

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

N°420

MARCH 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
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ISBN 0761 1285

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TURKEY: THE GOVERNMENT PREFERS TO FIGHT THE KURDS RATHER THAN THE CORONAVIRUS



As the coronavirus epidemic spreads across the country, the Turkish economy continues to plummet. On March 3rd, *TurkStat* announced for February an inflation of 12.37% compared to the same month of 2019, and revealed on the 10th an unemployment of 15-24 years-old at 25% for last December, before indicating on the 20th an increase in unemployment of almost one million over one year, 932.000,

to reach 4.469.000 people in 2019...

At the same time, the authorities of the AKP-MHP alliance reacted to the epidemic in their usual way: denials/dissimulation of the seriousness of the situation, lies about their testing capabilities and, above all, repression of whistleblowers. Despite the spread of the epidemic in neighbouring Iran, on the 9th, the Minister of Health still declared that there were no cases in Turkey, while

travellers returning from Turkey tested positive in the United States (*National Interest*)... On the 11th, he announced a first case of CoVid, without specifying either age or location. On the 13th, a second case "related to the first" was announced, and later that day, five more cases were reported. On the same day, the closure of schools and universities was announced, then on the 16th, bars and nightclubs were closed, and air links to nine, then six more coun-

tries suspended. The next day, 29 more cases were announced, for a total of 47. The Physicians' Union of Turkey (TTB), which includes the vast majority of the country's doctors, warned that the actual number of cases was certainly higher than the official figures. On the 18th, Turkey suffered its first death as the number of officially recorded cases doubled in 24 hours to 98, before jumping again at the end of the day to 191, when a second death was announced...

As it became clear that the virus was circulating far more widely than the power had claimed, the authorities responded with repression. After an investigation against her opened by Ankara University, Dr. Güle Çınar was forced to publish a letter of apology on the 19th after having warned that there could be thousands of infected Turkish pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia. On the same day, 33 bar associations jointly demanded, in order to avoid an epidemic in the 375 overcrowded prisons in the country, the release of some of the 270.000 prisoners, by suspending their detention or serving it under house arrest. On the 23rd, while flights to 68 countries were suspended, the government did announce a programme to decongest prisons affecting 100.000 prisoners, but excluded all those detained for "terrorism, drugs and sexual assault", thus giving an indication that it intended to keep in jail all political opponents wrongly convinced with terrorism. The bill was criticised on the 25th in a new joint declaration by 14 bar associations, which called for the release of political prisoners as well.

It was only on the 23rd, announcing 1.236 cases and 30 deaths, that the Minister of Health first reported the number of screening tests performed: 20.345. On the 30th, there were 168 deaths and over 10.000 cases.

If Turkey has not been able to mas-

sively deploy the screening tests, it has on the other hand massively repressed the whistleblowers! On the 23rd, dozens of Kurds were arrested in Bingöl and Suruc, and charges were pressed against 316 people following messages about the epidemic on social networks, to the point that İsmet Çiğit, editor-in-chief of a local newspaper in Kocaeli, told *Bianet* that in the face of state intimidation, he would now limit himself to reproducing official statements. Several users of social networks who had criticised the government's health management were also arrested in Adana (*WKI*). HDP MP from Kocaeli and doctor Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu was investigated for "causing fear and panic among the public" after announcing that a 70-year-old Sincan detainee had been diagnosed positive. On the 30th, an investigation for "incitement to hatred" was opened against HDP Diyarbakir MP Remziye Tosun, who had participated in a car tour of the Sur and Yenişehir neighbourhoods during which announcements were broadcast over loudspeakers to incite people to stay at home... and in which the government was blamed for its lack of interest in protecting the population (*Bianet*). Journalist Nurcan Baysal was also investigated for "incitement to hatred" for her articles on the management of the epidemic in Diyarbakir and the Kurdish provinces of the country. At the same time, the union of APC doctors pointed out the responsibility of the authorities in the spread of the virus because of its mistakes, in particular not having set up a general quarantine against the development of the disease in Iran and not having carried out any tests on the nearly 20.000 pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia...

