prevented her release on parole by denying her bail. This is just one example of religious discrimination in the country. Since the end of January, a new regulation on the issuance of identity cards obliges applicants to declare themselves members of one of the constitutionally recognized religions: Muslim, Christian, Jewish or Zoroastrian. Those who do not tick the box corresponding to one of these religions (even if they lie about their religion) will not be able to obtain the card. This discriminatory measure affects not only the Bah'ais, but also the Mandeans and Yarsans (a minority of southern Kurds also known as "Ahl-e Haqq"). The identity card application form had an "Other" box on it until January 2019, when Javad Abtahi, a conservative deputy from Khomeinishahr (Esfahan), obtained its with-

drawal from the Ministry of Interior. He argued this option "legitimized" religious beliefs not recognized by the constitution, "like the Baha'is". This new discrimination explicitly targeting Baha'is comes on top of many others, such as the ban on education or the confiscation of their land, and is a flagrant violation of both the Iranian constitution, Article 19 of which provides for equality among citizens regardless of their faith or ethnicity, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Finally, the two researchers Fariba Adelhah and Roland Marchal, arrested last June, are still imprisoned in Iran, and on the 18th, the eight environmental activists imprisoned since January 2018, had their long prison sentences confirmed on appeal, pronounced on the basis of completely fabricated evidence. A ninth member of the group, Iranian-Canadian sociologist Kavous Seyed-Emami, died in Evin prison three weeks after his arrest in highly suspicious circumstances. The BBC has published excerpts from letters addressed to the then head of the judiciary, Sadegh Larijani, by one of the group's members, Niloufar Bayani, a former consultant to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). She testifies to the terrible conditions of interrogation and detention, including sexual harassment to which she was subjected. On the 21st, the CHRI published equally frightening letters from Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, sentenced in July 2019 in a closed trial to ten years in prison for "espionage" and imprisoned since September 2018 in the wing of Evin prison run by the *Pasdaran* (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2020/01/moore-gilbert-letters-full-revolutionary-guards-australia/>).

TURKEY: HDP SUCCEEDS IN HOLDING ITS CONGRESS DESPITE ALL-OUT REPRESSION BY THE GOVERNMENT

This February 2020 saw the publication of several reports on Turkey for 2019. On the 14th, the independent Turkish website Bianet published its report on violence against women, which includes 318 killed during 2019 and 1.699 in the last six years (<http://bianet.org/english/male-violence/219948-male-violence-infographic-2019>). See also the latest monthly report at: <http://bianet.org/english/male-violence/219679-men-kill-21-women-in-january>.

On the 17th, the CHP MP Sezgin Tanrikulu published for January his monthly report on human rights violations (<http://bianet.org/english/politics/220140-monthly-report-on-rights-violations-by-chp-mp-sezgin-tanrikulu>).

Besides, the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TİHV) counted 149 bans on demonstrations in 21 cities and one district in 2019, in violation of Article 34 of the Turkish Constitution which allows “unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstration marches without prior authorization”. Particularly in Van province, the governor has banned all demonstrations continuously since 21 November 2016 with repeated 15-day bans.

Already in January, the Association of Contemporary Journalists (ÇGD) noted in its last quarterly report the worsening of obstacles to press freedom (http://bianet.org/english/media/218161-we-are-left-unemployed-subjected-to-violence-imprisoned_full_report_in_PDF_in_Turkish):

(https://bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/002/866/original/%C3%87GD_Rapor.pdf). On the economic front, on the 3rd, the state statistics institute TürkStat reported annual inflation at 12.15%, before indicating on the 10th that the number of unemployed had reached 4,308 million. The Turkish economy has been facing increasing problems since the transition to a presidential system and recent polls suggest that even AKP voters are unhappy.

In Istanbul, residents continued to express their opposition to the ambitious Black Sea-Marmara Canal project in a march organized on the 3rd along the planned route. On the 12th, the Constitutional Court rejected the CHP’s request for suspension of the project, declaring it constitutional and referring the applicant to the administrative courts. The following day, a court ordered the censorship of three articles reporting the purchase of land along the future canal by the son-in-law of the Turkish President and current Minister of Economy Berat Albayrak, including the one on Bianet in English.

Another 2019 event has been the dismissal of 39 HDP mayors, almost all of whom charged with “membership of a terrorist organisation” and some of whom could face decades in prison. On 7 March, the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), counting 23 mayors arrested and 32 administrators appointed in HDP municipalities, considered that by this means, the AKP-MHP government had succeeded in effectively cancelling the results of the 31 March municipal elections, thereby violating

the rights of voters (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/07/turkey-kurdish-mayors-removal-violates-voters-rights>).

The hunt for the HDP continued during the first weeks of the month, with the government clearly seeking to prevent, or at least make more difficult, the party’s convention scheduled for the 23rd. On the 7th, at least 6 HDP members were imprisoned, including HDP officials from Istanbul. On the 14th, the HDP announced that at least 99 of its members had been imprisoned in Ankara, Istanbul, Adana, Ağrı, Dersim (10 young members, mostly students), Diyarbakır (including its provincial leader İrfan Söner), Kocaeli, Mardin, Mersin, Şanlıurfa and Van (including reporter Yunus Duman of the Mezopotamya agency). Also imprisoned was Kurdish writer and politician Mahmut Alinak, who had been arrested eight times before. In all, probably several hundred people have been imprisoned. On the 17th, the day when Ahmet Türk, former co-Mayor of Mardin and Necla Yıldırım, former co-Mayor of Mazıdağı, were acquitted of the charges that led to their dismissal, a new investigation was launched against the HDP deputy of Van Murat Sarısaç, who had already been followed for several days by plainclothes people. On the 21st, the HDP co-president for Şişli, Mutlu Öztürk and eight members of the party, arrested on the 13th in Istanbul for participating in the commemoration of the seventh anniversary of the founding of the HDP, a perfectly legal event, were acquitted of the charge of “organizing, leading

and attending illegal meetings and demonstrations” and released. They had initially been arrested for “insulting the Republic of Turkey” after chanting “No to war, peace now”.

On the 23rd, the HDP was able to hold its fourth congress in Ankara, during which Mithat Sancar was elected as the party’s new co-president before Sezai Temelli, and outgoing co-president Pervin Buldan was re-elected. The simple fact of holding this congress, which, in addition to its 1.018 delegates, brought together more than 20.000 members in the Turkish capital, constitutes a real victory in the context of such violent repression. As Buldan said after his re-election: “They took thousands of our friends hostages, but we have become millions!”. Moreover, the event had an international impact, with 28 countries, including France and several European countries, and some 30 political parties and women’s organisations from the Middle East sending delegations. Among the speakers invited by the Congress was the President of the United Left Group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tiny Kox. Referring to the repression by the power, Buldan also said: “But there is something they cannot see: they face an alliance of the oppressed. Cizre is allied with Gezi. Istanbul and Diyarbakır are allied with İzmir and Hakkari”.

As soon as the congress ended, an investigation was launched against the HDP for “propaganda for a terrorist organisation”, following the publication of a photo showing the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan at a photo presentation. Around 15 people who took part in the preparation of the presentation have been imprisoned. On the

same day, the 10-year prison sentence of former HDP vice-president Aysel Tuğluk, who has been detained since December 2016, was confirmed in appeal.

In other news, the situation in the prisons is as bad as ever. Referring to the data disseminated by the Human Rights Association (IHD), HDP MP Züleyha Gülüm said that, for a prison capacity of 220.000, Turkey currently counts 280.000 prisoners, with 1.334 sick, 457 of whom are seriously ill. 44 sick prisoners died in prison during the period 2017-2019. Of these 1.334 sick prisoners, the only one that the Turkish president chose to pardon on health grounds at the beginning of February was Ahmet Turan Kılıç, one of the life-sentenced prisoners of the Sivas massacre, which had cost the lives of 33 artists and writers who had come to take part in the Pir Sultan Abdal festival, and died in the arson of their hotel.

Already on 15 January, Kurdish political prisoner Nurcan Bakir had committed suicide. Detained for 28 years and transferred to Mardin as punishment for her participation in the hunger strike of 2019, sick and never released despite her health situation and several demands, she had preferred to end it all. It is known that many sick prisoners are refused treatment, and on 29 January, a prisoner from Tekirdağ, Hüseyin Polat, died in his cell of an intestinal haemorrhage after being sent back to prison after only an injection, due to “no available place in the hospital”. At the beginning of February, of the seven imprisoned musicians of Grup Yorum, two had been on hunger strike until death for seven months, singer Helin Bölek (released on November 20 but still fasting at home) and bassist İbrahim Gökçek. Accused of terrorism without any evidence, Gökçek

weighed only 40-45 kg at the end of January, according to CHP deputy Turan Aydoğan who visited him... On 5 February, the Progressive Lawyers’ Association (ÇHD) announced that eight of its eighteen detained members, including lawyers from Grup Yorum, had in turn gone on hunger strike. On 13 February, the HDP’s International Relations Committee requested in an open letter to the international community that it take immediate action to save the Grup Yorum detainees, who were in mortal danger. On the 14th, in the first hearing of the case, the Istanbul Criminal Court decided in a provisional judgment to keep Gökçek, who had been on hunger strike for 241 days, in detention while seeking the opinion of the Forensic Medical Institute, and postponed the trial to 26-27 March. But on the 24th, after 252 days of fasting, the Forensic Medical Institute decided on Gökçek’s release, ruling that his condition did not allow for further incarceration. The musician was placed under house arrest.

Arrests and convictions of journalists also continued. On the 13th, the Istanbul prosecutor requested 15 years in prison against former correspondent of the German newspaper Die Welt, Deniz Yücel, for “propaganda for a terrorist organisation”. Yücel had published an interview in 2015 with Cemil Bayık, one of the co-founders of the PKK. The next hearing is set for 2 April. On the 14th, in a rare piece of good news, the novelist Aslı Erdoğan was acquitted of “membership in a terrorist organisation” in the case of the pro-Kurdish newspaper Özgür Gündem, closed by decree in 2016, with which she had collaborated to support it, which earned her 130 days in detention. Released in December 2016 and only able to leave Turkey to go into exile in Germany after the

return of her passport in September 2017, the novelist told AFP she ruled out returning because of the risk of further imprisonment by a “neo-fascist” political system.

Other recent denials of justice include the launch of a disciplinary investigation on the 12th after a baton attack on their campus by security guards and then nationalists against a dozen students wanting to attend a symposium where the president of Ankara University and the deputy minister of culture were speaking: the investigation was directed against the students, not their attackers. In Istanbul, a trade unionist from the construction site of the new airport, secretary of a DISK-affiliated union, is facing 15 years in prison for his participation in the (legal) HDP

Youth Congress. He had actively participated in the fight against poor working conditions... On the 19th, the final hearing of the “Büyükkaya trial”, named after the island where eleven human rights defenders were arrested in 2017 during a training on digital security, was held. Among them were Taner Kılıç and Idil Eser, respectively former president and director of Amnesty International Turkey. Accused of being members of (at the same time!) the Gülen organisation, the PKK and the far-left DHKP/C party, they face up to 15 years in prison for, among other things, “membership of an armed terrorist organisation”. The court postponed the judgment until 3 April at the request of the defence.

The expression of Kurdish culture is still repressed. On the 8th, the two musicians Ilyas Arzu and

Jiyan Savcı were imprisoned in Adana, their homes and the Dem Music Centre searched. The investigation was declared confidential. On the 21st, the HDP announced that none of the parliamentary questions it had submitted in local mother tongues, Arabic, Kurmanchi, Syriac and Zazaki, on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, had been processed.

Finally, on the morning of the 23rd, a 5,9 magnitude earthquake struck the Kurdish regions of Iran and Turkey, killing at least nine people, injuring 70 and destroying 250 houses in Van province. A second quake, of magnitude 5,8, occurred in the evening, without any casualties. The last earthquake, on 24 January, had killed 41 people.

ROJAVA: IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX SYRIAN CONTEXT, TOWARDS INTRA-KURDISH DÉTENTE?

On 2 February, the Presidency of the Kurdish National Council in Syria (Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê, ENKS), in the opposition to the Administration of North-East Syria (AANES), led by the PYD-dominated TEV-DEM coalition, decided after four years of closure to reopen its offices in the area the latter controls. This decision follows the “Kurdish unity” initiative launched after the Turkish invasion of October 2019 by Mazloum Abdi, Commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the announcement by the AANES in early January that all restrictions on the political activities of the ENKS had been lifted. The closure had indeed been imposed by AANES. The ENKS explains its decision as a commitment to restore confi-

dence between political opponents, prior to an attempt to resolve differences. The FDS, their spokesman Mustafa Bali told the Iraqi Kurdistan Channel Kurdistan-24, have been encouraged in their reconciliation initiative by external actors such as the leadership of neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, including former President Massoud Barzani and his successor Nechirvan Barzani, but also recent French and American initiatives. Interviewed on another Iraqi Kurdish channel, Rûdaw, ENKS External Relations Officer Kamiran Haco, who is also the only Kurdish member of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, said that in these circumstances where “time is not on the side of the Kurds”, his organisation was ready to hold “serious discussions” with AANES: “What the Kurds

should do now is to formulate a political project”, he said. Haco also suggested that greater unity among the Kurds of Rojava would enable them, with the support of the French and Americans, to better defend their rights in the ongoing constitutional negotiation process (Full interview in English: <https://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/040220201>).

Since last October’s invasion, Turkey and its jihadist mercenaries, despite the ceasefire that followed it and their takeover of a so-called “security zone”, have not stopped their attacks. Nothing seems to be able to make the Turkish President deviate from his anti-Kurdish policy, even the decision of the United States, revealed at the beginning of the month, to stop sharing with Turkey the intelligence

obtained on the PKK by their drones... (Reuters) Despite an increasingly tense situation in Idlib, the Turks and their Syrian allies have continued to attack Kurdish villages on the edge of their zone of control, in particular near Tall Tamr on the Khabur, and to the west of Tall Abyad / Girê Sipî. In the conquered Syrian territories, Turkey is behaving as a colonising power plundering resources. This is what it had done to Afrin for olive oil, stolen from Kurdish farmers and resold in Turkey. Mehmet Güzelmansur, CHP deputy from Hatay, asked in a parliamentary question how much Afrin oil had been sold in this way on the Turkish market, but was refused an answer at the beginning of the month by the Minister of Agriculture, who argued that it was a "trade secret". However, Güzelmansur said that according to the state institute TurkStat, 44.5 million dollars worth of olive oil had been sold. What worried him was not so much the theft of the oil from the Kurds as the consequences of putting it on the Turkish market, which brought down prices and caused huge losses to producers. The question of who benefited from this looting does not seem to have been addressed.

But looting is only one aspect of the exactions committed by the occupants. In Afrin, where about 1.000 people are still missing, women were particularly targeted during the two-year jihadist occupation, with abductions, killings and rapes. Encouraged by the silence and lack of reaction from the international community, the occupiers, who have remained unpunished, resumed their abuses in the territories conquered in October. Sources in Ras-al-Ain / Serê Kaniyê informed the ANHA agency of dozens of kidnappings and

assaults in this town, but also in Tall Abyad / Girê Sipî. Among the women victims of the pro-Turkish mercenaries, one of the best known is certainly the Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf, co-founder of the Syrian Future Party, assassinated on 12 October 2019 by members of the Ahrar al-Charqiya group after her vehicle was intercepted on the M4 highway near Tall Tamr. Khalaf's mother, Souad Mustafa, addressed the European Parliament on 6 February to call for the perpetrators and instigators of this war crime to be arrested and brought to international justice: "I want Erdoğan to be held responsible for this crime. Hevrin has dedicated his life to the unity and brotherhood of all the peoples of the region. Each person responsible should be tried for his or her murder". Souad Mustafa, however, opposed US sanctions against Turkey, which would make the people suffer more than the real perpetrators, the government: "A war crime has been committed against humanity, and the very person who gave the orders to these activists must be held responsible before a just court", she concluded.

Another act of war by pro-Turkish mercenaries targeting civilian populations, and thus potentially a war crime, was revealed at the end of February: entering the Alok pumping station in the (Turkish-controlled) city of Ras al-Ain / Serê Kaniyê on the 24th, they expelled the Syrian staff before stopping the pumps, thus cutting off water to an area inhabited by 460.000 people and camps housing hundreds of thousands of displaced people. The towns of Hassakeh and Tall Tamr in particular, and the Al-Hol camp, where families of Daech fighters are detained, have been deprived of running water. After the Turkish bom-

bardments in October, the station was already operating at only 20% of its capacity... The situation is all the more difficult as hundreds of families driven out of the Idlib region by the fighting between the regime and the rebels arrived during the month in the area controlled by the AANES (Administration of North-East Syria), particularly in Manbij. The commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Mazloum Kobanê, had indeed indicated that this area was open to them.

In this tense context, a delegation of Kurdish parties representatives visited Hmeimim and Damascus, where they met government officials including the Syrian President, with the Russians acting as intermediaries. Both sides expressed their readiness to engage in political dialogue. Ilham Ahmed, co-chair of the Executive Council of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political voice of the FDS, confirmed to the newspaper Asharq al-Awsat that talks with the regime had resumed; it should be recalled that previous attempts had met with little success, mainly due to the rigidity of the regime. On the 19th, FDS spokesman Kino Gabriel denied that the FDS fought alongside the regime's forces against Turkish forces in Idlib, while FDS commander Mazloum Abdi reiterated on Al-Arabiya that there could be "no simple return to the Syria of before 2011", and that there was "no solution without the Kurds" (WKI).

In the middle of the month, Abdi also met with US special envoy James Jeffrey, arrived via Iraqi Kurdistan, to discuss the state of the fight against Daech. At the end of January, a delegation from the European Union's representative office in Iraqi Kurdistan visited the AANES

office in Suleimaniyeh for the same reason. Another point raised was the fate of the Daech prisoners held in 17 camps by AANES, which, together with the United States, is constantly calling on European countries to repatriate their nationals so that they can be tried in their countries of origin. If on the 6th, a Russian delegation received 35 orphans of parents members of Daech (AFP), the European countries, for their part, are still turning a deaf ear. After months of deadlock, the AANES announced in early February that it had finally resolved to try its prisoners on the spot and that it had asked for help from the member countries of the anti-Daech coalition. Abdulkarim Omar, co-chairman of the AANES Foreign Relations Committee, said: "There must be an international solution... This was the basis of our relationship with the international coalition against Daech [...] These members of [Daech] must be judged, and the international community must help us in this task by continuing this relationship". Helsinki, where a meeting was

held with AANES representatives, indicated support for the establishment of a special court in Rojava to try foreign ex-combatants or suspected foreign ex-combatants. In France, the group of about a hundred families, including relatives of the 300 children of French jihadists detained in the Rojava, once again requested their repatriation on the 14th (AFP). AANES reiterated on the 23rd its request for international legal assistance, while reaffirming its commitment to guarantee "a transparent and fair trial" for the jihadists who would be tried locally.

However, in his 10th report on the threat posed by Daech, published on 4 February, the UN Secretary General said the jihadist organisation had taken advantage of the Turkish invasion of north-eastern Syria to reorganise itself and continue its financial transactions... through Turkey (https://www.security-councilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_95.pdf). On the 5th, the Pentagon reported that the FDS had foiled

several suicide vehicle attacks in preparation against the civilian populations of Qamishli, Hasakeh and Derik, as well as an imminent attack on 1st January on a joint military base with US troops in Deir Ezzor province. Two jihadists were captured in the latter action.

Finally, the Party for Democratic Unity (PYD), which dominates the AANES coalition, held its eighth congress on 24th and 25th February in Rmeilan with the slogan: "With the Democratic Union, we are defeating the occupation, developing an autonomous administration and building a democratic Syria". Around 600 delegates attended, including some coming from neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan. At the end of the congress, Anwar Muslim, previously in charge of the Euphrates region, replaced Shahoz Hassan as co-president, while Aysha Hissu retained her position as co-president. "Our work since the founding of the party has been to build a free, democratic and decentralized Syria", Muslim said.

IRAQ:

ALLAWI IS STRUGGLING TO FORM HIS CABINET, KURDS AND SUNNIS FEAR BEING EXCLUDED FROM POWER

Iraq decidedly seems unable to emerge from its political deadlock. After the resignation of Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi in December, the Shiite parties dominating the parliament entered into endless disputes to find a successor for him. At the same time, protests against corruption and the lack of services and employment continued despite increasingly bloody repression. After President Barham Saleh threatened to choose one himself, parliament finally succeeded on 1st February, in a last-minute com-

promise, in appointing Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi. Charged by the Iraqi President to form his cabinet within 30 days, he first said he would present it to parliament before the end of the week, before more cautiously announcing that he hoped to finalise it by the end of the month...

The protesters immediately expressed their rejection of Allawi as still belonging to the same Shiite political staff they no longer want to see in power. Moqtada Al-Sadr, whose *Sayrûn* alliance had supported Allawi in

parliament, then ordered his supporters to turn against the protesters he had previously supported. From the 2nd, the "sadrists" violently attacked protesters throughout the country. On the 5th, eight were shot dead in Najaf and hundreds injured, so much so that even Allawi threatened to resign in the face of this "totally unacceptable" violence. In Kurdistan, the Presidency also called for an end to the violence, a request reiterated on the 12th (*Al-Monitor*). On the 7th, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani expressed in turn his condemnation.

To defuse the opposition, Allawi began by contacting the protesters, rather than the various political alliances. From then on, he found himself on the tightrope, between the protesters who continued their rejection, the Kurds and Sunnis who reproached him for not consulting them, Sadr who threatened him on the 11th to withdraw his support if he gave in too much, and finally, the parliament dominated by Shiite parties who would in the end have the power to approve or not his cabinet... On the 12th, in Baghdad, demonstrators and security forces were fighting for control of the streets and the bridges over the Tigris...

On the 13th, Sadr issued a “revolutionary charter” purporting to regulate the demonstrations, in which he condemned the “promiscuity” that prevailed there and called for gender segregation. Outraged, Iraqi women staged several marches to assert their role in the movement, Sadr responding with accusations of “promiscuity, drunkenness and immorality”.

On the 15th, Kurdistan’s Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, from the Munich Security Conference, reiterated Erbil’s conditional support for the new government in formation, while stressing the importance of Erbil-Baghdad military coordination in the fight against Daech...

Kurds and Sunnis, worried about being excluded from power, started to coordinate in some sort of anti-Allawi alliance as a means of exerting pressure. On the 16th, the (Sunni) Speaker of Parliament, Mohammed al-Halbousi, visited Erbil and Suleimaniyeh, before issuing a joint communiqué with KDP leader Massoud Barzani recalling that the new government should “represent all the compo-

nents of Iraq, and on the basis of national partnership” – that is to say, beyond a participation of each community, taking in account the wishes of Kurdish and Sunni political parties... On the same day, demonstrators marched with portraits of their own candidate for Prime Minister, the pharmacist from Nassiriya ‘Alaa al-Rikaby.

At the same time, Allawi announced that he would soon propose his government for a vote of confidence, which seemed a challenge given the differences in parliament: since the targeted assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the Shiites have been demanding the departure of American troops, while the Kurds and Sunnis have made a condition for their support of the continued cooperation with the anti-Daech coalition led by the United States... (AFP) Another stumbling block, the committee charged with formulating constitutional amendments in response to the protesters’ demands seemed to have become bogged down, even though its four-month mandate was about to end... (AFP)

On the 17th, the continued violence that had left at least 200 wounded in Baghdad and Karbala, including 59 in Baghdad during the previous three days, prompted a new condemnation by UNAMI, followed the next day by US Assistant Secretary of State David Schenker.

On the 22nd, it was the Kurds of Suleimaniyeh who demonstrated for the first time against corruption and the lack of services and jobs at the call of Sashwar Abdulwahid’s “New Generation” opposition party.

On 23 February, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Allawi

on the phone to remind him of the need to cooperate with Sunni and Kurdish leaders in the formation of his government. The next day, the leaders of several Kurdish parties, including those participating in the Regional government, met in Erbil to work out a common position. At the end of this meeting, they set three conditions for supporting Allawi: respect for the constitutional rights of the inhabitants of Kurdistan, respect for budgetary commitments, and normalisation of the security situation in the territories covered by Article 140 of the Constitution, that is to say the disputed territories. An agreement was reportedly reached with Allawi on Kurdish representation in the cabinet: it would comprise four Kurdish ministers, three of whom would be chosen by the Kurds themselves and one appointed by Allawi (*Asharq Al-Awsat*).

On 25 February, numerous demonstrators marched again in Baghdad to renew their opposition to foreign (i.e. Iranian) interference and the appointment of Allawi. Security forces again used excessive force against them, killing at least two people and injuring dozens more. On the same day, Allawi published his government programme, whose agenda included early elections and reforms. But this document, which did not mention the Kurdistan Region as a federal entity within Iraq, did not convince the Kurds, who decided to boycott the parliamentary session that was to approve it. Initially scheduled for the 24th, then postponed to the 27th, it was again postponed for lack of a quorum, the Sunnis having also boycotted it. The Kurds made their support conditional on guarantees on their budget and on treatment in accordance with the constitution of the Kurdistan Region, whose

special status, according to them, implies that it can choose itself the ministers it sends to Baghdad. A new session scheduled for the 28th was cancelled, again because of the Sunni and Kurdish boycott. At the end of the month, uncertainty still prevailed over the future of Allawi, whose support was rapidly eroding...

At the same time and despite all these difficulties, discussions continued between Kurdistan and Baghdad. On the 5th, the two parties reached an agreement on the 2020 budget, Erbil set to contributing 250.000 barrels of oil per day. However, Kurdish officials said they would wait for the formation of the new government before initiating the transfers.

Throughout the month, the jihadist organization Daech continued its attacks in the disputed territories. In addition to the security vacuum created by the lack of cooperation between Iraqi forces and Kurdish peshmergas, which has persisted since October 2017, Daech has also recently benefited from the temporary interruption of joint Iraqi-American operations, which only resumed on 31 January. The Pentagon also said that the death of the organisation's "Caliph", Al-Baghdadi, had had virtually no impact on the organisation's capabilities. The jihadist threat is therefore more pressing than

ever. The Prime Minister of Kurdistan, Masrour Barzani, took the opportunity of the Munich Security Conference to draw attention to the persistence of this danger and the need for better international coordination to combat it... The first day of the month, jihadists kidnapped two brothers at a mock checkpoint set up between the districts of Kifri and Touz Khourmatou (south of Kirkouk), the second kidnapping in this sector in 48 hours. Two people, most likely these two hostages, were released a few days later for a ransom of 70.000 US\$. Although the Peshmergas were able to capture an important leader in this area on the 3rd, the attacks continued, with the kidnapping and killing of two civilians on the 4th, west of Kirkuk. Further north, it was the Makhmur camp that was attacked on the 2nd... On the 9th at dawn, the Peshmergas and *Asayish* (Security) of Kurdistan launched with the air support of the Coalition a massive anti-Daech operation in Garmiyan, including precisely the Kifri area, near which they fought at length against the jihadists, killing an unspecified number of them. On the 12th in the night, Daech attacks on villages of the Kurdish religious minority west of Khanaqin left three dead (a father and his son, a peshmerga and an Iraqi officer), and ten wounded (*Kurdistan-24*). On the 17th, the *Asayish* of Garmiyan freed three prisoners held in a

tunnel and arrested some of those responsible for their abduction, jihadists or bandits. On the 23rd, two farmers were injured by an IED in Diyala. On the 24th, three civilians were killed and a fourth injured in an attack in Salahaddin province.

On the same day, the Iraqi Minister of Defence and the Minister of Peshmerga of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) met in Baghdad to coordinate the lines of control of their respective forces and discuss cooperation. On the night of the 24th-25th, an Iraqi operation eliminated 39 jihadists between the provinces of Kirkuk and Salahaddin in clashes that lasted more than 10 hours. Two tunnels were discovered with large quantities of ammunition and weapons (*Kurdistan-24*). On the night of the 25th, jihadists on motorcycles carried out several attacks against Kurdish villagers in Kirkuk, killing four people and injuring three. Some residents then accused Arab tribes of cooperating with Daech to drive them off their land. On the 28th, two Iraqi security personnel were killed and a third injured in Kirkuk. The following day, two civilians were injured by another IED in South Mosul and at least one member of the Shia militia was killed near Daquq (South Kirkuk). Daech also appears to be still present in Hawija, where Iraqi security forces have had to launch several raids.

GEZI TRIAL:

OSMAN KAVALA ACQUITTED AND IMMEDIATELY REARRESTED

On 18 February, all 230 defendants in the "Gezi trial", concerning the 2013 demonstrations in this Istanbul park, were acquitted. Among them was businessman, human rights defender and philanthropist

Osman Kavala, the only one of them still in prison, despite a 10 December ruling by the European Court of Human Rights ordering his "immediate release".

The prosecutor had requested

against him and two other defendants, Mücella Yapıcı and Yiğit Aksakoğlu, life sentences. However, in a recent ruling on the continued detention of another defendant, Professor Mehmet Altan, the Turkish Constitutional Court recalled

that it is not up to the local courts to challenge its authority, but rather to “put an end to the situation that led to the rights violations” on which it ruled... The Constitutional Court had referred in this ruling to the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to release Altan, that was also ignored in the case of Osman Kavala. Kavala’s lawyer had therefore challenged the prosecutor’s opinion on the basis of this ruling, which should also apply to his client, as his situation was similar to that of Altan.

The acquittal seemed for a while to make this debate academic. However, it shows to what extent the leader of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş, himself imprisoned without trial for almost four years despite a release ruling from the ECHR, may be right when he states that “there is no longer a judicial system” in Turkey .

But the biggest scandal was yet

to come. On the same evening that his acquittal was pronounced, Osman Kavala was targeted by a new warrant issued by the Istanbul Prosecutor General in the framework of an investigation into the attempted coup of 15 July 2016. This dramatic coup de theatre has provoked outraged reactions from all sides. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, said: “It is difficult not to notice a similarity between this new arrest and what happened in the cases of Ahmet Altan, Selahattin Demirtaş and Taner Kılıç, whose trials I am also following very closely”.

Osman Kavala was arrested again on the 19th.

On the same day, the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) authorized an investigation against the three judges who had delivered the acquittal verdict. On the 21st, thirty Turkish bar associations, including those of Ankara, Adana, Bursa,

Çanakkale, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Mardin and Şanlıurfa, describing this authorisation and investigation as attempts to intimidate judges, called in a joint statement for the collective resignation of the HSK, recalling that such pressure is totally unconstitutional. On the 24th, the Bar Associations of 25 provinces stated in a joint statement their opinion that “executive interference in the judiciary has reached an unacceptable level”.

On the 26th, a campaign of support by sending letters to Osman Kavala was launched. The aim is to write to him in his prison in Silivri at “Silivri Kapalı Ceza İnfaz Kurumu, 9 No’lu Cezaevi, A-7 / C 59, 34570 Silivri / İstanbul”. The organisers have specified that those who do not have the possibility or the means to send letters or cards to Osman Kavala by post can send their messages to the e-mail address freeosmankavala@gmail.com for forwarding to him.

THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS IN IRAN WORRIES PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

The death of two coronavirus patients in Iran on the 19th caused concern among the population, but also further damaged the government’s image. Many took the announcement as an admission by the regime that the epidemic had already spread to Qom, the country’s religious capital and destination of numerous pilgrimages. In addition, two more cases were reported in Qom the following day, and another in nearby Arak on the 21st. The many Iranians who have lost confidence in the regime, particularly since its attempt to conceal its responsibility for the Ukrainian plane crash, have begun to suspect that the gov-

ernment might have similarly concealed the disease in order to obtain a higher turnout in the elections. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, said on the 23rd that the reports in the foreign media about the spread of the coronavirus in Iran were intended precisely to dissuade people from voting...

On the 24th, Qom MP Ahmad Amirabadi-Farahani said that there had already been 50 deaths in his constituency and that the city had to be quarantined. He revealed that the outbreak had already started three weeks earlier and that there had been deaths as early as 13 February, but that the officials in charge had remained silent. According to

him, 250 patients were quarantined in Qom and 32 of the deaths occurred in quarantine... On the 26th, the government’s figures, 19 deaths and 139 positive diagnoses, were widely considered among the population to be grossly underestimated. As the public began to ask for the closure of some holy places, some particularly superstitious religious people on the contrary encouraged the faithful to visit them to benefit from their protection against the virus! However, two women returning from Qom tested positive in Beirut. While the authorities continued to claim that there were no cases in Mashhad, 7 pilgrims returning from that city out of a group of 700 tested positive in

Kuwait: inevitably, Iranians began to question the official statements...

In Iraq, the first confirmed case of coronavirus in Najaf, also on the 24th, also involved an Iranian student, who was transferred to hospital and quarantined.

On the 28th, while the Iranian Ministry of Health reported 34 deaths due to coronavirus, the BBC Persian channel claimed that according to information received from hospital sources, the true number was at least 210. Angry at the authorities' concealment, Rasht MP Gholam Ali Jafazadeh Imanabadi was reported saying: "You can hide the figures, but you cannot hide the cemeteries"...

The epidemic began to spread in Iranian Kurdistan where, according to a semi-official map, more than a dozen people had died by the end of the month.

Human rights defenders have

begun to worry about the consequences of the epidemic for the prisoners crammed into the terrible Iranian prisons where sanitary conditions are deplorable.

In neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, the authorities began by banning passengers from China from entering the region on 1st of February. On 4 February, air links to China were suspended, with the Chinese consulate in Erbil expressing "disappointment" at the decision. On the 20th, although there had not yet been any cases of coronavirus in Iraq or Kurdistan, the KRG decided to close its borders with Iran – with the exception of citizens of the Region then in Iran, who were allowed to enter, but were placed in quarantine for two weeks. Later the same day, Baghdad announced the suspension of all flights between Iraq and Iran. On the 26th, several public events planned in Kurdistan were cancelled, while the Iraqi Ministry of Health

announced that four members of the same family recently returned from Qom had tested positive. On the 28th, the celebrations for the next Newrouz were cancelled.

In Turkey, the Ministry of Health announced the suspension of air links with China from February 5th until the end of the month and the inspection with a thermal camera of passengers arriving from Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia. This measure was quickly extended to all origins. On the 24th, the land borders with Iran were closed, and on the 25th, the flights of the Turkish national airline THY with Iran and China were suspended, except for Tehran. On the 26th, all flights were suspended without any time limit. Turkey has also set up field hospitals at the borders with Iran. The health minister said there were no cases in Turkey yet, but that the epidemic "had reached the gates of the country".

PARIS:

A COLLOQUIUM AT THE PALAIS DU LUXEMBOURG IN TRIBUTE TO ABDUL RAHMAN GHASSEMLOU

An outstanding, multi-faceted personality, Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was both an academic and a political leader. After having played an important role in opposing the dictatorial regime of Reza Shah, he then opposed the Islamic Republic that succeeded him in 1979 when the latter confiscated the popular revolution with its democratic aspirations. As Secretary General of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan of Iran (KDP-I, PDKI), he peacefully advocated an autonomous status for Kurdistan within the framework of a democratic and secular Iran, and was able to

rally all Kurdish political parties around this slogan and establish links with Iranian secular opponents with a view to preparing a democratic alternative to the regime of the Ayatollahs.

After Khomeini launched the *jihad* against the Iranian Kurds in August 1979, the Kurdish resistance, under the leadership of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, sought to establish alliances with other Iranian democratic forces and personalities and to seek international support. Ghassemlou, a defender of democratic socialism, quickly found his place within the Socialist International. His inter-

national influence, his political vision and his ability to rally democratic opposition to the Islamic Republic made him the number one public enemy of Tehran. On Khomeini's death, the new Iranian President Rafsanjani offered him talks, claiming that the regime was prepared to settle the Kurdish question peacefully and to democratise itself. It was while trying to give a chance to dialogue that Dr. Ghassemlou, who had come to Vienna (Austria) for these "peace talks", was assassinated by the Iranian "negotiators" on 13 July 1989 together with two of his collaborators. This state crime has unfortunate-

ly not been punished. The identified perpetrators, who were in possession of diplomatic passports, were allowed to leave Austria freely and return to Iran, where they were congratulated and promoted. The Austrian justice system has not sought to identify the instigators of this state terrorism in the heart of Europe, still less to take them to justice.

Thirty years later, the ideals that guided Dr. Ghassemlou's struggle for the emancipation of the Kurdish people and for a democratic and secular Iran that respects its political, cultural and linguistic diversity remain as relevant as ever in Kurdistan, Iran and the Middle East. This is why the Kurdish Institute, of which he was an ardent defender, has invited those who knew Dr. Ghassemlou well to pay him a final tribute and to bring out their testimonies in order to transmit his democratic message, his humanist values and his

political thought to the new generations.

The interventions were distributed over several round tables on different periods of Dr. Ghassemlou's life. In the first one, devoted to the years of training and exile, his daughter, the architect Mina Ghassemlou, gave a moving testimony by addressing her father directly in front of the audience. Political companions, former leaders of the PDKI, youth friends and Kurdish political leaders such as the former Speaker of the Parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan Adnan Mufti also spoke. The second round table on "Years of Resistance and Relations with the Kurdish World", moderated by Senator Rémi Féraud, gave the floor to several Kurdish political leaders from Iran and Turkey, as well as to Fatoş Güney, the wife of the filmmaker Yilmaz Güney, of whom Ghassemlou had become a friend. Also, the former PDKI

representative in Europe Aziz Mameli also came back to the responsibilities for the impunity of Ghassemlou's assassins in 1989. Moderated by Hamit Bozarslan, the next table addressed Ghassemlou as a figure of the Iranian democratic opposition. Finally, the day ended with a last round table where spoke personalities who had met Ghassemlou internationally, journalists or researchers, humanitarian leaders or non-Kurdish political figures, such as Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of *Médecins sans Frontières* and *Médecins du Monde*, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Florence Veber, former president of *Aide Médicale Internationale*...

All the speeches can be listened to on the site of the Kurdish Institute (->). Their final version will be published in a forthcoming special issue of the journal *Etudes Kurdes*.



01-02-2020
Karwan Faidhi Dri

Syria Kurds discuss ISIS prisoners, Turkish offensive with EU officials in Sulaimani

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – A delegation from the European Union’s Liaison Office in the Kurdistan Region visited the Sulaimani office of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) on Friday to discuss the fate of Islamic State (ISIS) detainees and the recent Turkish offensive.

Vincent Guillaume Poupeau, head of the EU liaison office, told Kurdish officials it is vital to develop relations between the EU and the NES. He also praised the role of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against ISIS, according to the NES-affiliated Hawar News Agency (ANHA).

Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria on October 9 against the SDF – the military wing of the NES. Kurdish fighters were forced to withdraw from Turkey’s southern border under two Turkish agreements with the United States and Russia.



A French woman named Amal, 25, uses crutches to walk at the Kurdish-run Al-Hol camp for the displaced in the al-Hasaka governorate in northeastern Syria, January 14, 2020. File photo: Delil Souleiman / AFP

Ankara and its Syrian proxies have been accused of committing various violations by local and international rights groups. Kurdish officials urged the EU delegation on Friday to take action to halt such abuses.

More than 66,000 people, mostly families of ISIS fighters who were

killed or detained in battle with the SDF, live in the notorious Al-Hol camp. The population of the vastly overcrowded camp is made up almost entirely of women and children.

The fate of these ISIS-affiliated detainees was also discussed in Fri-

day’s Sulaimani meeting. The Kurdish officials told the EU delegation the SDF and NES authorities responsible for the camp are overstretched.

The SDF and the US have repeatedly called on European countries to repatriate their nationals captured on the front line fighting for ISIS.

There are a total of 17 camps for refugees and displaced persons under Kurdish control in northeast Syria, Sheikhmus Ahmed, head of the NES office for internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees, recently told Rudaw.

ISIS-affiliates held in these camps have made several escape attempts. On Thursday, six women originally from Turkey, Russia, Chechnya and Georgia attempted to flee with their nine children but were captured by camp guards, reported ANHA.



01-02-2020
Paul Iddon

US moots deploying Patriot system to shield its troops in Iraq

The United States may soon deploy air defense missile systems to Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to help shield its troops from rocket and ballistic missile attack following the Iranian strike that targeted Ain Al-Asad Airbase in Anbar province on January 8.

“The US is deploying PAC-3 Patriots to Iraq, and is arranging the modalities of this with the Iraqi government now,” Michael Knights, an Iraq expert and the Lafer Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told Rudaw English.

Knights anticipates one system

being deployed “to cover Erbil” and the other to Al-Asad.

The MIM-104 Patriot missile defense, especially the PAC-3 variant, is designed to intercept and destroy ballistic missiles like the ones Iran used on January 8.

The US already has such systems protecting its military facilities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. On several occasions over the last 30 years, the US and NATO deployed Patriots to Turkey to help defend it against potential Scud missile attacks from Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and later from war-torn Syria.

Iran-backed units of the Shiite-majority Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), also known as Hashd al-Shaabi, have targeted bases hosting US troops in Iraq with rockets numerous times in recent months.

On December 27, the Kataib Hezbollah group killed an American civilian contractor in one such rocket attack at the K1 base in Kirkuk – the first American fatality caused directly by one of these attacks.

The US promptly retaliated two days later, killing 25 paramilitiamen in five airstrikes, three in Iraq and two in Syria.

Iran fired at least a dozen ballistic missiles at Al-Asad airbase and Erbil International Airport in the Kurdistan Region five days after a US drone strike assassinated Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) extraterritorial Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis on January 3.

While the missiles didn’t kill any US troops, 50 of them suffered brain injuries in the Al-Asad strike. The Americans seemingly had hours of forewarning about when the attack would commence and took precautions to ensure the Iranian missiles

caused minimal damage to personnel and equipment on the base.

However, the US troops did not have any adequate air defenses with which to counter the missile strikes. That could be about change with the Pentagon mulling plans to send such missiles to Iraqi bases with US troops in the near future.

“After Iran fired ballistic missiles at US forces stationed in an Iraqi base in Anbar there was talk in the US media that the Americans might deploy anti-missile defenses to protect them from another such attack,” Joel Wing, author of the Musings on Iraq blog, told Rudaw English.

“They might do that, but the immediate threat is from short-range rockets fired from pro-Iran Hashd units,” he said.

“It seems like fortifying camps Americans stay at would be the priority over sending anti-missile defenses to Iraq.”



The Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Missile gun (C-RAM) fires during a weapons test at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, January 31, 2010. File photo: Britany Bateman / US Air Force

The Patriot missile is not designed for countering the kind of short-range Katyusha-type rocket artillery Kataib Hezbollah has fired at US bases in recent months.

“Lower level air defense platforms could be sent to smaller bases,” Knights said.

He suggested that AN/TWO-1

Avenger mobile short-range air defense systems and possibly additional C-RAM (Counter Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar) units might fulfil this role.

The C-RAM, in particular, is designed to detect and destroy incoming artillery and mortar rounds as well as short-range rockets. Such a system might prove well suited for deflecting

the kind of rocket and mortar attacks Iran’s proxies in Iraq carry out against US targets.

In the aftermath of the Soleimani strike, there have been growing calls in Baghdad for the removal of all US and foreign troops from Iraq, including a non-binding vote in parliament on January 5 demanding their expulsion.

However, neither Knights nor Wing anticipates the US facing any serious political pushback from Baghdad over any such deployment.

“Whether the US sends missiles or not will not change attitudes amongst Iraqis one way or another,” Wing said.

“Those that want the US out are committed to that goal regardless of what the Americans do.”

Knights pointed out that the Patriots and other missiles “are defensive systems and they would protect Iraqis on the bases too.”



01-02-2020
Paul Iddon

Zoroastrian winter festival begins in Iran’s Kurdistan province

Zoroastrian winter festival begins in Iran’s Kurdistan province

People from many parts of Kurdistan gathered in the village of Hawraman Takht in western Iran on Friday for the start of the traditional winter festival of Pir Shalyar – a 700-year-old ceremony associated with Zoroastrianism.

Pirs are pilgrimage sites in the Zoroastrian faith – an ancient belief system that predates all the major monotheisms. Its influences can still be found in Kurdish, Persian, Yezidi, and even Hindu traditions, particularly the Nawroz spring celebration.

In Zoroastrian legend, a man named Pir Shalyar cured a sick princess after many physicians failed to help her. The princess’ father agreed to let Pir Shalyar marry his daughter in a ceremony held on the 40th day of winter.



The celebration takes place over a period of three weeks. In the first week, children distribute walnuts, telling people that the ceremony is coming.

At dawn on the Wednesday of the second week, children sing songs from the rooftops of their homes. After sunrise, cows and sheep are sacrificed. In the evening, people play the daf drum and pray.

On the final day of the celebration, bread shaped like the sun is made from wheat and walnuts and taken to the tomb of Pir in Iran’s Kurdistan province.





Wladimir van Wilgenburg
February 03-2020

Syrian Kurdish party reopens office as part of Kurdish unity initiative

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The presidency of the Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC) on Sunday decided to reopen its offices in Syrian Kurdistan as a sign of good faith in response to a Kurdish unity initiative by the Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Mazloum Abdi.

The two major rival factions among Syrian Kurdish parties have continued meetings since early November to discuss the need for unity after Turkey's attack on northern Syria.

As a result, at the beginning of January, the local administration in northeast Syria announced it would lift a previous restriction on parties not licensed by the self-administration from opening offices.

“Our supporters also know that during the previous years, the offices of the Kurdish National Council in Syria and the headquarters of its parties were not closed by a decision of the Council, but by a decision of the [rival] Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed forces by force,” the KNC said in a statement.

But the KNC leadership decided to reopen its office and party headquarters to “enhance confidence and build on this to resolve contentious issues [with the PYD].”

Mustafa Bali, the head of the SDF press office, told Kurdistan 24 the SDF had previously offered to be a “guarantor for the reconciliation process in intra-Kurdish policies in Northeastern Syria.”

He added that other actors can also play a role in bringing the Syrian Kurds together, “especially the leadership in the Kur-



The presidency of the Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC) holds a meeting. (Photo: Archive)

distan Region, specifically Mr. Masoud Barzani and other Kurdistan actors,” he said, adding the SDF would support them.

Over eight months ago, the French government also led an initiative to bring the Kurdish parties together in France without much success. The United States has also supported efforts by the Syrian Kurdish parties to unite.

“We have invested hope in this process, and discussions are ongoing. We are trying to resolve the current existing differences and disputes. And we want to open a door for all political circles to come together,” Bali added.

Tensions between the KNC and PYD have increased since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, with the latter playing a significant role in the establishment of the self-administration that has ruled northeastern Syria.

The dominant Syrian Kurdish factions, the PYD and Kurdistan

Democratic Party (KDP)-backed KNC, have not successfully cooperated because agreements they reached in Duhok and Erbil between 2012 and 2014 were never effectively implemented.

Bali suggested the Kurdish parties should approach reconciliation with serious responsibility and understand the threats “if we should fail again.”

“The previous efforts must constitute experience for everyone, and this time, lead to trust building-grounds—and I hope that both TEV-DEM and KNC can seize the opportunity for reconciliation,” he said.

According to Aron Lund, a fellow with the Century Foundation, there has been a lot of bad blood between the PYD and KNC camps, “especially given that the KNC parties cast their lot with Turkey and the Turkey-backed opposition that has fought the YPG [People's Protection Units].”

“But at the end of the day, they're

all Kurds, and they're all from the same areas,” Lund told Kurdistan 24.

“The Ankara-backed attacks on Afrin and, more recently, in Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain brutalized local Kurdish communities, and seem to have shifted Kurdish public opinion to such an extent that KNC leaders now feel they need to make up with the PYD.”

Despite the calls for Kurdish unity in Syria, no concrete agreements to share political power have been reached on the ground.

“So, this attempt at reconciliation is the result of that, but I'm not sure what to make of it,” Lund stated.

“The KNC is very weak on the ground and may not be able to break completely with their foreign supporters, and there are still some serious, fundamental disagreements. We'll see what happens.”

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany



February 3, 2020

US forces expand military presence in north-east Syria

US forces are expanding their military presence in the two largest military bases at the Omar and Tal Baydar oil fields controlled by Kurdish units in the north-east of Syria.

The American army recently dispatched military and logistical equipment through Iraq to Syria in order to expand its bases in the oil-rich areas. They thwarted four attempts by Russian forces to advance towards the Rumaila oil field in January.

The American forces are deployed in 11 military bases and points in areas under Kurdish control including Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor.



US troops in Syria, 22 October 2019 [Twitter]

Syria: 4 Turkey soldiers killed in regime attacks

At least four Turkish soldiers were killed and nine others injured in intense shelling by Bashar al-Assad regime forces in northwestern Syria on Monday, the Turkish Defense Ministry said, Anadolu reports.

In a statement, the ministry said the soldiers — who were sent as reinforcements to the region for the purpose of preventing conflicts in Idlib de-escalation zone — were attacked by the regime forces, although their locations were previously coordinated.

One of the injured soldiers is in critical condition, the statement said, adding the Turkish Armed Forces responded to the attacks and destroyed the targets.

Erdogan: Turkey may launch Syria offensive if Idlib attacks continue

Cease-fire violations
Located in the northwestern Syria, Idlib province is the

stronghold of the opposition and anti-government armed groups since the outbreak of the civil war.

It is currently home to some four million civilians, including hundreds of thousands displaced in recent years by regime forces from throughout the war-weary country.



Members of Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in Syria on 17 October 2019 [Turkish Armed Force/Anadolu Agency]

Turkey and Russia agreed in September 2018 to turn Idlib into a de-escalation zone where acts of aggression are expressly prohibited.

READ: Displacement of 700,000 Syrians to Turkey due to regime campaign in Idlib and Aleppo

The Syrian regime and its allies, however, have consistently bro-

ken the terms of the cease-fire, launching frequent attacks inside the zone, killing at least 1,300 civilians since the agreement.

In a fresh move, Turkey announced on Jan. 10 that a new cease-fire in Idlib would start just after midnight on Jan. 12. However, the regime and Iran-backed terrorist groups continued their ground attacks.

More than 1.3 million Syrians have moved near the Turkish border due to intense attacks since the beginning of 2019.

Syria has been locked in a vicious civil war since early 2011, when the regime cracked down on pro-democracy protests with unexpected ferocity.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and more than 10 million others displaced, according to UN officials.

Irak : la rue en colère contre le nouveau premier ministre, Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui

Le nouveau premier ministre, choisi par les formations chiites au pouvoir, est rejeté par les manifestants.

Sur la place Tahrir de Bagdad, et dans les foyers de la contestation antipouvoir dans le sud de l'Irak, les manifestants ne décolèrent pas après la désignation, samedi 1er février, du nouveau premier ministre. Des milliers de contestataires ont encore brandi, dimanche, de grandes bannières arborant le portrait de Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui, barré d'une croix rouge et de la mention « rejeté par ordre du peuple ». A leurs yeux, cet ancien ministre des télécommunications de 65 ans, choisi par les formations chiites au pouvoir, incarne un système politique et une élite dont ils réclament la chute.

Le responsable politique chiite, qui se présente comme indépendant, a multiplié les gestes en leur direction. « Je vous demande de poursuivre les manifestations, car si vous n'êtes pas avec moi, je serai seul et je ne pourrai rien faire », a-t-il appelé dans une vidéo diffusée samedi sur les réseaux sociaux, leur promettant : « Maintenant, je travaille pour vous. » Dans une adresse télévisée à la nation, Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui a ensuite promis de former un gouvernement représentatif, d'organiser des élections anticipées, de lutter contre les ingérences étrangères et la corruption et de rendre justice aux manifestants tués – 543 depuis le 1er octobre, selon un bilan de la Commission irakienne pour les droits de l'homme, publié dimanche.

Ses promesses n'ont pas convaincu les manifestants. « Il est lié aux partis [au pouvoir], nous ne voulons pas de lui », juge Abdallah, un ouvrier de 29 ans, qui campe sur la place Tahrir depuis le 25 octobre. Né à Bagdad et ingénieur de formation, Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui a débuté sa carrière politique comme député après l'invasion américaine



Manifestation contre le premier ministre, Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui, place Tahrir, à Bagdad, dimanche 2 février. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR "LE MONDE"

de 2003. Il a été un temps membre du bloc laïque Iraqiya, dominé par les sunnites et dirigé par son cousin Iyad Allaoui. A deux reprises, il a été ministre des télécommunications (2006-2007 et 2010-2012) et a démissionné pour protester contre l'inaction du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki face à la corruption. Il a ensuite résidé au Royaume-Uni et au Liban.

Le revirement d'Al-Sadr

Sa désignation à l'issue d'un accord entre les formations politiques chiites le condamne davantage aux yeux des protestataires. Après de longues tractations, et un ultimatum du président Barham Salih, les coalitions Sairoun, de Moqtada Al-Sadr, et Al-Fatah, des chefs des factions armées de la Mobilisation populaire, l'ont choisi pour succéder à Adel Abdel-Mahdi, qui avait démissionné sous la pression de la rue, le 29 novembre 2019. La fin du blocage politique doit beaucoup à l'ultime revirement de Moqtada Al-Sadr, qui n'a cessé de souffler le chaud et le froid sur la contestation,

qu'ont rejoint nombre de ses partisans.

Ses espoirs déçus de s'imposer à la tête du mouvement, le chef populiste s'est entendu avec ses rivaux politiques chiites pour former un gouvernement. L'arrivée sur la place Tahrir, samedi, des gros bras de la milice Brigades de la paix (Saraya Al-Salam) de M. Sadr a été un message clair qu'il entendait reprendre en main la contestation par la force. Coiffés de casquettes bleues, la mine patibulaire, des centaines de miliciens ont repris le « restaurant turc », le donjon du sit-in, chassant ses occupants à coups de tubes métalliques. Des manifestants ont témoigné au Monde avoir été aussi chassés de leurs tentes et battus pour avoir brandi des bannières contre M. Allaoui.

Dimanche, après un message de Moqtada Al-Sadr appelant à un retour à la normale, des centaines de miliciens sadristes ont continué à se déployer sur la place Tahrir et l'ont ouverte à la circulation. Choqués de ce revirement, de nombreux manifestants dénoncent un coup de

poignard dans le dos de la part de Moqtada Al-Sadr. « Il est contre nous, il ne nous a soutenus que pour servir son propre intérêt, critique Saïf, 24 ans. Ici, c'est devenu trop dangereux avec les sadristes. On veut rejoindre Nassiriya [Sud], où la véritable révolution se poursuit, sans infiltration des milices ou des partis. »

« Feuille de route étrangère »

Les sadristes se défendent de vouloir étouffer la contestation. « Nous sommes venus en grand nombre pour protéger le peuple, à la fois des agents infiltrés du gouvernement qui menacent les manifestants pacifiques, et des agitateurs qui, parmi eux, incendient des bâtiments publics et bloquent les écoles », assure Ibrahim Al-Jebari, le responsable sadriste en charge du sit-in. Il dénonce toutefois la « feuille de route étrangère » des manifestants qui rejettent le nouveau premier ministre, et appelle à lui donner le temps de faire ses preuves. « Nous allons continuer à manifester pour nous assurer qu'il forme un gouvernement répondant aux demandes du peuple », ajoute-t-il.

Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui aura trente jours pour former son gouvernement, une fois sa nomination avalisée par le Parlement. L'ambassade américaine à Bagdad et la représentante des Nations unies pour l'Irak, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, l'ont appelé à mettre en œuvre les réformes réclamées par la rue. La composition du gouvernement sera un premier test de sa marge de manœuvre. L'absence de base partisane le rend tributaire, comme son prédécesseur, des pressions des partis qui l'ont choisi. Lui a assuré qu'il se retirerait si ces derniers tentaient de lui imposer des candidats aux portefeuilles ministériels.

franceinfo:

le 05/02/2020
Par Timour Ozturk
Valérie Crova

"On ne partira pas d'ici" : à Kobané, les Kurdes sous la menace d'une attaque de l'armée turque

La ville du nord de la Syrie, symbole de la résistance kurde face à l'État islamique, est devenue une enclave placée sous protection de l'armée du régime syrien.

A l'entrée de Kobané se dresse une imposante statue blanche. Elle représente une femme, deux ailes d'ange dans le dos, bras levés vers le ciel. "C'est la place de la femme libre, c'est pour les femmes kurdes qui se sont battues contre Daech", raconte un habitant. Kobané, la ville où les Kurdes ont arrêté l'expansion de l'État islamique en 2015 avec l'appui de l'aviation américaine, est désormais l'une des dernières villes le long de la frontière avec la Turquie à échapper à l'offensive d'Ankara : dans les rues des villes kurdes d'Afrin, de Ras Al-Aïn et de Tel Abyad, début février 2020, des milices fidèles aux Turcs patrouillent.



Un combattant kurde observe un drapeau turc de l'autre côté de la frontière, depuis la ville de Kobané, en octobre 2019 (AFP)

de l'armée syrienne à Kobané reste discret. Un jeune Kurde croisé dans le centre-ville donne son opinion sur cette présence : "C'est une très bonne chose que l'armée syrienne soit à Kobané, mais juste dans certains points de la ville, pas dans toute la ville. C'est surtout pour protéger notre frontière. La présence de l'armée syrienne, c'est bien pour ça."

>> "Je n'oublierai jamais ce qu'ils ont fait à ma fille" : à Kobané, la colère des parents de Barin, 23 ans, symbole de la tragédie kurde

Quand la Turquie a lancé son offensive le 9 octobre 2019 dans le nord de la Syrie, les Kurdes, qui avaient établi une administration autonome à la faveur du conflit syrien, ont demandé l'aide de Damas. Ils n'avaient pas d'autre choix. Convaincus qu'une guerre peut éclater à tout moment avec la Turquie, la population de Kobané perce des tunnels. Partout dans la ville, des marteaux piqueurs creusent dans la roche des galeries souterraines. Autour de Kobané, il n'y a pas de montagnes pour se réfugier en cas d'offensive.

"Ces travaux, c'est pour notre sécurité, au cas où il y aurait

des attaques, pour qu'on se protège des frappes aériennes. On pourra se mettre à l'abri à l'intérieur. Parce que nous, on ne partira pas d'ici." Un habitant de Kobané à franceinfo

À Kobané, on redoute maintenant que la montée de tension entre les forces d'Ankara et de Damas sur le front d'Idleb ne précipite un assaut de la Turquie. Que vont devenir la ville et ses habitants alors que le territoire du Rojava fait l'objet de tractations entre Moscou, allié du régime syrien, et Ankara ? La Turquie a déjà jeté sur les routes des dizaines de milliers de civils kurdes lors de son opération d'octobre 2019. Les habitants de Kobané, eux, jurent qu'ils n'abandonneront pas leur ville et qu'ils sont prêts à de nouveaux sacrifices.

Le reportage de Valérie Crova dans la ville kurde de Kobané

Le drapeau de Bachar flotte aujourd'hui sur Kobané

Sur un bâtiment, à l'autre bout de la ville de Kobané flotte le drapeau de la République arabe syrienne, celui des forces de Bachar Al-Assad. Le déploiement

franceinfo:

le 05/02/2020
Valérie Crova

Syrie : quel avenir pour Kobané ?

Le retrait surprise des forces américaines du nord de la Syrie, en octobre dernier, a permis à l'armée turque de prendre le contrôle d'une large bande de territoire dans une région à majorité kurde. La ville de Kobané est devenue une enclave sous protection de l'armée syrienne.

La ville de Kobané, capitale de la résistance kurde face à l'organisation État islamique, est devenue une enclave, placée sous protection de l'armée syrienne. Mais les habitants de Kobané redoutent aujourd'hui une invasion de la Turquie, au moment où la tension est montée d'un cran entre les forces d'Ankara et Damas.

Notre envoyée spéciale, **Valérie Crova**, a pu se rendre à Kobané, avec l'autorisation des autorités syriennes.

Une présence syrienne discrète

A l'entrée de Kobané se dresse une imposante statue blanche. Elle représente une femme,

deux ailes d'ange dans le dos, bras levés vers le ciel. "C'est la place de la femme libre. La statue, c'est pour les femmes kurdes qui se sont battues contre Daech.", explique un habitant.

Deux tanks ont été disposés autour de la statue. Fadhel, membre des Forces démocratiques



L'affiche avec des photos de martyrs de Kobané, janvier 2020. • Crédits : Valérie Crova - Radio France

syriennes emmenées par les Kurdes, nous explique qu'ils ont été utilisés par l'organisation État islamique pour attaquer Kobané fin 2014. Et c'est une combattante kurde, **Arin Mirkan**, qui s'est sacrifiée pour arrêter l'avancée des blindés de Daech. La statue de la femme libre lui est dédiée.



La place de la femme libre. La statue représente les femmes kurdes qui se sont battues contre Daech. • Crédits : Valérie Crova - Radio France

Sur un bâtiment, à l'autre bout de la ville, flotte le drapeau de la République arabe syrienne. La présence de l'armée de Bachar el-Assad est discrète. Nous demandons à un jeune Kurde croisé dans le centre de Kobané ce qu'il pense de cette présence :

C'est une très bonne chose que l'armée syrienne soit à Kobané, mais juste dans certains points de la ville, pas dans toute la ville.

C'est surtout pour protéger notre frontière, ne pas subir d'attaques turques. La présence de l'armée syrienne, c'est bien pour ça.

Une sorte de "modus vivendi" avec le régime syrien

Quand la Turquie a lancé son offensive, le 9 octobre dernier dans le nord de la Syrie, les Kurdes - qui avaient établi une administration autonome à la faveur du conflit syrien - ont demandé l'aide de Damas. Ils n'avaient pas d'autre choix. Aujourd'hui, les autorités locales tentent de trouver un "modus vi-

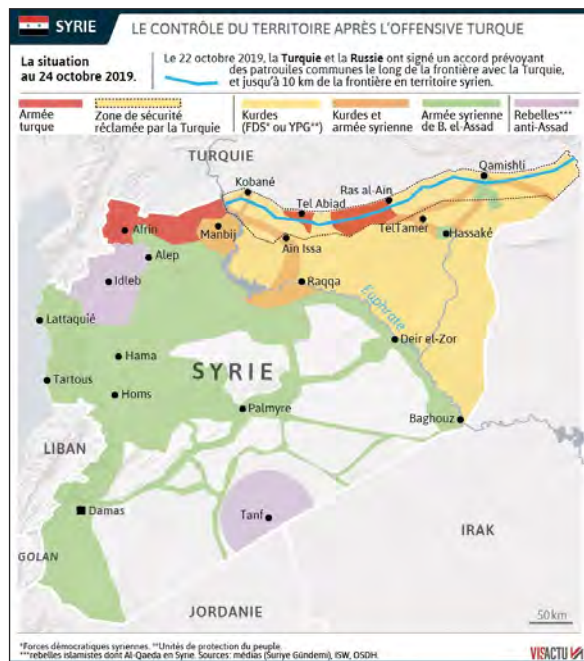


Drapeau de la République Arabe Syrienne sur un bâtiment de Kobané où sont positionnées des troupes syriennes. • Crédits : Valérie Crova - Radio France

vendi" avec le régime syrien. Nous avons rendez-vous avec Rania Mohammad, là où siège l'administration civile de Kobané :

Ici, à Kobané, nous sommes sur une partie du territoire syrien et on ne veut pas se couper du régime syrien. Mais on veut aussi des droits et une région administrative autonome, là où nous nous trouvons. Pour ce qui est de la protection de la frontière,

Des tunnels pour se protéger
Convaincue qu'une guerre peut éclater à tout moment avec la Turquie, la population de Kobané perce des tunnels. Partout dans la ville, des marteaux piqueurs creusent dans la roche des galeries souterraines.



• Crédits : Visactu

elle est assurée collectivement avec le régime. On a passé un accord pour que les forces démocratiques syriennes soit juste derrière l'armée syrienne qui est à la frontière.

Autour de Kobané, il n'y a pas de montagnes pour se réfugier en cas d'offensive. Un habitant confie :

Ces travaux, c'est pour notre sécurité au cas où il y aurait des attaques. On se protège des frappes

aériennes. On pourra se mettre à l'abri à l'intérieur, mais nous, on ne partira pas d'ici.

Une galerie a même été creusée devant le cimetière des Martyrs, où sont enterrés 2 000 combattants, hommes et femmes morts pour défendre la ville.

Dans une chanson, une combattante kurde parle de la résistance de son peuple et de l'exode dû à la guerre contre Daech. Que va devenir Kobané alors que le territoire du Rojava fait l'objet de tractations entre Moscou, allié du régime syrien, et Ankara ? La Turquie a déjà récupéré les villes d'Afrine, de Ras al-Aïn et de Tall Abyad, jetant sur les routes des dizaines de milliers de civils kurdes. Les habitants de Kobané, eux, n'abandonneront pas leur ville qu'ils ont si chèrement reconquise et sont prêts à de nouveaux sacrifices.

L'Armée syrienne est positionnée tous les dix kilomètres, le long de la frontière turque. Mais aucun accord politique n'a pour l'heure été passé avec Damas.

Les Kurdes annoncent un tribunal spécial pour juger les djihadistes étrangers

Ce tribunal spécial devrait être effectif à partir du mois de mars, a annoncé dans une vidéo le co-responsable des affaires étrangères dans le nord-est de la Syrie.

Le problème des djihadistes étrangers détenus par les Kurdes n'est toujours pas résolu. Alors que de nombreuses puissances - dont la France - refusent de rapatrier leurs ressortissants partis combattre sous le drapeau de l'organisation Etat islamique en Syrie, les derniers ayant été capturés par les YPG lors de la bataille de Baghouz en mars 2019, les responsables kurdes annoncent des mesures.



Des djihadistes présumés du groupe Etat islamique (EI) détenus dans une prison kurde du nord-est de la Syrie, le 26 octobre 2019 dans la province de Hassaké / afp.com/FADEL SENNA

Dans une vidéo publiée ce jeudi sur les réseaux sociaux, repérée par le président du Centre d'analyse du terrorisme, Jean-Charles Brisard, le co-responsable kurde des affaires étrangères dans le nord-est de la Syrie Abdulkarim Omar annonce la création d'un tribunal spécial pour juger les djihadistes

étrangers emprisonnés dans leurs geôles. Si un tribunal international avait été un temps évoqué, le projet n'est semble-t-il toujours pas sur la table.

La détention de ces ressortissants pose plusieurs problèmes aux Kurdes qui ont fait état de plusieurs évasions de prison-

niers, notamment lors de l'offensive turque dans le Nord-Est syrien en octobre 2019, après le retrait des troupes américaines. Depuis la défaite militaire de l'Etat islamique en Syrie, Donald Trump exhorte les Européens à rapatrier leurs ressortissants mais la France s'y est toujours opposée, estimant que les "Français doivent être jugés sur les lieux de leurs exactions." A l'exception des mineurs, dont la situation est examinée "au cas par cas".

En 2018, Benjamin Griveaux avait déjà estimé que les femmes djihadistes françaises arrêtées dans le Kurdistan syrien devaient être jugées sur place. Toutefois, la France ne reconnaît pas de juridiction kurde en Syrie, étant donné qu'il n'existe pas d'état kurde à proprement parler.



February 7, 2020

Turkey: Kurdish Mayors' Removal Violates Voters' Rights

End Politically Motivated Arrests and Trials

(Istanbul.) – The Turkish authorities' removal and arrest of democratically elected Kurdish mayors across southeastern Turkey violates voters' rights, Human Rights Watch said today. The Turkish government is intensifying its attack on the opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) by removing the mayors and preventing the functioning of elected

local councils across Turkey's southeast.

Twenty-three mayors are in pretrial detention on allegations that they committed terrorist offenses. One of them, Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, the elected mayor of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality, has a second trial hearing on February 10, 2020 on charges of "membership of a ter-

rorist organization." Although the prosecutor has issued a legal opinion requesting Mızraklı's conviction, the evidence in an indictment against him does not support the charge that he was involved with terrorism or committed crimes.

"Removing, detaining, and putting on trial local Kurdish politicians as armed militants with no compelling

evidence of criminal activity seems to be the Turkish government's preferred way to wipe out political opposition," said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "These cases are not linked to any legitimate counterterrorism effort but trample the rights of the mayors and the 1.8 million voters who elected them."

Dismissals and detention of Kurdish mayors from the left-leaning pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) rapidly increased after Turkey's October 9, 2019 military incursion into northeast Syria to remove Syrian Kurdish forces and administration controlling the area. Since then, the courts have ordered that mayors be held in pretrial detention pending completion of investigations and trials for alleged links to the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The removals and arrests show every sign of continuing, Human Rights Watch said. The removal of the mayors and disempowerment of local councils has effectively canceled the results of the March 31 local elections in the most populous cities of the south-east and eastern provinces.

The actions against the mayors began in August with the removal of the prominent HDP mayors in the three biggest cities of southeast and eastern Turkey, prompting protests against the government's actions in Diyarbakır.

Thirty-two HDP mayors in the region have been stripped of their office and replaced with Ankara-appointed provincial and district governor "trustees." After their appointment, trustees did not convene the local councils – effectively neutering their decision-making role in local government. The HDP won 65 municipalities in the region in the March local election.

Human Rights Watch was able to examine 18 cases in which courts ordered the pretrial detention of mayors, as well as records of their testimony before prosecutors and, in three cases, prosecutors' indictments. The court decisions relied on vague and generalized allegations against the mayors by witnesses, some secret, and on details of their political activities and social media postings, which fail to establish reasonable suspicion of criminal activity that would justify detention, Human Rights Watch found.

The prosecutor prepared an indictment against Mızraklı



Dismissed Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) mayors Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, Ahmet Türk, and Bediye Özgökçe Ertan speak at a press conference in Istanbul. © 2019 HDP

within days of his October 22 detention and his trial began on December 25.

This is the second time the authorities have systematically suspended local democracy for Kurdish voters in that region. Under the state of emergency that followed the July 2016 attempted coup, the Erdoğan government introduced amendments to the Municipalities Law, and took direct control of 94



Diyarbakır Mayor Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, photographed in prison, was dismissed on August 19, 2019, detained on October 22, and stood trial on December 25 on trumped up terrorism charges. Kayseri Bünyan Prison, November 14, 2019. © 2019 Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı

HDP municipalities and removed mayors and councils who had won at the polls in 2014 local elections. Those mayors detained in 2016-17 have also been subjected to politically motivated prosecutions.

"Turkey should end the politically motivated use of terrorism charges to detain and prosecute political opponents," said Williamson. "Parliament should repeal the changes it made to the Municipalities Law under the state of emergency, which are being used to justify the arbitrary removal and detention of mayors."

The European Union Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy called the removal of the three mayors in August "of serious concern as it puts the respect of the democratic outcomes of the 31 March elections into question." The president of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe also expressed grave concern, reminding Turkey that the Congress had previously warned against "the excessive use of legal proceedings against local elected representatives in

Turkey and their replacement by appointed officials." A European Parliament resolution on September 19, 2019 called on the Turkish authorities "to reinstate all mayors and other elected officials who won local elections on 31 March 2019."

"Turkey used its military incursion into northeast Syria as a pretext to intensify its crackdown on a democratically elected parliamentary opposition party," Williamson said. "The Erdoğan administration is closing down legal politics in the southeast and potentially fueling support for violent, undemocratic and illegal alternatives."

For details of the actions against the elected mayors, please see below.

Moves Against Elected Mayors Since 2016

The Turkish government's first move to capture municipalities and suspend local government in the mainly Kurdish eastern and southeastern regions came in 2016. Under the state of emergency that followed the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, the government amended articles 45 and 57 of the Law on Munic-



Diyarbakır residents hold a banner and march in protest against the removal of elected mayors. © 2019 Mezopotamya Agency (MA)

ipalities through an August 15, 2016 decree. The amendments to the law effectively authorized removing mayors the government accused of supporting terrorism, however unsubstantiated the claim and subjective the assessment. Previously, only a final conviction, instead of an initial investigation, would have justified removing a mayor.

Amendments to the Municipalities Law in decree no. 674 were subsequently incorporated into permanent law (no. 6758/article 34-35). The law also provides that the authorities should review any measure to remove a serving mayor at two-month intervals, but no mayor has yet been reinstated as a result of such a review.

When the removal of 94 elected mayors in the southeast and eastern regions began in October 2016, government-appointed trustees, either the provincial governor or the district governor, took over the mayors' functions. While the local councils were not officially dissolved, the trustees did not convene them, effectively preventing them from functioning.

Several of the mayors removed in 2016-17 remain in prison, convicted of terrorism offenses. The former Diyarbakır mayor, Gültan Kışanak, was convicted by a lower court of membership of a terrorist organization and

spreading terrorist propaganda and sentenced to 14 years and 3 months in prison. Human Rights Watch previously examined the indictment against Kışanak and determined that the case lacked compelling evidence of criminal activity or of any activity that could reasonably be described as terrorism. The local appeals court overturned the sentence, and Kışanak's retrial is underway. Kışanak has been in pretrial detention in Kandıra F-type prison since October 31, 2016.

In advance of the 2019 local elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once again raised the prospect of removing mayors. On October 7, 2018, he made a speech in Kızılcahamam, Ankara, saying: "If in the upcoming elections people involved in terrorism win at the polls, we will not wait, we will continue on our way with the trustee appointments immediately. No waiting."

The president repeated the same message during an election rally in the central Anatolian town of Yozgat on February 25, 2019.

On March 18, the Interior Ministry released a report justifying the appointment of trustees in 2016-17, raising concerns that the government already had plans to replace mayors with trustees. In the report, the min-

istry contended that appointing trustees was not a choice but an obligation and a legal duty, disregarding the political implications of such a move and the scant evidence in the earlier cases that mayors had been engaged in criminal activity.

After the election, in an April 10 decision the Higher Election Board approved the district election boards' decisions to deny office to anyone elected – whether as mayor or council member – who had been dismissed from an earlier position as a public official under Turkey's state of emergency. The main political party affected was the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

According to the HDP, six elected HDP mayors were

the elected mayors of the three largest municipalities in the region: Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality; Bedia Özgökçe Ertan, mayor of Van Metropolitan Municipality; and Ahmet Türk, mayor of Mardin Metropolitan Municipality. On the same day, the ministry also announced on Twitter the detentions of 418 people in 29 provinces, many of them either municipal staff or HDP members.

The ministry cited as grounds for removing the three mayors a series of ongoing prosecutions and investigations against them for crimes such as being a leading member or member of the PKK, spreading terrorist propaganda, praising crimes and criminals, and misconduct.



Police use water cannons and tear gas to disperse crowds protesting removal of elected mayors in Diyarbakır. © 2019 Mezopotamya Agency (MA)

refused office on this basis and at least 47 elected members of provincial and district municipal councils were similarly barred from assuming public office.

Human Rights Watch has seen a copy of the Higher Election Board decision relating to the mayor and some council members from Bağlar Municipality, Diyarbakır. In those cases, the Higher Election Board arbitrarily offered their seats to the runner-up party rather than setting a new election, awarding the seats to Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

On August 19, the Interior Ministry issued decisions to remove

The ministry claimed that all three municipalities "supported terrorist activities by working to turn them into sources for providing militants, financial resources and equipment."

As an example of criminal activity, the ministry cited the mayors' adoption of a co-mayor system. This practice was introduced by the HDP's predecessor Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) after local elections on March 30, 2014. To promote gender equality, a man and a woman shared the mayor's role, with one officially elected and the other selected as co-mayor from among the elected council members. The ministry also cited as

examples of criminal activity that municipalities informally employed people who had previously been dismissed from municipalities and relatives of deceased PKK members, and that mayors had attended PKK militants' funerals.

On the day the ministry removed the three mayors, it supplied the pro-government media with a report accusing the three of links with terrorism. The ministry's allegations were circulated before any information about formal criminal investigations from the prosecutors' offices was made available to the mayors or their lawyers. Human Rights Watch later obtained a copy of the English translation of the report.

On August 25, 2019, Erdoğan personally joined the smear campaign, alleging that the mayors were removed because they sent taxpayers' money to the PKK in the Kandil mountains of northern Iraq. No allegation of this kind was made in the prosecutor's November 2019 criminal indictment against Mızraklı. New criminal investigations against Türk and Özgökçe Ertan have not been announced or concluded.

The authorities detained the Kulp co-mayors, Mehmet Fatih Taş and Fatma Ay, after a PKK attack on September 12, which killed seven villagers in a rural part of Diyarbakır's Kulp district. The court sent them and other suspects to pretrial detention and replaced the mayors with the Kulp district governor. With no evidence of any links between Taş and Ay and the PKK attack, they and three others were released two months later at their first trial hearing, but they have not been reinstated.

After Turkey's military incursion into northeast Syria, the removal and jailing of HDP mayors in southeast Turkey increased dramatically. Turkey justified the Syria operation by alleging that the Kurdish autonomous administration in the area had close links to the PKK. The govern-

ment holds the same view of the HDP mayors. The government continued to detain mayors, while announcing criminal investigations against them and replacing them with trustees. Mayors from 29 municipalities were removed between October 17 and December 23. Twenty-three remain in pretrial detention.

Weak and Vague Grounds for Terrorism Investigations, Prosecution, Detention

Human Rights Watch has examined the evidence of alleged terrorism links in the indictments against Mızraklı and three other mayors and cited in court rulings as grounds for pretrial detention.



İkiköprü co-mayor Hatice Taş is blocked from entering the municipality building by police after the Interior Ministry removed her and the other co-mayor Osman Karabulut and appointed a state-appointed trustee as a replacement in İkiköprü town, Batman province, southeast Turkey, December 2019. © 2019 Mezopotamya Agency (MA)

The indictment against Mızraklı contains no compelling evidence of criminal activity, let alone activity that could reasonably be argued to amount to participation in violent or deadly acts, logistical support for violent acts, or incitement to violence. Human Rights Watch found that the court decisions to detain other mayors lacked compelling grounds to justify the measure and offered formulaic reasoning.

Mızraklı's Detention, Prosecution

The Turkish police detained Mızraklı on October 21 and a day later a court ruled that he

should be held in pretrial detention. Mızraklı was notified while in a police cell that his removal from office as mayor had been extended. On November 1, the prosecutor issued an indictment against him on charges of "membership of a terrorist organization." At his first trial hearing on December 25, he was not released from pretrial detention and the case was postponed until February 10. The prosecutor issued an opinion on January 27 requesting Mızraklı's conviction.

The main claim against Mızraklı in the indictment is by a witness, Hicran Berna Ayverdi, who spent almost three years in pretrial detention on charges of

Mızraklı has denied the allegations. Administering medical treatment to sick patients is a fundamental duty of all doctors regardless of the identity of the patient and cannot in itself be construed as a criminal act, Human Rights Watch said.

The authorities first brought Ayverdi to testify before the prosecutor against Mızraklı on March 20, 2019, shortly before voting in the local elections, when he was leading in the polls and likely to win. Mızraklı received 62 percent of the vote. Similarly, on March 27, authorities had Ayverdi testify against Keziban Yılmaz, mayor of Kayapınar, who was also leading his district's polling. Yılmaz received 66 percent of the vote.

Lawyers confirmed media reports that Ayverdi was released from detention by court order on September 5, but that her trial continues.

The prosecutors' indictment and opinion also claim as evidence of membership of the PKK that Mızraklı was formerly chair of Sarmaşık, an association focused on combatting poverty by providing food aid. The government closed the group down in 2016 under the state of emergency, citing links to the PKK, but there has never been a criminal case against it. Mızraklı's indictment suggests the group was linked to terrorism because the people who received its aid included families of PKK fighters. The prosecutors also allege that Mızraklı was involved with a platform called the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), which the authorities now accuse of being a PKK organ, though it has functioned for years without being closed or sanctioned.

The indictment also cites as evidence against Mızraklı his attendance at 12 public assemblies and demonstrations, including funerals of militants, his foreign travel, and some social media postings. Mızraklı's postings on Twitter were collected in a report on March 26, 2019, five days before the local elections. "While ...[the social media] does

armed separatism, for allegedly providing medical treatment to injured combatants in the southeastern town of Nusaybin during the 2015-16 conflict there. Ayverdi testified before the court at Mızraklı's December 25 first hearing that in 2012-13 she had worked in a private hospital in Diyarbakır, where she alleged that Mızraklı, a surgeon at the hospital, had operated on a PKK militant.

Ayverdi made a series of allegations about Mızraklı's political engagement and claims that he was acting on behalf of the PKK while discharging his professional duties as a surgeon.

not in itself contain elements constituting terrorist propaganda, it has been determined that they contain posts regarding the organization's [PKK] leader and hunger strikes and are supportive of the organization [PKK]," the indictment says.

On December 3, Mızraklı informed Human Rights Watch through his lawyers that during his ten-hour transfer from prison in Diyarbakır to Bunyan Prison in Kayseri province in Central Anatolia, he was kept handcuffed for the whole trip. Keziban Yılmaz and Rojda Nazlıer, the jailed mayors of Kayapınar and Kocaköy, were transferred with Mızraklı. Yılmaz also confirmed through her lawyers that they had not been given anything to eat or drink and had only one toilet break of 10 minutes.

Court Decisions on Pretrial Detention; Protected Witness Testimony

In the 18 cases of detained mayors that Human Rights Watch examined, the courts rely on three main kinds of "evidence" as grounds for pretrial detention. They are vague testimony by witnesses; the mayors' attendance at political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and funerals of militants; and their social media postings, in some cases from several years earlier.

In most cases, the identity of the witnesses is protected – the Turkish term is "secret witness." They allege that the mayors are associated with certain activist organizations that operated without hindrance for years but that the authorities now regard as PKK-linked. Or they assert in a generalized and vague way that that the mayors undertook unspecified activities for the armed group.

In many cases, the courts simply accept that the prosecutor's evidence meets the criteria for pretrial detention of reasonable suspicion of "membership of a terrorist organization." This is a "catalogue offense" in Turkey's Criminal Procedure Code, which means courts are automatically



Police block access to the Diyarbakır municipal building after the Interior Ministry replaces the elected mayor with a state-appointed trustee to govern the largest city in Turkey's Southeast, August 2019. © 2019 Mezopotamya Agency (MA)

permitted to rule that suspects under investigation for this crime can be held in pretrial detention.

It is important to note that in making their determinations on whether the evidence constitutes reasonable suspicion a crime has been committed, courts demonstrated no need to probe protected witnesses' generalized and vague assertions against suspects, or to question their motivation or why their identity has to be protected. This means that suspects are at a great disadvantage at court hearings in challenging the evidence presented against them to justify their initial pretrial detention. They often have little possibility of challenging subsequent decisions to prolong their detention during the months before the prosecutor issues an indictment.

The accusations against some mayors discussed below highlight the problematic use of protected witness testimonies. A full discussion of all evidence in all cases – including records of their attendance at political events, rallies, and funerals, plus social media posts that do not advocate violence – is not attempted here.

In the case of Yıldız Çetin, co-mayor of Erciş district of Van province, three protected witnesses made various vague claims. One said she was involved with a platform called the Democratic Society Congress

(DTK), which the authorities now accuse of being an organ of the PKK though it has functioned for years without being closed or sanctioned. Another said she was part of an activist organization called the Free Women's Congress (KJA), similarly now accused of being part of the PKK though it operated for years without being investigated.

In the case of Keziban Yılmaz, mayor of Kayapınar district of Diyarbakır and a human rights lawyer, Hicran Berna Ayverdi, the main witness against Mızraklı too, made a series of vague and wide-ranging claims on March 27, 2019, four days before the local elections. She claimed that Yılmaz was affiliated with the KJA; that as a lawyer she conveyed information between prisoners and the PKK; that she was a member of the Mesopotamian Lawyers' Association, which was arbitrarily closed down by state of emergency decree; and that she was involved in PKK-run investigations of women's personal relationships.

Yılmaz denies all these allegations apart from her affiliation with the Mesopotamian Lawyers' Association. The court cited her social media postings, none of which have supported violence, as further grounds to detain her. At her first trial hearing on January 15, 2020, the Diyarbakır court extended Yılmaz's pretrial detention.

In the case of Ferhat Kut, the detained co-mayor of Nusaybin, a protected witness claimed in a generalized way that Kut participated in protests on the orders of the PKK and attended a 2015 news conference in Nusaybin at which a declaration of local self-governance was read out. Kut denies both allegations.

In the case of Azim Yacan, co-mayor of İpekyolu district of Van province, a protected witness claimed that Yacan carried out media work for the PKK, and that he removed pictures of Atatürk and Erdoğan from the wall in the municipality office. Yacan denies all the claims. Protected witnesses also made vague claims that he and the co-mayor, Şehzade Kurt, provided the PKK with blankets intended for Afghan refugees and cable.

The evidence in the case of İrfan Sarı, mayor of Yüksekova district of Hakkari province, consisted of an unsupported allegation by a named witness that Sarı collected and sent money to the PKK in his position as head of the local Chamber of Tradesmen and Artisans. He refutes the accusation.

Sarı's family told Human Rights Watch that he was detained at gunpoint at his home at dawn on October 15, 2019 and forced to lie on the floor as a police officer shouted at him that he would be shot if he turned his head. He was then taken to the municipality and made to sit on a chair in his office with his hands cuffed behind him while the police conducted a search. Sarı confirmed these allegations in writing through his lawyers.

In the case of Hatice Çevik, elected mayor of the Suruç district of Urfa, the court cited as evidence to justify her pretrial detention on November 20, 2019 that she had participated in protests against the removal of the mayor in Diyarbakır, her social media postings, and the allegation she employed family members of deceased PKK militants at the municipality. There is no witness testimony against her.



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
February 07-2020

HRW: Turkey intensifying attack on pro-Kurdish party by removing mayors

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Turkey’s removal and arrest of multiple democratically elected Kurdish mayors across southeastern Turkey violates voters’ rights, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a press statement on Thursday.

The New York-based human rights watchdog said that the Turkish government is intensifying its attack on the opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) by removing legitimate mayors and preventing elected local councils across Turkey’s majority southeast from functioning.

Twenty-three mayors are now in pretrial detention on allegations that they committed terrorist offenses. One of them, Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, the elected mayor of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality, will have a second trial hearing on Monday on charges of “membership of a terrorist organization.”

“Although the prosecutor has issued a legal opinion requesting Mızraklı’s conviction, the evidence in an indictment against him does not support the charge that he was involved with terrorism or committed crimes,” HRW said.

“Removing, detaining, and putting on trial local Kurdish politicians as armed militants with no compelling evidence of criminal activity seems to be the Turkish government’s preferred way to wipe out political opposition,” Hugh Williamson, HRW Europe and Central Asia director, was quoted as saying in the statement.

“These cases are not linked to any legitimate counterterrorism effort but trample the rights of the mayors and the 1.8 million voters who elected them.”

Dismissals and detention of Kurdish mayors from the left-leaning pro-Kurdish HDP party rapidly increased after Turkey’s Oct. 9, 2019 military incursion into north-east Syria to remove Syrian Kurdish forces and administration controlling the area, HRW said.

Since then, the courts have ordered that mayors be held in pre-trial detention pending completion of investigations and trials for alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

The removal of the mayors and disempowerment of local councils has effectively canceled the

This is not the first time the Turkish government has dismissed HDP mayors or arrested HDP members. Under the state of emergency that followed the July 2016 attempted coup, the Turkish government took direct control of 94 HDP municipalities and removed mayors and councils who had won at the polls in 2014 local elections.

Demirtas, the former co-chair of the HDP and a previous presidential candidate, was detained and put in prison in November 2016 along with nine other lawmakers in a crackdown that purged President Tayyip Erdoğan

they spoke out for a freer and better future and were ready to pay the price for our struggle.”

“We continue to keep fighting but we need to speak out,” she said. “You need to fight on their behalf.”

Therefore, Human Rights Watch called on Turkey to end the “politically motivated use of terrorism charges to detain and prosecute political opponents.”

“Turkey used its military incursion into northeast Syria as a pretext to intensify its crackdown on a democratically elected parliamentary opposition party,” HRW Eu-



Former co-chairs of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag, celebrate election results in Istanbul, June 7, 2015. (Photo: Reuters)

results of the March 31 local elections in the most populous cities of the southeast and eastern provinces, HRW said.

Thirty-two HDP mayors in the region have been stripped of their office and replaced with Ankara-appointed provincial and district governor “trustees.” The HDP won 65 municipalities in the region in the March local election.

gan’s political rivals shortly after a failed military coup attempt.

HDP MP Gülistan Koçyiğit, during the two days of the annual EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) conference in the European Parliament, pointed out that Demirtas in the past freely spoke at the EUTCC conference and stated that “thousands of brothers and sisters are in jail because

rope and Central Asia director Williamson was quoted in the HRW press release.

“The Erdoğan administration is closing down legal politics in the southeast and potentially fueling support for violent, undemocratic and illegal alternatives.”

Editing by John J. Catherine

US Diplomats Underline Support for Preservation of Hebrew Prophet Nahum's Tomb in Kurdish Region of Iraq

A delegation of top US diplomats visited the burial tomb of the Hebrew prophet Nahum in northern Iraq on Friday, underlining America's commitment to preserving a site that is significant to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

Ambassador Matthew Tueller, the US envoy in Baghdad, was joined at the site by Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller of the US Consulate in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish Regional Government.

The US Embassy in Iraq has so far contributed \$1 million to the preservation project.

Nahum was a minor prophet



The tomb of the Hebrew prophet Nahum in northern Iraq. Photo: Screen-shot.

who lived in the ancient Babylonian city of Nineveh — on the outskirts of Mosul in today's Iraq.

At the end of last year, Nahum's tomb in his birthplace of Alqosh

was the site of Hanukkah celebrations organized by the local Kurdish Jewish community.

"Coexistence has always been one of the privileges of the Kur-

distan region," Hemn Faraydun — a member of the tiny local Jewish community — told Kurdish TV during a Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony at the time.

The project to preserve Nahum's Tomb is being implemented as a partnership between the US-based non-profit ARCH International and Czech company GEMA Art International, and is due to be completed by May.

The tomb has been guarded by a Christian family who promised Alqosh's long-departed rabbi to safeguard it. Christians make up the majority population in the town.



Frédérique Geerdink
Feb 08 2020

After Belgian court ruling, PKK might be removed from EU's terrorist organisations list

A ruling by Belgium's highest court last week can have far-reaching consequences that can end the practice of enlisting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an armed group which has been fighting inside Turkey since 1984, as a terrorist organisation in Europe.

The court approved a previous decision made by a lower court in March, which said the PKK could not be considered a terrorist organisation.

While Kurdish activists celebrated the Belgian court's ruling, both Belgian and Turkish government officials firmly rejected it. "The decision of the Court of Cassation is the expression of the judicial

power, which is strictly independent, and should be understood as such by all actors," said the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Philippe Goffin. "Belgium will therefore continue to defend the placement of the PKK on the European list of persons, groups and entities that are involved in terrorist acts," he said.

"This ruling of the Belgian judiciary means clear support to the PKK, a listed terrorist organisation by the EU, which is responsible for the death of over 40,000 Turkish citizens including civilians, children and even babies," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a written statement.

The judge's 51-page verdict mainly

explores the answer to the question whether the fight between the PKK and the Turkish state can be defined as a "non-international armed conflict."

The intensity and duration of a conflict and the organisational complexity and hierarchy of a non-state party are the two most important criteria in defining a group as a party in a non-international armed conflict, said Jan Fermon, one of the lawyers of the defendant.

"For us as lawyers, it was a mental conversion to deviate from the usual line of defence in such cases, which is to plea that the defendants are not terrorists but advocate for a peaceful solution to the conflict," Fermon said. "Suddenly we found ourselves

explaining to the judges that of course (the armed wing of the PKK) the HPG had the capacity to shoot down soldiers, that of course the HPG possessed heavy weapons and of course were able to attack army posts."

Being unprepared for the defence's strategy, the prosecutor unintentionally helped the defendant's case with his arguments. For example, the prosecutor said that the PKK recruited fighters and had communication lines to inform units in the field about movements of Turkish troops and fighter jets.

The judge, in turn, used this information to strengthen the assertion that the PKK is a well-organised non-state party.

International law stipulates that, in a non-international armed conflict, acts carried out by a non-state actor cannot be prosecuted under criminal law, including anti-terrorism legislation.

This principle is connected to the laws of war which determine actions allowed and prohibited on the battlefield.

For example, attacks on military targets are allowed, and in such attacks civilian deaths are permissible as collateral damage, but civilians can never be targeted.

“To encourage the parties in the conflict to respect these rules, it is important that the acts that are allowed in a war can’t be criminally prosecuted. If they could be, the parties would have no incentive to commit to the rules of war,” Fermon said.

The defendant’s team of lawyers will now seek cooperation with other lawyers across Europe to see if the same argument can be used in current and future cases against alleged PKK members.

Inside the EU, Belgium is the only country that has rooted the principle in its national legislation. Therefore, in other countries, the defence will have to be based on European and international agreements on combating terrorism, all of which refer to the principle in the preambles.

Several rulings by the International Criminal Court in The Hague which refers to this principle also strengthens the defence’s case, Fermon said.

The lawyers’ and Kurdish activists’ aim is to put pressure on European politicians to persuade Turkey to return to the negotiating table with the

PKK by getting similar rulings in other European countries,

After all, if the PKK is a terrorist organisation, it has to be eradicated. But if the Kurdish issue is a non-international armed conflict, then it has to be resolved.

This one ruling doesn’t do the trick yet, as is clear from the Belgian minister’s reaction, but the lawyers have another card up their sleeve. The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled in 2018 that the PKK was illegitimately listed as a terrorist organisation between 2014 and 2017 as the European Council had not provided sufficient justification for the decision. At the time, the Council immediately enlisted the PKK again, based on the exact same grounds as the ones that the judge had just wiped off the table.

The Council appealed the 2018 ruling, and ever since the PKK itself has been legally challenging the new EU enlistments which are renewed every six months.

Fermon said the PKK’s lawyers would for sure use the Belgian court’s ruling in their pleas.

“I don’t think it is inconceivable that the European Court will remove the PKK from the list, claiming that the justification is still not sufficient,” Fermon said.

It is for now unclear when the court in Luxemburg will announce its rulings on both cases. Its decisions will indicate whether the Belgian court’s decision will have consequences wider than Belgian and European politicians are willing to admit.



February 09-2020

Kurdish Peshmerga launch massive anti-ISIS operation

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region’s Peshmerga and Kurdish security forces (Asayish) launched a massive military operation at dawn on Sunday to pursue sleeper cells of the so-called Islamic State in the region bordering the southern Garmiyan area.

The Garmiyan Administration is an unofficial province in the Kurdistan Region that includes the three districts of Kalar, Kifri, and Chamchamal. Regional Kurdish Peshmerga and Asayish forces are in charge of security in Garmiyan, while Iraqi national forces control territory to its south and west.

Reporting on site, Kurdistan 24 correspondent Harem Jaf said the Peshmerga and Asayish forces clashed with terrorist elements in Daouda—an area that falls between the Kurdish Kifri district and Tooz district of Salahuddin province. The fight led to the death of many militants as the Peshmerga continued a pursuit across the valleys.



Kurdish officials have warned that the lack of effective joint security coordination between the Kurdish and Iraqi forces offers extremist fighters the opportunity to regroup and stage attacks in nearby populated areas. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

He added that two roadside bombs exploded on Peshmerga vehicles, but only resulted in minor material damages.

The area is partially composed of rugged, barren terrain that has been a haven for Islamic State fighters.

“That is how the militants are taking

advantage of this geography in addition to the security vacuum in it,” Jaf noted. The security issue has existed since the late 2017 Iraqi forces and Shia militia attack on areas of disputed claim between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Federal Government of Iraq.

Kurdish officials have warned that

the lack of effective joint security coordination between the Kurdish and Iraqi forces offers extremist fighters the opportunity to regroup and stage attacks in nearby populated areas.

In late January, a group of gunmen suspected to be an Islamic State sleeper cell set up a mock security checkpoint and abducted seven civilians to the west of Khanaqin and just south of the Kurdish run Garmiyan Administration. On Saturday, militants kidnapped two more people in a similar incident near the same area.

Days after the first abduction, senior Turkmen lawmaker Arshad al-Salih said the militant group had executed many of the abductees—whom he said were members of the Turkmen ethnic group. The exact number is still unconfirmed and the whereabouts of the rest is unclear.

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany
(Additional reporting by Harem Jaf)



Nurcan Baysal
Feb 09 2020

Cizrespor's story is a fraction of Turkey's Kurdish question

We had hosted them so well." These words belong to Maruf Sefinç, President of Cizrespor Football Club. For a decade, Cizrespor has represented the city of Cizre, in the predominantly Kurdish region of southeastern Turkey. They have competed in the Turkish Football Federation (TFF)'s Third League since 2015.

Last February, Cizrespor had an away game on the Mediterranean coast with Serik Belediyespor. After the match ended in a 1-1 tie, Cizrespor was attacked, and some football players were wounded. Following the attack, Maruf Sefinç described the incident to the media.

As Cizrespor walks into the Serik stadium, a lively song by Tarkan—one of Turkey's most famous pop stars—plays over the speakers. As soon as Cizrespor enters, the music changes, and the speakers begin blasting a song titled, "I Would Die for my Turkey", which is quite popular among the country's nationalists. Once the match begins, Cizrespor makes a goal to lead by 1-0, and the score on the scoreboard is replaced by the image of a Turkish flag. The referee's calls are rather biased, and three of Cizrespor's players are penalized. The game ends 1-1. Then the events begin. Objects are thrown from the stands. Serik Belediyespor's trainers, footballers, and supporters begin attacking Cizrespor players. As always, the police watches from the sidelines. They cannot leave the stadium. It is not until an hour and a half later, when armoured vehicles intervene,



that the Cizrespor players are able to leave.

In his recounting, Sefinç had said, "In the first period Serik's team had come to Cizre. We had hosted them so well."

Back then, this quote reverberated in my head for a long time: "We had hosted them so well." Almost a year after these events, this week, Cizrespor announced that it would be pulling out of the league due to the attacks it has been facing. In short, the announcement was as follows:

"We do not have the power to stand up to the lawlessness of TFF and the Central Referee's Association. Due to the injustices we have faced in our own stadium as well as at away games, due to the racist and nationalist behaviour of referees, our club president Maruf Sefinç has decided to pull Cizrespor out of the league."

But I am sure Cizrespor had hosted everyone so well. Not only Cizrespor, but also many of us Kurds have been good hosts to many visitors

from western Turkey.

I have seen this all around me since my childhood. I am not referring to regular hospitality. What I am talking about here is "extreme" hospitality that strives to explain to westerners that we here are good people. For years, Kurds have competed in hosting their "brothers and sisters" from the west with the mindset that "We should host them well so they can see what good people Kurds are."

I do not know what our guests saw here and what impressions they left with, but we have seen a lot here in the past five years. In summer of 2015, the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdish movement collapsed, and pressures against Kurdish people have mounted since. During the 24-hour curfew in southeastern Diyarbakır's central district of Sur that October, someone tauntingly wrote, "Ladies, we came and you were not here," on a house. After the 24-hour curfew was lifted, the very day that Kurdish activist Tahir Elçi was assassinated in November, I

read another piece of graffiti that said, "We are here, where are the bastards?"

This talk of hospitality reminds me of my mother's attempts to host teachers from the west who would stay in our building, sent by the central Turkish government to educate Kurdish children. Some of those teachers that we "hosted well" would teach us in school what a bad thing the Kurdish language and Kurdishness were. But my mother always hosted them so well.

Despite all of this, how strange it is that my mother, Cizrespor's president, and many more Kurds cannot believe what is happening to them. They assume that if you host your neighbour well, your neighbour will host you well in return. But your neighbour does not even see you as a neighbour, and instead tries to throw you out of your own home.

Why did I write this piece? It is because I had a few things to say to those who display this discriminatory and racist approach, to those who oppress Cizrespor, Amedspor, white-collar Kurds in Istanbul, Kurdish students in Izmir, Kurdish agricultural workers in Ordu, Kurdish businesspeople in Ankara, Kurdish singers in Bodrum, and many others:

We had hosted you so well.

© Ahval English

The views expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of Ahval.



Feb 09 2020

13 migrants froze to death on Turkey-Iran border

Some 13 migrants froze to death after they passed Turkey's border with Iran, Mezopotamya news agency reported on Sunday, citing a local news outlet.

Thirteen migrants, including 10 Afghans and 3 Syrian Kurds from the town of Kobane, died in the eastern province of Van's Çaldıran district, Mezopotamya said.

Turkish authorities could not reach the bodies due to adverse



weather in the region, according to the news agency.

"Unfortunately, dozens of people die every year at the borders, losing their hopes. I invite all the public to sympathy. Everyone must fulfil their responsibilities as soon as possible. The authorities must find bodies of those people as soon as possible," said Murat Melet, chair of Van branch of Turkey's Human Rights Association (IHD).

ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

Sunday, 9 February, 2020
Kamal Sheikho

Ilham Ahmed to Asharq Al-Awsat: Damascus Agreed to Political Dialogue with Guarantee from Moscow

Head of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Ilham Ahmed revealed that the Syrian regime has agreed to Russian-mediated political negotiations with Kurds.

She told Asharq Al-Awsat that the formation of a "higher committee" that would address the administration of the autonomous region in eastern Syria was also a possibility.

She said that a Russian envoy had met with Kurdish, Arab and Christian officials from north-eastern Syria at the Hmeimim air base at the end of 2019.

Discussions focused on how to "develop" the dialogue, she explained. "Are we part of this dialogue or not? What framework will they be held in?"

Ahmed said the parties were still in the very early discussions with



Head of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Ilham Ahmed. (Reuters)

the Damascus regime. "Moving forward from dialogue to serious discussions requires an agenda and plan that would be addressed through dedicated committees."

The Russians are "serious" about playing role of mediator and "guarantor" in the political process, she added. "They have pledged to exert pressure on the

regime to accept a comprehensive settlement," she stressed.

She revealed that after concluding talks at Hmeimim, "we traveled to Damascus the next day to meet Ali Mamlouk (head of the national security bureau)." The Russian envoy was present at the talks.

"I am awaiting for words to turn

into actions. This will be proven by practical steps and the launch of comprehensive dialogue that addresses the fate of the Syrian people and a region that is part of the Syrian state," she went on to say.

She stressed the need for a "responsible approach" that steers clear from hostility and hopes for a military solution.

Ahmed rejected the threatening rhetoric of some senior regime officials, saying thorny issues demand dialogue.

Furthermore, she pointed to meetings with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Syrian opposition figures in Cairo.

"We are working on holding the Cairo 3 conference in March," she said.



By Sirwan Kajjo
February 09, 2020

US Forces Reportedly Building New Base in Northeast Syria

WASHINGTON - The United States military has begun building a new base in northeast Syria, according to local reports.

The new U.S. military base reportedly is located in the city of Hasakah, one of the largest cities in Syria's northeast.

A local reporter told VOA that the U.S. maintains another base outside the city, "but this is the first time that U.S. forces have begun building a base in the city center."

"The U.S. flag is now raised over a building," said journalist Jindar Berekat, who lives in Hasakah, adding that "it is not clear how many American soldiers will be stationed at this location, but their armored military vehicles are here and it looks like they are still constructing parts of it."

The base was previously occupied by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a local military alliance that has been a major U.S. partner in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) terror group.

It is located near a major prison that holds hundreds of IS fighters. The SDF says it currently holds about 2,000 IS foreign fighters and 12,000 IS-affiliated women and children.

'Redeployment strategy'

Hasakah is largely controlled by Syrian Kurdish fighters, but Syrian government and Russian forces have a significant military presence in the city as well.

US Troops Block Russian Military Patrols in Northeastern Syria
Mapping Major Foreign Forces in Syria



FILE - U.S. military vehicles are seen in Hasakah, Syria, Nov. 4, 2018. © Reuters

A senior SDF commander confirmed to VOA that U.S. troops in fact have been dispatched to a new location inside the city of Hasakah.

"While the Americans have had a presence in Hasakah, the construction of this base is probably part of their redeployment strategy in northeast Syria," said the Kurdish commander, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media about such matters.

U.S. military officials have not commented on these reports.

US-Russian tensions

The move comes as tensions continue to grow between U.S. and Russian troops in the Kurdish-majority region.

On several occurrences recently, U.S. forces have prevented Russian military convoys from carrying out patrol missions in northeast Syria.

US Troops Block Russian Military Patrols in Northeastern Syria

U.S. forces were in control of most of northeast Syria until October, when the Turkish military and its allied Syrian militants launched a campaign against the U.S.-backed SDF.

Since then, Russian forces and the Syrian government have entered the border region between Turkey and northeast Syria with the aim of filling the area evacuated by U.S. forces.

"Many here believe that the building of a U.S. base inside Hasakah could be a response to the

growing Russian presence in the city," said Alav Hussein, a local reporter who closely follows military developments in the region.

He told VOA that according to local military sources, "this new center [is being built] with the aim of observing Russian forces in Hasakah."

There are still about 500 troops in the area who, according to U.S. officials, are protecting the region's oil fields and preventing IS from reemerging.

Last month, U.S. forces reportedly expanded another military base, which is located on the strategic M4 highway that stretches from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo in the west to the Iraqi border in the east.

How Idlib escalation could affect Syrian Kurds

Syrian Kurds are pondering how to take advantage of Turkish-Russian tensions over Idlib, focusing on Turkish-controlled Afrin and not ruling out the prospect of fighting along with government forces if the conflict escalates.

Amid heightened Turkish-Russian tensions in Idlib and a more assertive Iranian posture in the region, Syrian Kurds are said to be silently weighing their options in the event the conflict escalates and are not ruling out the prospect of fighting along with Syrian government forces.

Turkey had appeared rather calm last month when the Syrian army marched on Maaret al-Numan, an offensive that unfolded against the backdrop of a flurry of contacts between diplomats and military and intelligence officials in Moscow. Moreover, Turkish officials let Syrian rebel commanders know that the strategic M4 and M5 highways had to be somehow reopened as they briefed them about the talks with Russia in meetings in the Turkish border cities of Gaziantep and Reyhanli Jan. 15.