Also on the 31st, twenty-seven organisations, including the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ), called for the release of imprisoned journalists and human rights defenders. At the end of the

month, according to the Interior Ministry, dozens of villages and areas in 18 Turkish provinces were put under quarantine because of the epidemic, but neither in Ankara nor in Istanbul, large urban centres that were probably the most affected.

In this difficult situation, the "pro-Kurdish" HDP party, although it has faced repression, has not ceased to protect the citizens as best it can as an opposition party. On the 13th, the HDP deputy from Mardin Tuma Çelik asked in a parliamentary question to the Minister of Health that information on the virus be disseminated in the regional languages, Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac, for the elderly, at risk, who do not always understand Turkish well. On the 13th, the HDP spokesman called on the government to distribute hygiene products and disinfectants free of charge to the poorest. The HDP also decided the same day to cancel the Newrouz festivities. The HDP Justice and Human Rights Commission also called for the release of elderly, sick prisoners, mothers with children and minors to prevent them from becoming infected. From his cell, Selahattin Demirtaş called for solidarity and cooperation among the population as well as between the state and civil society organizations, adding that "society must be sure that nothing is hidden from it". On the 25th, HDP Vice President for Economy Garo Paylan unveiled an alternative economic programme to the government's, criticized for putting the interests of business ahead of protecting the poorest citizens, such as low-wage earners or the unemployed: "Who is protecting [the government's programme]? The "one percenters"... 99 of the 100 billion package goes to the rich, the 1%". The HDP also called for a halt to the payment of rent, interest on bank loans, water and electricity charges during the epidemic, that aid to businesses be made conditional on a ban on laying-offs, the maintenance of salaries for those who have to stop

work with 50% support from the state, unconditional unemployment benefits, and the payment of a domestic salary to women who have to look after their children who had to stop going to school...

However, the development of the epidemic has not stopped the repression. On the 9th, the dismissed co-Mayor of Diyarbakir, Dr. Selçuk Mızraklı, was sentenced to nine years in prison for terrorism. On the 12th, the co-Mayor of Cizre, Berivan Kutlu, was incarcerated in a raid on her home. On the 23rd, the HDP mayors of five Kurdish municipalities were detained. The Ministry of Interior reported that eight HDP mayors were dismissed on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist group and replaced by administrators. According to the communiqué, four mayors have been detained and an arrest warrant issued for a fifth, while three others are under investigation. The HDP said: "Our municipal buildings in Silvan, Ergani, Lice, Eğil and Batman have been cordoned off and searched. During house raids, our Batman co-mayors Mehmet Demir and Songül Korkmaz, the co-mayor of Silvan Naşide Toprak, Ergani Ahmet Kaya, of Eğil Mustafa Akkul, the dismissed co-mayor of Yenişehir Belgin Diken, the deputy co-mayors of Batman

Şehriban Aydın and Salih Çetinkaya, the co-mayors of the Batman Municipal Council Şükran Çelebi and Recep Yargı were incarcerated". The HDP elected representatives of Güroymak District (Bitlis) and the towns of Gökçebağ (Siirt) and Iğdır (Halfeli) were also dismissed and replaced. The administrator appointed to replace the mayor of Batman hastened to have the pages in Kurdish removed from the municipality's website. The HDP's foreign affairs committee denounced these dismissals, declaring: "Instead of fighting against the coronavirus, the AKP is fighting against the Kurds".

In almost exactly one year since the last municipal elections, the Turkish government has now dismissed a total of 40 elected officials. The Hasankeyf Coordination, which is fighting against the dam that has begun to flood the city, stated on the 24th that the installation of pro-AKP administrators in Batman was directly linked to the Ilisu Dam, as the dismissed elected officials had repeatedly expressed their concerns about the social and sanitary consequences of the project, including the discharge of untreated sewage into the reservoir and the possible mass displacement of uprooted people: "The administrator was appointed less than 12 hours after the municipi-

ality of Batman decided to postpone the payment of water bills"...

The following other news should not go unnoticed despite the fact that media space is quite monopolised by the epidemic: nearly five years after the murder of the President of the Diyarbakir Bar Tahir Elçi on 28 November 2015, four suspects were charged on 27 March, including three police officers (the fourth suspect is also accused of killing two other policemen); several journalists who covered the situation of refugees on the border with Greece at the beginning of the month, including Iraqi Kurdish TV reporter *Rûdaw* Rawin Sterk, were arrested for "terrorist propaganda". Also noteworthy is the forced hospitalisation on the 11th of two *Grup Yorum* artists on hunger strike at home, Helin Bölek and İbrahim Gökçek, and the arrest on the 12th for "terrorism" of at least nine lawyers in Urfa and Diyarbakir.