Yet when the Syrian army moved on to its next target, Saraqib, in late January, Turkey appeared to be going on a war footing to prevent the fall of the town, which lies on the junction of the M5 and M4 highways. It began sending reinforcements to Idlib, a move that came after Gen. Tod Wolters, the commander of the US European Command, visited Ankara Jan. 30 to discuss the situation in Syria, as shelling by Syrian government forces killed eight Turks, including soldiers and civilian contractors, Feb. 3 near Saraqib. While Ankara urged a return to the cease-fire line behind its 12 observation posts in the region, the Syrian forces took control of nearly 100 locations within a week, heedless of Turkey's intervention threats. With Turkish forces cutting off the eastern approach, they drew an arch from the south to the west to quickly capture Saraqib. As a result, seven Turkish military bases,



Turkish military vehicles enter the Bab al-Hawa crossing at the Syrian-Turkish border, in Idlib governorate, Syria, Feb. 9, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi.

including three recently established checkpoints, were besieged as of Feb. 8.

Turkey has continued to send reinforcements into Idlib, with hundreds of vehicles crossing the border. Turkish intelligence officials have reportedly held another meeting with some 40 rebel commanders in Reyhanli, telling them negotiations with Russia have failed and they should "prepare for the worst." A source who attended the meeting told Reuters the rebels saw Idlib city as "a red line."

All those developments in the northwest are reverberating to the east of the Euphrates River, where the Syrian Kurds are silently preparing for possible scenarios. Amid the escalation in Idlib, the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) has mounted attacks in the Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain areas but failed to pose a serious challenge to the Kurds. The Kurds, meanwhile, are mulling how to take advantage of evolving equilibriums in the event of a broader Russian-Turkish rift.

Turkey's beating of war drums over Idlib has led the Kurds to consider the option of collaborating with the Syrian army in even-

tual offensives to retake areas to the west of the Euphrates. The focal point of the Kurds is the Afrin region, which Turkey seized in March 2018 as part of efforts to stymie the Kurdish drive for self-rule in Syria on the grounds that it is led by affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the insurgent group in Turkey that Ankara considers to be a terrorist organization. According to Syrian Kurdish sources contacted by Al-Monitor, the Kurdish sentiment and assessments could be summarized as follows:

The Kurds have learned a good lesson from Operation Peace Spring in October, through which Turkey secured a foothold to the east of the Euphrates. They have reinforced their conviction that placing too much trust in the United States is a mistake, that they should not ignore Russia and that a settlement could be reached only through negotiations with Damascus.

With US forces focused on the oil fields in Rmelan, Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor in the northwest, the notion of opening more room to Russia without severing ties with the United States is being put into practice. There is even talk about offering a new base to Russia,

which has already taken over several facilities evacuated by the United States, in a bid to encourage it to press Damascus in favor of the Kurds.

The Kurds could get fresh room to maneuver if a continued escalation in Idlib causes the Russian-Turkish partnership to collapse. They do not rule out the possibility of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or the People's Protection Units backing the government forces if the clashes in Idlib grow into a war between the Syrian army and Turkey. In such an event, new fronts might be opened from Tell Rifaat and Manbij against the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield triangle between Azaz, Jarablus and al-Bab, in addition to possible military moves in areas to the east of the Euphrates, where the Turkish military and the SNA are present.

All those prospects, however, depend on Damascus engaging in full-fledged negotiations with the SDF, building on the dialogue that Russia initiated between the two sides after Turkey's Operation Peace Spring, which resulted in the Syrian army's return to certain stretches of the border with Turkey. If the risk of a war in Idlib does not materialize and the Syrian army reaches Afrin, the Kurds might still join the campaign at that point. At present, Russia is tacitly facilitating Kurdish operations against the Turkish-backed groups controlling Afrin.

If the escalation on the ground results in major tensions with Turkey, Russia might end its strategy of letting Turkey safely conduct military operations, including the "blinding" of air defense systems to the activity of Turkish aircraft, preventing confrontation between the Turkish and Syrian armies, reining in pro-government

militia and minimizing the risk of asymmetric responses, as seen in Turkey's Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield operations. The termination of such brake mechanisms, which have functioned thanks to joint coordination centers, might lead to surprise developments anywhere the Turkish military is present.

Alternatively, if Turkey and Russia agree on a new cease-fire line after the reopening of the M4 and M5 highways, Moscow might return to its strategy of paying regard to Turkish concerns on the Kurdish issue. For the Kurds, this would mean going back to the waiting room. The rapid changes in Idlib, however, have weakened the possibility of Russia green-lighting a Turkish offensive on Kobani in return for an Idlib deal, a scenario the Kurds have taken seriously for some time.

Meanwhile, a new aspect is emerging in Iran's involvement in Syria, which the Kurds are not very willing to discuss as of yet. Iran had kept a low profile until recently, as the United States used the Iranian presence to justify its stay in Syria and Israel did the same to strike targets on Syrian territory. But since the killing of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani in early January, Iran has vowed to oust US forces from Iraq and Syria as part of a broader "revenge" strategy, which appears to have brought it to the Idlib and western Aleppo fronts. Along with Hezbollah, pro-Iranian groups such as the Zainabiyoun Brigade, made up of Pakistani Shiites, and the Fatemiyoun Brigade, an Afghan Shiite militia, have taken part in the recent fighting in the region. Moreover, Ali Akbar Velayati, a top adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has

vowed that "the Syrian government and its allies from the resistance front will go from Idlib to the eastern Euphrates to expel the Americans."

The Iranian strategy closely concerns the Kurds. If the Kurds are to be drawn away from the United States and brought closer to Damascus, then meeting Kurdish demands on a "reasonable" level is not something Iran would object to. Despite its own Kurdish problem, Iran has been careful in its ties with the Syrian Kurds since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. While Russia sees rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus as a shortcut to closing ongoing fronts and moving on to the reconstruction stage, Iran is irked that Russia has opened too much room to Turkey. Ankara's conditions on the Kurds, meanwhile, are blocking Moscow's exit strat-

egy. Tehran, for its part, favors Kurdish alignment with Damascus in a way that would bring further gains to the Syrian government. Of note, the PKK leadership, based in Iraq's Qandil Mountains, has come to see Damascus as the address of settlement, taking into account the Iranian factor as much as the Russian one. Yet if the SDF keeps up its partnership with the United States, it could face the risk of the Idlib scenario being repeated to the east of the Euphrates at the expense of the Kurds; hence the significance of Velayati's warning.

With all that said, the main factor defining the present sentiment among the Kurds is their sense of uncertainty. Thus, no one in the Kurdish movement is willing to declare a clear position yet, making do with general assessments.



Feb 10 2020

Syrian Kurds agree with Assad regime to start political negotiations - Rudaw

A delegation of Syrian Kurdish party representatives has met with the Syrian government and agreed to start political negotiations, Mustafa Meşayih from the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (Yekiti), told pro-Kurdish news site Rudaw.

The delegation, including parties under the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) political wing Syrian Democratic Council, met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government officials in Hmeimim and Damascus, with Russia acting as an intermediary, Rudaw said.

"After critiques, exchange of views and suggestions, both parties have stressed their readiness for dialogue," Meşayih was quoted by Rudaw as saying.



Joint constitutions on the matters of Syria's constitution, administration, education, military, and oil resources will be established, Meşayih said, with participation from ministry officials from the Syrian government.

Russia is serious about acting as a guarantor for the political process, and Syrian Kurds are ready for dialogue if the government is serious as well, Meşayih said. Following U.S. troops' with-

drawal from northeast Syria and Turkey's consequent military incursion into the Kurdish-held region in October last year, Syrian Kurds had accelerated efforts to reconcile with Assad's government, to limited effect.

ARTE: Autopsie d'un triple meurtre – Sakine, Fidan, Leyla, militantes kurdes

PARIS – Sept années se sont écoulées depuis les meurtres de Sakine Cansiz, Fidan Dogan et Leyla Saylemez dans leur bureau du centre d'information kurde à Paris. Les trois militantes kurdes ont été exécutées de trois balles dans la tête chacune, le 9 janvier 2013. Le 23 janvier 2017 devait débiter le procès aux Assises d'Ömer Güney, le présumé coupable. Le suspect, qui était lié aux services de sécurité turcs à Ankara selon les informations obtenues par les avocats des familles des victimes, est décédé subitement en prison le 17 décembre, un mois avant le début du procès.

La famille et les amis des trois femmes se sont donc vu refuser toute chance de justice et vérité. L'affaire restera une plaie ouverte dans le système judiciaire français jusqu'à ce que ceux qui



ont ordonné ces meurtres épouvantables soient identifiés et condamnés. Le rôle joué par les services de secrets turcs était clairement indiqué dans l'acte d'accusation et dans le dossier de la juge d'instruction. Depuis, une nouvelle enquête a été re-

lancée en 2019 dans ce triple féminicide politique.

Pour son documentaire l'« Autopsie d'un triple meurtre – Sakine, Fidan, Leyla, militantes kurdes », le réalisateur Ahmet Senyurt a mené une enquête

approfondie sur le meurtre des 3 femmes kurdes.

« De la France à l'Allemagne en passant par les camps d'entraînement kurdes du nord de l'Irak et de la Syrie, le réalisateur Ahmet Senyurt plonge dans les zones d'ombre de ce crime non élucidé en retraçant, avec les témoignages de leurs proches et de leurs avocats, les trajectoires des trois militantes kurdes et de leur meurtrier présumé. En s'appuyant sur les éléments de l'enquête et sur des affaires parallèles – le cas d'un journaliste condamné en Allemagne pour avoir espionné au profit de la Turquie des individus proches du PKK [Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan] –, il met ainsi en évidence une inquiétante exportation du conflit turco-kurde en Europe. »

A voir sur Arte le mardi 03 mars 2020 à 22h25

Perspectives. 11/02/2020 Par Ben Driss

Retrait partiel des forces US d'Irak: Les bases kurdes et d'Ain Al Assad maintenues...

Le retrait des troupes américaines de 15 bases situées sur le territoire irakien a démarré, affirme la chaîne de télé «Al-Arabiya». Qui nuance que les soldats US stationnés dans les bases kurdes, à Erbil et, et ceux déployés à Ain Al-Asad resteraient sur place.

Suite à la décision du parlement irakien qui réclamait le départ de toutes les forces étrangères du pays, les militaires américains ont entamé leur retrait de 15 bases en Irak, a annoncé lundi 10 février la chaîne d'obédience saoudienne Al-Arabiya.

Pour l'heure, aucun commentaire officiel à ce sujet n'a été fait ni par Washington ni par Bagdad.

La chaîne affirme cependant que les militaires n'envisagent pas de quitter les bases se trouvant à Erbil, dans le Kurdistan irakien, ni à abandonner la plus grande base US dans la région,

celle d'Ain Al-Asad qui a été ciblée par une salve de missiles iraniens en représailles à l'assassinat du général iranien Qassem Soleimani.

La même source ajoute que la France, l'Allemagne et l'Australie ont envoyé au gouvernement irakien des demandes de retrait de leurs troupes du pays.

Auparavant, les États-Unis avaient fait part de leur déception face à la décision des députés irakiens qui avaient sommé le gouvernement d'expulser d'Irak tous les corps militaires étrangers qui ont été coalisés par Washington dans le cadre de lutte contre Daech. .

Putin Has Painted Russia Into a Syrian Corner

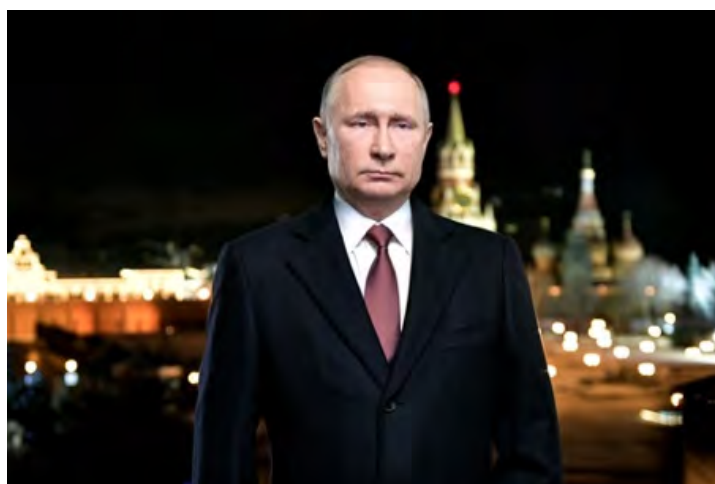
The battle for Idlib is the most severe test of Moscow's effort to be all things to all protagonists in Syria.

Russia has been unusually circumspect as a crisis in northern Syria simultaneously threatens to undermine its relations with Turkey and calls into question its support for Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship in Damascus. The Russian air force has been actively supporting the [regime offensive](#) that has displaced hundreds of thousands in Idlib, in northwestern Syria. Turkey, which supports the Syrian opposition to Assad, has been [striking at regime targets](#) in Idlib.

Moscow is the Syrian regime's main backer, and is committed to helping Assad reassert control over the country. On the other hand, Turkey is a major trading partner for Russia, over and above the \$2.5 billion [sale of S-400 air-defense systems](#).

Russia's trade with Turkey reached [\\$25.6 billion in 2018](#); the two countries want that number to [grow to \\$100 billion](#) in the next few years. Moscow's economic exchanges with the other stakeholders in the Syrian conflict are puny in comparison. Trade with Iran, hampered by U.S. sanctions, is in the region of \$2 billion; the two countries are looking for ways to increase flows [through barter deals](#). War-ravaged Syria a [small trading partner](#), even if Moscow [profits in other ways](#) from the conflict. Russia-Israel trade exceeded \$5 billion in 2019 for [the second year in a row](#) and looks likely to grow more.

Can Russia support the Syrian regime and preserve relations with Turkey? Thus far, Moscow has threaded these needles by hosting the [Astana peace process](#) on Syria and trying to be all things to all sides. Russian



A man in a jam. Photographer: Alexey Nikolsky/AFP

President Vladimir Putin has gambled that he can accomplish this because Syria and Turkey both need Russia more than Russia needs them.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has come to increasingly rely on Russia as he feuds with the U.S. and Europe. For his part, Assad is beholden to Putin for Russia's [2015 intervention in the Syrian civil war in support of Assad](#). Russian air power and special forces helped turn the tide in the dictator's favor.

Syria was already a key Russian ally dating back to Soviet times; Russia maintains a naval base and air base in the country. Helping Assad defeat the rebels is not only a point of prestige for Moscow, the conflict is also [a showcase for Russian weapons](#).

Putin has maneuvered to become the key power broker in Syria, presiding over [ceasefire deals with Jordan](#) and the U.S. in 2017, a deal with Turkey over Idlib in 2018, and another after the U.S. withdrew from parts of

northeastern Syria in 2019. Russia has also sought to assuage Israeli concerns about Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria [by deploying military police](#) near the Golan Heights.

But the Syrian chessboard has grown progressively more complex. The U.S. presence may be much reduced, but is not gone. American forces protect oil fields in eastern Syria and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish led group, remains a major force in the east. Turkey has [invaded the north-east](#), to keep the Kurds at bay, and create a buffer zone for refugees.

This leaves Russia to maneuver between Iran, Turkey, the U.S. and the Syrian regime. It creates a situation in which the Russian air force fights for Assad, even while Russian troops conduct [joint patrols with Turkey](#) in Kurdish areas, and Russian diplomats [negotiate with Kurdish groups](#) partnered with the U.S.

Idlib is the most severe challenge to Russia's effort to be all

things to everyone, all the time. As the Syrian regime ratcheted up its attacks on Idlib this month, it killed Turkish troops; Ankara responded by deploying armored vehicles to [Idlib in early February](#). Turkey fears an influx [of more refugees](#) from Syria, adding to the 3 million it already hosts.

Russia wants to tamp down the tensions in Idlib, but it has another crisis brewing in the south, where Israel has launched more than 1,000 airstrikes on Iranian targets in Syria. Last week, Russia claimed [an Israeli airstrike endangered a civilian airliner](#) over Damascus. Such attacks enrage both Assad and Iran, requiring careful handling by Russia.

The outcome of Russia's effort to manage all sides of the conflict has been a partitioning of Syria into zones of influence and control. Iran influences southern Syria, but has to contend with Israeli airstrikes. Turkey controls parts of northern Syria under tenuous ceasefire agreements with Moscow. The U.S. controls a shrinking portion of eastern Syria.

Putin's house of cards is built on making sure none of the countries gets what it wants and all must rely on Moscow to hold what they have: Iran can't take over southern Syria; Assad can't win the civil war outright; and Turkey can't remain in northern Syria forever.

The last thing Putin wants to do is to pick a side—and that is exactly what the battle for Idlib might force him to do. No wonder Moscow has gone mum.



12-02-2020
Zhelwan Z. Wali

Swedish FM blasts Demirtas imprisonment, calls for arms embargo on Turkey

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Turkey's prolonged imprisonment of former pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) leader Selahattin Demirtas is "entirely unacceptable", Sweden's Foreign Minister said in a parliamentary Q&A session on Wednesday.

Demirtas, 47, was detained with HDP co-chair Figen Yuksekdag in November 2016 for alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - a Kurdish armed group fighting for Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey, which is designated a terror group by Ankara.

"Sweden and the EU have expressed to Turkey on several occasions the fact that journalists and human activists have been imprisoned... something we have repeatedly underlined and condemned," Minister Ann Linde said at Stockholm's Riksdag, describing the HDP arrests as "entirely unacceptable."

Demirtas has been ordered released then re-arrested by different courts multiple times but remains in prison, and could face up to 142 years behind bars if found guilty on current terror-related charges.

The Turkish government intensified its crackdown on the HDP and its af-



HDP supporters hold a picture of Demirtas as they attend a 'Peace and Justice' rally in Istanbul. File photo: AFP

filiates after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, blamed on Fethullah Gulen - former ally of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Recently there have been growing concerns over Demirtas's health after he fell seriously ill in his prison cell in December. The European Court of Human Rights found several instances of human rights violations in Turkey's handling of Demirtas' case in a 2018 ruling, calling for an end to his pre-trial detention.

An Ankara court lashed out at the European court's ruling shortly afterwards, deciding not to release Demirtas pending a decision on his appeal of a terror conviction.

Turkey's leadership also rejected the court's ruling, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saying the European institution's rulings "do not bind us."

Ban on arms sale to Turkey

The EU should cooperate on placing an arms embargo on Turkey, Linde added.

Several European powers called for a similar move following Turkey's October invasion of northeast-Syria, aimed at ridding the area of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Kurdish fighters were forced to withdraw from Turkey's southern border under two Turkish agreements with the United States and Russia.

Ankara and its Syrian proxies have been accused of committing various violations by local and international rights groups. Kurdish officials have repeatedly urged the EU to take action to halt such abuses.

However, the Swedish foreign minister believes that EU did not do enough.

"We have condemned the Turkish offensive into Syrian territory," she said, saying the EU should collectively work to put "an arms embargo" on Turkey "when it comes to the way in which we need to be active most efficient, effective and have an impact on Turkey to achieve change."

"We did not achieve that fully at the EU level," she said.



12-02-2020
Beirut (AFP)

US-led coalition clashes with Syria regime loyalists

The US-led coalition said its forces in northeast Syria Wednesday confronted gunmen with live fire after one of its patrols came under attack near the city of Qamishli.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a US strike during the clashes in the regime-held village of Khirbet Amo, but coalition spokesman Myles Caggins denied any raid had taken place.

"Coalition forces, conducting a patrol near Qamishli, Syria, encountered a checkpoint occupied by pro-Syrian regime forces," Caggins said.

"The patrol came under small arms fire from unknown individuals. In self-defence, coalition troops returned fire."

Caggins said the patrol returned safely to base after the situation was "de-escalated".

An AFP correspondent saw a US flag flying above an armoured vehicle as it left the village.

According to the Observatory, loyalists residing in the village tried to block the passage of a US military patrol, firing in the air.

This prompted a response from US troops, who killed a regime loyalist in the clash, the Observatory said.

The coalition did not report such a casualty.

Khirbet Amo is among the few areas in the largely Kurdish-held northeast controlled by pro-government forces.

US troops in the region operate as part of the US-led coalition fighting the remnants of the Islamic State jihadist group.

They routinely carry out patrols in the area alongside their Kurdish allies.

Toutes les vies de Diako Yazdani

Le réalisateur kurde iranien, qui a grandi dans une famille religieuse et homophobe, signe un documentaire décapant.

Un pull rouge, un café, quelque chose de tendre et d'ironique dans le regard. Et un fil rouge que le cinéaste kurde iranien déroule sans lâcher deux heures durant, comme pour ne pas se perdre dans son labyrinthe mental. Il y a neuf ans exactement, en février 2011, Diako Yazdani faisait ses premières démarches pour obtenir le droit d'asile, à Paris. « J'étais dans la file d'attente pour avoir le récépissé. Je ne connaissais absolument personne et ne parlais pas un mot de français, à part "merci". La première année a été un stress permanent », raconte-t-il, dans la brasserie d'une gare parisienne. Puis il a obtenu le statut de réfugié politique en 2012, à l'âge de 31 ans. « On m'a dit : "A Paris, si tu cherches du travail, ne dis pas que tu es boulanger, dis que tu es cinéaste" », raconte-t-il en souriant. Cela tombait bien, il venait de réaliser quatre courts-métrages sous la direction d'Abbas Kiarostami, à Téhéran. « Mais ça m'a pris du temps, au moins trois ans, pour me dire que l'Iran, c'était fini. Heureusement, l'humour noir me permet de respirer », dit le réalisateur, tout en surveillant l'heure du train qui doit l'emmener à Lyon, pour l'avant-première de son film : Toutes les vies de Kojin, produit par Raphaël Pilloso, de L'Atelier documentaire, sort en salle le 12 février.

Interdit de séjour en Iran, c'est au Kurdistan irakien que Diako Yazdani a filmé son personnage, Kojin, un jeune homosexuel kurde qui se confie devant la caméra et se confronte à la société civile qui n'est pas des plus gay friendly – à commencer par la famille du cinéaste, dont le père est imam. Ce documentaire glaçant et comique a été sélectionné au festival Entrevues Belfort et a obtenu le Prix du jury de la 25^e édition du festival Chéries-Chéris, en novembre 2019. « Quand je suis monté sur scène, j'ai dit au public : "La dernière fois que j'ai gagné un prix, c'est parce



Le cinéaste kurde iranien Diako Yazdani. STÉPHANIE DUPONT

que j'étais le meilleur élève de l'école coranique en Iran". » Il ajoute : « J'espère qu'il y aura des homophobes parmi les spectateurs de mon film. Car on a besoin de parler. »

« Doublement puni »

Qui aurait dit, il y a vingt ans, que Diako Yazdani, professeur de coran, homophobe assumé, allait devenir un ardent défenseur des droits LGBT (lesbien, gay, bi, trans...) ? Le réalisateur, qui approche la quarantaine, a fait sa traversée, intellectuelle et géographique, qui l'a conduit à choisir la France en 2011, « pour le cinéma ». Diako Yazdani ne connaît pas le philosophe Paul B. Preciado, mais, à sa manière, il parle aujourd'hui comme le théoricien queer. Rejetant les catégories du masculin et du féminin, le réalisateur esquisse un parallèle entre le parcours des minorités de genre, et celui des migrants à la recherche d'une terre d'accueil. « Nous, les kurdes, on est traités comme des LGBT, on est marginalisés. Et nous-mêmes, nous reproduisons une mentalité de domination en rejetant les homos. Ça ne sert à rien l'émancipation de territoire sans l'émancipation des corps. »

Lui-même a vécu « la pauvreté, le patriarcat, l'agression sexuelle ». A l'heure de #metoo, le réalisateur explique qu'au Kurdistan ce sont les hommes qui se font violer. « Les femmes sont dans une sorte de prison, celle de leur père, de leurs frères. Donc, on n'y touche pas, et si un homme viole une femme, il risque d'être tué par la famille. En revanche, le corps d'un homme est libre dans la ville : s'il a un physique un peu féminin, il devient la femme libre... et peut se faire violer. » Il précise : « Le seul endroit où l'on était respecté, c'était la mosquée. On nous expliquait que si deux hommes se rapprochent et ont un rapport sexuel, il faut les tuer... » Quand un homo recevait des coups de fouet sur la place publique, Diako Yazdani était aux premières loges : « Il y avait la peur des viols et ces châtiments me rassuraient, je me sentais en sécurité... »

« Nous, les kurdes, on est traités comme des LGBT, on est marginalisés. Et nous-mêmes, nous reproduisons une mentalité de domination en rejetant les homos »

Comme Kojin, Diako Yazdani a eu

plusieurs vies. Enfant, il a découvert ou plutôt fantasmé le cinéma grâce à sa mère qui avait vu beaucoup de films avant la révolution de 1979 : « Tous les soirs, elle me racontait une scène. Ma mère a été mon meilleur professeur de cinéma. » Après avoir démarré des études de comptabilité – « Parce qu'il fallait gagner de l'argent », Diako Yazdani s'est inscrit à l'institut Karnameh d'arts et de culture, à Téhéran. Le cinéma lui a permis de se « trouver ». C'est en écoutant le récit d'un ami, en 2014, qui avait fait de la prison pour des raisons politiques et avait été « doublement puni » en raison de son homosexualité, que Diako Yazdani a eu le déclic.

Si le réalisateur se met en scène dans son film, c'est pour s'engager, dit-il : « Je ne voulais pas faire l'Européen qui apporte la lumière au Kurdistan. Je voulais montrer d'où je viens. Plus le tournage avançait, plus Kojin se libérait, se maquillait. J'étais content pour lui, mais j'avais peur. » Kojin a quitté le Kurdistan en 2017 et se trouve aujourd'hui dans un centre pour réfugiés LGBT à Francfort, en Allemagne. Diako Yazdani a créé une « cagnotte » pour lui payer un nouvel avocat, tout en préparant ses prochains films. « J'ai tellement attendu avant de faire du cinéma... Mais toutes ces années m'ont rempli d'histoires. » L'AVIS DU « MONDE » - À VOIR

Sur la carte de l'homophobie mondiale, on savait, notamment par le cinéma, certaines zones particulièrement en pointe. Récemment encore, le remarquable Et puis nous danserons de Levan Akin nous introduisait aux charmes ineffables de la Géorgie dans ce champ particulier. Force est toutefois d'avouer que jamais on n'avait vu une violence verbale aussi exacerbée que celle qui apparaît dans ce documentaire de Diako Yazdani.

Kurde iranien réfugié en France, le

« Toutes les vies de Kojin » : un documentaire sur le courage d'un jeune homosexuel assumé, au Kurdistan irakien

Le réalisateur filme la confrontation entre son milieu d'origine, réactionnaire, et son ami qui revendique son orientation sexuelle.

réalisateur, interdit de séjour dans son pays natal, est retourné à proximité de chez lui, dans le Kurdistan irakien, pour y mener une chronique de l'existence minoritaire en territoire kurde – à travers le personnage d'un jeune homme farouchement décidé à assumer socialement sa préférence sexuelle. Quelle que soit la sympathie qu'on puisse par ailleurs avoir pour ce peuple qui fait partie des éternels vaincus de l'histoire et qui démontre nonobstant une vaillance à toute épreuve, le tableau est accablant. C'est au demeurant une dimension intéressante du film que de pointer cet écart.



« Toutes les vies de Kojin », de Diako Yazdani. ROUGE DISTRIBUTION

Il semblerait en effet qu'adeptes d'une lecture stricte du coran et d'une fidélité sans faille aux coutumes tribales, quelque chose comme 95 % des mâles de ce film considèrent l'homosexualité comme une tare irrémédiable et un péché passible de la mort. Expression favorite entendue au détour des conversations : « Si cela arrivait dans ma famille, je le tuerais de mes propres mains. » Sur de telles bases socio-psychologiques, le tour

de la question est vite vu. Il semblerait que le film ne puisse ni ne sache éviter une certaine monotonie dans la dénonciation, ni un certain manichéisme dans le propos. Du moins montre-t-il clairement l'état pour le moins réactionnaire d'une société qui, comme le rappelle un des personnages du film, ne dispose même pas des mots adéquats pour nommer et plus encore distinguer entre des réalités – l'homosexualité y est subsumée dans la même catégorie

que la pédophilie – dont elle voue l'existence aux enfers.

Echappées salutaires

Fort heureusement, quelques échappées salutaires tirent le spectacle hors de cette dialectique pour le moins stérile. C'est la personnalité touchante de Koji, garçon pour le moins intrépide qui met sa vie en jeu pour se sortir de l'enfer de l'exclusion que les siens lui réservent.

C'est la confrontation entre la famille du réalisateur et Kojin – sur le fond non moins intractable, elle fait montre d'une hospitalité sans faille vis-à-vis du jeune homme – d'où résulte un exemplaire dialogue de sourd.

Enfin, clou humoristique du film, l'intervention d'un imam thaumaturge d'obédience radicale mais si pénétré et enflammé de ses convictions – il argue de la clémence de l'islam qui permet trois tentatives de sauvetage avant la mise à mort de l'impétrant – qu'il en deviendrait sympathique. D'autant que son mode opératoire et ses recommandations – vaporisateur intensément utilisé, manière de stéthoscope dont on n'a pas bien compris la fonction, coups de férule pour extirper les djinns – valent leur pesant d'or. Quant à Kojin, le film prend le temps de le voir quitter le pays, pour se retrouver durablement cloîtré en Allemagne dans un camp de réfugiés. Le prix de ce que l'on n'ose appeler la liberté est décidément très cher à payer.

Documentaire franco-kurde de Diako Yazdani (1h27).

The New York Times

By Loren DeJonge Schulman and Paul Scharre
Feb. 12, 2020

The Iranian Missile Strike Did Far More Damage Than Trump Admits

Hundreds of our troops suffered brain trauma.
We need to reconsider the costs of military interventions.

Over 100 American soldiers have been treated for traumatic brain injuries following Iran's missile strike on Al Asad Air Base in western Iraq. The strike came in retaliation for the killing of Qassim Suleimani, the Iranian Quds Force commander, which

has become a rhetorical staple of President Trump's re-election campaign.

At the time, most of the American reaction to the strike – which included about a dozen ballistic missiles, some carrying upward of

1,100 pounds of high explosives – was muted gratitude that it was limited, there were no American casualties, and there would be no spiral of escalation.

But we soon learned that numerous American servicemembers

were being treated for brain trauma. The Pentagon's climbing numbers and mixed messages on the seriousness of the injuries show how far the military has come in responding to traumatic brain injuries (T.B.I.s) – but more important, how far it still has to go.

It is also a warning about how Americans weigh the costs of military interventions, which at best reflects only the headlines of conflict and rarely considers the long-term effects.

The creep of reports is not surprising for an injury as insidious as T.B.I. The symptoms of mild T.B.I. can be subtle, and diagnosis can take weeks or months. The fact that more than 100 troops have been found to have T.B.I. from the attack so quickly is a sign that the military's system for screening and identifying troops with the trauma is functioning.

What is still broken is how both the president and defense leaders characterize the scope and impact of brain trauma or weigh the need to mitigate its effects. In the field, American forces understand the importance of immediately examining personnel exposed to explosions for brain injury and the urgency of prevention and treatment.

But in Washington, such understanding is far behind, as we saw in the president's most likely calculated determination, shortly after the strikes, that the injuries were "not very serious."

The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have come a long way in their ability to diagnose the injury and offer treatment, but they continue to fall short on other measures needed to combat T.B.I.

In 2017, Congress mandated that the Defense Department establish a program to monitor and record blast pressure exposure for any servicemembers who may experience a blast in training or combat. A wearable blast gauge developed by DARPA in 2011 makes it possible to quantify blast pressure; that information helps to better understand the relationship between blast pressure and T.B.I., and identify troops who may be at risk for future injuries.

If troops in the missile attack had been wearing blast gauges, we would have quantifiable data on the amount of blast pressure they'd been exposed to — both for those who developed T.B.I. and those who did not. This would help the



U.S. military personnel surveying the damage at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar, Iraq, after a strike by Iranian missiles last month. Credit...Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

Defense Department better understand what level or type of exposure is problematic and inform designs for improved protective measures — helmets, bunkers or walls — against future attacks.

As a result of two years of bureaucratic foot-dragging inside the Defense Department, none of the troops hit by the Iranian missile attack were wearing the gauges.

The Iranian ballistic missile strikes could have caused brain trauma through a variety of mechanisms:

- The primary mechanism is a wall of blast pressure from an explosion. Even relatively low levels of blast exposure can result in temporary cognitive deficits.
- A secondary mechanism: Wind rushes to fill the vacuum left by the pressure wave. This can hurl shrapnel and fragments.
- A tertiary mechanism: People or things can be thrown by this wind, leading to impact concussions.
- A quaternary mechanism: Fires, toxic gases, burns or crashes can follow.

The non-primary mechanisms of injury are relatively easy to understand and protect against through traditional means such as body armor, helmets and fire-resistant uniforms.

The primary mechanism of injury — the blast pressure wave itself — is less understood. We don't know whether servicemembers at Al

Asad were injured by the blast pressure directly rather than being knocked over and hitting their heads. If Defense Department officials had done their jobs, that information could have been available.

Still, it's clear that the Defense Department's mandatory post-incident T.B.I. screening has advanced remarkably since the inconsistent mechanisms in the years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

What has been slower to adjust is a culture that has approached concussions as something to be "shaken off" or worries that diagnoses may harm their careers.

Extensive public education has mitigated some of the cultural stigma of brain trauma diagnosis and treatment, but it still has a way to go. This is why the public communications from the White House and Pentagon have been such a bumbling disaster.

The minimizing statements in the wake of the Iran missile strike by the president, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Centcom contradict the department's own extensive medical research on the severity of T.B.I. and the potential need for a lifetime of monitoring or intervention. Many initially judged these comments as part of the downward trend of transparency from the Defense Department. But slow acknowledgment is more likely a lingering hang-up from the invisibility of this injury that trickles down to both flawed short-term as-

sessments and long-term understanding of costs and risks. Such narrow lenses of the impacts of war pervade in politicians' talking points, public debate and even military training and planning.

The Defense Department needs to change its public reporting on brain trauma casualties. For too long, its official casualty statistics have significantly undercounted the true number of wounded personnel because they often miss individuals with T.B.I. As a result, the numbers severely underestimate the costs of today's wars and the long-term interventions necessary to address them.

The Defense Department's official count is 52,000 servicemembers wounded in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Over 413,000 servicemembers have been diagnosed with T.B.I. since 2000. That figure combines both combat and noncombat causes. Yet the huge spike in brain trauma numbers in the years during and following the peak of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars speak to the volume of combat-related injuries. The true number of war wounded is most likely in the hundreds of thousands.

These misleading numbers are not a deliberate deception, but the result is the same: The American public is not being told the truth about the human cost of these wars in wounded Americans.

In response to public scrutiny, Secretary Esper recently stated: "We are still learning. There's a lot more to be learned about these injuries." It's time to put that education into practice and start treating traumatic brain injury with the seriousness it deserves.

Loren DeJonge Schulman served in the Obama administration on the National Security Council staff and at the Department of Defense. Paul Scharre is a former Army Ranger who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, worked as a civilian in the Defense Department and is the author of "Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War." They are senior fellows at the Center for a New American Security.

Syrie : les menaces guerrières d'Erdogan

À l'adresse d'el-Assad et Poutine, le président turc dit que ses soldats frapperont « partout » dans la région d'Idlib.

PROCHE-ORIENT À Idlib, la contre-offensive turque est en marche. Du moins est-ce le message que Recep Tayyip Erdogan veut imprimer dans les esprits du président syrien Bachar el-Assad et de son parrain russe, Vladimir Poutine.

Le 5 février, après la mort de sept soldats et d'un civil de l'armée turque dans l'ultime province rebelle du nord-ouest de la Syrie, le chef de l'État turc avait adressé un ultimatum au régime syrien : se retirer, avant la fin du mois, de toutes les zones d'Idlib reprises à coups de bombardements et au prix de la fuite de centaines de milliers de civils, ou affronter une opération militaire d'Ankara. La mort de cinq autres soldats turcs dans des tirs du régime lundi a brusqué le calendrier. « Nous sommes déterminés, d'ici fin février, à repousser le régime en dehors des frontières de l'accord de Sotchi », a lancé mercredi le président Erdogan. Nous ferons ce qu'il faut, sans hésiter, sur terre et dans les airs », a annoncé Recep Tayyip Erdogan mercredi.

L'accord russo-turc de Sotchi, signé en septembre 2018, était censé faire d'Idlib une « zone démilitarisée ». La Turquie s'était engagée à évacuer les djihadistes du groupe Hayat Tahrir al-Cham, anciennement affiliés à al-Qaïda. Quelques centaines de soldats turcs, déployés sur 12 postes d'observation, devaient garantir le cessez-le-feu entre rebelles pro-Ankara et forces fidèles à Damas. Mais les promesses de Sotchi n'ont jamais été tenues et l'offensive du régime, engagée fin avril 2019 avec le soutien de l'aviation russe et des milices pro-Iran, a abouti ces derniers jours à une confrontation directe entre soldats turcs et syriens. « À partir d'aujourd'hui, si nos soldats déployés sur nos postes



Une colonne de véhicules militaires turcs, mercredi, à Binnish, près de la frontière syro-turque, dans la région d'Idlib.

d'observation ou ailleurs subissent la moindre attaque, nous frapperons les forces du régime partout, sans tenir compte des frontières d'Idlib ou de l'accord de Sotchi », a lancé mercredi le président Erdogan.

Déploiement à haut risque

La probabilité d'une escalade incontrôlée augmente d'heure en heure : à Idlib, la Turquie a mobilisé plus d'hommes, de véhicules et d'armement que lors de

place. La grande majorité a franchi la frontière ces dernières semaines. Ce déploiement massif est d'autant plus risqué que les militaires turcs - déjà encerclés, pour certains, par les forces syriennes loyalistes - ne bénéficient en cas d'agression, ou pour appuyer leur contre-offensive, d'aucune couverture aérienne. L'espace aérien sur Idlib est contrôlé par Moscou, qui l'interdit aux avions turcs. Pourquoi, dès lors, Recep Tayyip Erdogan expose-t-il son armée à de tels périls ? Quelle est sa stratégie à Idlib ?



toutes ses précédentes incursions en Syrie. Quelque 9 000 soldats turcs se trouveraient sur

« La Turquie est en train de forcer la main à la Russie », estime Emre Kürsat Kaya, chercheur au Centre d'études sur les affaires économiques et diplomatiques (Edam) à Istanbul. « Elle veut trouver avec Moscou - et peut-être, indirectement, avec Damas - un accord global et permanent, non seulement sur Idlib mais aussi sur le

contrôle de toutes les régions du nord de la Syrie » où l'armée turque est présente. L'enjeu est bien là. Pour Ankara, il ne s'agit pas seulement de bloquer la fuite vers ses frontières des trois millions de civils d'Idlib, alors que le pays accueille déjà difficilement plus de 3,6 millions de Syriens. Il s'agit aussi, vis-à-vis de Moscou et de Damas, de ne pas céder de terrain - psychologiquement, comme physiquement.

« Il est évident qu'après Idlib, les forces syriennes vont se concentrer sur les régions des précédentes opérations turques telles que Bouclier de l'Euphrate (entre Jarablous et al-Bab) et Rameau d'olivier (Afrin) », explique Emre Kürsat Kaya. « La Turquie ne veut surtout pas créer un précédent de recul » et être contrainte, finalement, d'abandonner ses protectorats dans le nord de la Syrie, qui visent prioritairement à empêcher l'établissement d'une région kurde autonome.

Ces derniers jours, des discussions à Ankara entre officiels turcs et russes se sont achevées sans résultat. Une délégation turque doit se rendre prochainement à Moscou pour reprendre les négociations. Au milieu de sa tirade anti-Damas, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a eu cette phrase peu relevée : « Désormais, nous ne fermerons plus les yeux sur [...] le fanatisme, la trahison, les provocations [...] de francs-tireurs au sein des groupes d'opposition qui offrent au régime un prétexte à ses attaques. » Un durcissement de l'armée turque contre les djihadistes d'Idlib ? C'est peut-être la contrepartie que Recep Tayyip Erdogan propose à Vladimir Poutine.

Sur la défensive militairement en Syrie, la Turquie menace l'armée d'Assad et la Russie

Jusqu'ici, Ankara, favorable à la rébellion, et Moscou, protectrice du régime de Damas, étaient parvenues à s'entendre. L'offensive du régime à Idlib a rompu l'équilibre.

Le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, s'est dit prêt, mercredi 12 février, à frapper les forces du régime de Damas « *n'importe où* » si les positions de la Turquie dans la région d'Idlib sont à nouveau attaquées. Le dirigeant s'exprimait devant les députés de son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur), réunis à Ankara.

L'offensive des troupes de Bachar Al-Assad sur Idlib, la dernière poche de la rébellion syrienne soutenue par la Turquie, met M. Erdogan au pied du mur. Critiqué par l'opposition kémaliste sur l'impéritie de sa politique en Syrie, incité par son allié ultranationaliste Devlet Bahçeli à porter le fer « *jusqu'à Damas* » et à « *renverser le tyran* », Recep Tayyip Erdogan doit montrer qu'il est prêt à tenir tête au monde entier. C'est dans ce rôle que ses partisans le préfèrent.

Pour montrer sa détermination, le président turc, qui est aussi le commandant en chef de l'armée, a dépêché des renforts ces derniers jours à Idlib. Des commandos et du matériel militaire, des chars, des véhicules de transport de troupes, des obusiers et des lance-roquettes multiples ont franchi la frontière.

La Russie règne en maître dans le ciel syrien

Mardi, un hélicoptère de l'armée syrienne a été abattu par un tir de roquette au sud-est de la ville assiégée. Ghaith Alsayed / AP

M. Erdogan a assuré que les avions et les hélicoptères qui



Des Syiens fuyant Idlib en masse, le 11 février. AAREF WATAD / AFP

bombardent les civils « *ne pourront plus mener leurs actions tranquillement comme avant* ». Mardi, un hélicoptère de l'armée syrienne a été abattu par un tir de roquette au sud-est de la ville assiégée.

Ses moyens sont malgré tout limités. Prêt à faire « *tout ce qui est nécessaire, sur terre et dans les airs, sans hésiter ni tergiverser* » pour chasser le régime de Damas, il est paralysé par le fait que l'espace aérien lui échappe. [La Russie y règne en maître, entre autres grâce à ses systèmes de défense anti-aérienne S-400](#), ceux-là même qui ont tant impressionné M. Erdogan qu'il en a fait l'acquisition malgré leur incompatibilité avec le matériel de l'OTAN, dont son pays est le pilier oriental.

A Idlib, l'armée d'Ankara est en mauvaise posture. Quatorze soldats ont été tués en une semaine et sept avant-postes turcs – ce qui représente des centaines d'hommes et un important matériel militaire – ont été encerclés par les forces de Bachar Al-Assad et sont désormais coupés de leur état-major.

Ces attaques n'auraient pas pu avoir lieu sans l'aval de Moscou, M. Erdogan le sait. De là son ressentiment envers son homologue russe, Vladimir Poutine, avec lequel il pensait avoir une relation privilégiée. Pour la première fois, mercredi, il a critiqué la Russie, accusée « *de commettre des massacres et de verser le sang* » à Idlib, où vivent 3,5 millions de personnes, pour une large part des déplacés du conflit.

Moscou fait la sourde oreille

Jusqu'ici, Ankara, favorable à la rébellion, et Moscou, protectrice du régime de Damas, étaient parvenues à s'entendre en Syrie malgré leur soutien à des camps opposés. En 2018, à Sotchi, la résidence estivale du président russe sur les bords de la mer Noire, MM. Poutine et Erdogan avaient trouvé langue commune sur Idlib.

Ils avaient signé en faveur du retrait des « *militants radicaux* » de la zone, d'une surveillance

conjointe et de la libre circulation des personnes sur les grands axes routiers qui traversent la province, telle l'autoroute M5 en direction d'Alep, la grande ville commerçante, aujourd'hui détruite, du nord de la Syrie. Mais l'accord a volé en éclats. Convaincue que Bachar Al-Assad l'a violé en faisant encercler les postes turcs, la Turquie menace désormais d'en sortir et d'attaquer les positions du régime d'ici la fin du mois de février.

Moscou fait la sourde oreille. Voici des mois que les Russes reprochent aux Turcs de ne pas avoir pu convaincre les factions rebelles liées à Al-Qaïda, dominantes à Idlib, de se plier aux accords signés. Estimant que les engagements n'ont pas été respectés, Vladimir Poutine se détourne de M. Erdogan et soutient son protégé Bachar Al-Assad, acharné à reprendre le contrôle de la province rebelle.

Toute la zone d'influence turque en Syrie est menacée

Aidé dans son offensive par les milices iraniennes au sol et par l'aviation russe, le régime gagne du terrain. La prise, mardi, de l'autoroute M5, aux mains des rebelles depuis 2012, est une avancée considérable qui a galvanisé Bachar Al-Assad. [Ses forces ne cessent de pousser la population civile syrienne vers la frontière turque, fermée par un mur.](#)

Plus d'un million de personnes sont massées dans la zone frontalière au nord-ouest de la province. En une semaine, 100 000 déplacés ont pris cette direction.

C'est comme si Bachar Al-Assad cherchait à punir M. Erdogan de son soutien à la rébellion en menaçant la Turquie, qui héberge déjà 3,6 millions de réfugiés syriens, d'un nouvel afflux en provenance d'Idlib.

La Turquie pourrait alors tenter de diriger ces réfugiés vers Afrin ou au nord d'Alep, dans les enclaves contrôlées par son armée. « *Un exode massif de réfugiés risquerait de provoquer un vaste chaos sur les territoires que les Turcs administrent et qu'ils essaient de présenter comme des exemples de réussite politique* », écrit l'expert américain Aaron Stein dans une [analyse publiée mardi sur le site du Club de Valdaï](#), un groupe de réflexion proche du Kremlin.

A terme, toute la zone d'influence turque dans le nord de la Syrie est menacée. Une issue

désastreuse pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui comptait installer une bonne partie des réfugiés syriens hébergés dans son pays sur ces territoires, qui vont de l'enclave kurde d'Afrin (conquise en 2018) jusqu'à la ville de Tall Abyad (2019) en passant par Azaz et Djarabulus (2016).

Etroite marge de manœuvre

La question est de savoir ce que va faire le régime de Damas : poursuivre son offensive pour récupérer toute la province d'Idlib ou faire une pause ? Cette dernière option donnerait à la Russie le temps nécessaire pour tenter de trouver un arrangement avec Ankara.

La marge de manœuvre est étroite entre les deux leaders autoritaires. Le maître du Krem-

lin a perdu patience. Le « reis », le chef turc, s'estime, lui, trahi. Chacun teste les limites de l'autre à Idlib. Mercredi, les deux hommes se sont entretenus de la situation par téléphone, sans résultats. Vladimir Poutine revient aux accords de Sotchi, Recep Tayyip Erdogan veut renverser la table. Peu après leur conversation, ce dernier a laissé éclater sa colère, dénonçant les « *promesses non respectées* ».

L'exaspération est palpable aussi côté russe. Lors d'un point de presse, Dmitri Peskov, le porte-parole du Kremlin, a accusé Ankara de ne pas respecter les accords de Sotchi et de ne rien faire pour « *neutraliser les terroristes* » qui mènent « *des attaques répétées contre [leurs] infrastructures militaires en Syrie* » : « *C'est inacceptable.* »

Les délégations font la navette. Des discussions entre militaires, membres des services et diplomates n'ont rien donné à Ankara ; elles vont se poursuivre à Moscou où une délégation turque est attendue.

Aucune rencontre au sommet n'est prévue. « *Il n'est pas aisé pour Poutine de travailler avec Erdogan, car ce dernier l'irrite fortement, mais il n'a pas le choix* », a expliqué récemment à des journalistes russes Gleb Pavlovski, une ancienne éminence grise du Kremlin. Il va devoir en passer par là, les Etats-Unis l'y invitent. En visite à Ankara mercredi, James Jeffrey, l'envoyé américain pour la Syrie, a dit tout le soutien des Etats-Unis à la Turquie dans son combat contre le régime syrien. Washington est prêt à l'aider face à « *une menace à Idlib de la part de la Russie et du gouvernement Assad* ».

Le Monde le 14 février 2020
Editorial du « Monde »

Syrie : empêcher un bain de sang à Idlib

Editorial. Les tragédies n'ont pas manqué pendant 9 ans de la guerre civile, mais celle qui est en cours autour de la ville d'Idlib est d'une ampleur jamais vue.

Les tragédies humanitaires n'ont pas manqué pendant les neuf années de la guerre civile syrienne, mais celle qui est en cours autour de la ville d'Idlib, dernier bastion de la rébellion anti-Bachar Al-Assad, dans le nord-ouest du pays, est d'une ampleur jamais vue.

Trois millions de civils se trouvent pris en étau entre 20 000 combattants rebelles, principalement djihadistes, épaulés par la Turquie, et les forces gouvernementales aidées par des bombardements russes qui n'épargnent ni les hôpitaux, ni les écoles, ni les marchés, selon une méthode déjà éprouvée par Vladimir Poutine en Tchétchénie.

Depuis l'offensive lancée en décembre 2019, 700 000 personnes ont dû quitter les zones pilonnées, provoquant « le plus grand déplacement de la pire guerre de notre génération », selon le chef du Conseil norvégien pour les réfugiés, Jan Egeland. Le temps des déplorations est

passé : le régime de Bachar Al-Assad est en train d'achever le sanglant travail de reconquête de son territoire. Le cessez-le-feu conclu en septembre 2018 entre la Turquie et la Russie était censé desserrer la pression sur Idlib. En contrepartie d'une retenue russe et d'une suspension de l'offensive de Damas, Ankara se faisait fort de contraindre les djihadistes du mouvement Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, une émanation d'Al-Qaida, à quitter la ligne de front. Ce que l'armée turque n'a pas pu ou pas voulu faire.

La reconquête par l'armée syrienne, mardi 11 février, des positions tenues par les rebelles sur l'autoroute stratégique M5 permet au régime de rouvrir l'axe stratégique Nord-Sud Damas-Alep. Mais la lenteur de l'avancée laisse entrevoir un terrible carnage si une escalade militaire finale destinée à écraser l'insurrection a lieu.

Il n'existe pas de bonne solution
Entre d'une part Damas et Moscou,

qui font peu de cas de la vie des civils qu'ils prétendent libérer des « terroristes » – l'appellation que le régime réserve à tous ses adversaires –, d'autre part la Turquie, parrain ambigu des insurgés, le pire est possible. A l'origine partenaires, Vladimir Poutine et Recep Tayyip Erdogan apparaissent désormais comme de redoutables concurrents pour exercer leur influence dans une région où Américains et Européens ont perdu leur crédibilité.

Alors que la tension monte entre Ankara et Moscou, le risque est réel d'une confrontation directe turco-syrienne, voire turco-russe. La Turquie, qui accueille déjà 3,7 millions de réfugiés, redoute que l'assaut sur Idlib ne gonfle encore leur flux. Les civils tentent en effet de gagner la zone frontalière proche, que les Russes hésitent à bombarder, et qui est déjà saturée de déplacés.

Il n'existe pas de bonne solution pour Idlib. Mais la poursuite de l'offensive militaire prétendument « fi-

nale » représente assurément la pire pour tous les protagonistes. Non seulement elle précipiterait le déplacement forcé des populations vers la Turquie, au risque de déstabiliser des régions déjà sous tension, et inciterait Ankara à reprendre son chantage aux migrants vis-à-vis de l'Union européenne, mais elle provoquerait une dissémination des djihadistes et de leurs armes en Syrie mais aussi en Turquie.

La tragédie de la guerre civile syrienne, que les pays européens et les Etats-Unis ont échoué à enrayer faute d'une stratégie cohérente et conséquente à l'égard de la rébellion anti-Assad, a déjà causé la mort de près de 500 000 personnes et forcé à fuir des millions d'autres. Seul un véritable cessez-le-feu incluant l'ensemble des groupes rebelles, et dont toutes les parties engagées seraient les garantes, peut empêcher un ultime bain de sang aux conséquences incalculables.

En Syrie avec la dame de Rakka

« Le rêve caressé par les quelque 2 millions de Kurdes de Syrie s'estompe »

Dans sa chronique, Alain Frachon, éditorialiste au « Monde », revient sur la volonté, portée par des militants comme la maire adjointe de Rakka, Leïla Mustapha, d'imaginer une autre Syrie et de refuser l'alternative « Bachar ou les barbus ».

Quelque part au bord de l'Euphrate, dans une petite ville en ruines, une jeune femme rêve d'une autre Syrie. Leïla Mustapha, 32 ans, aimerait que son pays échappe à la guerre, qui y sévit toujours, mais aussi à la dictature, qu'il s'agisse de celle de Bachar Al-Assad ou de quelque puissance étrangère. Leïla Mustapha sait de quoi elle parle. Elle est maire, très exactement maire adjointe, de Rakka, l'ex- « capitale » de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI).

Elle est Syrienne, ingénieure civile, major de sa promotion, chargée de la reconstruction d'une ville à majorité arabe. Symbole de la barbarie djihadiste, Rakka reste traumatisée, en partie démolie par les combats menés pour en chasser l'EI. Leïla Mustapha est aussi Kurde, fille de ce pays kurde syrien qui, au nord du pays, court le long de la frontière avec la Turquie.

Elle veut croire que la Syrie et notamment sa région ne sont condamnées ni à la botte de Damas ni à celle d'Ankara. Elle n'a pas peur de l'adversité, comme elle le raconte dans un livre coécrit avec la journaliste Marine de Tilly, *La femme, la vie, la liberté* (Stock, 250 p., 19,50 euros). Mais elle est bien seule, Leïla Mustapha.

Les Kurdes de Syrie ne sont plus dans l'actualité. On les a oubliés, maintenant qu'ils ont fait le boulot : un face-à-face victorieux, sur le terrain, maison à maison, contre la soldatesque islamiste. Avec Damas, ils entretiennent une relation orageuse, tantôt dans une alliance tactique, tantôt en conflit. Ils ont été

lâchés par les Russes, qui furent un temps des partenaires. Ils ont été trahis par les Etats-Unis et les Européens dont ils furent les indispensables alliés contre l'EI. Ils sont aujourd'hui attaqués par la Turquie, qui s'installe dans leur région. Mesure chiffrée de l'ingratitude manifestée à l'égard des combattants kurdes de Syrie : ils ont eu 11 000 morts et des milliers de blessés graves dans les combats contre l'EI – blessés qu'ils n'arrivent pas à venir faire soigner en Europe.

Un caractère trempé dans l'épreuve

Depuis quelques semaines, chasseurs syriens et russes pilonnent le massif d'Idlib, dans l'ouest du pays, où vivent 3 millions de personnes. Idlib est le dernier bastion de la rébellion armée contre Bachar Al-Assad. Celle-ci est, pour l'essentiel, composée de groupes islamistes, des Arabes sunnites, protégés de l'armée turque – laquelle est entrée en confrontation avec la Syrie.

Les Kurdes craignent un exode massif sur le peu de territoire qu'ils contrôlent encore. Pareil mouvement accélérerait une politique d'épuration ethnique encouragée par Ankara.

Le rêve caressé par les quelque 2 millions de Kurdes de Syrie s'estompe. Au fil de ces huit années de guerre, le principal parti autonomiste local, le PYD, a cherché à rassembler en une zone continue les trois cantons majoritairement kurdes du pays (Afrin, Kobané et Jaziré). Avec deux gros obstacles : ce Rojava, le Kurdistan syrien, est, ici et là, traversé de régions majoritaire-

ment arabes ; d'autre part, il longe la frontière avec une Turquie en guerre contre ses propres autonomistes kurdes, ceux du PKK.

C'est là qu'intervient Leïla Mustapha. Fille de Rakka, bourgade de garnison du temps du mandat français devenue riche avec un barrage sur l'Euphrate, Leïla a vécu la dictature du clan Al-Assad, puis la tyrannie sanguinaire de l'EI. Elle a connu l'ostracisme de Damas à l'égard des Kurdes, puis la guerre. Parce qu'elle est ingénieure, parce qu'elle a milité dans une petite formation, le Parti de la Syrie future, dans l'orbite du PYD, parce qu'elle est réfléchie, posée, presque timide mais avec un caractère trempé dans l'épreuve, cette jeune femme va faire l'unanimité pour codiriger la mairie de Rakka.

« Dékurdiser » la région

Dans cette ville, les Kurdes sont minoritaires, mais Rakka, à l'automne 2017, a été libérée par des forces majoritairement kurdes dirigées par le PYD. Sans ces forces, appuyées par l'aviation américaine, la peste djihadiste sévirait encore – et menacerait l'Europe.

Mais voilà, le PYD est un enfant du parti frère turc, le PKK, qui a commis l'erreur stratégique majeure, en 2013, de reprendre la lutte armée contre Ankara. Dès lors, la Turquie va moins que jamais tolérer un Rojava autonome le long de sa frontière qui, selon elle, servira de base de repli au PKK.

Peu importe qu'aucun coup de

feu n'ait été tiré contre la Turquie depuis le Rojava. Peu importe que nombre de militants kurdes se soient employés à « syrianiser » leur combat, à le distinguer du PKK, à affirmer leur singularité syrienne. Dès que Donald Trump lui a donné son feu vert, en octobre 2019, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a poursuivi son offensive dans le nord-est syrien. Ses supplétifs arabes syriens, des voyous islamistes, chassent les Kurdes de certaines de leurs places fortes, volent, pillent, terrorisent.

L'objectif d'Ankara est de « dékurdiser » la région frontalière pour s'assurer de la profondeur stratégique dans le combat contre le PKK ; celui de Damas est d'en revenir exactement à la Syrie « d'avant », qui traitait les Kurdes en sous-citoyens. Les uns et les autres écrasent des expériences menées ici et là par des Kurdes tels que Leïla Mustapha qui, ignorant le marxisme-léninisme dogmatique des origines du mouvement, entendent aujourd'hui pratiquer la démocratie municipale, la réconciliation arabo-kurde, l'égalité femmes-hommes : « la reconstruction de Rakka, je la mène non au nom de l'autonomie du Kurdistan, mais au nom de la Syrie de demain », dit-elle. Prudence politique, peut-être. Mais ce qui mériterait d'être soutenu par l'Europe ici, à Rakka, c'est cette volonté, que l'on a connue ailleurs au début de la révolte syrienne, d'imaginer une autre Syrie, de refuser l'alternative « BB » – « Bachar ou les barbus ». A Rakka, menacée de toutes parts, Leïla Mustapha poursuit l'expérience. Mais jusqu'à quand ?

The New York Times By Alissa J. Rubin
Feb. 14, 2020

Iraq doubts the culprit blamed by U.S. for attack

Iraqi military and intelligence officials have raised doubts about who fired the rockets that started a dangerous spiral of events.

NEPTIS, Iraq — The white Kia pickup turned off the desert road and rumbled onto a dirt track, stopping near a marsh. Soon there was a flash and a ripping sound as the first of the rockets fired from the truck soared toward Iraq's K-1 military base.

The rockets wounded six people and killed an American contractor, setting off a chain of events that brought the United States and Iran to the brink of war.

The United States blamed an Iraqi militia with close ties to Iran and bombed five of the group's bases. Angry Iraqis then stormed the American Embassy. The United States then killed Iran's top general. Iran then fired missiles at American forces and mistakenly shot down a passenger jet, killing 176 people.

But Iraqi military and intelligence officials have raised doubts about who fired the rockets that started the spiral of events, saying they believe it is unlikely that the militia the United States blamed for the attack, Khataib Hezbollah, carried it out.

Iraqi officials acknowledge that they have no direct evidence tying the Dec. 27 rocket attack to one group or another. And elements of Iraq's security forces have close ties to Iran, which might make them reluctant to blame an Iranian-linked force.

American officials insist that they have solid evidence that Khataib Hezbollah carried out the attack, though they have not made it public.

Iraqi officials say their doubts are based on circumstantial evidence and long experience in the area where the attack took place.

The rockets were launched from a Sunni Muslim part of Kirkuk Province notorious for attacks by the Islamic State, a Sunni terrorist



Iraqi soldiers surveying the launch site of a rocket attack that killed an American contractor on a military base near Kirkuk. Credit...Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

group, which would have made the area hostile territory for a Shiite militia like Khataib Hezbollah.

Khataib Hezbollah has not had a presence in Kirkuk Province since 2014.

The Islamic State, however, had carried out three attacks relatively close to the base in the 10 days before the attack on K-1. Iraqi intelligence officials sent reports to the Americans in November and December warning that ISIS intended to target K-1, an Iraqi air base in Kirkuk Province that is also used by American forces.

And the abandoned Kia pickup was found was less than 1,000 feet from the site of an ISIS execution in September of five Shiite buffalo herders.

These facts all point to the Islamic State, Iraqi officials say.

"All the indications are that it was Daesh," said Brig. General Ahmed Adnan, the Iraqi chief of intelligence for the federal police at K-1, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. "I told you about the three incidents in the days just before in the area — we know Daesh's movements.

"We as Iraqi forces cannot even come to this area unless we have a large force because it is not secure. How could it be that someone who doesn't know the area could come here and find that firing position and launch an attack?"

Khataib Hezbollah has denied responsibility for the attack, and no group has claimed it.

American officials, however, said they had multiple strands of intelligence indicating that Khataib Hezbollah carried it out.

American investigators examined the Kia pickup, which yielded evidence that helped attribute the attack to Khataib Hezbollah, two American officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters. They did not say what about the truck connected it to the group.

One American official said they also had intercepted communications showing the group's involvement.

The American officials said that there had been 11 rocket attacks in November and December against Iraqi bases used by American or coalition forces. One official said that for more than half of those at-

tacks, including the Dec. 27 attack, the United States had high confidence that Khataib Hezbollah was responsible.

The United States has not presented any of its intelligence publicly. Nor has it shared the intelligence with Iraq.

"We have requested the American side to share with us any information, any evidence, but they have not sent us any information," Lt. Gen. Muhammad al-Bayati, the chief of staff for former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, said in an interview.

The director general of Iraqi Intelligence and Counterterrorism, Abu Ali al-Basri, said the United States did not consult Iraq before carrying out the Dec. 29 counterattacks on Khataib Hezbollah.

"They did not ask for my analysis of what happened in Kirkuk and neither did they share any of their information," he said. "Usually, they would do both."

Despite the fact that American and Iraqi forces work side by side on counterterrorism, American intelligence and defense officials said that the United States does not always share sensitive intelligence with Iraq because Iranian operatives have penetrated the Baghdad government and will feed intelligence to Tehran.

Iraqi intelligence officials said it was difficult to assess the American assertions without seeing the American intelligence.

They said they saw nothing unusual about the truck or the rockets used in the Dec. 27 attack that would have connected them to Khataib Hezbollah. The truck was a standard Kia pickup, except that its bed had been fitted with rocket launchers, they said. The rockets — 107 mm katyushas — are used by all sides in Iraq.

>>>>>>>

>>>>>>

General Adnan said he delivered the truck to the Americans, and that American investigators removed any rocket fragments and one unexploded rocket from the Iraqi side of the base, so it would be difficult for the Iraqis to conduct a deeper forensic investigation of their own.

One discrepancy in the intelligence concerns the number of rockets fired. The Americans said that 31 rockets were fired.

Iraqi witnesses, including General Adnan, who was the first to reach the truck, counted 11.

Several Iraqi officers on the K-1 base thought there might have been as many as 16 but definitely not 31.

Ali Farhan, a farmer and the mayor of Neptis, a tiny village about four miles from K-1 and barely a mile from the launch site, said he happened to be outside talking to his brother about the next morning's plowing when he saw a truck coming from the southwest — territory friendly to the Islamic State. The truck veered onto a dirt track, went another half mile or so, stopped and turned off its lights.

About 35 minutes later, at 7:20 p.m., he saw the first rocket arc into the sky. So did General Adnan, whom the mayor had called for help and who was driving as fast as he could on the dirt road toward the truck to stop it.

"I immediately called headquarters and warned them that rockets had begun to launch toward our base," General Adnan recalled.

When he reached the truck, he found that the attack could have been worse. There were three racks of 12 launchers, but fewer than half appeared to have had rockets in them and of those four had failed to launch. That would mean a maximum of 14 rockets were fired.

The attack was hardly unanticipated. On Nov. 6, Iraq's National Security Council sent a report to the Americans noting that since last October, "ISIS terrorists have endeav-



The rockets fired at the K-1 base were launched from the back of this Kia pickup truck. Four rockets that failed to launch can be seen in their silos. Credit...Iraqi Federal Police

ored to target K-1 base in Kirkuk district by indirect fire (Katyusha rockets)."

An intelligence brief sent to United States officials on Dec. 25 said that Islamic State fighters were trying to gain ground northwest of K-1.

General Adnan said he had warned the Americans about the possibility of a rocket attack on K-1 as recently as lunch the day of the attack when the Iraqis had invited the American commanders at the base for security talks over chicken tikka, rice and kebabs.

One Iraqi Federal Police commander, Col. Talib Madhloum al-Tamimi, said he had beseeched the Americans to keep their reconnaissance balloon in the air to help prevent an attack, but the balloon was down that day for maintenance, he said.

General Adnan said three rockets fell on the Iraqi side of the K-1 base, one on the perimeter fence and about seven on the American side. At least one hit a munitions store on the American side, causing a large secondary explosion.

Unlike most of the attacks against Iraqi and American targets, this one had casualties. Four American soldiers and two Iraqi federal police of-

ficers were wounded. The civilian contractor who was killed, an Iraqi-born American named Nawres Waleed Hamid, was working as an interpreter for the Americans.

For the chief of staff of the Iraqi side of the base, Brig. Gen. Amer Isa Hassan, the logical conclusion was that the Islamic State was responsible. "The villages near here are Turkmen and Arab," he said. "There is sympathy with Daesh there. Why do we resort to blaming Hezbollah or others?"

The Islamic State has been increasingly active in this part of Kirkuk Province in the past year, carrying out near daily attacks with roadside bombs and ambushes using small arms.

Six days after the attack on the base, Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper told reporters, "As you know, last Friday, U.S. forces were attacked by Khataib Hezbollah in — at a base near Kirkuk."

When American officials informed the Iraqi prime minister they were about to bomb Khataib Hezbollah bases in retaliation, the Iraqis were startled.

Iraqi officials said the group had not had a presence in Kirkuk Province in years. The only time it was active

there, they said, was in 2014 during the early days of the fight against the Islamic State.

Muhammad Muhi, the spokesman for Khataib Hezbollah, denied that the militia was responsible for the attack on K-1. The group was only in Kirkuk Province for 80 days in 2014, he said in an interview.

If the Americans had proof that Khataib Hezbollah carried out the attack, he said, they should "share it."

American officials said that the group has operated throughout Iraq, and has routinely conducted attacks in Sunni territory.

The American attacks on Khataib Hezbollah on Jan. 2 and the drone attack that killed the Iranian and Iraqi military leaders at the Baghdad airport the next day led to widespread anger against the American presence in Iraq and a vote in Iraq's Parliament to expel all American forces.

The United States has about 5,000 troops in Iraq, whose primary mission is fighting the Islamic State and training the Iraqi military. The Iraqi government has not yet formally asked the Americans to leave but officials on both sides report that relations have been strained.

Iraqi officials say many unanswered questions remain about who was responsible for the K-1 attack.

"The identity still has not been confirmed," said Abdul Hussain al-Hunain, an aide to Mr. Abdul Mahdi who served as prime minister until Saturday. "There are certain suspicions and I do not claim to know everything, but it could be ISIS or the Baath Party," he said, referring to disgruntled remnants of the Sunni establishment that held sway over Iraq before the American invasion of 2003. "The situation is complicated in Iraq."

Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington, and Falih Hassan from Baghdad.



by Sofia Barbarani
14 Feb 2020

Hundreds of Iraqi women challenge al-Sadr's call for segregation

Shia leader's call for gender separation at anti-government rallies prompts hundreds of women to take to streets.

Baghdad, Iraq - Defiant chants and combative banners filled Tahrir Square in Iraq's capital Baghdad on Thursday as hundreds of women from all walks of life gathered to demand their rights.

The march, spearheaded and organised by women, sought to challenge a Twitter post by Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr which called for gender segregation in the anti-government rallies that have swept across the capital and southern cities.

The mercurial Shia leader, who initially backed the protest movement only to later withdraw his support and then reinstate it, had also suggested that demonstrators were making use of drugs and alcohol.

"We refuse [al-Sadr's] tweet," said 20-year-old protester Ruwayda Khteer. "We're protesting for our rights because in Iraq they've been stolen."

Fuelled by long-standing grievances, the popular uprising has seen Iraqis take to the streets to demand basic services, more job opportunities and an end to government corruption and foreign interference in the country - and women have been at the forefront of the movement.

Both the young and old have played critical roles in securing the continuation of the protests by lending their support, including as first aid responders, artists, cooks and online activists.

A new, confident generation

One result of women taking on leading roles, protesters say, is that Iraq's often conservative gender dynamics have started to shift as more



Women have participated in anti-government protests in a number of ways, including as first aid responders, artists, cooks and online activists [Sofia Barbarani/Al Jazeera]

women carve out a place for themselves in the country's public sphere.

"Society inside the square has changed," said one of the march organisers, 23-year-old Fatama Ramadan. "You can see there's a difference [in how women are perceived] between inside and outside [of Tahrir Square]."

In Iraq, where gender segregation is often the norm, protesters have challenged the country's conservative communities by sharing the same living quarters and ensuring the equal participation of both sexes.

"Taking into consideration that the challenges of violence [are] so great against them, but they have broken down all these tribal norms, the religious fatwa, the hegemony of male mentality against them. This is a new era we are living in," said 74-year-old Hanaa Edwar, an Iraqi civil rights activist.

"They are very much different from the old generation in this respect," said Edwar, who has been active in women's rights movements for more

than 50 years.

Edwar praised Iraq's young women for their public expression of anger and confidence in taking on the long-standing patriarchal norms and challenging the recent attempts to exclude them from the country's popular uprising and the public sphere. This, she went on to say, is unique to today's women of Iraq.

"These young women, they are very much different from us," she said in reference to her own generation.

"They express confidence, they express the will and determination to be at the forefront of changing Iraq," she told Al Jazeera.

Even in the more conservative cities of Najaf, Karbala, Nasiriya and Basra, where women also rallied to march, "they got ... respect from the local public opinion."

"I feel that the young people will never give up ... there is nothing to lose, we have nothing to lose. We are ready to die for the change and for our homeland," said Edwar.

Wileding large Iraqi flags, the

women in Tahrir Square also sang for their country. "We will give our soul and blood to Iraq and only Iraq," they chimed in unison.

Three women led the multitude: One wore a symbolic gas mask, another donned a black hijab, while the third wore a red and white keffiyeh around her head.

"Who is [al-Sadr] to say men and women should be separate?" remarked Kamal Dabr, one of the people responsible for the security of the march. Beside him, men interlaced fingers in a long human chain set up to ensure the safety of the event.

According to Dabr, he and other male protesters had been warned on Wednesday night of a potential attack on the march. Al-Sadr's die-hard supporters have recently attacked women protesters, said Dabr.

The men, tasked with keeping the women safe from ill-intentioned on-lookers, kept a watchful eye as the women marched.

"Our voice is not shameful, it's the key of the revolution," came the collective response to what they view as al-Sadr's attempt to marginalise them. "Stop discrimination against women, stop gender segregation," they chanted.

Amid Baghdad's crowd of pinks and purples reminiscent of International Women's Day, Shams, a protester wearing oversized sunglasses and an infectious smile brandished a sign that read: "Women rule the world."

"Muqtada al-Sadr said women shouldn't be here but we're proving him wrong," said the 21-year-old.

>>>>>

>>>>>

Other placards mirrored the anger and frustration of a generation of women yearning for change.

"I can't believe I'm still protesting this s***," read a sign held by a keffiyeh-clad young woman.

"The woman is no less than the man, the female participants [also] fought in the protests," said 31-year-old journalist Shahad al-Khaleel who left her adoptive home of Jordan in October to join her countrymen and women in the anti-government movement.

Over the course of the warm winter morning, celebratory ululations, chants and songs rang out through the heart of the capital.

Onlookers perched on either side of the march, curious to get a glimpse of the boisterous women sweeping through Tahrir.

Some men responded to the women with chants of their own. "Heroes, we come to support you," they sang.

But not everyone was in agreement

with the women's chants. One young man said he supported the women but was quick to add that he agreed with gender segregation.

"We are a religious country, and Muqtada al-Sadr refuses such contact with women," he said.

One elderly woman, disagreeing with the anti-Sadr sentiment of the march, pushed her way out of the crowd, waving her arms and hurling insults at the other women. "I was supporting you, but now you're chanting against cleric Muqtada al-

Sadr," she yelled, wielding a small Iraqi flag.

On Thursday evening, al-Sadr took to Twitter to attack the march, calling it sinful and warning against the country's moral demise.

"We shall not be slaves to temptation and the infidel West," he said.

In what appeared to be a move to counter Thursday's protest, al-Sadr called on women to join his own march on Friday.



Feb 14 2020

Turkish court acquits dismissed Kurdish mayor Ahmet Türk

A Turkish court on Friday has acquitted Kurdish politicians Ahmet Türk, dismissed mayor of the southeastern Mardin province, and Necla Yıldırım, former mayor of Mardin's Mazıdağı district, pro-Kurdish news agency Mezopotamya reported on Friday.

The case had been cited as one of the reasons for dismissal in the interior ministry's decision to remove Türk from his seat as mayor in 2016 and again in 2019 after his re-election. The decision to dismiss Yıldırım in 2016 also referred to the same case.

Türk and Yıldırım, as well as other members of the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), faced charges of terrorist propaganda for attending the funeral ceremony of a mem-



ber of the Syrian-Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers to be the Syrian wing of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

All charges against Türk were politically motivated, Türk's lawyer Erdal Kuzu was quoted by Mezopotamya as saying during the hearing.

Türk's attendance to the funeral did not constitute any act of violence or praise of the YPG, and served the purpose of offering condolences to the family who were Türk's constituents, Kuzu said. "A prison sentence could lead to the punishment of all people in the region."

The interior ministry has removed from office 23 of the

65 HDP mayors since the local elections in March 2019, on allegations of terrorism ranging from propaganda to leadership, while a total of 95 mayors elected from HDP's sister Democratic Regions Party (DBP) were removed from office following the breakdown of a peace process between Turkey and the PKK in 2015.



February 15-2020

PM Masrour Barzani reiterates call on Russia to mediate for inclusive Syria

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Saturday and discussed a range of issues, most notably the situation in Syria as it pertains to the Kurds.

Lavrov and Barzani “recognized the need to de-escalate tensions, especially in Syria,” a tweet from Barzani’s account read. “I reiterated my request that Russia helps to mediate a long-term political settlement in Syria that respects the rights of all, including the Kurds.”

Moscow has been spearheading an initiative to facilitate talks between the self-administration in northeastern Syria and the cen-



Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani ahead of a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 15, 2020. (Photo: PM's Office)

tral government in Damascus. A senior official in the Kurdish-led



Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) recently told Kurdistan 24 that the two sides had made significant progress.

At the same time, a once divided Syrian Kurdish front is starting to come together to settle long-held disputes. Earlier in the month, the Kurdish National

Council in Syria (KNC) reopened its offices in the Kurdish regions of the country after improving ties with the Kurdish component of the SDC, which, along with its armed wing, lead northeastern Syria.

During the Barzani and Lavrov meeting, the two sides also discussed other regional developments, including the unrest in Iraq, with the top Russian diplomat affirming that Moscow hopes Iraq stabilizes and prevents the terrorist activities of the so-called Islamic State, a statement from Barzani’s office said.

The two officials also highlighted improving Erbil–Moscow relations.

Editing by Karzan

Le Point

15/02/2020
© 2020 AFP

A Strasbourg, plusieurs milliers de Kurdes réclament la libération d'Öcalan

Plusieurs milliers de Kurdes ont défilé samedi à Strasbourg, comme chaque année, pour réclamer la libération de leur chef historique Abdullah Öcalan, arrêté il y a 21 ans et condamné à la prison à vie en Turquie.

Partis en fin de matinée des alentours de la gare de Strasbourg, les manifestants ont été estimés à environ 12.000 par les organisateurs et 4.200 selon la police. Un meeting politique est prévu en début d'après-midi dans le sud de la ville.

"Depuis 21 ans, il (Abdullah Öcalan) est en prison et depuis 21 ans, des millions de personnes le soutiennent toujours", a souligné Agit

Polat, porte-parole du Conseil démocratique kurde en France, espérant une "pression" internationale pour la libération du chef historique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et que soit mis un terme à "la politique de guerre" du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Déambulant derrière une banderole tenue uniquement par des femmes et sur laquelle était inscrit "Liberté pour Öcalan, statut politique pour le Kurdistan", les manifestants agitaient de nombreux drapeaux avec la photo d'Abdullah Öcalan et scandaient notamment "Vive notre leader".

Avec un foulard aux couleurs kurdes (jaune, rouge et vert) au-

tour du cou, Ya ?ar, 36 ans, est venu presque tous les ans participer à cette marche annuelle depuis 1999. "C'est important de montrer que nous sommes derrière notre président et que la liberté doit être pour tous au Kurdistan", explique cet habitant de la région allemande de Sachsen-Anhalt, toutefois peu optimiste sur les perspectives à venir pour son peuple.

Ce grand rassemblement kurde se tient à Strasbourg, ville du Conseil de l'Europe -dont la Turquie est membre- et de la Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme, chaque année depuis l'arrestation le 15 février 1999 d'Abdullah Öcalan.

Le chef de la rébellion kurde du PKK est détenu sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, située au large d'Istanbul, dans un isolement quasi-total.

"En prenant en otage M. Öcalan, c'est tout un peuple qui est pris en otage. (...) On refuse de vivre sans notre leader, notre langue, notre culture, nos valeurs", a déclaré Hélène Erin, porte-parole des organisateurs de la manifestation, critiquant que "l'Europe laisse faire".

Cette manifestation annuelle kurde avait rassemblé l'année passée 7.000 personnes, selon la police et 17.000 selon les organisateurs.

Nassiriya, dernier bastion de la révolte irakienne

Dans le Sud chiite, la mobilisation contre le pouvoir de Bagdad continue, alors qu'elle s'affaiblit ailleurs. Le mouvement de désobéissance civile, qui a fermé établissements d'enseignement et administrations, reste notamment suivi.

Dans une tente aménagée en bibliothèque sur l'avenue qui mène à la statue du poète Mohammed Saïd Al-Habboubi, dans le centre-ville de Nassiriya, dans le sud de l'Irak, des hommes assis en cercle écoutent, religieusement, un quadragénaire exposer ses idées. « *Nassiriya appartient désormais à l'ensemble de l'Irak. Nombreux la voit comme la place forte de la contestation. Cela nous rend fiers et nous donne une responsabilité. Nous sommes fatigués, mais nous ne pouvons le montrer et nous devons dépasser cette crise en relançant la mobilisation* », appelle l'activiste, aussitôt entraîné dans un débat animé par son auditoire.

Quatre mois et demi après le début des manifestations antipouvoir à Bagdad et dans le Sud chiite, et alors que les partis chiites au pouvoir font bloc pour étouffer le mouvement et former un gouvernement autour de Mohammed Taoufiq Al-laoui, ce bastion contestataire résiste. Le sit-in n'a rien perdu de son animation. Le mouvement de désobéissance civile, qui a fermé établissements d'enseignement et administrations, reste suivi. Des abris en brique, ornés de fresques colorées honorant les 170 « *martyrs* » de la ville, ont été érigés à la place des tentes incendiées lors de la dernière attaque contre le sit-in, le 24 janvier.

De jeunes ouvriers désœuvrés qui campent sur la place Habboubi se mélangent aux étudiants et étudiantes, présents quasi quotidiennement. Des hommes de tribu en tenue traditionnelle conversent avec des employés en costume et des notables de la ville autour d'un thé. « *Les manifestants ne renonceraient pas à cause du sang des martyrs, de la colère, des erreurs politiques répétées, du rejet du professionnalisme et du fort sentiment patriotique. La société de Nassiriya est unie derrière ces objectifs* », assure Nasser, un acti-

viste de 30 ans, qui réclame des élections anticipées pour se débarrasser d'une classe politique qu'il juge corrompue et incompétente.

Nassiriya ne manque pas de quartiers défavorisés pour alimenter la contestation, mais elle a surtout une tradition que tous ont à cœur d'honorer. « *L'historien Hanna Batawu a dit de Nassiriya qu'elle avait un esprit indompté du fait de sa géographie, de sa riche histoire et culture, de son sens de la résistance et de la résilience* », poursuit Nasser. Ville d'intellectuels et terre tribale, elle a été tour à tour au cœur des révoltes contre l'occupation britannique dès 1920, le lieu de naissance irakien du communisme et du baasisme, et le foyer du soulèvement chiite contre Saddam Hussein, avec ses marais environnants où les insurgés ont pris le maquis.

« Tribus fortes et soudées »

Depuis octobre 2019, Nassiriya porte à nouveau le flambeau de la contestation. Après un massacre qui a coûté la vie à 29 manifestants, le 28 novembre 2019, elle a chassé le gouverneur militaire tout juste nommé, le général Djamil Al-Shammari, et contribué à la chute du premier ministre Adel Abdel-Mahdi. Les contestataires de Nassiriya ont depuis lancé plusieurs ultimatums au gouvernement et l'un des plus célèbres d'entre eux, Alaa Al-Rikabi, a proposé sa candidature au poste de premier ministre. Mais, alors que, depuis fin janvier, les sit-in de Bagdad et des autres villes subissent les assauts répétés des partisans du chef populiste chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr, la ville est relativement épargnée.

« *Ils ont essayé d'étouffer le mouvement mais, à Nassiriya, les gens sont plus forts qu'ailleurs et il y a très peu de sadristes ici* », explique le cheikh Asad Al-Nasri. Depuis qu'il s'est désolidarisé de Moqtada Al-Sadr, lorsque ce dernier a pris ses distances avec la contestation le

24 janvier, l'imam sadriste a quitté Nadjaf pour s'installer dans une tente place Habboubi, sous la bonne garde de quelques fidèles, inquiets des menaces que l'imam reçoit de chefs sadristes. « *Je suis venu apporter mon soutien aux manifestants de Nassiriya, qui réclament les droits et la patrie que les partis et l'Iran leur ont volés. Mon nom, ma stature d'homme religieux leur donnent plus de pouvoir* », assure le cheikh Nasri, issu d'une tribu de Nassiriya.

L'identité tribale, fortement marquée dans la province, nourrit la témérité des manifestants. Et, bien que conservatrices et souvent cooptées par les pouvoirs en place, les tribus s'interposent quand l'un des leurs est menacé, lourdement armées au besoin. « *Les tribus ici sont fortes et soudées, à la différence de Bagdad. Elles se sont mobilisées à plusieurs reprises en faveur des manifestants* », poursuit le cheikh Nasri. Lors du massacre perpétré par les forces du général Shammari, fin novembre, des membres de tribus sont ainsi apparus, en armes, dans les rues de Nassiriya pour mettre fin au cycle de violences.

« *Quand Djamil Al-Shammari a appris que nous le recherchions, il s'est enfui à Bagdad. On a demandé au chef de la police de nous le livrer pour rendre justice. Je suis allé à la rencontre des manifestants pour les empêcher d'attaquer le commissariat* », témoigne le cheikh Ali Hussein Khayoun. Depuis son fief de Chatra, le jeune cheikh de 36 ans règne sur quelque 100 000 hommes dans la province et une petite lionne apprivoisée de 8 mois. Beaucoup de membres de sa tribu ont rejoint la contestation, lui la soutient autant par conviction que par révérence à la marjaya, la direction religieuse chiite.

Nombreuses menaces

Son soutien logique au sit-in et les avertissements qu'il adresse régu-

lièrement aux autorités et aux responsables politiques lui valent de nombreuses menaces. Des vitres blindées perforées d'impacts de balles trônent dans son jardin. Sa voiture a été attaquée à la mitrailleuse en décembre par les gardes d'un député de Chatra alors qu'il venait empêcher les manifestants d'incendier sa maison. « *Je suis encore intervenu récemment auprès de responsables de partis pour empêcher que de nouvelles attaques soient menées contre les sit-in de Nassiriya et de Chatra* », assure-t-il.

Sur la place Habboubi, un militant sadriste lâche, avant de s'éclipser : « *Cette contestation sera bientôt finie : les chefs de tribu ont été payés*. » Seize chefs de tribu ont lancé un appel au calme en direction des manifestants, le 8 février. Dans la maison d'hôte de la tribu Albou Chama, au milieu des marais, le porte-parole de cette initiative, le cheikh Adam Mo'an Safaa Al-Ghezzi, assure soutenir la contestation et comprendre la colère des jeunes manifestants. Le chef tribal plaide toutefois pour donner une chance au premier ministre désigné Allaoui et exige que les manifestants cessent de bloquer les routes et les écoles. « *Il y a un risque que des étrangers profitent des problèmes sécuritaires pour attaquer la prison de la province, où sont détenus de nombreux terroristes* », plaide-t-il.

Tout cela n'est qu'un « *spectacle* » aux yeux du cheikh Khayoun. « *Peu sont honnêtes quand ils disent soutenir la contestation, la plupart ont soutenu tous les gouvernements depuis 2003 contre prébendes et ils reçoivent de l'argent pour étouffer la contestation* », dit-il. Le jeune cheikh avertit du risque de guerre civile. « *Les manifestants pourraient finir par prendre les armes pour se défendre de nouvelles attaques si les cheikhs ne font rien pour s'interposer* », prévient-il avant de lâcher dans un soufre : « *Ce pays n'a pas d'avenir*. »

En Turquie, la romancière Asli Erdogan acquittée

La journaliste était jugée pour « appartenance à une organisation terroriste » après avoir écrit des articles dans un journal prokurde.

Un tribunal d'Istanbul a acquitté, vendredi 14 février, la journaliste et romancière turque Asli Erdogan, jugée pour « appartenance à une organisation terroriste » et « atteinte à l'intégrité de l'Etat », dans le cadre d'un procès à rallonge, emblématique de la dérive de l'institution judiciaire en Turquie. « *On jugeait ici la liberté de pensée et d'expression. A partir de maintenant, nous espérons la même issue pour tous les journalistes incarcérés et en procès* », a déclaré son avocat, Erdan Dogal, aux soutiens de l'auteure présents dans les couloirs du palais de justice de Caglayan, à Istanbul.

Asli Erdogan (sans lien de parenté avec le président turc), qui réside en Allemagne, n'était pas présente. Voici quatre ans que cette femme de 52 ans est harcelée judiciairement pour avoir écrit des articles pour *Özgür Gündem*, un journal prokurde qui a été fermé après la tentative de coup d'Etat en 2016. Aux yeux du pouvoir turc, collaborer à ce quotidien vaut appartenance au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation armée en lutte contre Ankara depuis plus de trente ans. Une accusation aberrante selon les partisans d'Asli Erdogan. Plus de neuf ans de prison étaient requis contre elle.

Dans un texte lu par son avocat lors de l'audience de vendredi, la romancière a estimé que les accusations qui la visaient, fondées uniquement sur ses textes littéraires, « *sont une chose que la raison peut difficilement accepter au XXI^e siècle* ». A travers ses livres, ses articles, qu'a-t-elle fait, sinon « *faire entendre*



La romancière turque Asli Erdogan le 23 juillet 2018 à Francfort. DANIEL ROLAND / AFP

les voix des victimes » ? Un engagement qui lui a valu d'être arrêtée sans ménagement à l'aube du 17 août 2016 à son domicile stambouliote. Ecrouée, elle a passé 136 jours à la prison pour femmes de Bakirköy, surpeuplée du fait des purges menées par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan en réponse au putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016.

La répression qui se met en place vise tout particulièrement les intellectuels. Universitaires, journalistes, artistes, militants de la société civile sont emprisonnés, condamnés, poursuivis, privés de leur passeport, de leur emploi. Plus de 180 organes de presse sont fermés sur simple décret présidentiel, plus de 100 journalistes sont emprisonnés.

Le sort d'Asli Erdogan, dont les livres ont été traduits en plusieurs langues, suscite alors une vague d'indignation à travers le monde et jette une lumière crue sur la nouvelle Turquie de M. Erdogan. La solidarité s'organise,

il faut faire vite car son état de santé se dégrade. Asli sombre dans la dépression en prison. Le 29 décembre 2016, sa libération est prononcée. « *Rien ne compensera jamais un jour de prison* », dira-t-elle à sa sortie.

« **Je ne suis qu'une écrivaine** »

L'action judiciaire contre elle n'est pas éteinte pour autant. Les audiences du procès se poursuivent, il lui est interdit de quitter la Turquie. Les autorités mettront dix mois à lui restituer son passeport. « *On me charge comme si j'étais la fondatrice du PKK, alors que je ne suis pas kurde, que je ne parle pas le kurde, que je n'ai aucune expérience politique ou militaire. Je ne suis qu'une écrivaine* », expliquait-elle au *Monde* en avril 2017, quatre mois après sa sortie de prison.

Son acquittement prouve que la mobilisation internationale a fini par payer. Vendredi, le tribunal a également acquitté Bilge Aykut et la linguiste Necmiye Alpay,

coaccusées dans le même procès. Le Pen Club America, qui défend plusieurs intellectuels turcs poursuivis, s'est dit « *soulagé* » par l'acquittement des trois femmes. En revanche l'organisation a déploré que les charges aient été maintenues contre quatre autres collaborateurs de *Özgür Gündem*, les journalistes Zana Kaya, Inan Kizilkaya, Kemal Sancili et l'avocate Eren Keskin.

« *Nous continuons à demander l'abandon des charges contre eux dans cette affaire, ainsi que la libération de toutes les personnes injustement emprisonnées en Turquie pour leurs opinions pacifiques* », a déclaré vendredi Karin Deutsch Karlekar, directrice des programmes de PEN America pour la protection de la liberté d'expression. Moins connus internationalement, les derniers prévenus de l'affaire du journal *Özgür Gündem* risquent des dizaines d'années de prison pour leurs articles, leurs propos, leurs opinions.

« *Je n'ai jamais tenu une arme à feu de toute ma vie. Je pense différemment de l'idéologie officielle sur la question kurde, la question arménienne et la question chypriote. J'en ai payé le prix à plusieurs reprises. Je suis une militante des droits universels* », a expliqué vendredi Eren Keskin. « *Fermer des journaux et punir des journalistes, c'est sombrer dans les ténèbres. Le journalisme ne peut pas être jugé. Le journalisme n'est pas un crime* », a déclaré Inan Kizilkaya, l'ancien rédacteur en chef de *Özgür Gündem*, qui a passé quatorze mois en détention préventive.

The New York Times

By Patrick Kingsley
Feb. 17, 2020

Highly Secretive Iranian Rebels Are Holed Up in Albania. They Gave Us a Tour.

Depending on whom you ask, the People's Jihadists are Iran's government-in-waiting or a duplicitous terrorist cult that forbids sexual thoughts. What are they doing in Albania?

ALBANIA DISPATCH MANEZ, Albania

In a valley in the Albanian countryside, a group of celibate Iranian dissidents have built a vast and tightly guarded barracks that few outsiders have ever entered.

Depending on whom you ask, the group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Jihadists, are either Iran's replacement government-in-waiting or a duplicitous terrorist cult. Journalists are rarely allowed inside the camp to judge for themselves, and are sometimes rebuffed by force.

But after President Trump's decision to assassinate Qassim Suleimani, a powerful Iranian general, it seemed worth trying again. Would a group that claims to want a democratic, secular Iran allow a reporter inside their camp?

The group's loudest allies include Rudolph W. Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, and John R. Bolton, his former National Security Adviser. Both have received tens of thousands of dollars for speaking at the group's conferences, where these influential Americans describe the People's Jihadists as Iran's most legitimate opposition.

Initially, the group ignored several requests for access. So less in hope than desperation, I drove to its base and presented my credentials to a guard.

Three hours later, shortly before sunset, I got a call. To my surprise, I was being allowed inside. So began a series of interviews, propaganda sessions and tours that lasted until



Playing chess at the camp. Credit...Tara Todras-Whitehill for The New York Times

1:30 a.m. A New York Times photographer was admitted several days later.

The group perhaps hoped to correct the impression left by previous journalistic encounters. A visit in 2003 by a Times reporter to the group's former base in Iraq ended badly after her subjects spoke from a rehearsed script, and she was barred from talking to people in private.

This time around, most residents were off limits, but officials did allow private interviews with several members.

At my request, these included Somayeh Mohammadi, 39, whose family has argued for nearly two decades that she is being held against her will.

"This is my choice," said Ms. Mohammadi, after her commanders left the room. "If I want to leave, I can leave."

While the group may not have tried to hide Ms. Mohammadi,

there were several odd and telling moments when secrets were tightly held.

In particular, senior officials stumbled when asked about the whereabouts of the group's nominal leader, Massoud Rajavi, who vanished in 2003.

"Where is he?" said Ali Safavi, the group's main representative in Washington. "Well, we can't talk about that, that's ..."

He trailed off, staring at his feet.

Is he still alive? Is he in Albania?

"We can't talk about it," Mr. Safavi replied, after several seconds of silence.

Founded in 1965 to oppose the Shah of Iran, the group later rejected the theocracy that replaced him.

Immediately following the revolution, the group attracted significant public support and emerged as a leading source of

opposition to the new theocratic regime, according to Professor Ervand Abrahamian, a historian of the group.

The group claims it still attracts significant support, but Mr. Abrahamian said its popularity plummeted after becoming more violent in the early 1980s.

"When you talk to people who lived through the revolution, and you mention the name 'Mujahedeen', they shudder," said Mr. Abrahamian.

By the 1980s, the group's ideology had begun to center on Mr. Rajavi and his wife, Maryam.

To prove their devotion to the Rajavis, members were told to divorce their spouses and renounce romance.

At the time, the group was based in Iraq, under the protection of Saddam Hussein.

Its destiny changed after the American-led invasion of Iraq. After an initial standoff, the group, also known as the M.E.K., gave up its weapons. Despite having been listed by America as a terrorist organization in 1997, it was placed under American protection.

But in 2009, American troops ceded responsibility for the M.E.K. to the Iraqi government. Led by politicians sympathetic to Iran, the Iraqi authorities tacitly allowed Iran-allied militias to attack the group.

American and United Nations diplomats began searching for a safer country to house the

group. After intensive lobbying by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, the American government also removed them from a list of terrorist organizations in 2012.

A year later, they were finally welcomed by Albania. The Albanian government hoped its hospitality would curry favor with Washington, according to the foreign minister between 2013 and 2019, Ditmir Bushati.

The group purchased several fields in a valley 15 miles west of Tirana, the capital, and built a camp there.

When I visited, the base seemed oddly empty. The group claims it houses about 2,500 members. But across the two days, we saw no more than 200.

The others seemed to have been sequestered away — or to have left the group altogether.

Dozens of former members now live independently in Albania. I met 10 of them, who each described being brainwashed into a life of celibacy.

Inside the group, they said romantic relationships and sexual thoughts were banned, contact with family highly restricted, and friendships discouraged.

All recounted being forced to participate in self-criticism rituals, whereby members would confess to their commanders any sexual or disloyal thoughts they had.

“Little by little, you are broken,” said Abdulrahman Mohammadian, 60, who joined the group in 1988 and left in 2016. “You forget yourself and you change your personality. You only obey rules. You are not yourself. You are just a machine.”

The group strongly denied the accusations and portrays many of its critics, including Mr. Mohammadian, as Iranian spies.

I was taken on a three-hour tour of a museum about the M.E.K.'s history, where the exhibits did not mention Saddam Hussein or forced celibacy. Instead, they focused on the group's persecution.

Some rooms had been turned into replica torture chambers, to explain how Iranian jailers punished and interrogated supporters during the 1980s.

In each room, members waited in silence for me. These turned out to be survivors of the torture — ready to personally explain each method of repression.

One survivor, Raheem Mousavi, stood beside a bloodied



A cafe in Tirana where Iranian defectors from the M.E.K. often gather. Credit... Tara Todras-Whitehill for The New York Times

mannequin and slowly detailed the four different techniques the Iranian torturers used to beat him. The process culminated in being whipped by a metallic cat-o'-nine tails.

Searching for influence, the group has turned increasingly to the internet.

I was shown a recording studio, where two musicians compose anti-regime songs and music videos for release on Iranian social media.

I wasn't shown the computer suites, which defectors had por-

trayed as a kind of troll farm: junior members using multiple accounts on Facebook and Twitter, typing messages that criticize the Iranian government, lionize the M.E.K. leadership and promote its paid lobbyists.

When Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Bolton made public speeches in recent years, members were ordered “to take a particular line and tweet it 10 times from different accounts,” said Mr. Mohammadian, the former member.

I was taken to an empty gym, and then to a small cafeteria. It was already close to midnight, but a small group of women had been told to wait up for me.

They scoffed at the idea of the troll farm. As for the limits on their private lives, they said such discipline was necessary when battling as cruel an adversary as the government of Iran.

“You can't have a personal life,” said Shiva Zahedi, “when you're struggling for a cause.”

After I left, the group put me in touch with three former American military officers who had helped guard an M.E.K. camp in Iraq after the American invasion.

Each spoke glowingly about the M.E.K., and said its members

had been free to leave since the American military began protecting it in 2003.

American officers had access to every area of the Iraqi base, and found no prison cells or torture facilities, said Brig. Gen. David Phillips, who commanded the military policemen guarding the camp in 2003 and 2004.

“I wanted to find weapons, I wanted to find people tied to beds,” General Phillips said. “We never found it.”

But other records and witnesses gave a more complex account.

Capt. Matthew Woodside, a former naval reservist who oversaw American policy at the Iraqi camp between 2004 and 2005, was not one of those whom the M.E.K. suggested I contact.

He said that in reality American troops did not have regular access to camp buildings or to group members whose relatives said they were held by force.

The M.E.K. leadership tended to let members meet American officials and relatives only after a delay of several days, Captain Woodside said.

“They fight for every single one of them,” he said.

It became so hard for some members, particularly women, to flee that two of them ended up trying to escape in a delivery truck, he recalled.

“I find that organization absolutely repulsive,” Captain Woodside said. “I am astounded that they're in Albania.”

Besar Likmeta contributed reporting.

Le président Macron veut lutter contre les ingérences de la Turquie en France

Inquiétude à propos des «écoles turques» hors contrat, existantes ou en projet, sur lesquelles la République n'a pas de contrôle.

Le président français va-t-il enfin s'attaquer aux ingérences de la Turquie en France? C'est en tout cas ce qu'il a promis, fin janvier, aux quelques 200 participant-es du dîner annuel du «Crif arménien» dont il était l'invité d'honneur. Au cours de cette soirée, Emmanuel Macron a évoqué sa nouvelle bataille: la «lutte contre le communautarisme, [...] le séparatisme [islamiste] dans l'État, et les ingérences étrangères». Et c'est à Mulhouse, ville à forte communauté turque, qu'il va lancer cette bataille, mardi 18 février.



Attendu à Mulhouse, son discours devrait aborder le thème de la reconquête républicaine, selon l'Élysée. | Ludovic Marin / AFP

«Les ingérences turques sont une réalité. Elles ne datent pas d'hier, mais se sont renforcées ces dernières années parallèlement au basculement autocratique et islamo-nationaliste d'Ankara, décrit un haut fonctionnaire, sous le sceau de l'anonymat. Ces ingérences ont pour but de contrôler la «diaspora» turque en tant que relai des idées «islamo-nationalistes» sunnites du pouvoir turc, c'est-à-dire anti-kurdes, anti-aléviens, anti-arméniennes. Ankara cherche à jouer la carte du groupe de pression capable d'influencer les élus locaux français durant les municipales, voire des élus nationaux, dans les relations franco-turques.» Ce que confirme le chercheur Svante Cornel, selon lequel l'objectif est de faire de la diaspora turque une «arme» politique au profit d'Ankara.

Ces ingérences sont particulièrement sensibles dans nos écoles et collèges publics, ainsi que dans les secteurs périscolaire et éducatif en général. À la manœuvre, un réseau «d'ensei-

gnants et d'imams, tous fonctionnaires turcs envoyés en France, ainsi que des groupes ouvrant des écoles hors contrat», poursuit notre interlocuteur. «Les activités éducatives permettent en effet à Ankara de contrôler, surveiller et instrumentaliser la diaspora», abonde le chercheur Ahmet Erdi Öztürk.

La Turquie seule à refuser la réforme des Elco

En première ligne, les Elco (enseignements de langue et de culture d'origine), mis en place dans les années 1970 pour permettre aux enfants d'immigré-es (d'origine algérienne, marocaine, tunisienne, portugaise, espagnole, italienne, yougoslave, turque) de ne pas couper les liens avec leur pays d'origine. Les cours destinés aux enfants et adolescent-es d'origine turque sont dispensés au sein

des établissements publics français par des enseignant-es rémunéré-es et envoyé-es par Ankara, qui sont autour de 200 actuellement.

«Il a été impossible d'obtenir quoi que ce soit des Turcs, ils ont constamment refusé de se conformer à ces nouvelles directives.»

Un haut fonctionnaire

Cela ne coûte rien à l'État français, qui n'a en revanche pas son mot à dire sur le choix de ces enseignant-es, qui se trouvent être souvent proches du parti islamo-nationaliste (AKP) au pouvoir, voire issu-es d'établissements destinés à former des imams en Turquie. En 2016, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, alors ministre de l'Éducation natio-

nale, avait lancé une réforme des Elco exigeant que ces professeur-es parlent le français et soient qualifié-es pour enseigner le turc.

«Or il a été impossible d'obtenir quoi que ce soit des Turcs, ils ont fait la sourde oreille, et ont constamment refusé de se conformer à ces nouvelles directives, à la différence des Marocains, des Portugais et même des Algériens», selon ce haut fonctionnaire. Un élément qui prouverait que les enseignant-es choisi-es et envoyé-es par Ankara ne le seraient pas toujours pour leur qualification pédagogique et leur maîtrise du français.

Des écoles communautaristes

Même schéma pour les hommes de religion. En France, le culte musulman à destination des Turc-ques est souvent du ressort d'imams turcs, lesquels

sont dans leur pays des fonctionnaires sélectionnés, envoyés et rémunérés par leur autorité de tutelle, la présidence des affaires religieuses (Diyanet), basée à Ankara, qui relève directement du président Erdoğan. Là encore, cela ne coûte rien à la France qui n'a pas vraiment son mot à dire sur le choix des imams. Or, selon des documents confidentiels que nous avons pu consulter, plusieurs de ces imams ont pu par le passé rédiger des rapports sur des ressortissants turcs ou franco-turcs vivant sur le sol français et opposés au pouvoir turc.

Il existe au moins cinq écoles «turques» en France, et plusieurs projets d'établissements à venir, gérés par des associations voire par des confréries religieuses aux liens plus ou moins étroits avec Ankara, comme «l'Union turco-islamique des affaires religieuses en France (Ditib), le mouvement Millî Görüş, l'association COJEP-UED, les confréries religieuses des Süleymanci, Menzilci et Naqshibendi». Par ailleurs, Ankara soutient l'ouverture de

cours de langue et de culture turque, à destination des enfants de la diaspora, parfois avec certaines de ces associations et confréries. Le contenu de l'enseignement qui est dispensé dans ces écoles et ces cours hors contrat échappe à tout contrôle. Le créationnisme peut y être préféré aux théories de l'évolution, par exemple, et la laïcité à la française dénoncée. Le président français a laissé entendre, toujours fin janvier lors du diner annuel du conseil de Coordination des organisations arméniennes de France (CCAF), qu'«il sera mis fin à toutes les pratiques éducatives qui ne respectent pas les règles, les lois, les programmes de l'école de la République [...] Je serai, sur ce point, intraitable», a-t-il affirmé.

Stratégie à l'échelle européenne

Or l'enjeu pour le gouvernement islamo-nationaliste turc dépasse de loin quelques cours ou écoles communautaristes en France. Il concerne une stratégie globale à l'échelle de toute l'Europe.

Selon Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, sous couvert d'engagement auprès de la diaspora turque, le pouvoir a instauré «un appareil d'état transnational dont la Direction des Turcs de l'étranger et des populations affiliées (YTB), fondée en 2010, constitue le sommet et qui comprend les Instituts Yunus Emre, l'Agence de coopération et de coordination (Tika), le Conseil des relations économiques avec l'étranger (Deik), un coordinateur [...] rattaché au président de la République, les différentes branches internationales de la présidence des Affaires religieuses, et enfin la Fondation Maarif, qui finance des écoles un peu partout dans le monde». Avec la mission clairement affirmée de reprendre tous les actifs de l'organisation de l'imam Fethullah Gülen, du nom de l'ancien allié devenu adversaire d'Erdoğan, très impliquée dans l'éducation avec plusieurs centaines d'écoles dans le monde.

Cet appareil d'État transnational, très développé sur l'Europe, a pour objectif d'y pousser l'agenda politique, islamo-nationaliste, ainsi que de constituer

un réseau de surveillance des ennemis de la Turquie. C'est dire les risques diplomatiques que prendrait le président Macron s'il devait s'attaquer à cet édifice, sans parler des possibles mesures de rétorsion d'Ankara contre certains établissements francophones en Turquie, par exemple.

Pour autant, notre interlocuteur, haut fonctionnaire, expert du sujet, n'y va par quatre chemins. Selon lui, il est plus que temps de mettre un coup d'arrêt à ce soft power turc qui n'aurait en vérité rien de soft. Les mesures qu'il préconise sont radicales: «Suppression des cours Elco, refus de visa pour les imams turcs envoyés par la Diyanet, fermeture des écoles hors contrats à coloration islamiste ouvertes par les associations et confréries.» On saura bientôt si ses préconisations, qui auraient été transmises du terrain dans des notes confidentielles adressées au Ministère de l'éducation et de la jeunesse ainsi qu'au Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, ont trouvé l'oreille d'Emmanuel Macron.

The New York Times

By Eric Schmitt
Feb. 14, 2020

Russians Pressure U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria

Russian troops are engaging in standoffs with U.S. troops guarding oil fields and fighting remnants of the Islamic State.

WASHINGTON — Russia is intensifying a pressure campaign on U.S. military forces in northeastern Syria following the American withdrawal from much of that area ahead of a Turkish cross-border offensive last fall, American military and diplomatic officials say.

Russian military personnel have increasingly had run-ins with U.S. troops on highways in the region, breaking agreements between the two countries to steer clear of each other. Russian heli-

copters are flying closer to American troops. And on Wednesday, a U.S.-led convoy returned fire after it came under attack near a checkpoint manned by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who are backed by Russia.