Finally, on the 9th, the philanthropist and businessman Osman Kavala was the target of a new indictment, if possible even more ludicrous than all the previous ones: this time he is accused of "espionage". The Turkish authorities are clearly beginning to run out of inventions to keep him in detention...

IRAN:

THE COVID 19 EPIDEMIC HAS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

Exacerbated by corruption and sanctions, the economic difficulties faced by Iranians particularly affect the peripheral provinces, neglected since long by the authorities. In Iranian Kurdistan, for example, the number of young people with no choice but to work as cross-border porters, or *kolbars*, is constantly increasing. According to Mabsur Muradi, representative of Mariwan, unemployment in Kurdistan of Iran is around 50%, with an inflation rate of more than

45%. The *KHRN* (*Kurdistan Human Rights Network*) reported that in 2019, 57 of these *kolbars* had been shot down by border guards or security forces, 29 others had died in accidents, falls, avalanches or mines, sometimes while trying to escape from the police, and 66 had been injured. With the crisis, people are now coming from towns up to 150 km from the border to take up this dangerous work, which became illegal in 2017. In 2020, eight porters have already been killed and more than 20 injured, and another 40 were

victims of accidents. At present, porters are also faced with the coronavirus epidemic, as a result of which the Kurdistan Regional Government of neighbouring Iraq has closed its borders with Iran (*Al-Monitor*). In the first week of March, one carrier was killed and one injured and two of them fell into a ravine in Hawraman, and the following week another one died and one was injured, while another froze to death near Khoy (*WKI*).

Regarding the epidemic, while on

March 2, Iranian Health Minister Alireza Raissi announced a dizzying increase in the number of cases with 1.501 positive cases and 66 deaths, many witnesses speak of even higher figures. At least 16 Kurds were diagnosed positive and a 55-year-old woman died on 1st March in Saqqez. Dr. Abdolreza Fazel, Head of the Golestan province health agency, counted 594 cases in his province alone, and a Gilan MP, Imanabadi, said that hospitals were saturated in Rasht: this makes the national figures (*Radio Farda*), which Imanabadi indeed called a “joke” (*Le Monde*), not very credible. In Urumieh, according to the Kurdish human rights organisation *Hengaw*, a prisoner died in his cell from CoVid, and families of prisoners demonstrated outside the prison to demand the release on parole of their relatives (*WKI*). On the 8th, the *New York Times* noted that the country had the highest number of deaths outside China at the time, including a senior adviser to the Supreme Leader, one of the country’s vice-presidents, 23 members of parliament, the Vice Minister of Health and several other senior officials. Recalling the high quality of Iran’s health care system, the paper noted that many lives could have been saved if the government had adopted an attitude different from denial.

Even according to official figures, it soon became clear on the 9th that the epidemic was exploding when 237 deaths were reported out of 7.161 cases: 595 new cases had been diagnosed within 24 hours, while the authorities were still refusing to reveal the number of deaths in Tehran, in Qom, the first identified outbreak, and Gilan. *Hengaw* reported at least 44 deaths in the Kurdish provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam, Kurdistan and Western Azerbaijan. Prisoners in Urumieh went on strike due to the inaction of the prison administration. The pro-Ruhani website *Entekhab* announced more than 2.000 deaths

and called on the ministry to reveal the real figures. Faced with estimates without sources and so far apart, *Radio Farda* attempted a calculation based on figures taken from statements by various provincial authorities and arrived at between 477 and 519 deaths by the morning of the 9th. It seems that the authorities are lowering the figures by counting only those deaths confirmed by coroners and not those from hospitals, which could be two to three times higher, especially as the number of bodies to be examined would exceed the capacity of the doctors. On the 16th, again using regional data, *Radio Farda* calculated that at least 1.300 people had died and 32.000 had been admitted to hospitals in 30 of the country’s 31 provinces, roughly the double of official figures (853 deaths and 15.000 cases). At the same time, the hunt for those who dared to criticize the management of the epidemic on social networks began, as evidenced by the arrest on the 12th (reported on the 16th by *Courrier International*) of Mohammad Mokhtari, captain of the Damash football team, taken by the *Etelaat*, the intelligence service of the Revolutionary Guards (*pasdaran*) to the Razi hospital in Rasht, where he was told: “You are doing a live on Instagram. You’re filming all the Guardians and the *Basij* who work there and you thank them. Then you apologise [for criticising them]”. The weekly also reports that a former member of the Shiraz city council, Mehdi Hojati, has also been detained since 12 March for his criticism.