American officials say these actions by Russian personnel and their Syrian allies are devised to present a constant set of challenges, probes and encroachments to slowly create new facts on the ground and make the

U.S. military presence there more tenuous. About 500 American troops remain deployed in Syria with a mission to protect oil fields and help fight remnants of the Islamic State.

“These are not daily occurrences but they have been increasing in number, and thus is troubling,” James F. Jeffrey, the top American diplomat overseeing Syria issues, told reporters last week.

The confrontations risk escalat-

ing to a significant hostile encounter between Washington and Moscow in the country's northeast, even as Russian-backed Syrian government troops have stepped up an offensive against rebel enclaves in Idlib in Syria's northwest.

“We know they're pressing,” Vice Adm. Tim Szymanski, a Navy SEAL who is deputy head of the military's Special Operations Command, said in an interview. He echoed the assessment of other govern-

ment and independent analysts who say the Russians will continue to seek an advantage in the northeast, even in areas patrolled by U.S. and Syrian Kurdish allies and where Russian personnel are not supposed to go.

On Wednesday, a convoy led by U.S. Army soldiers was stopped at a Syrian army checkpoint east of the city of Qamishli. Photographs and video from the scene circulating on social media, and later confirmed by the Pentagon, showed armored vehicles with U.S., Russian and Syrian flags next to one another. Some residents pelted the American vehicles with stones. Another resident dumped a bucket of dirt on the back of one vehicle. Another tried to light some of the vehicles on fire, according to a Defense Department official.

A brief firefight broke out, with one Syrian man killed. No Americans were killed, but one was slightly injured after receiving hand lacerations in the ensuing chaos, the official said.

“After coalition troops issued a series of warnings and de-escalation attempts, the patrol came under small-arms fire from unknown individuals,” said Col. Myles Caggins, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition in Baghdad that oversees operation in northeastern Syria. “In self-defense, coalition troops returned fire.”

A Russian defense ministry official said the arrival of Russian troops at the scene made it “possible to prevent further escalation of the conflict,” according to the Tass news agency, a claim that American officials later dismissed.

The encounter drew sharp criticism from Brett McGurk, President Trump’s former special envoy to the coalition fighting the Islamic State.

“We have American soldiers with an ill-defined mission in Syria



Military convoys flying American and Russian flags where a brief firefight broke out near the Syrian city of Qamishli on Wednesday. Credit...Associated Press

(‘protect the oil’) after abandoning ¾ of once stable territory on Trump’s orders, now forced to navigate roads controlled by Russian and Syrian regime forces,” Mr. McGurk said on Twitter. “Too much to ask of our brave warriors.”

Last October, Mr. Trump abruptly ordered a complete withdrawal of the 1,000 American troops helping Syrian Kurdish forces combat pockets of Islamic State fighters, opening the way to a bloody Turkish cross-border offensive. Mr. Trump then, just as abruptly, reversed himself and allowed about 500 troops to remain in a much smaller operating zone.

Ever since then, American military officials say, Russia and its Syrian allies have been pushing the boundaries of agreements that Russia and the United States reached on whose armies would patrol which territory. The two sides established special communications channels to avoid clashing with each other on the ground, a process the Pentagon calls deconfliction.

But Mr. Trump has signaled very clearly his skepticism about the Syria mission, and Moscow perceives that as an invaluable opportunity, analysts say.

“A full-on Russian confrontation with American troops would risk encouraging Trump to lash out

and double-down, but if Russia and its local allies can sustain a constant, low-level campaign of challenges in which dynamics are manipulated and red lines blurred, then who knows what might happen,” said Charles R. Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute.

“A few random, unpredictable clashes or run-ins, like the one near Qamishli, could easily get onto Trump’s radar and pave a path towards a full American withdrawal,” Mr. Lister said.

American military officers and diplomats point to an array of troubling developments in recent weeks. The Russians have swamped the deconfliction channel, set up for direct communications between American and Russian forces to avoid confrontations, with requests to operate in American-patrolled areas; the Russians then ignored American objections and traveled there anyway. American patrols have then blockaded roads, forcing these Russian patrols to turn around. The Russians have also conducted ground patrols on their own when they were supposed to do joint Russian-Turkish patrols in areas Turkey controlled after its incursion.

The prevalence of Syrian and Russian forces is an issue not just on the ground, but also in the air, where the large number

of reconnaissance drones and other aircraft has eroded American air superiority, one American defense official said.

American officials voice fears that these run-ins could escalate after the Idlib campaign is over, and Russia and Mr. Assad’s government turn their full attention to the northeast.

American officials had predicted these potentially dangerous standoffs with the Russians and their Syrian allies would escalate. In an interview last November, soon after the Turkish incursion, Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie, the head of the military’s Central Command, said that protecting the oil fields might ultimately draw a larger challenge from Syrian Army troops than from the Islamic State.

“I’d expect at some point the regime will come forward to that ground,” General McKenzie said.

The last time pro-Syrian government forces and allied Russian mercenaries threatened American troops near the oil fields, in February 2018, the United States unleashed an artillery and aerial bombardment that left 200 to 300 of the attacking fighters dead.

After American and Russian commanders agreed in late 2017 to fly on opposite sides of a 45-mile stretch of the Euphrates to prevent accidents in eastern Syria’s increasingly congested skies, Russian warplanes violated that deal half a dozen times a day, American commanders said.

The Americans said it was an effort by Moscow to test the United States’ resolve, bait U.S. Air Force pilots into reacting rashly, and help the Syrian army solidify territorial gains ahead of any diplomatic talks aimed at resolving the country’s civil war.

Thomas Gibbons-Neff contributed reporting.

Oil exports into Iraqi Kurdistan give Syrian Kurds a financial lifeline

Over several years, Iraqi Kurdistan has become a key market for Syrian crude and provider of refined fuel – a trade worth tens of millions of dollars per month.

Thousands of barrels of oil per day are flowing from Syria into Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan region, in an opaque trade that has served for several years as a financial lifeline for the Kurdish-led government in northern Syria and its military wing, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The trade has evolved since it first began in 2014, and many details are still murky, but the exports are currently earning tens of millions of dollars per month, according to an Iraq Oil Report investigation based on interviews with oil officials in Syria, border officials in Iraq, oil and fuel traders, crude buyers in Iraqi Kurdistan, and foreign military officials.

"We have oil and sell it to whoever buys," said a top political leader in the Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria, known colloquially as Rojava. "It is a free market, and everyone can trade whatever they have.... The oil revenue is managed by Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria, and all of it is used to provide



Nearby these storage tanks of kerosene and diesel for sale at a "bourse" in Erbil, oil traders also provide samples to prospective buyers of their Syrian crude blend called Mahmoudiya, Feb. 2020. (RAWAZ TAHIR/Iraq Oil Report)

services and security for the area."

Iraq Oil Report Attribution Policy

All sources quoted or referenced spoke to Iraq Oil Report directly and exclusively, unless stated otherwise. Iraq Oil Report typically grants anonymity to sources that can't speak without risking their personal safety or job security. We only publish information from anonymous sources that we independently corroborate and are important to core elements of the story. We do not

provide anonymity to sources whose purpose is to further personal or political agendas.

Iraq Oil Report Commitment to Independence

Iraq Oil Report strives to provide thoroughly vetted reporting and fair-minded analysis that enables readers to understand the dynamic events of Iraq. To meet this goal, we always seek to gather first-hand information on the ground, verify facts from multiple angles, and solicit

input from every stakeholder involved in a given story.

We view our independence as an integral piece of our competitive advantage. Whereas many media entities in Iraq are owned or heavily influenced by political parties, Iraq Oil Report is wholly owned by several of its employees. In a landscape that is often polarized and politicized, we are able to gather and corroborate information from an unusually wide array of sources because we can speak with all of them in good faith.

To fund this enterprise, Iraq Oil Report depends on revenue from both advertising and subscriptions. Some of our advertisers and subscribers - including companies, governments, and NGOs - are also subjects of our reporting. Consistent with journalistic best practices, Iraq Oil Report maintains a strict firewall that removes business considerations from editorial decision-making. When we are choosing which stories to report and how to write them, our readers always come first.



Feb 20 2020

Prosecutors file to lift immunity from pro-Kurdish party deputies

A prosecutor's office in Turkey's capital city of Ankara has filed requests to lift the parliamentary immunity of five pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputies, T24 news site said on Thursday.

Prosecutors presented a summary of proceedings against HDP co-chairs Pervin Buldan and Sezai Temelli alongside 3 other lawmakers to the Turkish Parliamentary Speaker's Office, T24 said.

It was not immediately clear what the accusations against the lawmakers were.

Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has piled constant pressure on the HDP since it became the first pro-Kurdish party to win enough votes to break the country's 10 per cent electoral threshold in the June 2015 elections.

Shortly after the elections, a peace process broke down be-

tween the AKP and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an outlawed armed group that has fought for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey since the 1980s.

Dozens of high-profile HDP politicians and activists have faced legal action since 2015 due to their alleged links to the PKK, including two of the party's former co-chairs, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ.

The CHP politicians have been accused of "insulting the president," a crime with a maximum four-year prison sentence according to the Turkish constitution, which does not clearly define what constitutes an insult.

The Turkish parliament decided to make it possible to lift politicians' parliamentary immunity in a controversial vote in May 2016.

The New York Times

By Carlotta Gall
Feb. 20, 2020

‘It’s Like the End of the World’

At the Turkish border with Syria, tales of the desperation unfolding on the other side, where some 900,000 people are fleeing a Syrian assault.

REYHANLI, Turkey — A slight man in a cotton jacket, carrying a knapsack, shivered in the cold, waiting for the Turkish border gate to Syria to open.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are trying to get out of Syria. Yahya Jamal, 21, was trying to get back in.

His father had just died, he said. His family had fled their home under bombardment and were sleeping under the trees. So even though he had smuggled himself into Turkey several months ago, he was going back to Syria to help them.

“There is nowhere to take them,” he said, his face white with shock. “It is impossible to find a safe place.”

Hidden behind the hills of the Turkish border crossing at Reyhanli, a humanitarian calamity is unfolding on the Syrian side.

The Syrian government, backed by Russian forces, has accelerated its monthslong offensive to seize control of Idlib, the last province held by the opposition. Facing heavy bombardment of towns and villages, about 900,000 people, mostly women and children, have fled their homes since December, joining the largest exodus of Syria’s civil war since it began nine years ago.

Most have headed north, toward the Turkish border, and are living out in the cold. The lucky ones are crammed into tent camps, others sleeping in the open on the surrounding hillsides and olive groves. At least 12 children have died of exposure.

Turkey, already host to more than three million Syrian refugees, has closed its border



Rescue workers known as the White Helmets carrying away the body of a victim found amid the rubble of a building hit during an air strike by pro-regime forces on the rebel-held town of Ariha. Credit...Omar Haj Kadour/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

since 2015 to prevent a further influx. That has left the displaced people of Idlib trapped between advancing Syrian and Russian troops and the Turkish border.

It is the largest exodus in Syria’s civil war. Here’s what it looks like.

Reyhanli, a small agricultural town surrounded by orchards and cotton fields, is the main border crossing to and from Idlib although it is closed to general traffic. A concrete border wall snakes up the craggy hillside away from the customs gate and flocks of sheep dot the hills.

Over the weekend, half a dozen trucks loaded with donated clothes, blankets and food sent from all over Turkey were lined up in orderly fashion, waiting to enter Syria.

A few Syrian pedestrians, mostly medical personnel and traders who have permission to cross the border, clustered at the gate to cross on foot.

A jewelry trader, Muhammad, was traveling with his wife, Amina, to fetch their children from Syria and bring them back to Turkey. Some traders with business on both sides of the border are allowed to come and go.

He described the mood across the border in one word: “Threat.”

The couple, like others interviewed for this article, asked to be identified by only their first names out of fear of being identified by the Syrian government.

“People are afraid,” Muhammad said. “The situation is very bad. People are living in the streets,

under the trees. They are very cold.”

Public buildings and private houses are overflowing and it is hard to find a tent or any kind of shelter, he said. There is no food and no work.

“You can see a lot of families sleeping on cardboard and blankets in the streets,” he said. “All the towns are like that. If the bombardment does not stop there will be a disaster. Everyone is coming toward the border.”

A medical doctor, who gave his name only as Dr. Muhammad, was registering his family at the border immigration post. He said he had evacuated his wife and four children from their village in Syria just as government forces approached. He was able to get

them into Turkey while he was still working in a small field hospital in Syria.

The hospital is treating up to 300 patients a day. "We lacked most imported equipment," he said. "Fuel oil is scarce or very poor quality. Prices are getting higher and higher."

The road was clogged with refugees fleeing to the border and the 20-mile journey took six hours. "It's the most horrible scene," he said.

Russian and Syrian forces, advancing rapidly from the south and east of Idlib, have reached the town of Al Atarib, barely 15 miles from the Turkish border.

The attack seems to be a bid to cut supply lines from Turkey to areas held by the opposition forces or even an effort to encircle and besiege the city of Idlib itself, where some 700,000 people live, aid organizations said.

The Turkish army has deployed hundreds of troops and armor in the north of the province to protect the approaches to the Turkish border. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has demanded that Syrian government troops withdraw to previously agreed positions by the end of February or be forced to do so by Turkish forces.

But Syrians at the border displayed little confidence that the Turkish army would stop the Syrian advance.

"We wish the Europeans would strike the government," the trader, Muhammad, said. "We wish America would come. But we do not expect them to."

"Bashar is killing us," he blurted out, referring to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria. "Every day hundreds are dying and now America needs to do something."

Otursan Mustafa, 26, a mother of three, was reached by phone at Kafr Karmin, a Syrian village less than four miles from the



Close to one million displaced Syrians are crammed into tented camps or sleeping rough on the surrounding hillsides and olive groves. Credit...Muhammed Said/Anadolu Agency, via Getty Images

front line at Al Atarib, where she is stranded along with two other women and 14 children.

"There is bombardment all the time," she said. "If I stopped talking you would hear it."

The women, two of them widows, had fled three times since the latest offensive began on Dec. 18.

First they fled their hometown, Maarat al Noaman, to the countryside, east of Idlib province. Then as the government began an advance from the east, they fled to Kafr Karmin.

Now the fighting was again coming closer and the rest of the villagers had fled, Ms. Mustafa said. The three women were living in a half-built house — without doors, windows or electricity — but were loath to leave because at least they had a roof over their heads.

"We have nowhere to go," Ms. Mustafa said. "There are no tents and no space to put a tent because there are so many people."

Her 3-month-old son was crying all night, she said. "I am breast feeding, but the doctor said I must give him more food, he needs more."

With the village emptied, they were running out of food, she said.

The Syrian advance from the east has been so swift that many families were stuck, said Fouad Sayed Issa, the founder of Violet, a Syrian nonprofit relief organization.

Violet fields 1,000 volunteers who rent, beg or borrow trucks to evacuate families who are stuck without transportation or fuel in front-line areas.

The scale of the movement of people is staggering, he said. The group rescued 17,000 people from the town of Ariha in one operation. A United Nations camp of 10,000 displaced people emptied almost overnight as government troops neared. Everyone is converging on the already established camps by the Turkish border.

"It's like the end of the world," he

said. Thousands of people have massed at the camps, standing around, hoping for assistance.

"The biggest problem is shelter," Mr. Issa said. "Even if you have money you will not find anything to rent or buy. Tents are full and there are no more camps."

He, like other Syrian aid workers, expressed frustration that the relief effort has fallen far behind the huge need and is mired in bureaucracy. "The U.N. has 5,000 tents but people need 60,000 tents," he said.

As the Syrian shelling closes in, more people will flee, he predicted.

"No one will stay," he said.

That left only one solution, he said — for Turkey to open its border to the refugees.

"We are advocating they open the border," he said. "Ankara has to decide."

Saad al-Nassife contributed reporting.



Feb 18 2020

Turkish former president says country was wrong to adopt presidential system

Abdullah Gül, a founding member of Turkey's ruling party and the predecessor as president to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, spoke out against the executive presidential system and Turkish foreign policy in rare public criticism from a man sometimes tipped as a potential challenger to his former ally.

Gül served in the largely ceremonial post of president from 2007 to 2014, while his close ally, Erdoğan, was prime minister, and before that as a widely respected foreign minister.

But since Erdoğan took over as president and steered Turkey towards a system in which the head of state has wide-ranging executive powers, Gül has largely stepped back from frontline politics, though analysts say he has been unhappy with the country's political direction. Some have even pointed to Gül as a leader who could unite Erdoğan's disparate opponents.

"I said the parliamentary system is more accurate for Turkey even while I was the president. My choice is for a fully democratic parliamentary system. Parliament has never been this insignificant until today. Turkey feels the absence of it," Gül said in an interview with Karar newspaper published on Tuesday.

Turkey voted to move to the new system in a referendum in 2017, held during a period of emergency rule following a failed coup attempt in July 2016. The new system did away with the position of prime minister and allowed Erdoğan to pass laws by decree and tied key institutions, as well as much financial control, to the presidency.

Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) maintains the new system allows for the



smoother running of government, but critics say it has emasculated parliament and ushered in one-man rule.

Gül also voiced concern over Turkey's policy in Syria, where 13 Turkish soldiers were killed in shelling by Russian-backed Syrian government forces this month. Erdoğan last week pledged to hit back at the Syrian government anywhere in the country if any more Turkish troops were hurt in posts they control in the rebel-held northwest Syrian province of Idlib.

"What I will say, that even if we are very provoked, is not to enter an all-out war with Syria," Gül said.

Turkey has been involved in the crisis in Syria since the war broke out in 2011 without a proper exit plan, and had enhanced collaboration with Russia while drifting away from its Western allies, he said.

Turkey's problems with the United States have also drawn it closer to Moscow, but drifting away from the West would weaken Turkish democracy, Gül said.

"Turkey needs to be part of the Western bloc together with Europe to ensure a democratic and pluralistic country. In this respect, its recent relations with Russia are off-balance," he said.

Gül also criticised the government's purchase of Russian S-400

air defence missiles, despite the objections of Turkey's NATO allies.

The United States opposes the S-400 deal since the Russian system is not compatible with NATO systems and due to fears that Turkey's deployment of the missiles would allow Russia to glean sensitive information about the defences of NATO's advanced fighter jets.

Turkey also risks U.S. sanctions over S-400 purchase which aims to deter third parties from defence partnership with Russia and Congress has blocked the delivery of the 100 advanced fifth-generation F-35 stealth aircraft the Turkish military has ordered.

The former president said Turkey's S-400 acquisition could undermine the power of its army, the second largest in NATO after that of the United States.

"Because ultimately all the standards of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), everything from its air force to ground forces is at NATO standards. The strength of the TSK comes from that," Gül said.

Turkish defence officials and diplomats should have seen that a country could not have both Russian missiles and aircraft developed to bypass that defence system at the same time, he said.

Gül said Turkey's Kurdish question had become a regional and

international issue after the 2015 collapse of a promising ceasefire between the government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the subsequent Turkish invasion of Kurdish-held northern parts of Syria.

"It is all our responsibility. When we could not solve it within our initiative through high human rights standards, it gained regional and international dimensions, these are tough jobs," he said.

Former President Gül also spoke on the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the biggest anti-government demonstrations since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

"From the very beginning, when I was asked [about the protests], I said 'I am very proud of them'," Gül said.

"People [of Turkey] in the past, would take to the streets to for human rights or for end to unsolved murders. But now, people had taken to the streets to prevent the cutting of trees," he added.

"I said to myself, we have turned Turkey's problems into those of the UK and the United States," the former president added.

The Gezi protests, which started as a small-scale peaceful sit-in to demonstrate against the proposed destruction of a small Istanbul park, quickly spread across the country, with many young people joining in to voice their discontent with Erdoğan's Islamist government.

Gül's statements arrived on the day a Turkish court acquitted nine top civil society activists accused of terrorism charges linked to protests.



By John Irish, Leigh Thomas
FEBRUARY 21, 2020

Global watchdog places Iran on terrorism financing blacklist

PARIS (Reuters) - The global dirty money watchdog placed Iran on its blacklist on Friday after it failed to comply with international anti-terrorism financing norms, a move that will deepen the country's isolation from financial markets.

The decision came after more than three years of warnings from the Paris-based Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) urging the Islamic Republic to either enact terrorist financing conventions or see its reprieve from the blacklist lifted and some counter-measures imposed.

"Given Iran's failure to enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, the FATF fully lifts the suspension of counter-measures and calls on its members and urges all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures," the group's 39 members said in a statement after a week-long plenary session.

These would entail more scrutiny of transactions with Iran, tougher external auditing of financing firms operating in the country and extra pressure on the few foreign banks and businesses still dealing with Iran.

"The consequence of (Iran's) inaction is higher costs of borrowing and isolation from the financial system," a Western diplomat told Reuters.

The United States commended the task force's action after what it said was Tehran's failure to adhere to FATF's standards.

Iran "must face consequences for its continued failure to abide by international norms," U.S.



FILE PHOTO: The logo of the FATF (the Financial Action Task Force) is seen after a plenary session in Paris, France, October 18, 2019. REUTERS/Charles Platiau/File Photo

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

Iran's central bank chief dismissed FATF's decision. "(It) is politically motivated and not a technical decision," the state news agency IRNA quoted Abdolnasser Hemmati as saying. "I can assure our nation that it will have no impact on Iran's foreign trade and the stability of our exchange rate."

The FATF appeared to leave the door open for some engagement with Iran saying in its statement: "Countries should also be able to apply countermeasures independently of any call by the FATF to do so."

"It's a middle solution. A sort of a fudge to leave the door open for the Iranians," said one of the diplomats.

Foreign businesses say Iran's compliance with FATF rules is essential if it wants to attract investors, especially since the United States reimposed sanctions on Tehran in 2018 after

quitting a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and other big powers.

Iran's leaders have been divided over approach to the FATF.

Supporters of cooperation say it could ease foreign trade with Europe and Asia, offsetting U.S. sanctions. Hardliners argue that passing legislation to join the FATF could hamper Iran's support for its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah.

MAXIMUM PRESSURE

Washington has since pushed a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran, saying a broader deal should be negotiated to encompass nuclear issues, Iran's ballistic missile program and Iranian support for proxy forces around the Middle East.

France, Britain and Germany have tried to salvage the nuclear accord but have faced growing pressure from the United States to join its efforts to isolate Iran.

"The United States was pushing

for the toughest position (by FATF), while other countries like China and Russia preferred something more flexible," said a European official. "The Europeans were looking for something in between."

U.S. sanctions have crippled Iran's economy, decimating its oil exports and largely sealing it off from the international financial system.

"Until Iran implements the measures required to address the deficiencies identified with respect to countering terrorism-financing..., the FATF will remain concerned with the terrorist financing risk emanating from Iran and the threat this poses to the international financial system," the FATF said.

Iran's action plan to meet with the FATF requirements, implemented in 2016, expired in January 2018.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif this week appeared resigned to the FATF blacklisting, accusing Washington of using its maximum pressure campaign to exert influence at the FATF.

In another important decision on Friday, the FATF granted Pakistan an extra four months to meet anti-terrorism financing norms, keeping Islamabad for now on its "grey list" of countries that do not adequately comply with its rules.

Additional reporting by Parisa Hafezi in Dubai, and Susan Heavey in Washington; Editing by Mark Heinrich and David Gregorio



21-02-2020
Karwan Faidhi Dri

Coronavirus: Erbil and Baghdad impose travel restrictions after Iran deaths

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region –

New travel restrictions were announced on Thursday by the governments of Baghdad and Erbil to prevent the spread of coronavirus from Iran, where a recent outbreak in the city of Qom has killed two people.

After quarantining several people suspected of contracting the virus in Qom, Iran's health ministry confirmed on Thursday that two elderly people had died.

The deaths forced Iranian authorities to set up a crisis cell to respond to a potential outbreak of the virus, which has killed at least 2,118 people and infected 74,546 worldwide since December.

Neighboring Iraq and the Kurdistan Region have responded with new measures to prevent the transmission of the virus from Iran.

Both had already imposed measures in late January.

Nationwide campaign

Masrour Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has assigned a budget to help prevent an outbreak in Kurdistan Region.

"We will provide all material and moral support to protect the health of the people of the Kurdistan Region," KRG spokesperson Jutyar Adil told local reporters on Thursday.

The KRG will launch a campaign next week, which will in-



An Iranian woman wears a protective mask in the capital Tehran, February 20, 2020. Photo: Atta Kenare / AFP

clude the public distribution of leaflets explaining signs and symptoms and how to prevent transmission.

"We will begin next week and it will continue until the World Health Organization returns its status to normal," Chiman Taha, head of KRG's protection and health directorate, told Rudaw.

Additionally, the KRG Ministry of the Interior has decided to bar all border traffic with Iran, according to an official at the Parvizkhan border crossing.

In a statement on Friday, the official said, "Following an Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Interior decree, Parvizkhan's residency department was notified by Sulaimani Residency Directorate, starting from February 21, 2020 at 00:00, that movement of tourists from Iraq to Iran and vice versa is to be halted."

The statement went on to explain further: "Iraqis currently in Iran wishing to return to Iraq

will be notified that they are permitted to return to Iraqi soil and Kurdistan Region after tests conducted by the Health Department of Parvizkhan. A doctor of the department will issue an official letter to assure the residency department of the health stability [of the returnees]."

Three medical centres have been opened in Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok provinces to assess possible cases of the virus.

Sources told Rudaw that 104 people, including Kurds and some Chinese, have been monitored at the centers and since given the all clear.

Baghdad measures

Millions of Iranians come to Iraq every year to visit the Shiite shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. Such pilgrimages could bring the virus to Iraq if precautions are not taken.

On Thursday, Iraq's health minister Jaafar Sadeq Allawi

said he has also allotted a budget to help contain the virus.

His ministry "will take necessary actions at airports, border crossings, and sea [ports] across Iraq and we have dedicated institutions to deal with suspected cases, if any," Allawi said.

Among the Iraqi health ministry's measures is "preventing all entries from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Iraq at all crossings until further notice, except for diplomatic delegations who will be subjected to medical tests."

Iraqis currently in Iran must undergo a 14-day monitoring period before they are allowed to return home. Iraqis are also not permitted to visit Iran unless they are part of a diplomatic delegation.

All Iraqis who have returned from Iran in the last 14 days will be checked at their homes by medical teams.

The Iraqi government has also suspended all Iraqi Airlines flights serving Najaf and Baghdad routes to Iran until further notice.

The coronavirus outbreak is believed to have originated from the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Although cases of infection in China have dropped significantly in recent days, incidences of infection and death outside China are showing little sign of relent.

Intel: What's behind Erdogan's latest threat of imminent attack in Syria

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told the parliament Feb. 19 that an operation against Syrian government forces in the rebel-held province of Idlib was “a matter of moments” after talks between Turkish officials and their Russian counterparts in Moscow failed to deliver “the desired result.”

Hours later, Turkey’s ambassador to the UN, Feridun Sinirlioglu, said Turkey would hit all regime positions that “constitute a threat to Turkey” unless they withdrew.

Erdogan has set an end of February deadline for Russian-backed Syrian government forces to pull out of territory they captured in recent weeks. These include the strategic M5 highway linking Aleppo to Damascus and territory surrounding 10 Turkish military observation posts in Idlib.

Why it matters: Erdogan’s comments mark a dangerous escalation. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, “If we are talking about an operation against the legitimate authorities of the Syrian Republic and armed forces of the Syrian Republic, this would of course be the worst scenario.”

Should Erdogan act, this would put a big dent in Erdogan’s bromance with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Any repeat of the sanctions Putin slapped on Ankara after it shot down one of his warplanes in 2015 would likely send Turkey’s wobbly economy into another tailspin.

Is Erdogan bluffing? Until this week, it was widely assumed that he was. His goal was to pressure Moscow into accom-



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan attends a joint news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Istanbul, Turkey, Jan. 24, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Umit Bektas.

modating at least some of his demands. But Russia refuses to budge and the stakes are perilously high. Some 900,000 civilians, according to the UN’s latest count, are massed at the Turkish border. With over 3.5 million Syrian refugees, Turkey can ill afford taking any more. Should Idlib fall, Afrin and the Euphrates Shield zone seen as critical to curbing Kurdish expansion might be next.

Erdogan has a record of doing what he says he will do. Putin has demonstrated how nasty he can get when provoked.

American carrots: Erdogan’s latest spate of bullishness comes on the heels of his Feb. 15 telephone call with US President Donald Trump. Erdogan claimed today, “We can enjoy all kinds of solidarity with the United States at any moment.” A White House readout of the conversation said Trump had “conveyed the United States’s desire to see

an end to Russia’s support for the Assad government’s atrocities and for a political resolution to the Syrian conflict.” But there was no suggestion that the United States would get involved in Idlib. The Pentagon is firmly opposed to the idea.

Well-informed sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said the Trump administration was, however, weighing whether to provide “intelligence and some form of logistical support” for Turkey in Idlib, but declined to elaborate.

Trump’s envoy for Syria engagement, ambassador Jim Jeffrey, however, is known to be agitating for more. He is “egging on Turkey to launch a counterattack,” one of the sources said.

But this flies in the face of Trump’s aversion to “endless wars.” Soon after he took office Trump slashed all funding for rebels.

What’s next? Erdogan’s current posturing may well be calculated to wrest further concessions from Russia for a freer hand against the Syrian Kurds. The Russians want the Kurds to ditch their alliance with America. Playing hardball via the Turks might just suit their plans too. But then the opposite holds as well: The Russians can, and have, courted the Kurds to squeeze Turkey. “The humane policy would be to negotiate the return of highways to the regime and establish a new [supply] line to reduce humanitarian suffering,” a former Trump administration official told Al-Monitor.

Know more: Read this week’s Takeaway for Andrew Parasiliti’s latest take on how Erdogan may yet turn to Putin to end Turkey’s endless war in Syria, and see Fehim Tastekin’s piece on the Idlib escalation’s potential impact on Syria’s Kurds.

Turkey acquits the Gezi Park protesters, then rearrests one

Human rights groups call detention of Osman Kavala ‘cynical and outrageous’

Turkish authorities have detained a prominent philanthropist, just hours after a court acquitted him on terrorism-related charges and ordered his release from jail.

Osman Kavala was one of nine activists accused of terror charges over their involvement in Istanbul's Gezi park protests who were acquitted on Tuesday in a surprise ruling.

But within hours, a new warrant from the Istanbul prosecutor's office called for his re-arrest as part of an investigation into a failed 2016 coup against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government, and under the charge of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order.

After his release from the the Silivri maximum security prison on the outskirts of Istanbul, Kavala was taken by police to an Istanbul hospital for health checks before being formally detained again.

The court's earlier ruling was greeted by applause and cries of disbelief in the courtroom where more than a hundred supporters had waited to see Kavala walk free.

But an anxious silence overtook the stunned crowd – including Kavala's wife Ayşe Buğra – when word of the new investigation reached them later on Tuesday.

Kavala had been held in pre-trial detention for more than two years, and a guilty verdict had been widely expected for him, the architect Mücella Yapıcı and Yiğit Aksakoğlu, who were also facing life sentences in solitary confinement without parole.

After hearing about the new detention order for Kavala, Yapıcı tweeted: "Once again, a freakish-



Members of the activist group Taksim Solidarity Platform celebrating outside the court after the acquittals of Osman Kavala and eight others. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP via Getty Images

ness of the law, first you linked him to Gezi in an unrelated and illegal way and now July 15 ... Pity this country."

Six more of the 16 civil society figures on trial – among them an architect, a lawyer and filmmakers – were facing 15 to 20 years in prison each over allegations that they sought to violently overthrow then prime minister and now president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The case of seven further defendants, who are abroad and are being tried in absentia, will continue, but arrest warrants against them have been lifted. One lawyer said they were expected to be acquitted if they returned to Turkey.

Kavala's re-arrest sparked immediate condemnation from human rights advocates.

"This is a vindictive and lawless move, further demonstrating that Turkey's justice system is under tight political control," Emma Sinclair-Webb, of Human Rights Watch, told AFP.

Amnesty International slammed the "cynical and outrageous detention" and called for Kavala's immediate release.

"This decision smacks of deliberate and calculated cruelty," Amnesty's Turkey campaigner Milena Buyum said.

"It is time for Turkey to end the relentless crackdown on dissenting voices."

The high-profile case had already drawn strong criticism from Turkey's western allies and human rights groups, including the European court of human rights, which in December called for Kavala's immediate release, saying his extended time in custody served the ulterior purpose of reducing him to silence with a chilling effect on civil society.

"This is a trial that should have never happened in the first place. This whole process has caused untold misery to those who were so wrongfully targeted," said Sinclair-Webb, outside the courthouse.

More than 300 observers came to watch the tense proceedings on Tuesday, where the court rejected requests to hear the testimony of defence witnesses and to give the defendants more time to respond to the prosecutor's sentencing statement.

Tensions peaked when security forces tried to remove a defence lawyer from the courtroom. Officers in riot gear arrived after members of the audience and lawyers loudly voiced their objections.

Questions had already started to arise over why the court would rule against the government in such a high-profile case .

Speculation was rife on Tuesday that the move was calibrated to gain favour in Brussels and other western capitals as Ankara struggles with a new military campaign against Bashar al-Assad in Idlib, Syria's last opposition-held province.

The Gezi trial has been closely watched by western diplomats and human rights groups for years for clues over Turkey's democratic trajectory. The minister of defence, Hulusi Akar, pointedly acknowledged Nato's support for the Turkish armed forces in Syria in a statement last week.

The 2013 demonstrations were held over the future of Gezi park, a rare green space in central Istanbul, which was slated for redevelopment into a shopping mall.

The discontent soon blossomed into nationwide protests against Erdoğan's increasingly strong grip on Turkey, in which an estimated 3.6 million people took part. The demonstrations were met with a police crackdown in which the Turkish Bar Association says 15 people were killed and about 5,000 more were arrested.

The fallout from Gezi reignited political tensions between Turkey's right and left and set the scene for the increasingly authoritarian direction the government has travelled in since.

En Turquie, le mécène Osman Kavala tout juste acquitté est à nouveau arrêté

Le mécène, bête noire du président Erdogan, a été accusé de participer au putsch raté du 15 juillet 2016.

Quelques heures après son acquittement, mardi 18 février, l'homme d'affaires et philanthrope turc Osman Kavala a été arrêté de nouveau à la demande du parquet d'Istanbul, prêt à le mettre en examen, cette fois pour sa participation présumée au putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016.

L'organisation Amnesty International a dénoncé cette nouvelle arrestation, jugée « cynique et cruelle ». Selon Emma Sinclair-Webb, la représentante en Turquie de l'ONG Human Rights Watch, la décision du parquet prouve « une fois de plus à quel point la justice turque est contrôlée par le pouvoir politique ».

Le prévenu Kavala aurait dû être libéré mardi en fin de soirée de la prison de haute sécurité de Silivri, à la périphérie d'Istanbul. Sa femme, Ayse, et ses proches, venus assister mardi à la dernière audience de son procès, s'étaient réjouis de ce que le juge ait finalement prononcé l'acquittement, « en l'absence de preuves suffisantes ». Mais après avoir attendu son mari aux portes de la prison, Ayse est repartie sans l'avoir vu. Il a été déféré devant un juge pour une nouvelle mise en examen, aussi absurde que la première.

Sa vie et sa fortune, l'homme les a dépensées au service de sa fondation Anadolu Kültür, championne de l'action culturelle et artistique. Le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait en ligne de mire ce colosse affable et féru de culture. Avec ses témoins anonymes, ses approximations grossières, ses manquements à la procédure, le procès de Kavala est un affront à l'Etat de droit. Monté de toutes pièces, il jette une tache indélébile sur le fonctionnement de la justice turque.

Osman Kavala, 63 ans, était ac-



Devant la prison de Silivri le 18 février, d'où Osman Kavala a été libéré avant d'être arrêté de nouveau. OZAN KOSE / AFP

cusé, avec quinze autres personnalités de la société civile, d'avoir cherché à renverser le gouvernement en 2013. Le groupe était décrit comme le cerveau du « soulèvement de Gezi », du nom d'un petit parc situé sur la place Taksim au centre d'Istanbul, qui devint alors le haut lieu de la contestation contre l'autoritarisme de M. Erdogan, à l'époque premier ministre.

Prototype du « Soros rouge »

L'épisode a toujours eu un goût amer pour l'homme fort de Turquie. Incapable de digérer la première contestation de son règne, il s'est mis en tête, une fois devenu président, de réécrire l'événement à sa manière, sous la forme d'une sorte de putsch « terroriste » fomenté avec l'aide de puissances étrangères. C'est ainsi que seize intellectuels qui avaient pu servir de médiateurs à l'époque se sont retrouvés, quatre ans après les faits, accusés d'avoir ourdi un complot. « Leur but était d'allumer la fusible de la violence à travers les groupes marginaux et les organisations terroristes, de créer le chaos, et c'est ce qui s'est passé », indique l'acte d'accusation.

L'affaire semblait d'autant plus mal partie pour M. Kavala et ses amis que M. Erdogan s'était constitué partie civile. Tout son ancien gouvernement avait suivi, à l'exception de l'ancien ministre des affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu, qui, entré depuis peu en dissidence, a récemment retiré sa plainte contre les « putschistes ».

Osman Kavala, estimait M. Erdogan, est le prototype du « Soros rouge », un traître à la solde des puissances étrangères. L'acte d'accusation mentionnait d'ailleurs le milliardaire et philanthrope américain George Soros comme l'un des instigateurs de la révolte.

L'une des preuves à charge contre M. Kavala, découverte dans son téléphone portable, était une carte répertoriant la présence d'abeilles sur le territoire turc. Les procureurs y décelèrent une intention de redessiner les frontières du pays. Des appels téléphoniques insignifiants, des réunions anodines, des hashtags postés sur Twitter et une pièce de théâtre constituaient les éléments accusateurs les plus saillants du dossier.

Le tribunal a fini par jeter l'éponge

mardi, prononçant l'acquittement de neuf des seize inculpés, dont Osman Kavala. A même de raviver l'inquiétude des partenaires européens de la Turquie, le procès était suivi de près par les défenseurs des droits de l'homme et par des observateurs, soulagés à l'énoncé du verdict.

Contourner la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme

Au même moment, à Ankara, le Parlement bruisait des protestations des députés du parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur) réclamant le maintien en détention du « terroriste » Kavala. Quelques instants plus tard, le procureur d'Istanbul brandissait un nouveau mandat d'arrêt. L'incarcération du mécène va donc se poursuivre, conformément au souhait du parti présidentiel.

Cette nouvelle inculpation permet avant tout à la justice turque de contourner la décision de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme, qui, depuis le 10 décembre 2019, exigeait la libération immédiate de l'homme d'affaires, écroué sans preuve depuis deux ans et trois mois.

La décision du parquet d'Istanbul rappelle le traitement subi précédemment par deux autres bêtes noires du président Erdogan, à savoir le leader kurde Selahattin Demirtas, son principal rival politique, et l'écrivain Ahmet Altan, qui le critique et lui tient tête. Comme Kavala aujourd'hui, les deux opposants ont été remis en détention, en dépit des décisions prises par les juges de Strasbourg. Ces derniers sont les gardiens de la Convention européenne des droits de l'homme, le « mètre étalon » du Conseil de l'Europe, dont la Turquie se targue d'être un membre fondateur, tout en bafouant les décisions de sa juridiction.



20-02-2020
Yasmine Mosimann

Hanau attack: Six Kurds feared dead in German shisha bar shootings

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – At least ten people were killed in a gun attack on two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany on Wednesday night, according to local police. The suspect, thought to be a far-right extremist, was found dead at his home early on Thursday following a manhunt.

A number of the victims are reportedly of Kurdish origin, according to Germany's Oberhessische Presse.

A Kurdish shopkeeper in Hanau, who wished to remain anonymous, told Rudaw via WhatsApp that he understands from talking to other members of the Kurdish community that six of the victims were Kurds from Bakur (Turkey).

"There is a Kurdish community in Hanau from all over but mostly from Bakur," he said.

The attacks occurred at two shisha bars in the German town of Hanau, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of Frankfurt. The suspect fled the scene of the attack, sparking a massive manhunt involving helicopters and armed police.

Police in the central German state of Hesse said the likely perpetrator had been found dead at his home in Hanau after they located a getaway vehicle identified by witnesses. Another body was also discovered at the property.

"The suspected perpetrator has been found dead," Hesse police said. "There is currently no indication that there are additional perpetrators."

Germany's Bild newspaper said those killed in the first bar were of Kurdish origin.



Forensic police are seen at the crime scene in front of a shisha bar in the centre of Hanau, near Frankfurt, western Germany, February 20, 2020. Photo: Thomas Lohnes / AFP

The first attack occurred at the 'Midnight' bar in the centre of the city at around 10pm local time (2100 GMT). Three people were killed in front of the building, local media said. Witnesses report hearing a dozen shots fired.

The attacker, or attackers, fled the scene by car, according to police. There was then a second shooting at the 'Arena Bar'.

A gunman reportedly rang the doorbell before entering and opening fire on staff and patrons in the smoking section, killing five including one woman, Bild said.

"The search for suspects is going at top speed. There is no clear information yet as to a motive," authorities said.

Police said one person injured in the attack had also died.

Earlier reports said five people had been seriously wounded.

The suspected gunman, who has been named by German media outlets as Tobias Rathjen,

43, is believed to have released a video message on the internet prior to the attack announcing his far-right motives.

Peter Beuth, the interior minister of the state of Hesse, said federal prosecutors suspect terrorism was the gunman's intent.

'Decisive action'

Ali Can, who lives in the town of Essen near Dusseldorf, says a relative of his was amongst those killed on Wednesday. "We are afraid. We fear for our lives," he tweeted on Thursday. "Are we so helpless against right-wing terrorists?" he asked of the German state.

One of Can's cousins, a wedding photographer who nearly went to the attacked shisha bar on the night of the attack, messaged him, saying: "What if the Nazis [the attackers] are now storming our weddings? We celebrate with 1,000 people. That would be a bloodbath. We are afraid, we cannot sleep."

Ali Ertan Toprak, a Kurdish com-

munity leader in Germany, has called for a more determined fight by the state against right-wing extremism.

"We have been pointing out the dangers for years," he told The Oberhessische Presse. "The state has to show that it is defensive. And the police have to take decisive action against right-wing extremists."

"The victims are people we have known for years," said the bar manager's son, quoted by DPA news agency. Two employees were among the victims. "It is a shock for everyone," he added.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the attacks in a televised address on Thursday, saying "hatred is a crime".

'People live in fear'

Attacks by the far-right have become a particular concern for German authorities.

Germany has suffered several extremist attacks in recent years, one of which killed 12 people in the heart of Berlin in December 2016.

"People live in fear," Kurdish community leader Toprak said, branding right-wing extremism "the greatest danger in this country".

The Kurdish community regularly receives "threatening calls and emails, some of which have increased recently," but they are unsure whether they are right-wing extremists or Turkish nationalists, he added.

With additional reporting by AFP



le 23 février 2020
Par Jonathan Grelier

En Syrie, le drame humanitaire

"le plus important depuis la dernière Guerre mondiale"

Environ 900.000 Syriens ont déjà fui la région d'Idlib dans le nord-ouest du pays en raison des bombardements sur ce dernier bastion d'opposition au régime. "Il y a ce drame humanitaire le plus important depuis la dernière Guerre mondiale", se désole dimanche sur Europe 1 le médecin spécialiste de la médecine de guerre Raphaël Pitti.

INTERVIEW

La vidéo a fait le tour du monde. Sur cette dernière, la petite Salwa, une enfant syrienne rit à chaque bruit d'un bombardement, une parade trouvée par son père pour lui éviter la peur. En Syrie, les combats ont obligé ces derniers temps environ 900.000 personnes à fuir la région d'Idlib au nord-ouest du pays. Une zone connue pour être le dernier bastion opposé au régime syrien. "Il y a ce drame humanitaire le plus important depuis la dernière Guerre mondiale", souffle Raphaël Pitti, dimanche sur Europe 1.

"Il y a 12 millions de personnes qui ne sont plus chez elles, cinq millions à l'extérieur, sept millions à l'intérieur de



"Environ 900.000 Syriens ont fui la région d'Idlib. © Rami al SAYED / AFP

la Syrie, plus de 500.000 morts, 80% du territoire qui a été détruit", poursuit le médecin spécialisé dans la médecine de guerre et élu de gauche au conseil municipal de Metz. Formateur de nombreux professionnels médicaux sur place, il dénonce depuis des années le piège qui se referme sur les civils syriens.

Une "admiration sans bornes" pour les médecins syriens

"On a tout utilisé contre cette population syrienne qui est véritablement martyrisée", se désespère-t-il, énumérant les souffrances infligées aux

Syriens : "Les armes chimiques, le napalm, le phosphore, le chlore..." Le médecin raconte qu'il ne reste plus dans la région d'Idlib qu'un seul hôpital fonctionnel, celui de son association situé à Bab Al-Hawa. Celui-ci profite d'être "contre la frontière turque" et est de fait "pour l'instant un peu protégé".

"J'ai une admiration sans bornes pour le personnel soignant syrien, mais je dis bien sans bornes", témoigne Raphaël Pitti, qui décrit de "véritables héros" depuis le début de l'affrontement à Idlib. "Depuis le

mois d'avril, ce sont 72 structures médicales qui ont été détruites. Et là ils sont en train de mettre en place des cliniques mobiles pour éviter d'être eux-mêmes bombardés et pour aller vers ces populations déplacées", rapporte-t-il.

Reproches envers la communauté internationale

Face à cette situation, la réaction de la communauté internationale désole le médecin. Il lui reproche de ne pas "bouger d'un iota" dans un conflit qui a débuté en 2011 et de "regarder toujours ailleurs" sans intervenir. "On n'est intervenu en Syrie que pour lutter contre Daech, et encore nous ne l'avons pas fait avec courage, nous avons utilisé les forces kurdes qui étaient présentes, que nous avons lâchement abandonnées à la fin", insiste Raphaël Pitti. Il fustige par ailleurs la politique du président russe Vladimir Poutine dans le pays, contre laquelle il réclame des sanctions fortes.

"Depuis neuf ans, on vous parle de géopolitique, de géostratégie, de terroristes, mais on ne veut pas voir l'humain", conclut-il.



le 23 février 2020

Turquie: l'homme d'affaires Osman Kavala poursuivi par la justice

En Turquie les trois magistrats qui ont prononcé le 18 février l'acquittement de l'homme d'affaires Osman Kavala et de huit autres personnes font l'objet d'une enquête. Les prévenus étaient accusés d'avoir voulu renverser le gouvernement en 2013. À peine l'acquittement était-il prononcé que Osman Kavala, figure influente de la société civile turque, était à nouveau accusé, en lien cette fois avec la tentative de coup d'État de 2016.

Portrait.

« Il va falloir travailler dur pour convaincre davantage de monde dans la société turque de ce qui est arrivé aux Arméniens dans le passé », déclarait Osman Kavala au micro de l'ONG Egam en 2014. Jeter des ponts entre les cultures, c'est l'un de ses grands engagements.

L'homme d'affaires et mécène, né en 1957 à Paris, est aussi un humaniste, témoigne l'une de ses amies,

l'universitaire française Dalila Roger. « La première chose qui vient à l'esprit, c'est sa gentillesse, sa douceur et sa modestie. C'est quelqu'un d'extrêmement pacifique et pacifiste. Il m'a confié un jour où nous étions tous les deux son intolérance à l'injustice. Il y avait eu de grandes injustices dans ce pays. Et sa manière à lui de faire quelque chose pour les réparer, c'était de tenter de rapprocher les peuples, entre autres les minorités de Turquie, à travers la culture. »



Affiche représentant l'homme d'affaires et philanthrope emprisonné, Osman Kavala, lors d'une conférence de presse de ses avocats, en octobre 2018. FP/Ozan Kose



Feb 25, 2020

Turkish police detain 14 in pro-Kurdish HDP congress investigation

Turkish police detained on Tuesday 14 people as part of an investigation into the annual congress of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) over the weekend, Hürriyet newspaper reported.

Turkish authorities issued warrants for the detention of 15 people after the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the HDP ordinary congress, which featured a slideshow including photographs of the outlawed Kurdistan Work-

ers' Party (PKK) leader, Abdullah Öcalan, it said.

The PKK is an armed group that has been at war in Turkey for over three decades. Ankara accuses the HDP of harbouring sympathy and acting in the interest of the PKK.

Police are looking for one more person and the detainees remain in custody at the Ankara Police Department, Hürriyet said.



The HDP held its fourth ordinary congress on February 23, electing lawmaker Mithat Sancar and

re-electing Pervin Buldan as the party's co-chairs.



26 février 2020

19 ans de prison pour avoir osé chanter dans sa langue maternelle

“Un châtiement de 19 ans pour lui enlever le goût de chanter les chansons de son peuple... ou montrant la fausseté du discours officiel turc parlant de leurs frères kurdes” indique kurdistan-au-feminin.fr.

« Originaire de Cizre, Nûdem est bien connue dans toute sa communauté pour enseigner des chansons folkloriques locales en langue kurde aux enfants », ajoute le site internet.

« Les Kurdes sont persécutés depuis des décennies par les gouvernements de Turquie, d'Iran et de Syrie dans tout le Kurdistan ».

« Pour le gouvernement turc, qui a même interdit le mot « Kurdes » jusqu'aux années 1990 (les appelant plutôt Turcs des montagnes), chanter était tout simplement inacceptable ».



Elle c'est la chanteuse kurde Nûdem Durak ! Elle doit être remise en liberté en 2034.

Et d'ajouter : « Nûdem a été arrêtée en 2015 et inculpée sous la vague notion de propagande parce que les chansons qu'elle chantait étaient dans sa langue maternelle ».

« En avril 2015, Nûdem Durak a été condamnée à 10 ans et demi de prison pour « promotion de la

propagande kurde » en se produisant dans sa langue maternelle ».

« En juillet 2016, sans accusation ni condamnation supplémentaires, sa peine a été portée à 19 ans ».

« Des amis rapportent qu'elle

était recherchée par la police depuis au moins 2014 ».

« La chanteuse a été arrêtée avec trois autres femmes, mais, elles, ont été libérées ».

Récemment, un mouvement de chanteuses et de chanteurs a pris corps pour soutenir Nûdem Durak.

Baptisé Song For Nudem Durak, celui-ci fait entendre sa voix via les réseaux sociaux.

Vous aussi, vous pouvez chanter pour elle. N'hésitez pas à rejoindre la démarche.

Il est également possible de signer la pétition Free Nûdem Durak.

Ou encore d'écrire à Nûdem à l'adresse : Nudem Durak M Tipi Kapalı Cezaevi, Bayburt – Turquie

THE AGONY OF SYRIA'S DRAWN-OUT WAR

A cease-fire is needed as Mr. Assad, with Russian help, attacks the last desperate refugees.

The Syrian civil war has entered its endgame and it is as gruesome and fraught as any stretch in the hellish nine-year struggle. As the Syrian troops of Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia, move to clear the last rebel-held enclave in northwestern Syria, some 900,000 civilian refugees — more than half of them children — have been pushed against the Turkish border in the freezing cold.

More, the battle for the city of Idlib has embroiled Turkey, threatening a direct clash between a NATO power and Russia. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has threatened to block the Syrian advance militarily, and on Thursday two Turkish soldiers were killed in a Russian airstrike inside Syria.

If the Syrian-Russian drive continues, it stands to send thousands more refugees toward the border. Turkey is already burdened by almost four million Syrian refugees, whose presence is increasingly becoming a political liability for Mr. Erdogan.

The United Nations special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, has described a “devastating scale of humanitarian suffering” in Idlib in an anguished appeal for the U.N. Security Council to call a cease-fire. But with the Trump administration showing little appetite for any involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, and Europe effectively sidelined, Russia, Syria and Turkey are calling the shots. And neither Syria nor Russia has demonstrated concern for human suffering in a war in which Mr. Assad has made little distinction between rebels and civilians.

The United States actively supported rebel groups in the first years of the civil war and later fo-



The United Nations special envoy for Syria has described a “devastating scale of humanitarian suffering” in Idlib. Credit...Muhammed Said/Anadolu Agency, via Getty Images

cus on crushing the Islamic State in Syria. But once the Islamic State was effectively defeated, President Trump began reducing American involvement. Last October, Mr. Trump ignited controversy when he pulled American forces out of the Kurdish-controlled zone in northeastern Syria, leaving the Kurds vulnerable to Turkish attacks.

The president tweeted at the time that it was “very smart not to be involved” in the fighting. And while abandoning the Kurds was broadly criticized, the sentiment was evidently shared by many Americans as Syrian government troops, supported by Russian air power and Iranian militias, steadily routed the dizzying array of rebel and jihadist forces and their ever-shifting alliances.

The battle for Idlib, the latest and possibly last battle of the Syrian civil war, has attracted little atten-

tion in the West, particularly in an America embroiled in domestic political struggles. Syria did not rate a mention in the latest Democratic debate, which almost entirely ignored the rest of the world. Though Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has issued statements in support of Turkey and might be happy to fan differences between Turkey and Russia, which have drawn close in recent years, there remains no viable resistance inside Syria for America to support, even if anyone in the administration had any interest in doing so. At this stage, there is little to stop Mr. Assad’s forces from restoring control over all Syria, save the territory in northeastern Syria still controlled by Kurdish-led forces, which are not now being challenged by Mr. Assad and his allies.

But a cease-fire is essential, primarily to help the refugees and the civilians still in Idlib, but also to prevent an escalation between

Turkey and Russia and to facilitate the start of negotiations to put a formal end to the war. Russia and Turkey have cut deals before in Syria, and they are talking now, though without any results so far. Nudging them toward an agreement is where American, European and United Nations efforts should be focused.

Mr. Erdogan’s main immediate interest in the Idlib fight is to prevent the mass of refugees from crossing into Turkey. But he is also apparently trying to gain some leverage for postwar negotiations to ensure that the Kurds in northeastern Syria are kept away from Turkey. Working all angles, Mr. Erdogan has tried to cultivate a close relationship with Vladimir Putin, including a purchase of Russian missile defense systems that angered the United States, while threatening military action against Russian-backed Syrian forces.

Les conservateurs en tête des législatives en Iran

Le taux de participation de 42,5% est le plus faible jamais enregistré de l'histoire de la République islamique.

Tout s'est déroulé comme prévu, dans l'indifférence des électeurs et à l'avantage des plus durs. Les résultats partiels du scrutin législatif du vendredi 21 février ont dévoilé, dimanche, une confortable victoire des conservateurs, qui obtiennent une large majorité des 290 sièges du Parlement iranien. Ce succès chasse la majorité de modérés et de réformateurs qui soutenait le gouvernement du président Hassan Rohani, dont le second mandat s'achèvera en 2021. Il est inséparable d'une abstention record.

A 42,57 %, le taux de participation est le plus faible qui ait été enregistré de toute l'histoire de la République islamique. Depuis les premières élections législatives, en 1980, le taux de participation est en moyenne supérieur de quelques points à 50 %. Le décrochage est donc net, alors que des appels à voter en masse avaient été répétés en boucle par les caciques du régime et en premier lieu par le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, au cours des semaines qui ont précédé le scrutin.

Clôture de l'ère Rohani

En plus de leurs candidats, dont des centaines ont vu leurs candidatures invalidées par le Conseil des gardiens de la révolution, les réformateurs et les modérés ont vu disparaître leur électorat potentiel, manifestement passé d'une volonté de transformer le régime de l'intérieur à un refus de jouer le jeu du système en se rendant aux urnes.

Ce changement s'est fait tout particulièrement ressentir à Té-



Dans un bureau de vote à Téhéran, le 21 février. Ebrahim Noroozi / AP

héran. Si, dans les provinces, l'élection d'un parlementaire est souvent affaire de clientélisme et d'intérêts très locaux, les scrutins législatifs, dans les grandes villes et dans la capitale – qui envoie trente représentants au Parlement –, sont plus représentatifs des évolutions politiques nationales. La participation y a été, vendredi, inférieure à 25 %, et les électeurs qui avaient permis aux réformateurs d'obtenir l'ensemble des sièges de Téhéran en 2016 ne se sont pas présentés, permettant aux conservateurs de remporter une victoire complète dans la capitale.

Avec le scrutin de vendredi, le régime iranien a organisé la clôture de l'ère Rohani. La majorité parlementaire que le camp du président modéré avait obtenue lors des précédentes élections, en février 2016, avait fait figure d'encouragement populaire à la politique de détente vis-à-vis des Etats-Unis. L'électorat manifestait alors une volonté de croire aux promesses d'ouverture et de progrès économique qui lui étaient associées. L'ac-

cord sur le nucléaire iranien, signé en 2015, tardait à porter ses fruits sur le plan économique, mais n'avait pas encore été vidé de sa substance. Donald Trump n'était pas à la Maison Blanche. Il existait encore, pour les Iraniens avides de changement, des raisons d'espérer.

« Homogénéisation des centres de pouvoir »

Les effets des sanctions économiques rétablies par Washington en mai 2018, la violente répression par le régime du mouvement de protestation de novembre 2019, les tensions sécuritaires qui ont culminé avec l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani, début janvier, par les Etats-Unis et les mensonges d'Etat qui ont suivi la destruction de l'avion de l'Ukraine International Airlines par la défense antiaérienne iranienne au-dessus de Téhéran... Tous ces événements ont produit une réalité nouvelle, où une crise en chasse une autre et empêche une large partie de l'électorat de

se projeter dans un avenir qui paraît toujours plus incertain.

Le nouveau Parlement, dont la composition résulte indirectement du contrôle qu'exerce sur les candidatures l'instance non élue du Conseil des gardiens de la révolution, porte la marque du passage à cette période nouvelle. « On assiste au début d'une homogénéisation des centres de pouvoir au sein de la République islamique, relève l'analyste politique iranien installé aux Etats-Unis Mohsen Milani. Elle se fait au profit du Guide de la révolution, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, et de l'aile sécuritaire la plus autoritaire du régime. » Pour M. Milani, comme pour de nombreux observateurs, il était nécessaire à cette dernière de s'assurer, avec une large victoire conservatrice, un Parlement soumis.

Parmi les députés élus vendredi, une figure se distingue, celle de l'ancien maire de Téhéran, Mohammad Baqir Ghalibaf, qui, arrivé premier dans la capitale, fait figure de favori pour devenir le prochain président du Parlement. Son arrivée à ce poste marquerait une nouvelle rupture. M. Ghalibaf est en effet l'ancien chef des forces aériennes des gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique du régime qui profite du durcissement en cours au sein des institutions de la République islamique et de l'atmosphère de tension régionale et internationale. L'arrivée d'un homme au profil de cette nature à la tête d'une institution élue serait un nouveau défi à la dimension républicaine du régime, menacée par la montée en puissance des durs qui ont désormais, à défaut de légitimité populaire, un Parlement à leur main.

Pour éviter une catastrophe humanitaire à Idlib, la France et l'Allemagne cherchent une « solution politique »

Paris et Berlin discutent avec la Russie et la Turquie de l'organisation d'un sommet sur la situation dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie.

Catastrophe humanitaire, risque d'escalade militaire, équation politique introuvable : toutes les alarmes sont actionnées au nord-ouest de la Syrie, dans la province d'Idlib, dernière zone qui échappe encore au contrôle du régime de Damas, soutenu par ses parrains russes et iraniens. Les camps de réfugiés – 900 000 personnes jetées sur les routes depuis début décembre – sont surpeuplés, non loin de la frontière turque. Les températures négatives et les conditions sanitaires précaires contribuent à l'urgence absolue.

Dans ce contexte dramatique, alors que Damas poursuit son offensive, la fin de la semaine a été marquée par les contacts entre la chancelière Angela Merkel et Emmanuel Macron, d'une part, et les dirigeants turc et russe, Recep Tayyip Erdogan et Vladimir Poutine, d'autre part. Les Européens ont évoqué la nécessité d'une « solution politique », ce qui relève à la fois de l'évidence et du vœu pieux. « Les deux parties se parlent mais la confrontation se poursuit. Le fait est qu'ils n'y arrivent pas sans nous, explique-t-on à l'Élysée. On n'est pas à l'abri d'un dérapage. »

« Escalade militaire »

L'idée d'un sommet à quatre à Istanbul est discutée entre les capitales, Erdogan évoquant même, ce week-end, la date du 5 mars, non confirmée. Cet empressement turc est interprété comme un aveu de faiblesse. « L'enjeu essentiel est un cessez-le feu, mais surtout l'endroit où passerait la ligne de contrôle, explique Joost Hiltermann, directeur Moyen-Orient à l'organisation International Crisis Group (ICG). Si les Turcs prévalaient, ce serait sur la base de l'accord de Sotchi [créant en septembre 2018 une zone délimitarisée]. Le régime syrien devrait se retirer des zones autour des points d'observation turcs. L'autre



Ursula von der Leyen, Angela Merkel et Emmanuel Macron, le 20 février, à Bruxelles. JEAN-CLAUDE COUTAUSSE POUR « LE MONDE »

compromis vraisemblable serait plus défavorable à la Turquie, l'auto-roule Damas-Alep passant clairement sous le contrôle du régime syrien. »

Dans la logique de Damas et de Moscou, il y a peu de raisons de s'arrêter. De nouveau, la Russie a bloqué – avec la Chine – une résolution au Conseil de sécurité, le 20 décembre, devant permettre l'organisation d'une aide humanitaire transfrontalière. L'ONU, de son côté, revoit à la hausse son appel aux fonds pour l'aide d'urgence, passant de 330 millions à 500 millions de dollars (462 millions d'euros).

M^{me} Merkel et M. Macron ont appelé Vladimir Poutine à « la cessation immédiate des hostilités et à ne pas entraver l'accès à l'aide humanitaire des populations dans le besoin », précisait l'Élysée le 20 février. La main tendue à la Russie par la France, formalisée au fort de Brégançon en août 2019, a été sans effet sur le dossier syrien. Depuis décembre, Moscou soutient pleinement les forces de Damas dans son offensive, au prix de bombardements indiscriminés. A Bruxelles, le 21 février, en marge du Conseil européen, M. Macron s'est inquiété du risque de nouvelle « crise migratoire » et d'« escalade militaire »,

alors que seize soldats turcs ont été tués en février.

Depuis qu'Erdogan avait jugé Emmanuel Macron « en état de mort cérébrale », fin novembre, en réponse à l'analyse du président français sur l'état de l'OTAN, les relations entre les deux pays demeurent sous tension. Fin janvier, M. Macron a accusé le dirigeant turc de se trouver en « contravention explicite et gravissime » des engagements pris à la conférence de Berlin sur la Libye, en raison du déploiement continu de milliers de combattants syriens pro-turcs et de soldats turcs en faveur de Tripoli. Les Européens ont aussi condamné la remise en cause unilatérale des frontières maritimes en Méditerranée orientale, au détriment de la Grèce et de Chypre.

« Marchandage effroyable »

Dans la crise syrienne, Erdogan a besoin de la médiation de M^{me} Merkel et du président français, qui ont pourtant une faible marge de manœuvre. « L'Europe peut proposer une contribution financière pour aider les civils dans cette zone frontalière de 160 kilomètres de long et 5 à 10 de large, utilisant ainsi l'aide humanitaire comme ersatz de politique étrangère », souligne Marc Pierini, expert au centre de recherche

Carnegie et ancien ambassadeur de l'UE en Turquie (2006-2011). Mais, en échange, il est probable que Poutine réclamerait le retrait des postes d'observation turcs. Il risque d'y avoir un marchandage effroyable. Or, Poutine est bien plus fort qu'Erdogan et ses forces militaires n'ont pas d'inhibition. »

Ankara a demandé aux Etats-Unis le déploiement de batteries de défense antiaérienne Patriot. Une requête sans chance d'aboutir : Washington exige l'abandon préalable par la Turquie de l'achat du système de défense S-400 à la Russie. Derrière les rodomontades d'Ankara se dessine une fragilité. La Turquie espère préserver ses douze postes d'observation, établis dans la zone tampon à l'intérieur de la Syrie, malgré l'avancée des forces du régime. Elle espère un statu quo post-Sotchi, tandis que Damas et Moscou veulent la reconnaissance de leurs gains. Déjà confronté au défi de la présence de 3,6 millions de réfugiés syriens sur son territoire, Erdogan a investi un fort capital politique dans la projection de ses forces à l'étranger, en Syrie et en Libye. Il lui faut préserver les apparences.

Or Vladimir Poutine place son homologue turc devant ses engagements, pris à Sotchi en 2018 : l'éradication des groupes de combattants armés, parmi lesquels des milliers de djihadistes. « La Russie a peint tous ces combattants avec un gros pinceau comme étant des terroristes, ce qu'ils ne sont pas tous », souligne Joost Hiltermann, de l'International Crisis Group. Beaucoup sont arrivés d'autres régions syriennes et ont trouvé refuge à Idlib pour survivre. Il y a les durs parmi les durs, et aussi des étrangers, avec des agendas particuliers, non syriens. La Russie, elle, veut s'en débarrasser en les tuant tous, sans distinction entre les bonnes pommes et les pourries. »

Irak : qui a enlevé les otages français ?

La piste de l'enlèvement politique à Bagdad des quatre humanitaires de SOS Chrétiens d'Orient se précise.

MOYEN-ORIENT Cela fait trente-cinq jours que l'on est sans nouvelles des trois humanitaires français et de leur traducteur irakien, membres de l'ONG SOS Chrétiens d'Orient, disparus à Bagdad le 20 janvier. Officiellement, ni les autorités françaises, ni le pouvoir irakien ne parlent d'enlèvement et, à ce jour, aucune revendication publique n'a été présentée. Pourtant, selon nos informations, l'enlèvement est bien la piste privilégiée.

Dès le surlendemain, le mercredi 22, les services de renseignement français ont fait le tour des hôpitaux, des morgues et autres endroits où leurs corps auraient pu être. Sans résultat. La mort des quatre hommes a donc été écartée. De même que leur enlèvement par un groupe sunnite radical, type Daech, ou crapuleux. Reste donc la piste d'une « organisation politique » capable de détenir durablement quatre personnes. L'hypothèse d'un kidnapping par une milice chiite, plus ou moins dans l'orbite de certains centres du pouvoir irakien et de l'Iran, serait la piste la plus sérieuse.

Le Figaro a contacté SOS Chrétiens d'Orient au moment de l'annonce du kidnapping, le 24 janvier, puis récemment. Mais l'ONG, tenue à la discrétion par les autorités françaises, n'a pas répondu à nos dernières demandes. Interrogé, le Quai d'Orsay n'a pas voulu, non plus, en dire plus. S'agit-il d'un enlèvement d'opportunité ou a-t-il été programmé à l'avance ?

Deux des trois Français étaient arrivés à l'aéroport de Bagdad la veille de leur kidnapping. Ils sont sortis le lendemain matin de leur hôtel, recommandé comme sûr par les autorités irakiennes, pour se rendre à un premier rendez-



Le 20 janvier, à Bagdad, les trois humanitaires français et leur traducteur irakien ont disparu. Khalid Al Mousily/REUTERS

vous. Selon une source locale, une bande-vidéo atteste de leur sortie de l'hôtel, où ils sont revenus en début d'après-midi. Faux témoignage

Entre-temps, le troisième Français, arrivé lui aussi par l'aéroport de Bagdad, les avait rejoints à l'hôtel, d'où ils sont ressortis tous les quatre vers 16 h 40, pour se rendre à l'église arménienne. Mais là, la vidéo de leur départ a disparu. Or, la législation irakienne en la matière exige que ses propriétaires - en l'occurrence l'hôtel - gardent quinze jours ces bandes d'enregistrement. Le faux témoignage d'un employé de l'hôtel renforce la thèse d'un enlèvement programmé. En effet, le lendemain de leur disparition, un des employés de l'hôtel a affirmé avoir vu l'équipe de SOS Chrétiens d'Orient au petit déjeuner, alors qu'ils avaient disparu la veille vers 17 heures, non loin de l'ambassade de France, le long du Tigre.

Ce jour-là, de nombreux manifestants dénonçant l'incurie de leurs dirigeants mais aussi les

milices chiites omniprésentes battaient le pavé de la capitale, où des dizaines d'arrestations ont eu lieu. La voiture des trois Français a-t-elle été stoppée à un barrage ? Un témoin de seconde main affirme avoir vu les Français détenus dans la même cellule que lui et d'autres manifestants irakiens arrêtés ce jour-là, avant que ces derniers soient, eux, libérés.

Les trois employés de SOS Chrétiens d'Orient sont des humanitaires aguerris. Quant à leur traducteur, il travaille avec l'ONG en Irak depuis plusieurs années. À Bagdad, l'ambassade de France est mobilisée, de même que le Centre de crise du Quai d'Orsay à Paris. Le silence autour de cet enlèvement - de même que l'absence de preuve de vie transmise aux familles - ne veut pas dire qu'un contact n'a pas été établi, et que des négociations n'ont pas été engagées en vue de leur libération.

Comme à chaque prise d'otages ou presque, des personnages plus ou moins recommandables font des offres de service. Parmi

eux, Joachim Son-Forget, le député des Français de Suisse et du Liechtenstein, avec en second rideau, Alexandre Benalla à la tête de sa société de sécurité, ainsi que d'anciens gros bras des services qui se sont proposés pour « aller chercher » les otages.

Sur quoi peuvent porter les négociations ? Une demande de rançon ? Une demande de formation pour que ces milices chiites puissent - comme l'une d'entre elles l'avait confié au Figaro en septembre - bâtir leurs propres forces spéciales, concurrençant ainsi l'Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, mis sur pied en partenariat avec les États-Unis, leur ennemi ? Et dans quelle mesure les sponsors iraniens de ces formations paramilitaires seraient-ils impliqués dans les négociations ? Autant de questions à ce jour sans réponse.

Fin 2015, une vingtaine de membres de la famille régnante qatarienne avait été enlevée dans le sud de l'Irak où ils chassaient. Leur détention par la milice pro-iranienne Kataeb Hezbollah dura seize mois et fit l'objet de négociations complexes, impliquant le versement d'une très importante rançon, mais aussi des concessions politiques.

The New York Times

Feb. 26, 2020

By Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar

What Does the Iranian Election Tell Us?

The low turnout and the conservative victory in the parliamentary elections in Iran indicate intense electoral disenchantment and set the stage for the ascendance of a hard-liner as president.

On Friday Iran held its 11th parliamentary elections since the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979, and the first since the Trump administration renewed sanctions on Iran and battered its economy.

The voting turnout — 42.5 percent — was the lowest since 1979, and a loose alliance of conservative candidates won. In Tehran, the capital, where about 75 percent of the voters chose not to vote, all 30 seats were won by the conservative candidates loyal to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

The Iranian electorate faces a perpetual dilemma on whether to participate or boycott the elections as the choice of candidates is limited and the Guardian Council — a constitutional committee made up of six clerics and six jurists that vets the electoral candidates — bars those seen as critical of the regime or deviating from its positions.

More than 7,000 candidates, most of them reformists and moderates, including 90 members of the current Iranian Parliament, were disqualified from Friday's elections by the Guardian Council for having insufficient ideological loyalty, a move that reduced voter participation.

The turnout was higher than Tehran in smaller cities, where citizens have more incentive to vote if the candidates promise better schools and hospitals, improved roads, faster internet, more ethnic inclusion and even individual patronage. As the American sanctions have debilitated the Iranian economy, greater participation in parliamentary elections offers the provinces an opportunity to bargain for a better share of the shrinking pie from Tehran.

In Tehran and other major cities, the parliamentary elections signal not only the citizens' preferences for particular factions within the regime but also its legitimacy as a whole. Participation rates in the major cities fluctuate more often and reflect the political diversity of the candidates.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, a high turnout enabled moderate reformist candidates to secure Tehran's 30 seats in the Parliament. The conservative winners in Tehran, this weekend, were led by Mohammad



Poll workers during parliamentary elections in Tehran on Friday. Credit...Wana/Reuters

Bagher Qalibaf, the former head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' air force wing, who is expected to be the speaker of the incoming Parliament. Victories like Mr. Qalibaf's demonstrate that the Revolutionary Guard is ensuring its presence and domination of the Parliament as well.

Iranians who refused to vote expressed their anger and their disappointment with the Revolutionary Guard's bloody crackdown on protesters in November, and its cover-up of the accidental shooting of a civilian airplane near Tehran in January. But the trouble with boycotting the elections is that it opens the doors of the Parliament for the most conservative wing of the political system.

Iranian society stands at an uncharted crossroad and the regime is bringing the apparatus of the state under the control of what it considers to be its most loyal elites, one election at a time. In a politically, economically and regionally tumultuous environment, doing so would allow an orderly transition to the next supreme leader.

The brutal response to the November protests across the country showed the will and the capacity of the security apparatus to put down unrest. And a multinational army of proxies under the banner of the Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force operating from Lebanon and Syria to Iraq and Yemen, have demonstrated Tehran's will and effectiveness in defending its sphere of influence and fighting threats from hostile states to nonstate participants.

Iran's constitutional design places the Islamic Republic in a win-win position. High voter participation helps le-

gitimize the regime and a boycott invariably leads to a conservative victory. Elections also serve as a convenient device for the state to learn about and manage popular sentiments before they turn into a mass revolt.

Despite these institutional constraints, Iranian citizens have often outmaneuvered their leaders and stunned the world by using elections as a tool to coordinate nationwide social and political movements.

After the 1989 death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, and with the gradual decline of revolutionary fervor, competition among Mr. Khomeini's followers provided a narrow political opportunity for Iranian citizens.

By choosing candidates who appeared furthest from the establishment, Iranians revealed their preference for radical change not only to the ruling elites but also to each other. Far from strengthening the regime, elections often turned into national protests, deepening the gap between the state and the society and further polarizing factional politics.

The student uprising in 1999 over the government's crackdown on the media and the Green Movement against what millions viewed as a rigged re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009 were direct results of electoral politics and popular frustrations with the regime's suppression of the people's struggle for civil rights.

The ruling elites managed this 30-year cycle of elections and protests through a sequence of crackdowns, concessions and more crackdowns.

Disillusioned citizens sometimes boycotted elections only to return to the ballot box with vehemence.

Parliamentary elections in Iran have become a consistent predictor of relations between the state and the society. The low turnout in the 2004 parliamentary elections signaled popular disillusionment after the failure of the reform movement that started in the 1997 presidential election to protect civic rights, which led to the 2005 election of Mr. Ahmadinejad to the presidency.

The high turnout in the 2016 parliamentary elections confirmed the high approval rate of President Hassan Rouhani and the nuclear agreement he signed with the United States and other world powers, predicting his landslide re-election the following year.

The conservative victory in the recent parliamentary elections indicates that the Iranian people are disenchanting with electoral politics that deliver nothing. It sets the stage for the ascendance of a hard-line president in the 2021 election if the population's apathy persists. And the absence of public pressure and elite bargaining will determine the appointment of a possibly even more hawkish supreme leader after Ayatollah Khamenei.

Yet after this electoral cycle, Iranian voters may not easily return to the ballot box. Friday's election could be the beginning of the death of Iran's limited electoral politics.

Frustrations against the political system run deep in the country. So do anxieties over external threats to the nation's security and territorial integrity. It is unclear which direction Iranian society will take.

Elections in the past have laid the ground for cultural exchanges, diplomatic negotiations and a nuclear agreement between Iran and the United States. After the starkly low turnout and the conservative victory, we might be inching toward a more turbulent phase between the two countries.

Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar is an associate professor of international affairs at Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government and Public Service and a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

The New York Times

Feb. 26, 2020

By David D. Kirkpatrick, Farnaz Fassihi and Mujib Mashal

‘Recipe for a Massive Viral Outbreak’: Iran Emerges as a Worldwide Threat

Long a regional crossroads, Iran is spreading the new coronavirus to a host of neighboring countries. Many are ill equipped to cope.

Religious pilgrims, migrant workers, businessmen, soldiers and clerics all flow constantly across Iran’s frontiers, often crossing into countries with few border controls, weak and ineffective governments and fragile health systems.

Now, as it struggles to contain the spread of the [coronavirus](#), Iran is also emerging as the [second focal point after China for the spread of the disease](#). Cases in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates — even one in Canada — have all been traced to Iran, sending tremors of fear rippling out from Kabul to Beirut.

The Middle East is in many ways the perfect place to spawn a [pandemic](#), experts say, with the constant circulation of both Muslim pilgrims and itinerant workers who might carry the virus. Iran’s economy has been strangled by sanctions, its people have lost trust in their government and its leaders are isolated from much of the world, providing little clarity about the extent of the [epidemic](#).

Civil wars or years of unrest have shattered the health systems of several neighboring countries, like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen. And most of the region is governed largely by authoritarians with poor track records at providing public transparency, accountability and health services.

“It is a recipe for a massive viral outbreak,” said Peter Piot, director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the former founding executive



Iranians outside a Tehran hospital. Experts warn that the coronavirus may be spreading from Iran throughout the Middle East. Credit... Wana News Agency, via Reuters

director of the [Joint United Nations Program on H.I.V./AIDS](#).

Millions of Muslim pilgrims travel each year from around the region to visit Shiite holy sites in Iran and Iraq. In January alone, 30,000 people returned to Afghanistan from Iran, and hundreds of others continue to make the pilgrimage to Qom, the site of the outbreak, every week, Afghan officials say.

Iraq closed its border with Iran on Saturday, but millions cross it every year. So scores of infected people could potentially have brought the virus to Iraq, depending on how long it has been present in Iran. And as of midday on Monday in Najaf, flights to and from Iran were still taking off and landing.

Governors of Iraqi provinces bordering Iran were taking the potential for contagion seriously and at least two were personally inspecting the border crossings to ensure that they were being policed and that Iranians were barred from crossing into Iraq.

Qutaybah al-Jubouri, the head of the Iraqi Parliament’s Health Affairs Committee, called the coronavirus “a plague” and said his committee was demanding a far more complete closure of all “land, sea and air” borders with Iran “until the disease is completely controlled.”

Iran’s health ministry sent a letter to the governor of Qom on Thursday and asked Shiite religious leaders to limit the number of pilgrims at the Shrine to Fatima Masumeh and other religious sites in the city, but as of early Tuesday, throngs of people still gathered around the shrine, touching it and taking part in communal prayers.

Iran is in many ways a case study in the risks of the disease spreading. The country reported its first case of the coronavirus less than a week ago, in Qom. On Tuesday, health officials reported that a total to 15 people had died after contracting the virus. At least 95 others had been infected in Iran, the officials said, with new cases being re-

ported in Isfahan, Hamedan and other cities, as well as in Qom.

Now the slow drip of news about the spread of the virus is compounding Tehran’s already acute credibility problems, less than two months after officials were forced to admit lying about their knowledge of the accidental downing of a Ukrainian passenger jet by air defense systems. Many Iranians on Monday were openly skeptical about the official accounts of the spread of the virus.

A member of Parliament representing Qom claimed on Monday that at least 50 people had already died there, including 34 in quarantine, and that the first case had been reported more than two weeks before officials acknowledged any infections.

“Every day 10 people are dying in Qom,” the lawmaker, Ahmad Amiri Farahani, asserted in a speech to Parliament, demanding a quarantine on his city.

Health ministry officials vehemently disputed his claims. “I will resign if the numbers are even half or a quarter of this,” said Iraj Harirchi, adviser to the health minister.

Adding to the public anxiety, the Iranian news media reported that Dr. Mohamad Reza Ghadir, the head of a medical university in Qom and the top official in charge of managing the outbreak there, was among those placed in quarantine.

On Monday, Dr. Ghadir said on Iran’s state television network that the health ministry had ordered city officials “not to publish any statistics” related to the outbreak

in Qom. The situation there was “very dire and disease has spread across the city,” he said.

Iranians, distrusting the authorities, were ignoring official urgings to stay away from hospitals for fear of spreading the disease, instead crowding into emergency rooms to get themselves tested. Imam Khomeini Hospital in Tehran put up a triage tent outside to handle the overflow.

In an interview with BBC Persian from Tehran, Dr. Babak Gharaye Moghadam urged citizens to “please, please listen” to the advice of health officials and not to turn to social media feeds on their cellphones for guidance.

The price of hospital masks was spiking across the region, including in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan, where some were selling for as much as 30 times the usual cost.

Sign up to receive an email when we publish a new story about **thecoronavirus outbreak**.

Experts worry that few Middle Eastern countries are ready to respond effectively to the threat posed by the virus.

“How ready are these countries?” asked Dr. Montaser Bilbisi, an American-trained infectious disease specialist practicing in Amman, Jordan. “In all honesty, I have not seen the level of readiness that I have seen in China or elsewhere, and even some of the personal protective equipment is lacking.”

In Jordan, for example, he said that he had not yet seen a fully protective hazardous materials suit. “So health care workers would be at very high risk for infection.”

In Afghanistan, officials said the first confirmed case of the virus was a 35-year-old man from the western province of Herat who had recently traveled to Qom. Health officials declared a state of emergency in Herat. The gov-



A pharmacy in Tehran on Monday. Residents reported long lines to buy disinfectant and face masks, and pharmacies were posting signs that they had run out. Credit...Atta Kenare/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

ernment on Sunday had already suspended all air and ground travel to and from Iran.

But the border is difficult to seal. Thousands cross every week for religious pilgrimages, trade, jobs and study — about 30,000 in January alone, the International Organization of Migration, an intergovernmental agency, reported.

“In the past two weeks, more than a 1,000 people have visited or traveled to Qom from Herat, which means they come into closer contact with the virus,” the Afghan health minister, Ferozuddin Feroz, said on Monday at a news conference in Kabul.

As officials offered reassurances that they were ordering more hospital masks, residents were panicking about what other precautions to take.

The son of a professor at a university in Herat, who returned three days ago from Iran, called a reporter for The New York Times on Monday asking what the procedure for quarantine was.

“My father doesn’t show any signs of corona, but he and our family are worried,” the son, Mohamad Iman, said. “He’s locked himself up in a room where he just reads books. He has asked us to leave him some food and water at the door, but to stay away.”

Saudi Arabia was the epicenter of a similar outbreak seven years ago, known as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, that was transmitted from camels to humans.

But even after seven years, Saudi Arabia, one of the richest countries in the world, has struggled to adapt state-of-the-art hygiene procedures to limit the spread of the virus within hospitals. A MERS outbreak last spring infected at least 61 people, killing eight of them.

“Many hospitals in Saudi Arabia have improved but some could still do better at prevention,” said Dr. David L. Heymann, former chairman of Britain’s Health Protection Agency.

In Iraq, the country with the most extensive border with Iran, only one case has been detected so far: that of a 22-year-old Iranian religious student in Najaf, Suhail Mohammad Ali.

In the first comprehensive steps to combat the spread of the virus, the education department in Najaf on Monday postponed spring exams and the sacred Imam Ali Shrine was closed.

The central government’s health department recommended avoiding crowded places, kissing or shaking hands.

In Beirut, Lebanon, a 41-year-

old woman who had traveled to Qom on a religious pilgrimage landed in Beirut on Thursday night and was found on Friday to have the virus. It was not until Monday, though, that the government issued an emergency plan, suggesting that travel to the affected areas be restricted and that arriving passengers be isolated at the airport if they showed symptoms.

But no definite restrictions were ordered; not all passengers landing in Beirut in recent days have been screened; and another two planes from Qom were allowed to land in Beirut on Monday. Passengers on the plane carrying the infected Lebanese woman from Qom were told to quarantine themselves at home.

The country’s health minister, Dr. Hamad Hasan, on Monday urged the Lebanese to stay calm. But Rabih Shaer, founder of a Lebanese nonprofit that campaigns against corruption, called the government’s sluggish response “irresponsible and criminal.”

“Already the Lebanese population lost trust that this political class can face all the problems,” he said. “And now, until today, they still haven’t taken the right measures. There’s no transparency, there’s no accountability.”

Dr. Nada Melhem, a virologist at the American University of Beirut who has been consulting with the Health Ministry, acknowledged that, “the level of panic in Lebanon is really high.”

“But with systematic follow-up, we will be able to contain it,” she added. “Are we going to have some gaps? We will definitely have some, but I hope we can limit them as much as we can.”

Reporting was contributed by Alissa Rubin from Baghdad, Vivian Yee from Beirut, Lebanon, Asadullah Timory from Herat, Afghanistan, and Fatima Faizi from Kabul, Afghanistan.

« Ils ont tué nos rêves, anéanti nos joies »

Depuis bientôt trois mois, les régimes syrien et russe reconquièrent Idlib, dernière poche rebelle du territoire. L'offensive engendre un mouvement de déplacement gigantesque vers la frontière turque. Sous d'intenses bombardements, les espoirs portés par la révolution de 2011 et longtemps préservés chez certains, dans cette enclave, ont volé en éclats.

« Je m'appelle Ammar El Aswad, j'ai 25 ans, je suis né à Lattaquié et je vis dans la province d'Idlib depuis 2016. »

« Je m'appelle Hibatullah Barakat, j'ai 24 ans, et je suis née à la campagne, près d'Alep. J'ai été déplacée à Idlib il y a deux semaines. »

« Je m'appelle Kareem Kz (1), j'ai 21 ans et je suis né à Maarat Al-Nouman. Aujourd'hui, je vis à la frontière avec la Turquie... »

Ammar, Hibatullah et Kareem : tous les trois se trouvent en ce moment même dans la province d'Idlib, comme en plein cauchemar, au milieu de quatre autres millions de personnes, parmi lesquelles 900 000 déplacés. Sur ce dernier bastion de Syrie à ne pas être encore passé sous la coupe du régime de Bachar Al Assad, les armées syrienne et russe ont lancé en janvier une offensive du sud de la province vers le nord.

Kareem étudiait l'économie à l'université avant que celle-ci ne soit bombardée : « On pensait que grâce à la Turquie, la province d'Idlib resterait sûre. Mais les régimes d'Assad et de Poutine ont apporté du matériel militaire dans la zone et ont commencé à bombarder. Ils ont agi directement contre les hôpitaux. Leur but était de faire le plus grand nombre de victimes innocentes. Nous avons abandonné nos maisons aux ruines et aux flammes, et avons marché vers la frontière, à 90 km au nord. »

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan est revenu, mardi 25 février, sur le sommet qu'il avait annoncé pour le 5 mars prochain avec son homologue russe, en présence d'Angela Merkel et d'Emmanuel Macron (lire ci-contre). « Nous n'avons aucune issue à la guerre en Syrie, déplore Fabrice Ba-



Des déplacés syriens lors d'une distribution de repas, à Idlib, le 22 février. Burak Kara/Getty Images/AFP

lanche, géographe spécialiste de la Syrie et maître de conférences à l'université Lyon 2. Les Occidentaux réclament l'arrêt de cette offensive mais n'ont aucun moyen de pression sur la Russie, tout n'est que paroles. »

L'escalade de tensions entre la Turquie et la Syrie, appuyée par la Russie, culmine depuis le début de l'offensive sur la province d'Idlib. Lundi 24 février, neuf combattants pro-régime ont été tués par les bombardements turcs, deux jours après la mort d'un soldat turc, blessé par des tirs de char de l'armée syrienne. Sur place, les habitants sont les témoins démunis de ces tractations vaines et dangereuses escarmouches. « Nous n'avons aucun espoir dans les négociations, affirme Hibatullah Barakat. Nous avons perdu notre confiance dans le gouvernement turc et, après toute cette peine, ces exils, ces morts, personne n'acceptera de négocier quoi que ce soit avec le régime d'Assad. »

Les habitants de la province se résignent à des conditions de vie effarantes. L'ONU alarme : à Idlib se déroule la « pire crise humanitaire du XXI^e siècle et la pire derrière la Seconde Guerre mondiale ». Tue Jakobsen, coordinateur humanitaire en Syrie de l'ONG Care, alerte sur le manque de moyens pour répondre à l'afflux de déplacés vers la frontière turque. « Les besoins augmentent si vite, je n'ai jamais vu ça. Nous manquons de tout. Il faut obtenir un cessez-le-feu. »

L'aide internationale est d'autant plus difficile à acheminer que, depuis le 10 janvier, elle doit théoriquement passer par Damas et être contrôlée par le régime. Auparavant, des points de passage étaient autorisés à la frontière avec la Turquie, l'Irak et la Jordanie. Mais lors du vote à l'ONU pour renouveler ces autorisations pendant une année supplémentaire, la Russie et la Chine ont opposé leurs vetos.

« C'est devenu intolérable, et le régime syrien est maintenant à 9 km de la ville d'Idlib, dans laquelle vivent toujours plus de 600 000 personnes. Si le régime continue ainsi, que feront-elles ? », s'interroge Ammar El Aswad. Selon Fabrice Balanche, aucune des possibilités actuelles n'est une solution pour les déplacés : « Soit ces personnes se réfugient vers la Turquie, puis l'Europe, soit les Turcs poussent les Kurdes et ce sont les Kurdes qui devront chercher refuge, soit encore le nord d'Idlib devient une nouvelle bande de Gaza et la guerre continue », énumère-t-il.

Ammar El Aswad a tenté de traverser la frontière avec la Turquie. Sans succès. Il est alors resté dans la province d'Idlib et a repris son métier de journaliste. Ce qu'il dépeint est sans appel : « Je passe mes journées à déambuler entre les camps avec ma caméra. Il n'y a plus aucun endroit pour accueillir le nombre croissant de personnes déplacées. Le moindre espace couvert abrite quatre ou cinq familles. Beaucoup dorment sur le bord de la route, alors que les tempé-

ratures sont très rudes. Les camps qui existaient déjà avant décembre débordent, et la plupart sont envahies par la boue depuis le début de l'hiver. Il n'y a pas de toilettes, pas de lieu où se laver. Il y a énormément de malades, nous avons un besoin pressant, immense, de médicaments, de provisions, de matériaux pour se réchauffer. Aucune école ne peut s'organiser, la scolarité des plus jeunes est brisée. Les enfants sont affamés. »

Si la réponse internationale est si en deçà des besoins, c'est, selon Fabrice Balanche, à cause de la mixité au sein des quatre millions de personnes dans la province d'Idlib : « Lorsque nous demandons aux Russes de freiner l'offensive, ils demandent ce qu'il faut faire des djihadistes dans la zone. Il y a environ 40 000 combattants au milieu des plus de deux millions de réfugiés. Et l'essentiel d'entre eux sont des djihadistes. »

Du fait de la stratégie de Bachar Al Assad, la région est devenue une mosaïque de toute la Syrie. Le régime a pour méthode de proposer aux habitants des villes et régions reconquises de partir vers une zone non dirigée par le régime, s'ils ne veulent pas se soumettre à Bachar Al Assad. Au fur et à mesure, il ne restait plus qu'Idlib, devenue une poudrière. Kareem Kz se désole de ce que devient, depuis décembre, sa province natale : « La tension et l'inquiétude n'ont laissé place qu'à la dépression. Ils ont tué nos rêves, anéanti nos joies. Ils ont détruit ma jeunesse et je ne sais plus, aujourd'hui, de quoi sera fait mon futur. »

« La Syrie est morcelée et elle ne redeviendra jamais plus comme avant, regrette Hibatullah Barakat. Bien sûr, les personnes sont divisées dans leurs idées et leurs opinions. Mais tous souffrent, et n'espèrent plus qu'un endroit sûr pour s'abriter. Peu veulent que la révolution continue, et personne ne croit encore en une Syrie libre. Prendre des photos pour documenter l'histoire des Syriens, témoigner de ce qui se passe ici, c'est tout ce qu'il me reste avant de finir par mourir sous les bombardements. » nitaire à Idlib est « la deuxième pire crise humanitaire derrière la Seconde Guerre mondiale ».

Repères

La « pire crise humanitaire du XXI^e siècle »

La guerre a débuté en mars 2011, à la suite de la violente répression par le régime de Bachar Al Assad de la révolution menée en écho des printemps arabes.

En huit ans, depuis le début du conflit, l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme estime que 380 000 personnes sont mortes, dont 115 000 civils.

La province d'Idlib est la dernière poche du territoire syrien à ne pas avoir été reconquise par le régime. Alors qu'environ 350 000

personnes y vivaient avant 2011, la province accueille actuellement près de quatre millions de Syriens.

L'offensive menée avec la Russie, depuis décembre, dans la région a créé un mouvement de déplacement de plus de 900 000 personnes vers la frontière turque.

Pour l'ONU, qui lance un appel à financement de 500 millions de dollars (462 millions d'euros), la crise humanitaire à Idlib est « *la deuxième pire crise humanitaire derrière la Seconde Guerre mondiale* ».

LA CROIX

26 février 2020

Par Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner

A Idlib, la Turquie et la Russie en face-à-face

Les accords signés en 2018 entre la Turquie, la Russie et l'Iran faisant d'Idlib une « zone de désescalade » ont volé en éclats depuis décembre. La Turquie, qui redoute l'arrivée de réfugiés sur son sol, tente de les sauver, en utilisant alternativement la menace d'une confrontation armée et le dialogue.

La diplomatie pourra-t-elle éviter un nouveau désastre humanitaire en Syrie, peut-être le pire en presque neuf ans de conflit ? Depuis le mois de décembre, la province d'Idlib, ultime bastion rebelle dans le nord-ouest du pays, vit au rythme des bombardements quotidiens. Village par village, les forces de Bachar Al Assad progressent, appuyées par l'aviation russe.

Comme lors des précédents épisodes, notamment à Alep fin 2016, les mêmes protagonistes se font face : d'un côté, les forces de Bachar Al Assad appuyées par la Russie et l'Iran ; de l'autre, l'opposition soutenue par la Turquie. En principe, tous sont tenus par des accords signés dans le cadre du « processus d'Astana », qui avaient créé en avril 2017 des « zones de désescalade » dans le pays, dont celle d'Idlib. C'est à ce titre

que la Turquie dispose dans la région de douze « postes d'observation » et donc de soldats, dont certains ont été tués ces derniers jours par l'armée syrienne, entraînant des ripostes.

« Mais depuis l'accord de Sotchi de 2018, la situation militaire a changé », note le politologue Jean Marcou, enseignant-chercheur à l'IEP de Grenoble, à propos de la reconquête progressive du territoire syrien par Bachar Al Assad. « Et l'opposition n'existe plus à Idlib où elle est essentiellement représentée par des factions djihadistes comme Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, l'ancien Front Al-Nosra. Le régime syrien considère donc comme légitime de la supprimer et, au fond, d'en finir avec la rébellion. »

Face à l'avancée des forces syriennes, les 3 à 4 millions de civils et de combattants se retrouvent piégés. Cette fois, ils n'ont plus aucune échappatoire : il n'y a plus d'autre zone rebelle pour les accueillir, et même la Turquie – qui héberge déjà 3,5 millions de leurs compatriotes – refuse catégoriquement de leur servir de refuge. « Aux raisons pratiques – le pays s'est rendu compte du coût que représente, par exemple, la scola-

risation de 650 000 enfants – s'ajoutent désormais des raisons politiques », explique Jean Marcou, pour qui Recep Tayyip Erdogan se retrouve aujourd'hui « acculé, avec le risque d'une crise humanitaire à ses frontières, et celui de perdre la face sur le plan domestique, régional et international ».

Après avoir fait planer la menace d'une intervention armée, la Turquie a finalement fait machine arrière, affirmant, jeudi 20 février, qu'elle n'avait « aucune intention d'affronter la Russie », puis annonçant, samedi 22, la tenue d'un sommet le 5 mars avec Vladimir Poutine, Angela Merkel et Emmanuel Macron. « Ni les Turcs ni les Russes ne veulent s'affronter », fait valoir Dorothee Schmid, spécialiste de la Turquie à l'Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), en rappelant leurs nombreux intérêts communs. Au sujet d'Idlib, toutefois, leurs positions divergent radicalement. Ankara ne cesse d'appeler au maintien des accords de Sotchi ou, au minimum, à la création d'une « zone tampon, avec un vrai cessez-le-feu garanti par des acteurs militaires », note la chercheuse.

De son côté, Moscou refuse qu'il

ne serve à couvrir aussi les combattants djihadistes, ce qui serait une « capitulation face aux terroristes », a lâché, mardi 25 février, le ministre russe des affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov.

Fenêtre d'espoir ? Après avoir ignoré ses alliés européens en misant sur la Russie, la Turquie est contrainte, aujourd'hui, de faire à nouveau appel à eux. Ceux-ci pourraient faire office de « médiateurs », estime la chercheuse de l'Ifri, et bien entendu de « financeurs » tant, depuis la crise migratoire de 2015, ils redoutent l'afflux de réfugiés sur leurs territoires.

« La Turquie veut essayer de mettre sur la table toutes ces contradictions, russes et occidentales, pour les rendre cohabitables », analyse Jean Marcou, qui constate également que « ses partenaires avancent à pas feutrés et ne semblent pas prêts à lui faire une fleur ». Mardi 25 février, le président turc a dû admettre qu'il n'y avait pas d'« accord total » sur le principe d'un sommet le 5 mars, et que celui-ci pourrait se réduire à un entretien bilatéral avec le président russe...



26-02-2020
By Mohammed Rwanduzy

Three members of the same family killed in Turkish shelling in Afrin district

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Three members of a Kurdish family were killed on Tuesday evening when Turkish shelling struck a house in Afrin district, an acquaintance of the deceased told Rudaw. Three members of another family at the house were also injured in the attack, according to local media.

The two families were gathered in the same house when shelling occurred in the area of Sherawa, reported Hawarnews, a media outlet affiliated with the Kurdish ruling authorities of North and East Syria.

Abdulhamid Abdulhamid, an acquaintance of the deceased family from the nearby area of Shahba, told Rudaw that the three killed were Hesên Haj Izzat, 55, his wife Fatima, and their 12-year-old daughter Sirusht Hesên.

“The house of the Kurdish individual Hesên Haj Izzat was fully destroyed, and he, his wife and daughter were killed,” Abdulhamid told Rudaw.

“Fatima was an employee of the Syrian Red Crescent,” he said, adding that the family had been displaced from the Afrin village of Moba by Turkey’s offensive on Afrin in 2018, relocating to Sherawa.



Observatory for Human Rights
Smoke rises from the town of Afrin, northwest Syria. File photo: AFP

Abdulhamid told Rudaw that the shelling occurred from 9:30–10:00 pm on Tuesday evening, targeting multiple villages in Sherawa, close to the Kurdish force-controlled Minagh airbase.

Sherawa is the only remaining area of Afrin still controlled by Kurdish forces after their withdrawal from elsewhere in the district in 2018. The killed and injured were pulled out from the rubble once shelling stopped, according to Hawarnews.

UK-based war monitor the Syrian

(SOHR) also reported the family’s death in the shelling on Wednesday.

Members of the injured family were being treated at a hospital in Afrin’s Shahba district, according to Hawarnews. Mizgin Ibou, a nurse at the hospital, told the outlet that Issmat Hamo, 40, sustained bruising to the head, and Mufida Ramzi Hassan, 48, a broken leg. Eight-year-old Jameel Hamo suffered minor injuries, Ibou said.

Shelling by Turkish forces and their Syrian proxies frequently target Kur-

dish forces and the areas they control. Ten civilians were killed and 21 others wounded by Turkish shelling in the Aleppo province town of Tel Rifaat in December 2019.

Afrin was the westernmost part of an autonomous region Kurds carved out in northern Syria after nearly nine years of Syrian civil war.

Turkey launched an invasion of areas under the control of Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in early 2018. Turkey views the YPG as the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), designated a terrorist group by Ankara for its four-decade, often armed struggle against the Turkish state for greater political and cultural rights.

The invasion and subsequent control of the area by Turkish forces has caused mass displacement from the once majority-Kurdish town. Afrin’s displaced Kurds now mostly reside in the northwest Syrian camps of Tel Riffat, Shahba and Sherawa.

Kidnaps for ransom, and the mass cut-down of Afrin’s famous olive trees have become the norm in the area.

Additional reporting by Hussein Omer



26-02-2020
By Mohammed Rwanduzy

Kurdistan pollution mutates children’s DNA, causing defects: study

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region – Dark hair cut into a bob framed the round face of a young girl craning her neck to peek around her teacher, curious about the stranger in her classroom. “Bexerbe,” she said with a shy smile. Welcome.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Two!” she replied, holding up the corresponding number of fingers before her teacher gently corrected her. Nine-year-old Alla* has Down syndrome. She is a student at the Educational Training Centre for Children with Special Needs, a facility run by Sulaimani-based non-governmental organization Kurdistan

Save the Children (KSC).

KSC’s centre is a rare institution that caters to the needs of children with learning disabilities in a society that is slowly coming to understand and accept children with diagnoses like Down syndrome and autism. About 500 children are benefitting from

KSC’s centre, 75 of them full time students. Another 1,070 children have applied.

In Sulaimani province, more and more children are born with genetic abnormalities, according to new research. Dr. Farhad Abdulkarim Barzinji is executive manager of Microgene, the only

lab in Sulaimani doing the pre-natal and neonatal DNA testing that diagnoses genetic abnormalities. He provides testing for hospitals across the province and has seen an eight percent increase in Down syndrome – and it's growing. "The curve is increasing exponentially," he said. He is writing up his research in a paper to be published later this year.

The Kurdistan Region already has a high number of children born with abnormalities caused by incidents such as the 1988 chemical attack on Halabja, or inter-family marriage within close-knit communities. At his lab, Dr. Barzinji interviews parents and tests their DNA to learn their family history and discover any genetic mutations they may carry. Engaged couples will come to him for testing and Dr. Barzinji steps into the role of marriage counsellor, giving advice on whether or not they should wed based on what genetic material they will be passing on to their children.

But many of the new cases he is seeing cannot be attributed to these known factors and, as he eliminates the potential causes, he is frequently left with one common denominator: environmental pollution. "We cannot say that just chemical weapons had an effect," he explained. It's oil, vehicle exhaust, industrial pollution, unhealthy food. "[It's] everything. Everything."

A fetus, in the very early stages of development when cells are rapidly dividing, is highly susceptible to aberrations and there is growing scientific research linking environmental pollution to genetic mutations or problems in gene regulation. A study done in Hamilton, Canada found pollutants from steel mills caused mutations in the sperm of male mice. Researchers in Vancouver discovered that even short term exposure to pollutants from diesel exhaust affected gene regulation – the process of turning genes on and off. New research out of Harvard has linked damaged DNA to common additives in plastic.



A worker looks for items to salvage and sell from the garbage of Sulaimani city, dumped at a site on the bank of the Tanjero River, south of the city, February 22, 2020. Photo: Hannah Lynch

Proof of Dr. Barzinji's hypothesis can be found in the Tanjero area near the river that runs a few kilometres south of Sulaimani city. Oil, concrete, and steel factories line the road, and the city of Sulaimani dumps its trash here. A grey haze hangs over the valley and the air is acrid. The area is a well-known environmental hazard.

"It's a disaster," said Dr. Barzinji. "All the patients who come from Tanjero definitely have genetic defects... particularly if they're pregnant."

With more genetic abnormalities, more children will need specialized education and care. Those who attend KSC's centre are the lucky ones. Specialized teachers, social workers, psychologists, and physiotherapists are on staff. Each child has a tailored program that includes one-on-one lessons, sports, music, group activities, math, and sci-

ence – designed to meet their specific needs and delivered in a way that fits how they learn. Parents are closely involved so that the education continues at home, too.

Six years after the centre opened its doors, staff say they are seeing a change in how children with learning disabilities are welcomed in wider Kurdish society. It used to be that children with developmental disabilities were considered a shame and never seen in public, explained Sirwa Gharim, educational coordinator at KSC. But now, it is common to see children with diagnoses like Down syndrome out in public. "Parents can hold their head high without having negative connotations," she said.

Parents have learned about their children's rights and "now they are the torchbearers," advocating for their sons and daughters, she explained.



A student at Kurdistan Save the Children's Educational Training Centre for Children with Special Needs has a one-on-one lesson with a teacher, February 23, 2020. Photo: Hannah Lynch

Society may be adapting, but government services haven't caught up, according to every professional asked about the issue.

Public schools are not equipped to give special attention to students with learning difficulties. Most schools will either treat a child with a learning disability as they would all their students, or they tell the parents to keep their child at home. The government gives a monthly stipend to families who have children with disabilities, but even with that, the extra medical expenses for a child with special needs are beyond the means of many families.



Dr. Farhad Abdulkarim Barzinji examines the results of a DNA test on a patient on a computer in his microgene lab in Sulaimani, February 20, 2020. Photo: Hannah Lynch

If the trend Dr. Barzinji is seeing continues and the frequency of genetic mutations grows exponentially, the inability of public services to address the needs of children with special needs and their families will only get worse.

Pediatrician Dr. Hersh Hama says the government and civil society actors need to take a concerted, multi-disciplinary approach to increase public awareness, provide services, and improve education of teachers. The number of children able to access the resources they need through centres like KSC's is in the minority. For most families, a child born with special needs is a hardship, eased only by death.

"This community is difficult for normal people," said Dr. Hama. "What is the situation if you have a child with special needs? Most of the parents want the child to die because they are a burden."

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the children.

Hasankeyf, village millénaire bientôt englouti sous les eaux

Dans le Sud-Est turc, la population à dominante kurde assiste, impuissante, à la construction d'un barrage qui va noyer un village vieux de 12 000 ans. Les autorités avancent des raisons économiques, mais les activistes y voient un geste politique d'Ankara contre la minorité kurde.

« Il était, il n'était pas... ». Ce pourrait être le début d'un conte - c'est ainsi qu'ils commencent tous en Turquie. Ou l'amorce d'un roman dystopique. Quand on arrive à Hasankeyf, les yeux rivés sur les toits noyés sous les eaux du Tigre, c'est la première phrase qui se glisse à l'esprit, comme le refrain entêtant d'un désastre - bien réel - annoncé. « Il était » : une cité millénaire de Mésopotamie, l'un des plus vieux sites habités par les hommes. « Il n'était pas » : ce que prétendront, un jour, les manuels d'histoire lorsque la petite ville du Sud-Est turc sera entièrement engloutie, rayée des cartes de géographie au profit d'un barrage géant, projet fétiche de l'ambitieux président Erdogan.

« C'est un génocide culturel », s'emporte Saliha Ruzgar, les sourcils en accents circonflexes. Le matin même, cette Kurde de Batman, à 36 kilomètres d'ici, a fait monter ses enfants en voiture pour faire avec eux ses adieux à Hasankeyf, son village natal. « Il y avait urgence. Je voulais leur montrer d'où je viens, la magie de ce lieu condamné à disparaître. Avant qu'il ne soit trop tard », glisse-t-elle, la voix pétrie d'émotion. Bonnet à pompons sur la tête, son aînée, Sevda, enchaîne les selfies au bord de la vallée du Tigre, dont la crue ne cesse de monter. Là-bas, de l'autre côté du pont qui sépare le village en deux, la vieille citadelle se dresse, orpheline, sur l'impressionnante falaise trouée de grottes qui domine, en contrebas, les maisons évacuées. « C'est ma première fois ici.



La petite ville de Hasankeyf à proximité de Batman, en Anatolie turque, va prochainement disparaître sous les eaux du lac artificiel du barrage hydro-électrique d'Ilisu, construit en aval sur le Tigre. BURAK KARA/Getty Images/AFP

Quelle beauté. Et quel gâchis. Le jour où tout sera immergé dans les profondeurs aquatiques, il me restera au moins ces quelques photos, gravées dans mon smartphone », murmure la jeune femme de 24 ans.

Les critères de l'Unesco

À la terrasse du salon de thé qui surplombe cette étendue d'eau faussement calme où barbotent quelques canards, des touristes coréens ont pris place à la dernière table libre, incrédules face à ce tableau en mutation. « Mais pourquoi donc détruire ce site ? », lance l'un d'eux, caméra à l'épaule. La réponse officielle est économique. Avec Ilisu - le nom

de ce barrage géant qui a coûté plus d'un milliard d'euros -, Ankara espère fournir l'équivalent de 3 % de la production nationale d'électricité et irriguer 1,7 million d'hectares. D'un point de vue stratégique, c'est un moyen idéal de domestiquer le Tigre, mais aussi l'Euphrate, afin de contrôler, si besoin, le débit des fleuves qui descendent vers la Syrie et l'Irak voisins. Dans les discours, la promotion « marketing » bat son plein. Lors d'une visite à Hasankeyf en 2012, le ministre des Finances d'alors, Mehmet Simsek, avait promis de faire de l'ouvrage hydraulique « une opportunité pour sauver Hasankeyf » en modernisant les infrastructures - bateaux touristiques, téléphérique et jet-

skis - et en créant de nouveaux emplois dans cette région longtemps délaissée par le pouvoir.

« Le problème, c'est qu'on nous vend du rêve, tout en broyant sans scrupule l'un des plus beaux bijoux du patrimoine de l'humanité. Ici, tant de civilisations ont laissé leur empreinte : les Perses, les Romains, les Byzantins, les Ottomans. Hasankeyf, comme les pyramides d'Égypte, devrait appartenir au patrimoine mondial de l'humanité. Le site remplit 9 des 10 critères de l'Unesco. Mais comme nos autorités n'ont jamais daigné l'y inscrire, personne ne se soucie de son sort », regrette Ridvan Ayhan, 58 ans. Béret vissé sur la tête, cet « activiste à

plein temps » - ainsi qu'il se définit - est le porte-parole de l'association Sauver Hasankeyf. Il se souvient avec une gourmandise d'enfant de ce petit bout de paradis sur terre, vieux de plus de 12 000 ans, où il grandit dans l'une des nombreuses maisons troglodytes creusées à même la roche : « Notre vie s'articulait autour du Tigre. L'été, mon père y pêchait les poissons qu'il vendait au marché. L'hiver, il tissait des tapis. Cinq fois par jour, ma

trop d'ombre au pouvoir. « Je me souviens du jour où j'ai fait un discours ici même devant une centaine de personnes pour alerter la population sur les conséquences environnementales du barrage. Dès le lendemain, on frappe à ma porte à 5 heures du matin : douze policiers, mandat d'arrêt en main pour m'embarquer en prison. J'étais accusé de propagande terroriste ! », raconte-t-il. Libéré au bout d'un an et demi, le mili-



mère m'envoyait dans la vallée à dos d'âne pour remplir les seaux d'eau. En bas, sur les terres fertiles irriguées par le fleuve, on allait cueillir des figes et du raisin. Quelle ironie du destin : il y a bien longtemps, nos ancêtres s'installèrent ici pour l'eau. Et aujourd'hui, c'est à cause de l'eau que les habitants sont chassés ».

L'idée d'un barrage remonte aux années 1960. « À l'époque, on entendait nos parents s'en inquiéter vaguement, mais sans qu'aucun plan ne soit formalisé », raconte Ridvan Ayhan. En 2002, avec l'arrivée au pouvoir de l'AKP (le parti islamo-conservateur d'Erdogan), les contours du projet se concrétisent. Dès 2004, de petites manifestations s'organisent. Sans grand succès. « Les habitants, dit-il, voulaient croire aux promesses de réforme et de développement de la nouvelle classe politique d'alors. C'était l'époque du boom des infrastructures et des services ». En 2012, la contestation prend de l'ampleur sur fond d'espairs déçus. Très vite, l'aura de Ridvan se met à faire

tant a, depuis, repris son bâton de pèlerin. « Hasankeyf, c'est un peu le Gezi du Sud-Est », glisse-t-il, une allusion aux manifestations - sévèrement réprimées - de 2013 contre la destruction d'un parc d'Istanbul. D'après lui, c'est même plus que ça : « À Hasankeyf, le pouvoir central s'attaque au patrimoine et à l'écologie. C'est aussi une façon de renforcer son autorité sur la minorité kurde, majoritaire dans cette région ». Depuis l'échec du processus de paix, après quarante ans de violents affrontements entre l'armée turque et guérilla du PKK qui firent plus de 45 000 morts, le sud-est subit une emprise renforcée d'Ankara : mise sous tutelle des mairies remportées par le parti prokurde HDP, profusion de drapeaux turcs au cœur des bourgades kurdes, démultiplication des postes de contrôle sur les routes.

Ridvan Ayhan n'est pas Kurde. Il est issu de la minorité arabe. Mais sa conscience de citoyen engagé le pousse à dénoncer l'ingénierie démographique dont il est le témoin dans cette partie

du monde tristement familière des déplacements forcés : « Ce sont 199 villages qui, comme Hasankeyf, sont condamnés à disparaître. À ce jour, plus d'un tiers sont déjà sous l'eau. On estime à quelque 75 000 le nombre de personnes qui sont ainsi chassées de chez elles... ». La complainte d'un rebab (instrument à corde) lui vole ses derniers mots. Ridvan relève la tête, surpris par l'écho musical de sa propre mélancolie. Debout, face à ce fleuve miroir où se reflète la tragédie de Hasankeyf, un musicien amateur joue quelques notes improvisées. « Je suis arrivé ce matin d'Istanbul pour des rendez-vous de travail dans la région. En chemin, j'ai voulu m'arrêter ici. Un spectacle tellement navrant. L'islam nous apprend à protéger la nature, non à la détruire », déplore Yildirim Gurel, un homme d'affaires.

Des allures 'après-guerre

En centre-ville, à l'autre extrémité du pont, le marché n'est plus qu'un serpent de graviers où traînent les chats sauvages. La rue principale, autrefois si vivante, a des allures d'après-guerre. Sauf qu'ici, ce sont les bulldozers qui ont arraché les rideaux de fer et édenté les façades, avant que l'eau ne vienne bientôt tout recouvrir. Un peu plus loin, quelques modestes maisons tiennent encore debout. Mais plus pour longtemps : la majorité de la population a été délogée à contrecœur moyennant un dédommagement financier. Sabiye Salkan, une Kurde de 40 ans, fait partie des quelque vingt derniers riverains abandonnés à leur sort, par refus de partir ou manque de moyens. « J'ai raté de quatre jours la date butoir pour remplir mon dossier me permettant de trouver un nouveau logement. J'ai déposé plusieurs recours. En vain. Dans quelques jours, on va nous couper l'électricité. Je n'ai aucun endroit où me réfugier avec mes quatre enfants ! Notre vie est en suspens », se lamente-t-elle. Du toit en ter-

rasse de sa modeste demeure, on aperçoit la ville nouvelle aux allures de Legoland : quelques bâtisses grisâtres plantées au milieu d'un désert de rocaille, qui narguent les cimes enneigées.

Pour y accéder, il faut de nouveau emprunter le pont, puis suivre le panneau bleu flambant neuf qui indique dans un bleu criard : « Hasankeyf ». La route zigzague entre les herbes folles, passe par le commissariat de police, le bureau de poste, la mairie et les pompiers. Un copié-collé version futuriste de la vieille ville où même le cimetière a été délocalisé. Dans les rues quasi désertes, les nouveaux arrivants sont aussi muets que les oiseaux. « On est ravis d'être là ! », se contente d'avancer, façon automate, un père de famille planté sur le peron de sa maison. L'homme, qui a récemment déménagé ici, ajoute en aparté : « Je sais que d'autres n'ont pas notre chance... » D'abord à cause des tarifs de l'immobilier : chaque nouvelle maison achetée a coûté dans les 150 000 livres (environ 22 500 euros) - un montant qui dépasse les compensations reçues (entre 80 000 et 100 000 livres) et qui contraint les habitants à s'endetter. Ensuite, parce que l'infrastructure n'est pas adaptée aux éleveurs, dans l'incapacité de mettre leurs bêtes en pâture sur le gazon miniature du lotissement. Sans compter les cas particuliers comme celui de Sabiye ou encore des couples non mariés qui, selon les règles en vigueur, n'ont pas droit aux aides au logement.

Un froid glacial s'abat sur les rues silencieuses du nouvel Hasankeyf. À l'heure du soleil couchant, quelques adolescents font la course à vélo d'une ville à l'autre. Deux villes fantômes qui se toisent. « Et nous, nous assistons, impuissants, à l'effacement de notre patrimoine au profit d'un barrage et d'une nouvelle cité sans âme. L'Histoire aura du mal à nous pardonner. La mémoire ne s'achète pas ! », murmure Ridvan Ayhan.

Can this veteran singer save Kurdish people's forgotten tunes?

Kurdish singer Mazhar Khaliqi says the Kurds should use globalization and technology to carry their musical tradition beyond the borders of the Middle East.

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraqi Kurdistan — Age has not stopped Mazhar Khaliqi, the legendary Iranian Kurdish singer who heads the Sulaimaniyah-based Kurdish Heritage Institute, a nongovernmental institute for preserving Kurdish national heritage and music.

The 81-year-old folk singer, poet, composer and folklorist, hails from the city of Sanandaj, the capital of the western Iranian province of Kurdistan. But it was only last year, in July 2019, that he had been able to go back to his hometown to receive an honorary award from the Kurdish Elites Congress (KEC), organized by the University of Kurdistan. He had left Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution because he could no longer sing under the ban on broadcast music.

In an interview with Al-Monitor, Khaliqi told Al-Monitor that singing has been part of his life from the age of nine. His strong voice was recognized by his teacher in the second year of primary school in Sanandaj, who offered to give him extra lessons. "We had only one hour of music, so my teacher asked me to stay back on Wednesdays so he could teach me the Kurdish and Persian maqams," he told Al-Monitor. (Maqam is the system of melodic modes used in traditional Middle Eastern music, often used interchangeably as a music genre.)

Khaliqi was invited to sing on the radio when he was merely 12, and he continued the half-hour broadcast on the Sanandaj radio station throughout the 1950s. His fame grew locally but no records of those broadcasts remain today.



Industry lines the heavily polluted Tanjero River, south of Sulaimani, February 22, 2020. Photo: Hannah Lynch

He went to study at Tehran University in 1958, where he received a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's degree in industrial management.

"In Tehran, I went to Radio Tehran [Iran's state radio at the time] and introduced myself. Fortunately they knew who I was and they offered me a spot on the radio without an audition," he recalled.

The radio's Kurdish department encouraged him to sing Kurdish songs, so that was mainly what he did until 1975. It was at Radio Tehran that he learned to collaborate with orchestras. "I sang with the best orchestras in Iran at that time and all my songs were recorded," he said. "I have recorded nearly 200 songs with different orchestras in Tehran, Kermanshah and Sanandaj. And I worked with famous Iranian composers like Morteza Hananeh and Mostafa Kasravi."

Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Khaliqi was obliged to leave his country and live in exile in the United Kingdom, as the new Iranian religious regime banned singing and music.

"After the Islamic Revolution, singing was banned. But this was the most important part of my life. So I needed to leave my country," he said. He arrived in London in 1984, where he continued singing and recording albums. Often, his choice of songs reflected his love of Iranian-Kurdish heritage and homesickness, such as "Bari Bayana" ("It Is Dawn") or "Egeremewe Bo Wlatakam" ("I Will Return to My Homeland") that were based on the poems of two great Kurdish poets.

"[Before I left Iran] I used to travel to remote Kurdish villages to collect original Kurdish melodies that would [otherwise] have been forgotten, because they had not been recorded," he said tearfully. "I was inspired by the rich Kurdish folklore and I liked to convey my own messages through my songs."

"In 1985, I noticed that the peshmergas and even the Kurdish leaders had lost hope and began seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. That was the best moment for me to encourage the Kurds all over the world to resist and keep hope alive.

Thus I chose 'It is Dawn,' which is the best poem by Abdulla Goran, the great Kurdish poet [1904-1962], to convey my message to make the Kurds to be passionate and that there is still hope," he said.

Khaliqi used his songs to call for Kurdish nationalism and development in order "to encourage women to go to school, and farmers to cultivate and not leave their villages."

"I do not think singing is just a pleasure and jubilation — it is also a reflection of the Kurdish customs and values, as well as remembering the suffering and the massacres," he added.

Khaliqi's visit to his hometown in July 2019 to receive an honorary award from the KEC was a way to recognize the collaboration between the Kurdish intellectuals who collaborate to maintain their common identity.

"I decided to participate in the KEC event because they did a good job; they invited many intellectuals from the four parts of Greater Kurdistan and awarded us all," Khaliqi said. "Although some people opposed the event, I thought it was worthy of appreciation. If they [the countries with a Kurdish population] negotiate with us as equals, we can co-exist," he said.

According to Khaliqi, the event brought together different people from across the region and it was a good opportunity to build bridges. "At the event, all participants expressed their love and respect for me and that was a very nice feeling," he admitted.

In reply to a question on how the Kurds can achieve their cultural

and political rights within the four countries with a Kurdish population — Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey — Khaliqi said, “Given globalization, it is inevitable that there would be compromises. I do not mean in political terms, but in art and culture. We should not let our traditions fade away in the globalized world. On the contrary, we should use globalization and technology to take our music and our culture beyond the Middle East.”

Khaliqi started traveling to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2003, where he established the Kurdish Heritage Institute to preserve traditional Kurdish musical genres, melodies and other folklore.

“No nation in the world has as many original melodies as the Kurds. Until now the institute has archived more than 20,000 Kurdish melodies. We have collected stories and storytellers from different parts of Kurdistan dating back more than 600 years, which show our civilization and that we were peace-loving people,” he said.

He added that Kurdish music, songs and stories have been a tool for the Kurds to maintain

their culture in the face of the states that rule their territory, particularly because some have banned the use of the Kurdish language and schools.

“I think we can pass our own culture to the world through music, which already has established good preliminary steps and foundations. We only need [new] composers and musicians in order to develop the Kurdish music,” Khaliqi said.

He used as an example Kurdish musician Kayhan Kalhor, a Tehran-born virtuoso on the kamancheh (spiked fiddle) who has won many international awards and highlighted the profile of Kurdish music globally.

“Fortunately we have the means to develop our music in southern Kurdistan, but we lack the mentality,” he said.

He also said the Kurds have so far failed to benefit from globalization to promote their music and culture, but simply moved on to listening to popular music at the expense of their own.

“Unfortunately cabaret music and popular music shows cur-

rently dominate the music scene in the Kurdistan Region. I am not a politician; however, I learned by experience that many things got messed up here in the Kurdistan Region including music and culture. The Kurdistan Regional Government authorities are responsible for that situation,” Khaliqi stressed. “This is due to two reasons: ignorance and a lack of experience. We [Kurds in the Kurdistan Region] did not succeed in the economy, oil and agriculture; similarly, we failed in preserving our culture, art and language. Nevertheless, there is still hope that we have learned from our past mistakes.”

Khaliqi said he has not quit singing, but he is now busy with saving the Kurdish folklore through research and archives.

“Indeed, I did not quit. I work full-time here as the head of the Kurdish Heritage Institute, which is innovative. We never had such an institute. I think my current job is more important than to sing again,” Khaliqi said.

In reply to a question on how he feels about Kurdish artists whose works were censored or, until very recently, could not sing

in their own mother-tongue, Khaliqi said, “This is not only about singing, it is also related to poetry and the message of songs. They [Turkey and Iran] are creating obstacles to the lyrics and the message behind some songs; otherwise, the Kurds can sing freely. But what you sing and your message is the issue.”

Bashdar Ahmad Sdiq, a Kurdish lecturer at the University of Sulaimani, who received a master’s degree in music from Western Michigan University, told Al-Monitor, “In addition to his strong voice, Khaliqi has been an avid researcher who traveled to the Kurdish villages and searched for unique Kurdish melodies. I think his works are major pioneering attempts to preserve our music.”

He added, “If you want to understand a country’s culture and art, listen to its music. Currently the Kurdish community in Iraqi Kurdistan is in decline in all aspects including music and singing. A key factor behind this collapse is the Kurdish media that is giving priority to showy pseudo-art and neglects the authentic Kurdish melodies. This poses a threat to Kurdish art and culture.”

Le Monde

Par Marie Jégo
le 27 février 2020

LETTRE D’ISTANBUL

Les discrets « martyrs » de l'intervention d'Erdogan en Libye

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé la mort d’officiers turcs qui combattent aux côtés des forces du gouvernement libyen d’accord national. Et il y en aura d’autres, a-t-il prévenu.

Après avoir perdu seize militaires à Idlib, en Syrie, l’armée turque vient de subir ses premières pertes à Tripoli, en Libye, où des officiers turcs et des mercenaires syriens combattent aux côtés des forces du gouvernement libyen d’accord national (GAN) dirigé par Faïez Sarraj.

Reconnu par les Nations unies (ONU), le GAN, soutenu par la

Turquie et le Qatar, voit sa survie menacée par les attaques répétées des forces du maréchal libyen dissident Khalifa Haftar, aidé militairement par l’Egypte, les Emirats arabes unis, la Russie et la France.

La mauvaise nouvelle a été annoncée samedi 22 février par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, alors qu’il inaugurerait la bretelle d’une autoroute à Izmir, la

troisième ville de Turquie sur la côte égéenne. « *Bien sûr, nous avons quelques martyrs, mais en contrepartie nous avons neutralisé près de 100 légionnaires* », s’est-il félicité.

Les « légionnaires » désignent les forces du maréchal Haftar, les « martyrs » sont, selon la terminologie officielle, les officiers turcs tombés au combat.

Il y en aura d’autres, a prévenu M. Erdogan, volontiers disert sur le thème du sacrifice. « *La colonne des martyrs ne restera pas vide !* », a-t-il promis après avoir offert du thé aux participants à son meeting.

Tactique d’instrumentalisation

Des dizaines d’officiers turcs et leurs supplétifs syriens, environ 2 000 combattants venus d’Idlib,

ont été envoyés en Libye conformément à un accord de coopération militaire signé en 2019 entre le président turc et Faïez Sarraj.

Les rotations vont se poursuivre, les pertes sont inévitables, ainsi va la guerre. Tel est le message délivré samedi par M. Erdogan à son opinion, peu convaincue du bien-fondé du déploiement militaire en Libye.

Fidèle à sa tactique d'instrumentalisation de l'histoire, il a évoqué la nécessité de lutter « contre les menaces à l'unité nationale et à la survie » de la Turquie, embarquée en Libye dans « une nouvelle lutte pour l'indépendance en tant qu'Etat et en tant que nation ».

Selon des sources libyennes, trois officiers turcs et leur traducteur syrien ont été tués lors d'une attaque menée mardi 18 février dans le port de Tripoli par l'armée nationale libyenne (ANL) du général Haftar.

L'attaque a été aussitôt démentie par Ibrahim Kalin, le porte-parole de la présidence turque. L'ANL a déclaré pour sa part avoir tué seize militaires turcs depuis qu'Ankara a envoyé ses troupes dans le pays pour soutenir sa faction rivale. Cent mercenaires syriens alliés des Turcs sont morts dans des affrontements récents à Tripoli lors d'une avancée de l'ANL, a rapporté dimanche la chaîne de télévision Sky News Arabia.

Côté turc, la plus grande discrétion prévaut sur le nombre exact d'officiers tués. M. Erdogan a entretenu le flou en évoquant « quelques martyrs ». Les médias qui lui sont acquis, soit 95 % des télévisions et des journaux du pays, sont désespérément muets sur le sujet.

Visiblement, consigne a été donnée de ne pas ébruiter les déboires de l'armée sur le terrain

libyen. Il ne faudrait pas risquer de contrarier davantage la population, laquelle, déjà passablement mécontentée par la perte de son pouvoir d'achat, ne voit pas d'un bon œil l'envoi d'offi-



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'adresse à ses supporters, le 22 février à Izmir. SERVICE DE PRESSE PRESIDENTIEL / POOL / AP

ciers et de matériel militaire sur un théâtre d'opération aussi éloigné, une initiative jugée coûteuse et inutile.

Enterrements secrets

Selon un sondage réalisé par la société Istanbul Economics Research, 58 % des personnes interrogées sont opposées à l'intervention en Libye. L'opposition parlementaire, les nationalistes du Bon Parti et les républicains du CHP, le vieux parti d'Atatürk, multiplient les critiques. « Quels intérêts protégeons-nous ? », interroge Aydin Sezgin, député du Bon Parti, sur son compte Twitter.

M. Sezgin, élu au Parlement pour la ville d'Aydin, située non loin d'Izmir, est d'autant plus affligé que l'un de ses administrés, le colonel Okan Altınay, tué dans les combats autour de Tripoli, a été inhumé en catimini à Aydin, sans avoir reçu les honneurs mili-

itaires dus à son rang. Prise au plus haut niveau, à Ankara, la décision de « l'enterrer secrètement », selon l'élu, est plutôt inhabituelle. C'est la première fois dans l'histoire de la République

turque que l'armée, qui a pour coutume de rendre un hommage appuyé à ses soldats, manque à l'appel des funérailles.

Les camarades de promotion du colonel Altınay ont très mal vécu la chose. Blessés, ils se sont demandé pourquoi il avait été privé des cérémonies d'usage. Après tout, n'est-il pas un « martyr » lui aussi ? Ils n'ont pas apprécié l'attitude du chef de l'Etat qui exalte les « martyrs », en promet d'autres à l'avenir, et refuse d'accorder les honneurs à ceux qui sont tombés sur le champ de bataille.

A des journalistes du quotidien d'opposition *Yenicag*, ces militaires ont raconté le difficile parcours du colonel, qui, après avoir été congédié de l'armée pour « kéralisme » (du nom de Kemal Atatürk, le fondateur de la République), avait réussi à la ré-

intégrer en se portant « volontaire » pour les missions les plus difficiles, notamment en Libye.

Comme la polémique commençait à enfler sur les réseaux sociaux et

dans les allées du Parlement, M. Erdogan a bien été obligé de reconnaître la perte de « quelques martyrs », histoire de ne pas trop contrarier sa base islamo-conservatrice. Pour autant, les journalistes qui avaient révélé le pot aux roses, soit la pratique des enterrements secrets, ne sont pas restés impunis.

Les comptes Twitter de Murat Agirel et de Batuhan Colak, du quotidien d'opposition *Yenicag*, ont été bloqués. Le premier, qui avait publié des photos des officiers décédés, a raconté avoir reçu de nombreux messages de menaces. Des interlocuteurs lui ont expliqué que les officiers tués en Libye travaillaient en réalité pour le renseignement, ce qui, selon eux, justifie la très grande discrétion affichée par les autorités.



By Kayla Matthews
27 FEB 2020

U.S. Credibility Rests on its Treatment of the Kurds

Independence, freedom, equality, loyalty. These words have peppered the speeches of American presidents and policymakers for time immemorial. Well, at least the last 244 years. Americans have built a foundational narrative around these words. However, in the eyes of our Kurdish allies, this narrative is full of holes.

Let's embrace one of our words. Loyalty. Let's show the Kurdish people that we understand their struggle. That we will protect them as allies. That the might of the U.S. military and economy is in their corner. Let's supply them with \$1 billion in military aid, impose diplomatic pressure on those who threaten them, and threaten sanctions on those who attack them. Instead of abandoning the Kurds to fend for themselves among hostile neighbors, let's show them and the world that America stands by its allies.

An American ally would take a rather dim view of the way the U.S. has treated the Kurds. Fair-weather friends would be putting it lightly. In the 1970s, the U.S. encouraged the Kurds to rise against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. This disturbance benefited the U.S. because it distracted Saddam from his rivalry with the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran. However, instead of standing with them, the U.S. cut the Kurds off. This abandonment allowed the Iraqi army to crush their resistance. Again, in the 1990s, the Kurds challenged Saddam, believing they had U.S. support. Again, they were broken. Most recently, Syrian Kurds fought alongside U.S. troops to defeat ISIS. Again, the U.S. abandoned them, pulling out of the region, allowing Turkey to push the



Kurdishstruggle/Flickr

Kurds away from their border forcefully.

Sending military aid to the Kurds allows them to fight their own battles without drawing the U.S. into another costly war in the Middle East. Sending \$1 billion is just a drop in the bucket; we send proportional amounts to other allies in the region. This money will give the Kurds the ability to protect themselves but is not so much to encourage them to destabilize the region. With the money will come the stipulation that they do not take offensive action.

Diplomatic pressure will show the world that the U.S. is willing to use its clout for an ally. Even with its decline in credibility, when the U.S. says something, the world listens. If the U.S. turns up the heat on Turkey and demands a

cessation of hostility against the Kurds, it will be a strong gesture of support. It will show allies that the U.S. will not stand by silently in their hour of need.

Economic sanctions will show U.S. resolve. No country wants to be on the wrong side of the world's biggest economy. A credible threat of economic sanctions will lend a little muscle to the diplomatic pressure.

Henry Kissinger said, "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests." If this is true, as many critics argue, then why is our past policy toward the Kurds so flawed? It is flawed because loyalty is in the U.S. interest.

Permanent, strong alliances have been the foundation of world order since the end of World War II. The U.S. has built

a global web of partnerships that are held together largely by credibility. States support each other's interests because they believe their allies will act in kind. When the U.S. abandons a partner, it damages its credibility. This damage can weaken the whole world order. American allies in Europe and Asia wonder whether the U.S. will really stand by them if things go sideways. Conversely, adversaries such as Russia and Iran see opportunities to subvert the U.S.

The U.S. can show the world that it is a reliable ally. Through military, diplomatic, and economic support of the Kurds, we can confirm that loyalty is more than just a spoken word. Loyalty is what American allies expect. Loyalty is what we expect in return. Loyalty holds together the fabric of world order.



BY JOHN BOWDEN
02/27/2020

Turkey suffers mass casualties in Syria airstrike

Turkish forces suffered heavy casualties on Thursday when dozens of troops were hit by an airstrike in northeastern Syria apparently ordered by the Syrian government.

The New York Times reported Thursday that at least 22 Turkish soldiers were killed in an airstrike on a Turkish observation post in Syria, with one Syrian aid agency telling the Times that the number of fatalities could be as high as 34.

A convoy resupplying the post was attacked, Turkish officials told the Times, before the post was hit by the airstrike. No Syrian forces on either side of the



© Getty Images

conflict were injured in the attack, according to the newspaper.

Turkish forces have launched a

military offensive in previously Kurdish-held areas of northeastern Syria, where the Turkish government is attempting to resettle more than 1 million Syrian

refugees who fled the waning Syrian civil war.

Kurdish and Syrian rebel groups operating in the area have reportedly called for assistance from Syria's government amid the offensive, resulting in Syrian forces circling Turkish military, according to the news source.

Thursday's offensive occurred in the war-torn Idlib Province, which has seen many families aligned with the rebel forces arrive as refugees throughout the course of the war. The area has become the last remaining stronghold of Syrian rebel forces.



Letters
Fri 28 Feb 2020

Free Kurdish poet İlhan Sami Çomak

Signatories including George Szirtes and Ruth Padel are appealing to Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab to help free the writer, who has been jailed in Turkey for 26 years despite evidence of his innocence

We write to draw attention to the plight of the Kurdish writer İlhan Sami Çomak. Çomak was originally arrested in 1994 as a 22-year-old geography student at the University of Istanbul. He was charged with starting a forest fire and of being associated with the banned Kurdistan Workers' party, charges he denied and to which he confessed only under torture.

Despite evidence of his innocence, and despite a series of failed or constantly postponed appeals, he is still in prison on the basis of that same confession. While in prison, his sentence was extended after the events of 2016, the failed coup and the ensuing repression. There



'There are many other writers in Turkey who have fallen foul of the government ... but a writer such as Çomak, being the longest-serving one-time student, deserves our special attention,' say the signatories. Photograph: Getty

seems to be little prospect of his release in the near future.

Despite his 26 years of prison, Çomak has produced several volumes of highly regarded poetry, the last of them [winning](#) the prestigious Sennur Sezer prize in 2019. On 3 February in the poetry cafe at the Poetry Society, a packed audience attended an event organised by Exiled Writers Ink and Norway PEN, dedicated to Çomak's poetry and fate. It was a moving evening.

There are many other writers in [Turkey](#) who have fallen foul of the government. And 70,000 students currently in prison, but a writer such as Çomak, being the longest-serving one-time student, deserves our special attention. We call on the prime minister and the foreign secretary to make representations to the Turkish government to free him as soon as possible.

Ipek Ozel Lecturer, Turkey, **Erkut Tokman** Poet and editor, Turkey, **Caroline Stockford** Norway PEN and translator, **Ali Has** Solicitor and human rights campaigner, **Margaret Owen** Human rights lawyer, Peace in Kurdistan, **Sally Green-gross** Human rights campaigner, **Annette Lawson** Campaigner and sociologist, **George Szirtes** Poet, **Anne Stevenson** Poet, **Ruth**

Padel Poet, **Gillian Clarke** Poet, **Jack Mapanje** Poet, **Choman Hardi** Poet, **Pascale Petit** Poet, **Ifor ap Glyn** Poet, **Gwyneth Lewis** Poet, **Menna Elfyn** Poet, **Mel Pryor** Poet, **Chris Winterflood** Poet, **Kelly Davis** Poet, **Jennifer Langer** Founder, Exiled Writers Ink, **Julie Ward** Former MEP, **Camilla Reeve** Publisher, **Aydin Mehmet Ali** Writer and translator, **Michael Baron** Campaigner and poet, **Estella Schmidt** Campaigner, Peace in Kurdistan, **Eugene Schoulgin** Norway PEN, **David Scott** Emeritus professor, UCLA, **Rachel Palmer** Campaigner, **Elizabeth Nussbaum** Campaigner, **Michael Wells** Translator, **Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes** Publisher and **Nasrin Parviz** Writer

L'Iran, le coronavirus et le « complot de l'ennemi »

Beaucoup d'Iraniens doutent du chiffre de 95 cas de contamination, car les mensonges récents des autorités ont fait perdre à la parole gouvernementale tout crédit.

Le territoire de la République islamique d'Iran est devenu l'un des principaux foyers de Covid-19 hors de Chine. Pour son président, Hassan Rohani, cette situation est le résultat d'une conspiration ourdie par « l'ennemi ». « Nous devons tous continuer à travailler, poursuivre nos activités tout en étant prudent », a déclaré mardi 25 février le président lors d'une allocution télévisée, promettant un retour à la normale dans les semaines à venir. Ce message rassurant, empruntant aux codes de la théorie du complot dont le régime de Téhéran est coutumier, était délivré aux Iraniens alors que, les unes après les autres, des figures officielles s'avéraient, elles-mêmes, être atteintes par le coronavirus.

Mardi, Iraj Harirchi, vice-président du ministère de la santé, a ainsi confirmé avoir été testé positif au coronavirus. Il a dit avoir eu de la fièvre la veille avant de se faire diagnostiquer, sans mentionner son apparition, dimanche soir, toussant sans masque, à la télévision nationale où il a tenté d'assurer les Iraniens de la bonne maîtrise de la situation concernant la propagation du virus.

Quelques heures plus tôt, lors d'une conférence de presse, Iraj Harirchi se trouvait aux côtés du porte-parole du gouvernement, Ali Rabii. Transpirant, le vice-ministre n'a cessé d'essuyer son front. Ce dernier n'a d'ailleurs pas assisté à la session du Comité national de lutte contre le Covid-19 dirigée par le président Rohani. Aucune information n'a fuité sur son état de santé alors que deux autres officiels iraniens ont déclaré avoir été infectés par le coronavirus : le député Mahmoud Sadeghi et le maire du 13^e arrondissement de Téhéran, Morteza Rahmzadeh.

Déclarations publiques non fiables

On ignore si ces nouveaux cas sont compris dans les chiffres officiels particulièrement bas, qui étaient, dans la journée de mardi, de 15 morts et de 95 cas reconnus. Les déclarations publiques sur le sujet ne sont toutefois pas

considérées comme fiables par la population comme par le corps médical. Les mensonges publics répétés pendant plusieurs jours par les autorités iraniennes à la suite de la destruction par la défense antiaérienne du Boeing d'Ukraine International Airlines le 8 janvier ont fait perdre à la parole gouvernementale tout crédit aux yeux de nombreux Iraniens.

« Les chiffres qui circulent de manière informelle entre médecins laissent entrevoir une crise d'une ampleur sans commune mesure avec les chiffres donnés par le gouvernement », observe un médecin iranien. « Les soignants s'informent par des conversations groupées et des informations ponctuelles sur de nouveaux cas, de nouveaux décès, mais il n'y a pas de centralisation de l'information, il est donc difficile d'avoir une idée de ce qui se passe. »

Lundi, un député de Qom, Ahmad Amiriabadi Farahani, avait accusé le gouvernement iranien de mentir, affirmant avoir connaissance dans sa ville d'une cinquantaine de décès causés par le Covid-19. Alors que les premiers cas ont été reconnus à Qom le 19 février, foyer de l'épidémie en Iran, le représentant avait déclaré, lors d'une réunion à huis clos, que des cas d'infection remontaient dans la ville à plusieurs semaines, impliquant qu'elles avaient été cachées par les autorités. Des représentants du ministère de la santé annonçaient encore en début de semaine que l'Iran avait été préservée de l'épidémie.

« Fin janvier, un malade est décédé dans notre hôpital et nous pensons qu'il a été atteint de coronavirus. Mais les responsables de l'hôpital l'ont nié. Ensuite, d'autres malades sont arrivés et un autre est mort. Nous avons alors protesté et expliqué que nous arrêtons de travailler si les conditions de travail ne changeaient pas. Nous étions sûrs qu'avant la fête nationale, le 11 février, et les législatives le 21 février aucune information ne serait communiquée. Et c'est exactement ce qui s'est passé », raconte un deuxième médecin à Téhéran.

Un autre, qui a publié sur les réseaux sociaux une radiographie des poumons d'un enfant mort du coronavirus dans son hôpital raconte faire l'objet depuis de pressions de ses supérieurs, lui ordonnant de retirer l'image. Il déclare également faire l'objet d'appels menaçants depuis des numéros masqués. « Dans les hôpitaux de Racht, on écrit "grippe" comme raison du décès pour les malades qui meurent du Covid-19, raconte un médecin de cette ville située dans le nord du pays. Les tests de diagnostic ne sont pas effectués pour s'assurer qu'il ne s'agit pas de coronavirus. Ce qui se passe ici est un crime et les gens n'en savent rien. »

Sérieuses lacunes

A l'incertitude sur les chiffres et aux déclarations officielles s'ajoutent, au sein de la communauté médicale et de la population, de sérieuses doutes sur la manière dont les autorités réagissent à la crise. Sur les réseaux sociaux, de nombreux Iraniens s'interrogent sur les raisons pour lesquelles le gouvernement n'a toujours pas mis la ville de Qom en quarantaine. Cette cité sainte compte plusieurs sanctuaires visités par des foules importantes de fidèles de manière quotidienne, multipliant les risques de transmission. « Le gouvernement ne prend vraiment pas cette crise au sérieux », juge un autre médecin de Téhéran : « Les mesures prises sont très largement insuffisantes. Est-ce délibéré ? Est-ce parce qu'ils ne prennent pas la mesure du danger ? »

Des hôpitaux de référence consacrés au traitement du Covid-19 ont été mis en place. Plusieurs d'entre eux se trouvent à Téhéran. Ils souffrent toutefois de sérieuses lacunes, comme un « manque de masques et de vêtements de protection ». « La mobilisation exemplaire des soignants permet pour l'instant de pallier les problèmes de logistique, de transparence, de planification qui affectent la gestion de la crise par le gouvernement...relève un autre docteur. Il faut maintenant que les autorités écoutent le corps médical et réagissent, les deux semaines qui

viennent vont être cruciales. » Un autre médecin se montre plus inquiet : « Si le gouvernement continue comme ça, dans quinze jours, ce sera la catastrophe du siècle. »

Economie déjà très fragilisée

En plus de la crise de confiance que le régime traverse, les conséquences de l'épidémie risquent d'affecter durement une économie déjà très fragilisée par les sanctions américaines. Les voisins de l'Iran ont fermé leurs frontières avec la République islamique, interrompant, pour une durée indéterminée, les exportations non pétrolières de l'Iran.

D'autres observateurs s'interrogent également sur l'apparente volonté de l'Iran, dans les premiers jours de la crise, de privilégier ses relations avec la Chine à la protection de son territoire. Pékin est en effet le seul acheteur significatif de brut iranien dans le contexte des sanctions américaines contre la République islamique et un partenaire que Téhéran, isolé diplomatiquement, n'a d'autre choix que de courtiser. « L'Iran est nécessairement plus exposé à tout ce qui vient de Chine et, en voulant protéger sa relation commerciale avec Pékin, la République a importé une crise sanitaire de grande ampleur », explique l'économiste spécialiste de l'Iran Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj. De fait, la compagnie aérienne Mahan Air, contrôlée par les gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique du régime très présente dans l'économie, a maintenu ses vols en direction et en provenance de Chine. La République islamique est même allée jusqu'à envoyer en Chine une cargaison de masques respiratoires, qui viennent désormais à manquer en Iran. Mardi, l'ambassadeur de Chine à Téhéran, Chang Hua, a mis en scène à son tour dans une vidéo diffusée sur son compte Twitter une donation de masques respiratoires à l'Iran. « Sois fort, Iran ! », scandait le diplomate en tenant les mains de deux officiels iraniens. Les masques offerts par la Chine à cette occasion sont de fabrication iranienne.

« Nous appelons le régime syrien et ses soutiens, notamment russes, à la cessation immédiate des hostilités »

Dans une tribune au « Monde », quatorze ministres des affaires étrangères de pays membres de l'Union européenne appellent la Russie à poursuivre les négociations afin d'aboutir à une désescalade à Idlib, en Syrie.

Tribune. A Idlib se joue une nouvelle catastrophe humanitaire, l'une des pires d'une crise syrienne qui, en près d'une décennie, en a provoqué d'innombrables. Le régime de Damas persiste dans une stratégie de reconquête militaire du pays à n'importe quel prix, quelles qu'en soient les conséquences pour les civils.

Depuis le mois de décembre 2019, ses opérations dans le Nord-Ouest s'intensifient, avec l'appui de la Russie, et notamment de son aviation. Les frappes aériennes incessantes et le largage de barils d'explosifs ont jeté sur les routes près d'un million de Syriens en quelques semaines. Les structures d'accueil sont saturées, des centaines de milliers de personnes, en majorité des femmes et des enfants, s'amusent dans des campements de fortune, à la merci du froid, de la faim et des épidémies.

Au mépris du droit international humanitaire, les frappes visent délibérément des hôpitaux et des centres de santé, dont soixante-dix-neuf ont dû cesser de fonctionner, des écoles et des abris. Selon le Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies aux droits de l'homme, 298 civils ont trouvé la mort à Idlib, depuis le 1^{er} janvier.

Nous sommes parfaitement lucides sur la présence de groupes radicaux à Idlib. Nous ne prendrons jamais à la légère le problème du terrorisme : nous le combattons avec détermination, et nous sommes engagés en première ligne dans la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique. Mais la lutte contre le terrorisme ne peut pas, ne doit pas, justifier les violations massives du droit international humanitaire, auxquelles nous assistons chaque

jour dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie.

Les Nations unies (ONU) ont mis en garde contre le risque d'une crise humanitaire sans précédent si l'offensive en cours se poursuit. Nous appelons le régime syrien et ses soutiens, notamment russes, à mettre un terme à cette offensive et à en revenir aux arrangements de cessez-le-feu de l'automne 2018. Nous les appelons à la cessation immédiate des hostilités et au respect de leurs obligations au titre du droit international humanitaire, en particulier la protection des travailleurs humanitaires et des personnels médicaux, qui paient de leur vie leur engagement en faveur des populations civiles.

Nous appelons également la Russie à poursuivre les négociations avec la Turquie, afin d'aboutir à une désescalade à Idlib et de contribuer à une solution politique.

Au-delà de l'urgence d'une trêve, nous appelons la Russie à ne pas empêcher, dans les prochains mois, le renouvellement par le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU du mécanisme permettant d'acheminer vers le Nord-Ouest syrien une aide humanitaire transfrontalière dont la région a cruellement besoin. Ce mécanisme, la Russie l'a déjà fermé dans le Nord-Est, où nous devons maintenant trouver des alternatives au point de passage de Yaroubiya. Qui peut penser aujourd'hui que le régime syrien autorisera lui-même l'aide à parvenir à ceux qui en ont besoin, alors qu'il est le premier responsable de leur situation ?

Lutter contre l'impunité

Enfin, rappelons que seule une solution politique négociée pourra mettre fin durablement à la crise sy-

rienne. La normalisation politique ne pourra avoir lieu tant qu'un processus politique réel et irréversible ne sera pas fermement engagé.

Tout à sa stratégie militaire, le régime cherche précisément à entraver tout processus politique inclusif, en bloquant toutes les discussions constitutionnelles prévues à Genève, sous l'égide de l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU, Geir Pedersen.

Mais la reconquête en cours est en trompe-l'œil, et les mêmes causes produiront les mêmes effets : la radicalisation, l'instabilité en Syrie et dans la région, l'exil, dans un pays dont plus de la moitié de la population est déplacée ou réfugiée.

Nous saluons les efforts considérables déployés par les voisins de la Syrie pour offrir un refuge aux Syriens qui ont dû quitter leurs foyers. Face à la tragédie en cours, les Européens aussi prennent leurs responsabilités. Sous l'angle humanitaire, l'Union européenne et ses Etats membres sont les premiers donateurs en soutien aux populations syriennes. Nous soutiendrons et développerons ces efforts collectifs déployés face à la crise actuelle à Idlib.

L'Europe continue d'exercer des pressions sur le régime pour qu'il s'engage véritablement dans le processus politique. Les Européens ont adopté, le 17 février, de nouvelles sanctions ciblant, à titre individuel, les hommes d'affaires syriens qui alimentent l'effort de guerre du régime et prospèrent sur ses retombées.

Notre responsabilité, c'est aussi de lutter contre l'impunité pour les crimes commis en Syrie. C'est une question de principe et de justice.

C'est aussi une condition nécessaire à une paix durable, au sein d'une société syrienne déchirée par près de dix années de conflit.

Nous entendons poursuivre notre soutien aux mécanismes de lutte contre l'impunité, mis en place par l'ONU, dont les travaux de collecte de preuves sont indispensables pour préparer de futures poursuites contre les responsables des crimes les plus graves : la Commission d'enquête internationale sur la Syrie et le Mécanisme d'enquête international, impartial et indépendant.

Nous continuerons également d'œuvrer en faveur d'une saisine de la Cour pénale internationale. Nous maintiendrons notre engagement, notamment dans le cadre de nos juridictions nationales, pour que les crimes commis en Syrie ne restent pas impunis. Il s'agit notamment de l'emploi d'armes chimiques et des violations des normes les plus fondamentales du droit international. Nous devons établir les responsabilités et demander des comptes. La lumière doit être faite sur le sort des nombreux détenus et personnes disparues.

Les ministres des affaires étrangères :

Stephanus Blok (Pays-Bas) ; **Simon Coveney** (Irlande) ; **Jacek Czaputowicz** (Pologne) ; **Luigi Di Maio** (Italie) ; **Philippe Goffin** (Belgique) ; **Arancho Gonzalez Laya** (Espagne) ; **Pekka Haavisto** (Finlande) ; **Jeppu Kofod** (Danemark) ; **Jean-Yves Le Drian** (France) ; **Ann Linde** (Suède) ; **Linas Linkevicius** (Lituanie) ; **Heiko Maas** (Allemagne) ; **Urmas Reinsalu** (Estonie) ; **Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva** (Portugal).

By Vivian Yee and Hwaida
SaadFeb. 26, 2020

The New York Times

Syrian Children Freeze to Death. Bombs Rain Down. And ‘Nobody Cares.’

The Syrian government’s assault on a rebel-held province has created one of the worst humanitarian emergencies of a brutal nine-year war.

REYHANLI, Turkey — The baby wasn’t moving. Her body had gone hot, then cold. Her father rushed her to a hospital, going on foot when he could not find a car, but it was too late.

At 18 months, Iman Leila had frozen to death.

In the half-finished concrete shell that had been home since they ran for their lives across northwest Syria, the Leila family had spent three weeks enduring nighttime temperatures that barely rose above 20.

“I dream about being warm,” Iman’s father, Ahmad Yassin Leila, said a few days later by phone. “I just want my children to feel warm. I don’t want to lose them to the cold. I don’t want anything except a house with windows that keeps out the cold and the wind.”

Ahmad Yassin Leila and his infant daughter Iman, who froze to death.

Syria’s uprising began in a flare of hope almost exactly nine years ago. Now, amid one of the [worst humanitarian emergencies](#) of the war, some of those who chanted for freedom and dignity in 2011 want only to ward off the winter cold.

Already the effective winner of Syria’s civil war, President Bashar al-Assad is closer than ever to retaking Syria’s last rebel-held territory, Idlib Province in northwest Syria, a milestone that will clinch his victory even as it deepens his people’s suffering. Over the past three months, his forces, backed by Russian airstrikes, have intensified their assault on the



Nearly a million Syrians have fled toward the border with Turkey over the past three months. Many are living in makeshift tents or in the open. Muhammed Said/Anadolu Agency, via Getty Images

province, driving nearly a million residents [toward the border with Turkey](#).

Many are living in tents or sleeping out in the open in the freezing cold. Iman Leila was just one of nine children who died of exposure in recent weeks.

The exodus is the largest of a war that has displaced 13 million people and taken hundreds of thousands of lives, and ranks among the largest in recent history, second only to the flight of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar in 2017. With about three million residents trapped between a sealed Turkish border to the north and bombs and shells thundering up from the south and east, the crisis has the potential to grow far worse as the

government battles to reclaim all of Syria.

“These are people who are trying to take the hardest decisions of their lives in conditions that are out of their hands,” said Max Baldwin, the North Syria program director for Mercy Corps. “The level of intensity, the fact that you’ve got the Turkish military here, the front line moving there, they’re continuing to target hospitals — it’s creating a level of fear and uncertainty that’s been a huge challenge for everyone. And this could get worse.”

The fleeing Syrians scabble for safety in camps in the rural countryside near the Turkish border or in towns that may be bombed at any moment. The luckiest shelter in rented or

abandoned buildings, many of which lack doors or windows. The less fortunate sleep in tents. Tens of thousands huddle on sidewalks or under olive trees, the branches draped with plastic tarps, blankets or nothing.

Those who can afford it buy fuel for heaters, if any fuel is to be had. Those who cannot wrap their children in plastic sheets and fill any bag they can find with hot water to thaw their children’s beds at night. When they run out of wood, they burn clothes and shoes.

Some fled hauling pieces of their old homes — like doors and window frames — hoping to improve their temporary shelters or to rebuild someday. Now those, too, go into the fire.

One family that tried to keep a small fire in their tent this month ended up burning it down as they slept, killing two children.

“There are a lot of other people dying,” Mr. Leila said. “Nobody cares.”

Like hundreds of thousands of others, the Leilas had already fled from elsewhere and ended up in Idlib as a last resort.

Nine years ago, Mr. Leila joined the peaceful protests against the brutal authoritarianism of President Bashar al-Assad, which erupted into armed uprising and war. When Mr. Assad’s forces recaptured the Leilas’ hometown, the Damascus suburb of East Ghouta, two years ago, the family accepted the government’s offer of safe passage to Idlib rather than face retribution.

More than a million civilians from all parts of Syria have done the same thing, many having already moved multiple times. They have doubled Idlib’s population, turning it into a crowded stew of transplanted dissidents and their families and an array of jihadist and rebel groups who exploited the chaos to seize political control.

These groups — dominated by the Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham — have given the Syrian government cover to justify its onslaught in the name of counterterrorism.

People who evacuated when the Idlib offensive began last spring filled up the available buildings near the Turkish border, leaving those who fled in recent weeks to cram into overcrowded camps that flood with every rain. Even those with money cannot find tents now.

Some have stitched together plastic tarps. Others have built huts out of grapevines.

With much of the area under fire, aid organizations cannot reach civilians, or take hours to deliver



Ahmad Yassin Leila and his infant daughter Iman, who froze to death.

supplies to camps just a few miles away because the roads are so jammed. Aid workers, volunteers and contractors who supply water, blankets and food are fleeing their own homes as they try to help others, leaving the humanitarian response mired in chaos.

Aid groups have long ago run out of tents, and lack the funding to buy more.

“People don’t have high standards for shelter,” said Fouad Sayed Issa, 25, the founder of Violet, a Syrian nonprofit relief organization based just across Turkish border. “They just want to have a place to stay. They call us asking for tents, and we don’t have any to give.”

Cut off from countries that once sent military aid to the rebels, they plead for a rescue no one is offering.

“We are alone, for sure,” Mr. Issa said. “This is the end.”

Until the government offensive began last spring, Idlib had maintained a fragile stability under a cease-fire brokered by Russia, which backs Mr. Assad, and Turkey, which supported opposition forces.

Turkey has protested the violation of the agreement and held talks with Russia, to little avail. Russia has promised to reinstate the cease-fire even as its planes [bomb civilian hospitals](#).

Turkey has now launched a modest counteroffensive, though few expect it to end the carnage.

The United States, which has 500 troops in southern and eastern Syria, has ruled out military involvement in the northwest.

The Trump administration has sided with Turkey, expressing support for its counterattack and a proposed Turkish-enforced safe zone for displaced civilians at the border.

“Turkey alone cannot deal with suddenly three million refugees coming across its borders,” James F. Jeffrey, the top American diplomat overseeing Syria issues, told a Turkish television interviewer in Istanbul this month. “It has every right to ensure that that does not happen, and we’re here to see how we can help the Turks carry out that right.”

On the Turkish side of the border, Syrian refugees watch in agony as their phones overflow with pleas from their relatives in Idlib, asking where they can go.

“They don’t want to leave and be humiliated — to stay in the street, to not be able to feed their kids, to see them shake from cold,” said Abdulhamid Sallat, 31, a Syrian activist who escaped to the small Turkish border town of Reyhanli in 2014. His family remains in his Syrian home village, Binnish.

“I’m not sleeping,” said his cousin, Turki Sallat, 32, a blacksmith in Reyhanli whose parents and brothers are also in Binnish. “I can’t do anything.”

Under Idlib’s new calculus of risk, a few shells or bombs are not enough to dislodge many residents. In the town of Ariha, it was only after counting 27 airstrikes in one day that Inaya Aloush’s family decided to leave, even though there was nowhere safe to run.

“There was no bakery, no water,” said Ms. Aloush, 47. “Life had stopped.”

She was in Reyhanli, where she was allowed to go for chemotherapy for colon cancer, but her family remains in an unfinished concrete building in Idlib, just 30 miles away.



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
February 28-2020

Legendary Syrian Kurdish musician Seid Yusif, 'Prince of Buzuk,' dies at 73

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Revered Kurdish composer and performer Seid Yusif, from the Syrian city of Qamishlo, died on Wednesday at age 73 after an almost three-month struggle with cancer at a hospital in Istanbul.

He leaves a rich and powerful 50-year legacy of Kurdish music and culture.

“He did not think he would die,” Asad Das, Yusif’s son-in-law, told Kurdistan 24 in Istanbul. “He said he wanted to make many more songs and write lyrics. But he did not have time to make these songs.”

Although not much is written about Yusif (also commonly spelled Said Youssef) in English, among Kurds he was a musical legend. He is known for his songs about love, and Kurdish patriotism, such as the favorites *Kurdistan yan neman* (Kurdistan or death) and *ey Newroz*.

After his death, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani said on Wednesday in a condolence statement, “We are very saddened with the passing of the famous Kurdish artist Seid Yusif.”

“He devoted his entire life to art and did a great service of Kurdish music and songs, leaving behind a great and rich artistic legacy. He will always be remembered by his voice, sound, and art.”

The Cultural Committee of the Kurdish-led Self-Administration in North and East Syria said in its own statement, “Yusif has contributed greatly in developing Kurdish music and has deserved a great appreciation from all sides, whether inside the country or overseas.”

The administration expressed its deep sorrow at the death of the “Prince of Buzuk,” as he was often called because of his expert performances on the folk instrument



Kurdish musical artist Seid Yusif, celebrated for 50 years, died after succumbing to cancer at a hospital in Istanbul on Feb. 26, 2020. (Photo: Sara Distribution)

known as the *buzuk*, a long-necked fretted lute related to the Greek *bouzouki* and *Saz*.

According to Gani Mirzo, a Barcelona-based Syrian Kurdish musician and composer, Yusif was responsible for introducing the *buzuk* to Kurdish music.

“Since then, this instrument has evolved among the Kurds,” he told Kurdistan 24.

Lukman Ahmad, a Syrian Kurdish artist living in exile in the United States, told Kurdistan 24 that Yusif played an important role in giving Kurdish music in Syria a new style and original artistic form.

That form, he said, was “based on the aesthetics and simplicity of the melody and also on the lyrical poetry that Seid Youssef developed based on popular vocabulary and daily expressions.”

“He gave a classy aesthetic image of the beauty of Kurdish women through symbolic description. He raised the Kurdish romance to an aesthetic level that is enjoyed by everyone, from Kurds to other peoples in the region.”

The Kurdish musician Gani Mirzo added that that the role of Yusif was important, especially during years when Kurdish

music and culture were suppressed by states in the region such as Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

“His role was very important for Kurdish songs, Kurdish music, and for changing the Kurdish culture, during a very difficult time in the 1960-1970s.”

“He didn’t sing old traditional songs,” Mirzo added. “He actually modernized Kurdish songs, and his lyrics were close to the people. For this reason, he has had influence among Kurds in all four parts of Kurdistan. His was a turning point... Before Seid Yusif and after Seid Yusif.”

Many other Kurdish artists, such as Eyas Yusif from Zakho and Mihemed Şêxo from Qamishlo, have been strongly influenced by Yusif and regularly sang his songs.

Yusif famously named his city of Qamishlo “The city of love” in one of his most beloved songs, *Qamishlo Bajarê Evîne* [see video below].

His family and his fans are determined to bury him in his hometown in northern Syria. His body is expected to return to Qamishlo on Friday and the funeral is scheduled to take place the following day.

“His music will influence future singers for decades to come,” Mirzo concluded.

“It is a foundation for many artists to make their original music. We must recognize that Seid Yusif has a major role in the evolution of Kurdish music. His death is a big loss for the Kurds.”

Editing by John J. Catherine



Seid Youssuf’s Takassim Buzuk LP, a rare example of improvisational Kurdish music played on the Buzuk, Saz, and Tambour, was released in 1973. (Photo: Sara Distribution)

Turquie et Russie au bord d'une confrontation militaire en Syrie

Après la mort de 33 de ses soldats à Idlib, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan se retrouve dos au mur et se tourne vers les Occidentaux, entre menaces et appels à l'aide.

Une frappe aérienne a tué au moins trente-trois soldats turcs à Idlib, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, jeudi 27 février, soit les pertes les plus importantes subies par la Turquie en une seule journée depuis sa première intervention militaire en Syrie en 2016. Le ministère turc de la défense a affirmé que des frappes ordonnées en représailles par Ankara ont permis de « neutraliser » 309 soldats du régime.

Il s'agit d'une grave escalade dans les combats qui opposent la rébellion syrienne soutenue par la Turquie aux forces loyalistes de Bachar Al-Assad appuyées par l'aviation russe. La frappe aérienne, un tir « de précision » selon des experts militaires turcs, a touché dans la journée de jeudi un immeuble de deux étages à Balyoun, une localité de la province d'Idlib, où des soldats turcs avaient trouvé refuge après un bombardement sur leur convoi, dépêché en renfort dans la zone pour aider les groupes rebelles.

Après un revers aussi sévère, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan se retrouve dos au mur et se tourne vers ses alliés occidentaux, entre menaces et appels à l'aide. La Turquie a ainsi annoncé avoir actionné son ultime moyen de pression sur les Européens : [déclencher un afflux massif de réfugiés syriens vers l'Europe](#). Ces menaces proférées dès jeudi soir, à la suite d'un conseil de sécurité extraordinaire présidé par M. Erdogan, ont été réitérées vendredi.

Dans le même temps, les médias turcs, largement contrôlés par le pouvoir, diffusaient des images non vérifiées montrant



Le ministre de la défense turc, Hulusi Akar, supervise les opérations militaires contre des objectifs du régime syrien dans un centre de commandement à Hatay, en Turquie le 28 février. Arif Akdogan / Anadolu

des groupes de Syriens, des Irakiens et des Pakistanais avançant en courant vers ce qui était présenté comme la frontière grecque.

Menace récurrente d'Ankara

« Nous ne retiendrons plus ceux qui veulent se rendre en Europe », a déclaré vendredi matin un officiel turc cité par l'Agence France-presses sous couvert d'anonymat. La police, les gardes-côtes et les gardes-frontières auraient reçu l'ordre de ne pas empêcher les réfugiés d'atteindre l'Europe par voie terrestre ou maritime. Ouvrir les portes de l'Europe aux migrants est une menace récurrente d'Ankara, qui touche un point sensible. L'Europe vit dans la crainte d'une nouvelle crise migratoire, après celle de 2015 qui avait vu un million de Syriens affluer sur le continent.

Dans le même temps, Ankara a appelé la communauté internationale à mettre en place une zone d'exclusion aérienne dans la région d'Idlib et a obtenu une

réunion d'urgence de l'OTAN. Le porte-parole de la présidence, Ibrahim Kalin, s'était également entretenu jeudi soir avec Robert O'Brien, le conseiller à la sécurité nationale des Etats-Unis. M. Erdogan, qui avait demandé aux Etats-Unis de déployer des missiles Patriot à la frontière avec la Syrie, a reconnu mercredi que sa demande avait peu de chances d'aboutir.

Depuis que les Etats-Unis ont retiré une partie de leurs forces du nord-est syrien en octobre 2019, à la demande pressante de la Turquie, le destin de la Syrie se joue entre Moscou et Ankara et les convergences d'intérêts entre les deux capitales se sont considérablement fragilisées, notamment autour d'Idlib depuis décembre 2019. Pour préserver le statu quo et éviter une reprise totale de l'enclave par le régime, Ankara a dû renforcer sa présence aux côtés des rebelles, quitte à risquer l'escalade avec Moscou.

L'attaque contre les forces turques est une riposte à la re-

conquête de la ville stratégique de Saraqeb par les rebelles et leurs alliés d'Ankara qui en ont chassé les forces du régime soutenues par la Russie. Située à la jonction de deux autoroutes – la M4 qui relie la région à la Méditerranée et la M5 reliant Damas à Alep –, Saraqeb est un verrou stratégique qui avait été pris par Damas le 5 février. Mercredi 26 février, les combattants de Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, avec l'aide d'autres factions non-djihadistes, ont réussi à reconquérir la ville avec le soutien de l'armée turque, qui dispose de plus de 7 000 hommes sur le terrain et d'un puissant matériel militaire.

Plus tôt cette semaine, les rebelles syriens, avec l'aide de la Turquie qui les a équipés en chars, lance-roquettes multiples et autres armes, avaient capturé la ville clé de Nairab, proches de Saraqeb, une victoire essentiellement symbolique. Mardi, les rebelles ont perdu Kafranbel, une ville qui fut parmi les premières à se révolter contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad dès le début du soulèvement en 2011.

Réunion de crise à Ankara

Grâce à la reconquête de Saraqeb par les rebelles, plusieurs postes militaires turcs dans la zone, qui s'étaient retrouvés encerclés du fait de l'avancée des forces de Damas, ont pu être libérés. La jubilation du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, prompt à déclarer combien « les événements se déroulaient en faveur de la Turquie à Idlib », a été de courte durée. Quelques heures plus tard, Rahmi Dogan, le gouverneur de la province de

Hatay, province turque voisine d'Idlib, reconnaissait la perte de neuf soldats, puis de vingt-deux, puis de trente-trois, tandis que des ambulances transportant les blessés, trente-deux selon le gouverneur, affluaient vers l'hôpital de la ville frontalière de Reyhanli.

Maîtresse de l'espace aérien syrien, la Russie n'a pas autorisé l'armée turque à évacuer ses blessés par hélicoptère, ce qui aurait pris quelques minutes alors qu'il faut une heure par la route. Dans ses déclarations, le gouverneur Rahmi Dogan a rejeté la responsabilité de l'attaque sur le « régime syrien ». Dans la soirée de jeudi, comme c'est souvent le cas lors de crises graves, les autorités turques ont bloqué l'accès à tous les réseaux sociaux.

Au même moment, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan tenait une réunion de crise à Ankara pour discuter des réponses à apporter à la frappe aérienne, laquelle porte à cinquante-quatre le nombre de soldats turcs tués à Idlib depuis le début du mois de février. La Turquie frappera « toutes les cibles du régime » en utilisant tous les moyens à sa disposition, a déclaré Farhettin Altun, le directeur de la communication du palais



Un nuage de fumée au-dessus d'un village près de Saraqeb, à l'est d'Idlib, le 26 février. OMAR HAJ KADOUR / AFP

présidentiel, après la réunion. Jeudi, les autorités turques avaient indiqué qu'au total, depuis début février, plus de 1 700 combattants prorégime avaient été « neutralisés » ainsi que des dizaines de véhicules et trois hélicoptères.

Vladimir Poutine dans l'impasse

De fait, la frappe aérienne de jeudi marque un nouveau tournant dans la dégradation récente des relations entre Moscou et Ankara sur le dossier syrien. Vladimir Poutine se trouve également dans l'impasse. Hâter la victoire finale de son allié Bachar Al-Assad n'est

pas compatible avec la poursuite de son partenariat jusqu'ici si utile avec la Turquie. L'accord de Sotchi ne tient plus, l'accord d'Astana, conclu en 2017 entre la Russie, l'Iran et la Turquie pour favoriser la « désescalade » en Syrie, est moribond.

Jusqu'ici, le Kremlin est resté sourd à la demande turque de négocier un cessez-le-feu. Des pourparlers menés ces derniers jours entre Russes et Turcs à Ankara se sont achevés jeudi sans résultats. La visite de M. Poutine à Istanbul, donnée comme imminente par Erdogan, qui lui avait même fixé une date, le 5 mars, n'aura pas lieu. Le président russe a « d'autres rendez-vous de travail prévus ce jour-

là », a déclaré son porte-parole, Dmitri Peskov.

Le sommet à quatre – Russie, Turquie, France, Allemagne – proposé par M. Erdogan, n'a pas l'heur de plaire à Moscou qui a décliné l'invitation. « Si c'est pour parler de problèmes bilatéraux, alors il faut les aborder dans un format bilatéral », a souligné Maria Zakharova, la représentante du ministère des affaires étrangères russe.

Grèce : patrouilles doublées à la frontière turque

La Grèce a annoncé vendredi avoir renforcé ses patrouilles à la frontière avec la Turquie, après l'annonce d'Ankara que les autorités turques n'empêcheraient plus les candidats à la migration vers l'Union européenne de quitter le pays. Selon une source policière grecque citée par l'Agence France-press, le nombre de patrouilles a été doublé et un appel à la mobilisation générale a été passé en interne. « Tout est sous contrôle, il n'y a pas de raison de s'inquiéter », a toutefois assuré cette source. L'agence de presse turque DHA a rapporté qu'environ 300 migrants syriens, irakiens ou encore iraniens étaient arrivés dans la province d'Edirne, à la frontière grecque.

Le Monde Par Benjamin Barthe
le 29 février 2020

« La plus grande histoire d'horreur humanitaire du XXI^e siècle » a actuellement lieu à Idlib, en Syrie

Le nombre d'habitants de la province déplacés par les combats depuis le mois de décembre 2019 atteint désormais 900 000, dont 80 % de femmes et d'enfants.

Huit mois de fuite éperdue sous les bombes, une chute libre que rien ne semble pouvoir arrêter. Le calvaire de la famille Hallak, des fermiers de la région d'Idlib, est emblématique du supplice enduré par les civils de cette province du nord-ouest de la Syrie.

Au printemps 2019, les forces

pro-Assad partent à l'assaut de la région, le dernier bastion de la rébellion, dominée par le groupe djihadiste Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham. Les raids de l'aviation russe et syrienne se rapprochant, les parents affrètent des camions et transfèrent tout le contenu de leur grande maison de Kafr Sijnah, dans le sud de la région, à Jinderes, 150 km plus au

nord. « On a même emporté les portes et les fenêtres », témoigne Ahmed, le fils aîné, joint sur WhatsApp.

Après quelques mois, ses économies fondant à vue d'œil, la famille quitte l'appartement où elle avait trouvé refuge pour un logement plus modeste, dans la campagne de l'ouest d'Alep. Le

répit est de courte durée. L'avancée des troupes gouvernementales dans cette zone oblige les Hallak à abandonner de nouveau leur domicile. Une troisième fois en huit mois. « Plus question cette fois-ci de prendre les meubles, l'essence est devenue trop chère, raconte Ahmed. On est parti avec nos couvertures, nos

vêtements et quelques ustensiles de cuisine seulement. »

La famille s'entasse aujourd'hui à quinze dans un minuscule deux-pièces, sans fenêtres, sans eau et sans électricité, dans le village de Deir Hassan – une localité des environs de la frontière turque, région où des centaines de milliers d'autres Syriens ont échoué ces dernières semaines. « *Le régime est en train de pousser toute la population d'Idlib le long de la frontière, comme s'il voulait créer une bande de Gaza syrienne, s'inquiète Ahmed. On a le sentiment de basculer dans l'inconnu.* »

L'ONU parle de « *la plus grande histoire d'horreur humanitaire du XXI^e siècle* ». Le nombre d'habitants de la province d'Idlib déplacés par les combats depuis le mois de décembre 2019 atteint désormais 900 000, dont 80 % de femmes et d'enfants. Cette population s'agglutine entre Dalkoch, Al-Dana, Afrin et Azaz, des territoires contigus de la Turquie, relativement épargnés par les bombardements.

Une nasse à ciel ouvert

Les plus chanceux ont trouvé une tente dans l'un des immenses camps, fouettés par les vents et la neige, qui jalonnent ces collines des confins de la Syrie. Les autres dorment en plein air, dans leur véhicule ou dans des bâtiments inachevés. Tous les abris collectifs, comme les mosquées et les écoles, ont été réquisitionnés lors de la précédente vague de déplacement, au printemps et à l'été 2019, qui avait concerné 300 000 personnes.

Les naufragés d'Idlib sont pris au piège, dans une nasse à ciel ouvert. La Turquie, qui abrite sur son sol 3,5 millions de Syriens, mais se refuse à accueillir une nouvelle arrivée de réfugiés, a bouclé sa frontière à triple tour. De l'autre côté, les corridors ouverts par l'armée syrienne pour faciliter le passage en territoire gouvernemental, à l'abri théoriquement du danger, n'ont vu



Des familles syriennes déplacées dans un camp à Sarmada, au nord d'Idlib, le 17 février. RAMI AL SAYED / AFP

passer qu'un millier de personnes depuis décembre 2019, selon l'ONU. « *C'est bien la preuve, s'il en fallait une, que les gens d'Idlib ne veulent pas vivre sous le régime Assad* », observe Ossama Shorbaji, le directeur de l'ONG syrienne Afaq.

Mais la menace se rapproche. Les forces loyalistes, qui avaient piétiné durant la première phase de l'offensive, l'année dernière, se sont emparées en quelques semaines de plus de trois cents localités, soit environ la moitié de la poche d'Idlib. Mercredi 26 février, les combattants de Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, avec l'aide d'autres factions non djihadistes, ont certes réussi à reconquérir Saraqeb, un carrefour autoroutier, qu'ils avaient perdu au début du mois. Cette opération a été menée avec le soutien de l'armée turque, qui dispose de plusieurs milliers d'hommes sur le terrain. Une trentaine d'entre eux ont d'ailleurs été tués, jeudi, dans un bombardement attribué à l'aviation syrienne.

Gigantesque exode

Mais au même moment, les rebelles étaient boutés hors des régions montagneuses du djebel Al-Zawiya et du djebel Shashabo, fiefs historiques de l'insurrection, dans le sud de la province d'Idlib. Les pro-Assad ont notamment pénétré dans Kafr-Nabel, une bourgade rendue célèbre par la créativité et

l'endurance de ses habitants. Pendant des années, ceux-ci ont manifesté tous les vendredis, narguant le pouvoir avec des slogans percutants et pleins d'humour.

Le début de déroute des groupes anti-Assad est le résultat logique de leur épuisement, après des mois de pilonnage, qui ont progressivement érodé leurs lignes de défense. Le gigantesque exode déclenché par le blitz russo-syrien, qui a anéanti des dizaines d'infrastructures civiles, dont des écoles et des hôpitaux, a accentué la désorganisation du camp rebelle. Selon le bureau du haut-commissaire aux droits de l'homme de l'ONU, ces frappes ont causé la mort de plus de 1 700 civils, dont 337 femmes et 503 enfants, en dix mois.

Le recul des insurgés résulte aussi de l'introduction dans les rangs loyalistes de drones et d'instruments de vision nocturne, en nombre plus important que par le passé. Du matériel qui a accru la supériorité militaire des assaillants, déjà écrasante. De nombreux véhicules blindés rebelles, certains livrés par la Turquie, ont été touchés par un tir de missile, peu après avoir été localisés par l'un de ces avions espions.

Le retour sur le champ de bataille des milices pro-iraniennes, composées de combattants chiites afghans et irakiens, a eu

aussi un effet. « *La République islamique était restée à l'écart des combats de l'année dernière pour ne pas abîmer sa relation avec la Turquie*, explique Nawar Oliver, analyste du centre d'études syrien Omran, proche de l'opposition. *Téhéran espérait qu'Ankara continuerait à lui acheter son pétrole, en dépit des menaces de sanctions de Washington.* »

Coût humanitaire « dément »

Un calcul infructueux : en dépit de relations compliquées avec l'administration américaine, la Turquie s'est rangée à son embargo anti-Iran. Les troupes à la solde de Téhéran ont fait leur apparition sur le terrain syrien, notamment à l'ouest d'Alep, une zone qu'elles ont contribué à reprendre au début du mois. Cette avancée a permis aux autorités syriennes de rouvrir l'aéroport d'Alep, fermé il y a presque huit ans, sous la pression de la rébellion.

Le désenclavement de la grande métropole du Nord syrien a fait la joie de sa population. Ses quartiers ouest étaient régulièrement pris pour cibles par les groupes armés implantés en périphérie. Selon l'ONU, les tirs rebelles sur les zones sous contrôle gouvernemental, à Alep et dans le nord de la province de Hama, ont tué 93 civils depuis avril 2019, dont 23 femmes et 28 enfants.

Le régime Assad, qui ne cesse de répéter son intention de rétablir son autorité sur l'intégralité de la Syrie, entend mener cette offensive à son terme : la reconquête de la ville d'Idlib et des deux postes-frontières, Bab Al-Hawa et Atmé, par où transitent des armes et de l'aide humanitaire. « *Si Idlib tombe, 600 000 personnes supplémentaires seront jetées sur les routes*, prévient Assaad Al-Achi, le directeur d'une ONG syrienne, basée dans le sud de la Turquie. *Le coût humanitaire sera dément. La Russie est-elle prête à laisser faire cela ?* »

Malgré la mort des soldats turcs, la Russie prétend maintenir la guerre en Syrie « sous contrôle »

Pour Moscou, les soldats turcs tués étaient « dans les rangs de groupes terroristes », une version démentie par Ankara.

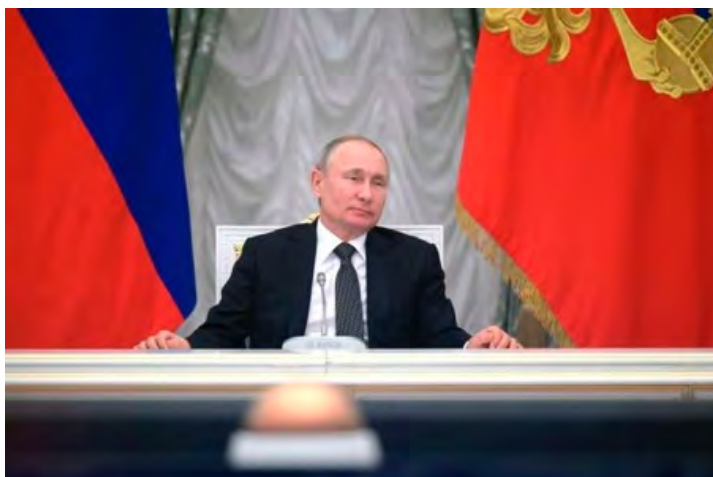
[Les militaires turcs visés jeudi 27 février](#) par des frappes de l'armée syrienne « se trouvaient dans les rangs de groupes terroristes ». La réaction du ministère russe de la défense, cohérente avec la position de Moscou qui qualifie tout combattant anti-Assad de « terroriste », laisse peu de place à l'ambiguïté : la Russie se tient fermement au côté de son allié syrien dans un moment de crise aiguë.

Et si le message n'était pas clair, il est appuyé par l'envoi vers les côtes syriennes, également annoncé vendredi, de deux navires de guerre équipés de missiles de croisière Kalibr. Ankara a rejeté pour sa part la version russe des événements. « *Aucun élément armé ne se trouvait au côté de nos unités au moment de cette attaque* », a déclaré le ministre turc de la défense, Hulusi Akar, cité par l'agence de presse étatique Anadolu.

L'objectif stratégique fixé par Vladimir Poutine n'a pas varié depuis début de l'intervention de son armée en Syrie, en septembre 2015 : reconquête du territoire syrien pour le compte de Bachar Al-Assad, quel qu'en soit le prix, et marginalisation des puissances rivales, acculées à se retirer de la scène ou à négocier.

Les blocages de Moscou à l'ONU

Depuis cette date, le rouleau compresseur russe a fonctionné sans égard pour les pertes humaines massives causées par son aviation ni pour la réprobation internationale. Autant de fois que cela a été nécessaire, Moscou a bloqué, au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, les résolutions qui auraient pu entraver son action ou remettre dans le jeu les Occidentaux, y



Le président russe, Vladimir Poutine, le 26 février à Moscou. Alexei Druzhinin / AP

compris par le biais d'opérations humanitaires.

Aussi déterminé Moscou soit-il à soutenir l'offensive syrienne dans la région d'Idlib, l'épisode de jeudi et la mort de 33 soldats turcs constituent une escalade dangereuse et inconfortable pour la Russie, qui a pris soin de ménager le « partenaire » turc depuis le début du conflit.

En soulignant, vendredi, que les avions de combat russes n'avaient pas effectué de frappes dans la zone où se trouvaient les soldats turcs, et que la présence de ces derniers n'avait pas été communiquée, la partie russe offre ainsi à Ankara une porte de sortie qui ne conduise pas à une escalade directe avec Moscou. Le ministère russe de la défense précise également avoir obtenu au plus vite un cessez-le-feu pour permettre l'évacuation des blessés et des morts vers les lignes turques.

« Sauver les apparences »

La confrontation entre les deux puissances paraissait inévitable dès le début de l'offensive sur Idlib. Le

18 février, une dernière série de négociations avait permis d'acter les désaccords, chaque partie reprochant à l'autre d'avoir enfreint l'accord de Sotchi de septembre 2018 : la Russie, en soutenant l'offensive syrienne sur la province d'Idlib ; la Turquie, en n'abandonnant pas les combattants du mouvement djihadiste Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham.

Sauf qu'Ankara s'est révélé un adversaire déterminé et imprévisible, alors que Moscou s'attendait à une répétition de la bataille d'Alep, lors de laquelle son armée avait eu les mains libres. La forte implication turque dans les combats à Idlib semble avoir pris de court les généraux russes. Ceux-ci sont conscients, qui plus est, que « *l'armée syrienne n'a aucune chance face à la Turquie dans un face-à-face ouvert* », comme le souligne le commentateur proche du Kremlin Maxime Soutchkov.

Parallèlement à l'escalade sur le terrain, les deux parties ont toutefois pris soin de sauver les apparences. Lorsqu'elle a subi des pertes importantes, le 20 février, l'armée turque

s'est bien gardée d'accuser la Russie, évoquant des frappes « syriennes ». Et ce alors même que, écrivait le 25 février l'expert militaire Pavel Felguengauer dans la *Novaïa Gazeta*, « *la différence entre un SU-24M "syrien" et un avion russe du même type tient à un écusson sur le fuselage, et que tous les vols sont dirigés depuis le centre de contrôle russe de Hmeïmim* ».

Assumer le rapport de force

Ankara et Moscou ont aussi continué à évoquer la solution miracle d'une rencontre entre leurs deux dirigeants, Vladimir Poutine et Recep Tayyip Erdogan. A plusieurs reprises, de longues rencontres entre les deux hommes avaient permis d'arracher des accords in extremis, quitte à ce que ceux-ci soient bafoués quelques semaines plus tard. Jeudi, avant l'annonce de frappes meurtrières d'Idlib, le Kremlin avait toutefois décliné la proposition turque d'une rencontre entre les deux hommes le 5 mars, à Istanbul.

Cette prudence d'une Turquie de plus en plus isolée sur la scène internationale place la partie russe dans une position qu'elle affectionne particulièrement : assumer le rapport de force sur le terrain tout en laissant à son adversaire le loisir d'abandonner ses positions en sauvant la face. L'incident meurtrier du 26 février, sans doute suivi d'une poursuite de l'offensive sur Idlib, peut-il troubler cet équilibre précaire ? L'expert militaire Alexandre Golts estime que la priorité devrait rester, des deux côtés, de garder au maximum le conflit « sous contrôle ». Pavel Felguengauer, lui, résume l'équation de manière plus pessimiste : « *Ni nous ni les Turcs n'avons envie de nous faire la guerre pour Idlib, mais peut-être y serons-nous forcés.* »

Idlib, la nasse du conflit syrien

Après neuf années de guerre, l'enclave rebelle est devenue le nœud des rivalités entre Moscou et Ankara.

Avant 2011 : entre désintérêt et répression du régime

Province agricole majoritairement sunnite et conservatrice, Idlib a été laissée à l'écart du développement économique sous le régime d'Hafez Al-Assad. En 1980, à la suite du soulèvement des Frères musulmans dans plusieurs villes du pays, dont Jisr Al-Choghour, une violente répression s'abat sur la région d'Idlib.

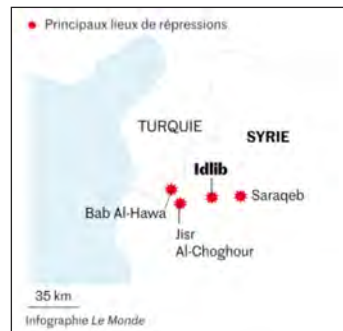
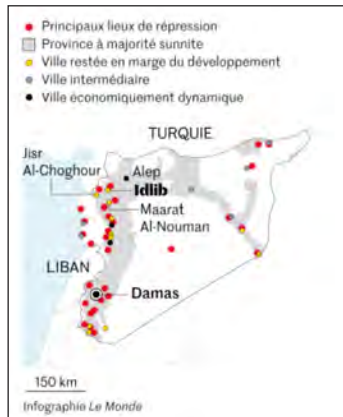
première à basculer dans la lutte armée. En juillet 2012, l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), la branche modérée de la rébellion, s'empare du poste-frontière de Bab Al-Hawa. Des armes commencent à lui parvenir, mais en nombre limité. L'ouverture profite surtout aux combattants islamistes, qui sont ravitaillés par l'Arabie saoudite, le Qatar et la Turquie.

cherche à imposer sa loi sur toute la province.

armes d'être évacués avec leur famille vers la poche d'Idlib. Les éléments les plus irrédutibles de l'opposition armée s'entassent progressivement dans cette région.

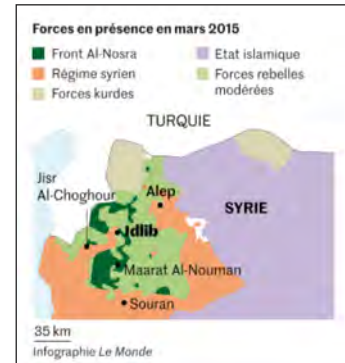
Depuis 2017 : de la désescalade à l'offensive

En mai 2017, la province d'Idlib est incluse, avec la Ghouta, Homs et Deraa, dans l'accord de désescalade signé à Astana (Kazakhstan) entre la Turquie, marraine de l'opposition à Bachar Al-Assad, et la Russie et l'Iran, soutiens du régime. L'armée turque érige une dizaine de postes d'observation du cessez-le-feu dans la région. Mais les combats reprennent rapidement.



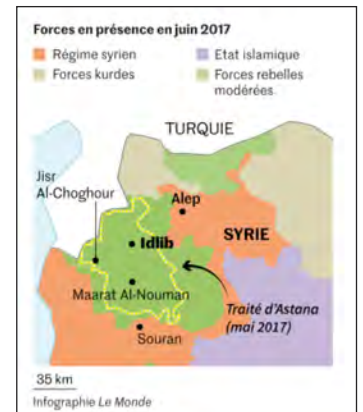
Entre 2014 et 2015 : la montée en puissance des djihadistes dans la région

Le groupe djihadiste Front Al-Nosra (branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda) profite de l'affaiblissement de l'ASL et prend Idlib au régime en mars 2015. Les militants anti-Assad saluent d'abord cette victoire. Mais, très vite, les modérés et les minorités religieuses heurtent à la violence du groupe qui



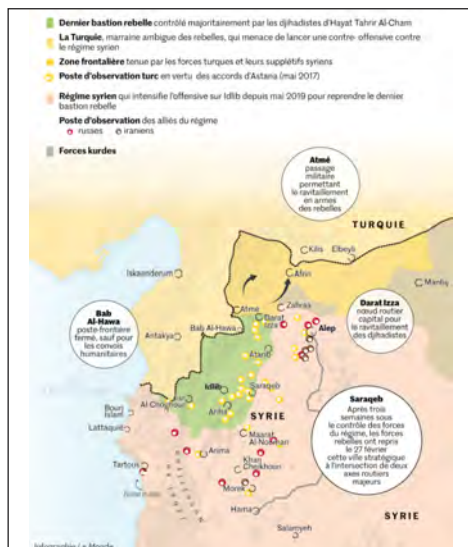
Fin 2015 : le ghetto des irrédutibles

En septembre 2015, l'intervention de l'armée russe permet au régime syrien de repartir à l'offensive. A chaque victoire, Damas offre aux rebelles refusant de rendre les

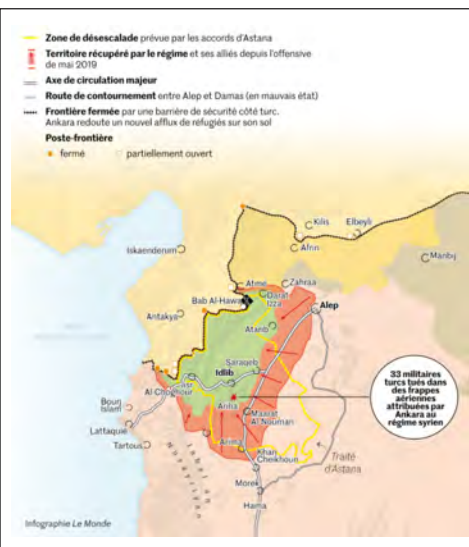


L'offensive du régime contre la souricière

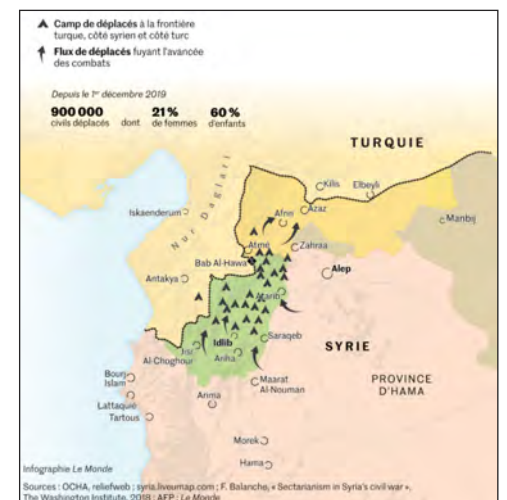
Les forces en présence en février 2020



Le front



La situation humanitaire



Sources : OCHA, reliefweb ; syria.liveuamap.com ; F. Balanche, « Sectarianism in Syria's civil war », The Washington Institute, 2018 ; AFP ; Le Monde

Turquie-Russie : le risque d'une escalade en Syrie

La situation restait volatile vendredi, après la mort de 33 soldats turcs dans des frappes du régime de Damas, protégé de Moscou, dans le Nord-Ouest syrien.

LA TURQUIE savait l'aventure risquée. En dépêchant ses troupes sur le territoire du nord-ouest de la Syrie, elle les soumettait à la rude épreuve d'un ciel dominé par les avions chasseurs russo-syriens. Mais dans son bras de fer avec Damas et Moscou, Recep Tayyip Erdogan en avait fait une question d'honneur. « Nous ne ferons pas le moindre pas en arrière à Idlib. Nous repousserons le régime syrien en dehors des frontières fixées par nous et assurerons le retour des gens dans leurs foyers », insistait-il encore mercredi.

Jeudi soir, à peine vingt-quatre heures après son allocution, le ciel déversait sa foudre contre des positions militaires turques dans la région d'Idlib. Le bilan est lourd : 33 soldats turcs tués et des dizaines de blessés, annoncent aussitôt diverses sources indépendantes sur les réseaux sociaux, vite inondés de vidéos des frappes et de photos des victimes. Il est alors vers 23 heures en Turquie.

Signe de la panique du pouvoir, un silence - imposé - s'empare rapidement du pays : l'accès à Twitter et à Facebook est vite bloqué, tandis que le très volubile président turc s'enferme dans un inhabituel mutisme. Ni discours ni apparition publique. En pleine nuit, il se contente de convoquer, à huis clos, un conseil de sécurité extraordinaire à Ankara. L'heure est grave, l'humiliation profonde. « C'est une déclaration de guerre. À ce stade, tout est possible », s'inquiète Ahmet, un journaliste turc. La riposte ne se fait pas attendre : une vingtaine de combattants du régime syrien ont péri lors de bombardements de représailles menés par l'ar-



L'armée turque a bombardé vendredi des positions syriennes faisant une vingtaine de victimes parmi les combattants du régime d'Assad.

mée turque selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). En plein bouclage, les journaux progouvernementaux bouleversent leur une du lendemain, en titrant sur des appels à la « vengeance ». À Istanbul, un attroupement s'organise devant le consulat russe. « Poutine, assassin ! », scandent les manifestants, en réclamant, pour certains, la fermeture des détroits turcs aux navires russes se rendant vers la Syrie depuis la mer Noire.

« L'escalade était malheureusement prévisible », confie un expert turc, sous le couvert de l'anonymat. Principaux maîtres du jeu syrien, Vladimir Poutine (qui soutient le régime syrien) et Recep Tayyip Erdogan (qui appuie les anti-Assad) avaient conclu en 2018 à Sotchi un accord instaurant une « zone de désescalade » à Idlib, visant entre autres à démilitariser les groupes djihadistes de cette dernière enclave de l'opposition syrienne échappant au contrôle de Damas. Mais ces dernières semaines, le « deal » a volé en éclats : les Russes reprochant à Ankara de ne pas avoir tenu sa promesse de nettoyer cette région des factions dites terroristes ; les Turcs accusant

Moscou de violer la trêve en bombardant indistinctement militaires et civils, y compris les hôpitaux et les écoles.

Déterminée à arrêter cette offensive, à l'origine d'un afflux d'un million de déplacés à sa frontière, et craignant qu'ils ne se déversent sur son territoire, la Turquie a fini, début février, par envoyer des renforts militaires à Idlib. Ces derniers jours, une série d'affrontements mortels entre forces turques et syriennes avaient déjà mis à rude épreuve l'étroite coopération développée entre Ankara et Moscou dans d'autres domaines tels que la défense et l'énergie.

Vendredi, pourtant, l'appel à la retenue semblait néanmoins avoir repris le dessus. Lors d'un entretien téléphonique matinal, MM. Erdogan et Poutine ont exprimé, selon un communiqué du Kremlin, leur « sérieuse inquiétude » envers la situation à Idlib et décidé d'étudier la « possibilité de tenir prochainement un sommet ». Ce schéma rappelle une méthode, désormais bien rodée, qui consiste, comme en Libye - autre terrain d'affrontement entre Moscou et Ankara - à alterner coups de force militaire et négociations diplomatiques.

En 2015, déjà, la destruction en vol d'un chasseur militaire russe par l'armée turque à la lisière de la Syrie avait provoqué un gel temporaire des relations avant que les deux pays, qui restent d'importants partenaires commerciaux, ne retrouvent un terrain d'entente. L'Otan, dont fait partie Ankara, a également tenu une réunion d'urgence à la demande de la Turquie. La présidence turque a en outre exhorté la communauté internationale à mettre en place une zone d'exclusion aérienne pour clouer au sol les avions russes et syriens qui pilonnent la région depuis plusieurs mois.

Otages d'une situation qui les dépasse, les réfugiés syriens se retrouvent, quant à eux, une fois de plus instrumentalisés dans cette guerre à la fois militaire, idéologique et médiatique. Dans une apparente tentative de faire pression sur l'Union européenne pour obtenir davantage de soutien, la Turquie, qui héberge déjà 3,6 millions de Syriens, a soudainement décrété qu'elle ne stopperait plus les migrants qui tentent de rallier clandestinement la Grèce.

À peine la nouvelle annoncée, des colonnes de réfugiés ont mis le cap sur le quartier Fatih d'Istanbul où des autocars les attendaient pour les acheminer jusqu'à la frontière grecque d'Edirne. Ce vendredi, la télévision turque a également diffusé une vidéo de l'agence de presse DHA montrant un canot gonflable rempli de migrants mettant le cap en direction de l'île grecque de Lesbos. Affolé, Athènes s'est empressé de doubler ses patrouilles à la frontière turque.

L'affaiblissement turc change la donne dans la confrontation près d'Idlib

LES FRAPPES conjointes russo-syriennes, selon une source onusienne, qui ont tué 33 soldats turcs près d'Idlib, changent la donne du conflit dans cette ultime province aux mains des opposants à Bachar el-Assad, soutenus par la Turquie voisine. L'accord de Sotchi, dans sa version conclue en 2018 entre Vladimir Poutine et Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui instaurait une « zone démilitarisée » censée séparer les positions du régime de Damas de celles des rebelles et des djihadistes, a été enterré jeudi soir. Vendredi en milieu de journée, MM. Poutine et Erdogan se seraient mis d'accord sur de « nouvelles mesures ». Lesquelles ? De source russe, on fait savoir que les militaires turcs présents dans douze postes d'observation à travers la province d'Idlib doivent rester désormais cantonnés dans leurs installations. « Ils ne servent plus à rien, la plupart sont encerclés par l'armée syrienne », estime un humanitaire dans la région. L'armée turque les avait renforcés, ces dernières semaines. Moscou accuse les soldats turcs déployés dans ces postes de s'être mêlés aux rebelles, ce qu'a démenti l'insurrection syrienne. Ankara devra toutefois s'interroger sur le maintien de

soldats impuissants, qui pourraient devenir de nouvelles cibles pour les forces syro-russes.

La fourniture de missiles sol-air turcs aux rebelles a alimenté la colère de Damas, dont deux hélicoptères ont été visés par ces missiles, et de son parrain russe. Même si les avions de combat russes volent à haute altitude, un accident est vite arrivé. Mais au-delà, c'est la reprise jeudi de la ville stratégique de Saraqeb par les rebelles pro-turcs qui a mis les Russes en colère. « L'armée syrienne et ses alliés russes étaient déployés plus à l'ouest dans les montagnes du Djebel Zawiya, commente un observateur qui se rend régulièrement sur place. Poutine n'a pas du tout aimé, dit-il, d'autant qu'au même moment, une délégation russe rencontrait des Turcs à Ankara. »

Drame humanitaire

Saraqeb est situé au croisement des routes M5, reliant Alep à Damas, et M4 entre Alep et Lattaquié, le fief des Assad, sur le littoral méditerranéen. Après en avoir repris le contrôle il y a trois semaines, jeudi matin, Damas a perdu Saraqeb, et donc la M5.

Avant cette défaite, l'objectif

des forces syriennes était de reconquérir également l'autoroute M4, ce qui leur aurait permis de contrôler tout le sud d'Idlib. Une pause aurait pu ensuite être envisagée dans l'offensive contre le reste - c'est-à-dire la moitié - de la province qui échappe à Damas, en vue de négocier - en position de force - face à la Turquie une réactualisation de l'accord de Sotchi. Désormais, « notre priorité c'est de reprendre Saraqeb, confie depuis Damas une source syrienne informée, cela ne devrait pas prendre trop de temps. Les batailles ne s'arrêteront que lorsque nous aurons repris, au minimum, le contrôle des autoroutes M4 et M5. Après le lourd bilan subi, ajoute cette source, c'est aux Turcs de décider s'ils veulent continuer à se battre avec les djihadistes ou appliquer Sotchi ».

Même si l'échange téléphonique Poutine-Erdogan a pu faire baisser la tension, les violences vont se poursuivre, faisant craindre une aggravation de la crise humanitaire - 400 civils tués depuis décembre et près d'un million de déplacés en raison des bombardements syro-russes. Toute la question est de savoir jusqu'où Vladimir Poutine, maître du jeu en Syrie, voudra punir Erdogan ?

« Soit la poussée russe vers la frontière turque est telle que des dizaines de milliers de réfugiés paniqués passeront en Turquie qui, malgré un mur le long de sa frontière, ne pourra pas tirer sur la foule, observe le chercheur et spécialiste de la Syrie, Fabrice Balanche. Soit Poutine et Erdogan s'accordent pour que ces déplacés soient acheminés vers les régions d'Afrine, Al-Bab et Azaz que la Turquie a conquises dans le nord-est de la Syrie. » Mais là encore se posera le problème de l'acheminement de l'aide humanitaire. Ankara réclamera une aide occidentale. Mais qui acceptera de cautionner une relocalisation de populations arabes en zones, souvent, kurdes ? La géopolitique n'est jamais loin des complexités du conflit syrien. « Jusqu'à maintenant, Poutine voulait laisser une chance à Erdogan pour qu'il fasse pression sur les Américains afin qu'ils se retirent complètement de la Syrie, en échange de quoi Moscou aurait donné à Erdogan un mini-territoire pour établir sa zone de sécurité et y reloger les réfugiés, mais Erdogan est allé trop loin », estime Fabrice Balanche.

La solidarité de l'Otan mise à l'épreuve par Ankara

À la demande de la Turquie, le Conseil de l'Alliance atlantique s'est réuni pour des « consultations ».

LA SOLIDARITÉ a une limite. Dans la crise qui l'oppose à la Syrie et la Russie, la Turquie n'a obtenu vendredi qu'une déclaration de principes de la part de ses « alliés » de l'Otan. Ankara avait demandé la convocation dans l'urgence d'une réunion du Conseil de l'Alliance au titre de « l'article 4 » du traité. Celui-ci permet à l'un des membres de demander « des consultations » lorsque son « intégrité territoriale, son indépendance politique ou sa sécurité est menacée ». Après la mort de 33 de ses soldats dans la province d'Idlib, la Turquie voulait faire monter la pression et adresser un signal à Moscou, acteur clé de la région. Elle s'est aussi subitement souvenue qu'elle avait des alliés militaires.

« Les alliés ont exprimé leurs sincères condoléances » à la Turquie, a déclaré Jens Stoltenberg, le secrétaire général de l'Otan, à l'issue de la réunion vendredi matin. « La réunion d'aujourd'hui est un signal clair de solidarité », a-t-il insisté en rappelant que la Turquie était particulièrement affectée par le conflit dans la région, que ce soit en raison « d'actes terroristes » commis contre elle ou par l'accueil de « millions de réfugiés » sur son territoire. Mais au-delà des mots apparemment compatissants, il n'est pas question d'aller plus loin.

« L'Otan continue de soutenir

la Turquie pour sa défense aérienne. Cela lui permet de se protéger contre la menace d'une attaque de missiles tirés depuis la Syrie », a-t-il ajouté comme seul signe concret d'une solidarité purement défensive. Les soldats turcs sont tombés sur le sol syrien. Il a aussi mentionné



Un groupe de migrants attend devant la frontière grecque, vendredi, dans le no man's land près de Pazarkule, en Turquie.

le déploiement d'avions de renseignement Awacs qui patrouillent dans l'espace aérien turc. L'appui de l'Otan est volontairement limité dans l'espoir de favoriser une logique de désescalade dans la région. La Turquie est elle aussi responsable des tensions. Le secrétaire général s'est contenté d'appeler « la Russie et le régime de Bachar el-Assad à cesser les combats et les attaques aériennes aveugles » et à « respecter pleinement le droit international ». Il a condamné le bombardement des populations civiles.

« Les propos de Jens Stol-

tenberg soulignent le soutien a minima des alliés envers la Turquie », observe Guillaume Lasconjarias, chercheur associé à l'Ifri. Au sein de l'alliance militaire, le cavalier seul d'Ankara et son offensive en Syrie ont été sévèrement critiqués. L'Otan avait été mise devant le fait

phique en fait aussi un acteur clé.

Dans son double jeu avec l'Otan, la Turquie est une habituée de l'article 4, qu'elle a déjà invoqué deux fois dans le passé récent : en juin 2012, après qu'un avion turc a été abattu par l'aviation syrienne et en juillet 2015 après l'attentat terroriste de Suruç. Pour Guillaume Lasconjarias, Ankara ne pourra guère aller plus loin pour requérir l'appui de ses alliés et surtout pas invoquer l'article 5, qui fait appel à la solidarité militaire. « Il n'y aurait pas de consensus parmi les 29 États-membres pour la soutenir », dit-il.

Les frappes contre les soldats turcs ont été attribuées à la Syrie. Mais l'ombre de la Russie plane évidemment. Moscou détient la suprématie aérienne dans le ciel syrien. Les alliés de l'Otan ont donc saisi l'occasion de rappeler à la Turquie qu'elle avait joué un jeu ambigu avec Moscou en souhaitant acquérir des systèmes russes de défense anti-aérienne S-400. Les États-Unis ont invité vendredi Ankara à voir « la Russie telle qu'elle est vraiment » et à renoncer à son projet. L'acquisition par la Turquie de ces systèmes fragilise la défense commune de l'Otan. Mais en l'occurrence, Ankara voudrait se passer de l'avis de ses alliés.

accompli lorsque Ankara avait visé les milices kurdes en Syrie, celles qui ont combattu avec les Occidentaux les groupes djihadistes au Levant. Lors du dernier sommet à Londres en décembre, le président français Emmanuel Macron, la chancelière allemande Angela Merkel et le premier ministre britannique Boris Johnson avaient fait part de leurs désaccords au chef de l'État turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan. La réunion n'avait pas permis de dénouer la crise. La Turquie est devenue un partenaire encombrant pour l'Alliance. Mais sa situation géogra-



Uzay Bulut
Feb 29 2020

Turkey's endangered languages

Eighteen languages in Turkey are currently listed as endangered, vulnerable, or have become extinct, according to UNESCO.

This is a result of decades of government policies that have not put other languages on an equal footing with Turkish, the first language of around 80 percent of the population.

The history of forced Turkification targeting non-Turkish languages and cultures goes back to the early years of the new Republic of Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s. Non-Turkish names of towns and villages across the country were Turkified and changed. In 1924, Turkish became the sole medium of education, except for a small number of non-Muslim schools.

In 1928, a student association in Istanbul launched a campaign to stop the public use of non-Turkish languages, and a 1934 law banned the adoption of non-Turkish surnames.

Kurdish is the mostly widely spoken mother tongue in Turkey after Turkish, but such is the number of Kurds – some 15 percent of the population of around 80 million - that UNESCO does not see it as being in danger.

Other minority languages though are listed as endangered and the bans and pressure from the state and the public have had a deleterious effect.

Laz, the language of a people living in the Black Sea region of Turkey and parts of Georgia, is listed as a definitely endangered by UNESCO. According to the Istanbul-based Laz Cultural Association, there are an estimated 1.5 million Laz people in Turkey, around 70 percent of whom can understand the language, but only 40 percent can speak it.



“The two most important factors for preserving a language is family and state policies,” said Gökhan Alptekin, the vice president of the association. “If parents speak their native language with their kids, the language will very likely survive throughout generations.

“But I learnt in my research that many Laz parents do not speak Laz with their children because they don't want them to have broken Turkish, and these parents themselves do not speak Laz with their own parents because it is considered a disgrace,” he said.

“And the teachers who themselves are Laz put serious pressure on students to stop them speaking Laz. The children are terrified because they are told that they are secretly listened to by those outside when they speak Laz at home.”

Alptekin said the government should help preserve languages in Turkey.

“TV channels, newspapers and other means of communication in Laz should be established with the support of the government. Laz people do not have any of these things in Turkey,” he said.

A big reason for the elimination of non-Turkish languages was the 1913-1923 genocide that targeted Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks in Ottoman Turkey and the subsequent forced population exchange between Turkey and Greece.

Religion was the sole criterion for the exchange of 400,000 Muslims in Greece and the 250,000 remaining Greeks in Turkey in 1922 and 1923. More than a million ethnic Greeks had already left Turkey and some Turkish-speaking Christians were also sent to Greece, while Greek-speaking Muslims remained in Turkey.

The Pontic Greek dialect, spoken in the Pontus region near the Black Sea, is “definitely endangered”, UNESCO said, while the Cappadocian Greek dialect of central Turkey is extinct.

“After the Greek Christian expulsions from Pontus, the Muslim Pontians, excluded from the 1923 religion-based, forced population exchange treaty, spoke their Pontian dialect, but only at home and not in public. The Turkish governments required them to speak Turkish only,” said George Mavropoulos, the founder of the Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center in Chicago.

Professor Kyriakos Chatzikyriakidis, chair of the Pontic Studies Department at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, said if there were tens of thousands of Greeks-speaking Muslims in the Trabzon area at the time of the 1923 population exchange, there may be hundreds left, though it was impossible to be sure.

“Establishing new educational and research programmes in which the Pontic Greek dialect will be studied, opening courses at schools and universities related to the Pontic dialect and history and other similar activities could enhance the dialect's chances of survival,” he said.

“When humanity tries to save a language, it actually tries to save a part of the world's cultural heritage. Every language is a monument of the world heritage, for every language embodies and discloses the thinking and culture of its speakers,” Chatzikyriakidis said.

The two dialects of Armenian in Turkey - Homshetsma and Western Armenian - are also “definitely endangered”, UNESCO said. The land which is now modern-day Turkey was once host to a large Armenian population, but up to 1.5 million

Armenians were killed or expelled from what was then the Ottoman Empire from 1915 in a campaign that historians say was constituted genocide.

There are about 50,000 people speaking Western Armenian, mainly in Istanbul, but the number of the speakers of Homshetsma, the language of the Hamshen people who converted to Islam, is not known.

Anahit Khosroeva, a genocide scholar and lecturer at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences in Armenia said that even after the republic was established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire discrimination against Armenians had continued.

“Since the founding of Turkey in 1923, international laws have been ignored there. For instance, the United Nations condemns national discrimination. But Turkey continues to carry

out a policy of assimilation adopted by its founders under the slogan ‘one nation, one language, one flag and one country,” she said.

“The 1915 physical genocide against Armenians and Assyrians has been transformed into a cultural genocide against these communities through the government’s assimilationist policies,” Khosroeva said.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne set Turkey’s borders, but also defined the rights of non-Muslim minorities. But the Assyrians in Turkey were excluded from the treaty and so still do not officially have the right to education in their mother tongue. There are currently around 25,000 Assyrians in Turkey today but only 4,000 or 5,000 can speak the Assyrian language.

The UNESCO Interactive Atlas lists four Assyrian dialects in Turkey: Suret (definitely endan-

gered), Turoyo (severely endangered), Hertevin (critically endangered) and Mlahso (extinct).

Many Assyrians have moved to Europe in recent decades as fighting between the state and Kurdish rebels raged in their homelands in Turkey’s east and southeast.

Nicholas Al-Jeloo, an expert on Assyrian history, said the Turkish government could help preserve the language by providing incentives and, above all, security for Assyrians to return.

The reason why non-Turkish languages in Turkey are struggling to survive is that the state has tried to wipe out other, non-Turkish identities, said Zeynem Arslan, the editor of the book “Zazaki - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” about the Zazaki language and people, mainly in eastern Turkey.

“Turkish hegemony is imposed

on them. The problem in Turkey is the monist, annihilationist mentality that bases its existence on exterminating others,” Arslan said.

Zazaki is a member of the Western Iranian sub-branch of the Indo-European language family. Zazaki and Kurdish are related but separate languages, noted Arslan. It is spoken by between 4 to 6 million people, but UNESCO lists it in its vulnerable category of languages.

“The Zazaki language has for long years been banned officially. And no support has been given by the state to develop this language,” Arslan said.

“For a vulnerable or endangered language to live on, the political environment should be more democratic and pluralistic,” she said. “Multilingualism and official recognition of cultural rights should be adopted as government policy.”