On the 18th, the *Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI)* reported a number of 102 deaths in the whole of Iranian Kurdistan, from *Hengaw* source (provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Western Azerbaijan), and announced that following the explosion in the number of cases in Urumieh prison, prisoners sentenced to five years or less and having already served 15% of their sentence were being released. All

Newrouz festivities were cancelled. On the 21st, 966 new cases were officially announced for the whole of Iran for a total of more than 20.000 and 1.566 deaths including 123 in the last 24 hours – *Radio Farda* still counted more than twice as many with 46.972 cases, including 16.000 for Tehran alone... On the 24th, the number of deaths in Kurdistan was at least 227 (*WKI*).

On the 30th, one hundred Iranian personalities living outside the country directly accused in an open letter the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of bearing responsibility in the spread of the epidemic, reproaching him for having turned it into a “national disaster” with the sole aim of maintaining the rate of participation in legislative elections. The text, which also denounced the Guide’s refusal to allocate the billion dollars requested by President Rouhani to fight the epidemic, criticised the latter as well for aligning himself with Khamenei in concealing the seriousness of the disease and attributing it to a “foreign conspiracy”. Among the signatories was, for example, former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) consultant Behrouz Bayat.

At the end of the month, the regime decided to place a number of prisoners on provisional release because of the epidemic, but excluded from the scheme all political prisoners sentenced to long terms. Prisoners held in extremely unsanitary prison conditions and facing the danger of contracting the coronavirus in a closed environment also include thousands of protesters arrested during the November and January protests. Many of them are even deprived of any contact with their families. Riots broke out in several prisons in Kurdistan, and in Mahabad and Saqqez, 80 prisoners were able to escape, according to the *Kurdistan Human Rights Association (KMMK)*. In Mahabad, security

forces and the *Pasdaran* killed two prisoners and injured three others. According to *Hengaw*, there were then 315 deaths throughout Iranian Kurdistan.

At the same time, the repression of dissidents, activists and critics of the regime in general continued. On the 1st of March, *Etelaat* arrested seven Kurds in Piranshahr for “cooperation with Kurdish opposition parties”. Other activists were arrested in Kurdistan, as well as a woman member of Dehgholan’s “Mothers for Peace” organisation, Zainap Ismaeli, whose son was killed by Daech while fighting with the YPG in Rojava. Hundreds of Kurds are still in prison, particularly in Saqqez and Piranshahr, and there is still no news of many of them, held incommunicado. In Sanandadj, Sirwan Rahimi, a

Kurdish environmental activist, was sentenced to 13 months in prison. Three other environmentalists, Arman Wafai, Faradin Karimi and Afshen Shekholislami, arrested during the November demonstrations, were sentenced to three months in prison for “cooperation” with the PJAK. In Mazandaran, prominent Kurdish author Mozghan Kawsi was sentenced to seven months and 15 days in prison for “propaganda against the Islamic Republic”. On the 18th, *Hengaw* estimated that in 2019 the authorities had arrested no less than 3.000 Kurds on charges related to political activities (*WKI*). Several Kurdish political prisoners are on hunger strike in Urumieh: one in protest against the prison administration’s refusal to grant him conditional release, others to demand their recognition as political prison-

ers, while they are incarcerated with ordinary convicts.

Religious minorities also continue to be targeted by repression, such as the Baha’is, whose religion is not recognized in Iran, thirty of whom were summoned to the Shiraz court (*HRANA*) on 14 March.

Finally, it should be noted that while French researcher Roland Marchal was released on March 21, most likely as part of a prisoner exchange negotiated between France and Iran with Iranian engineer Jalal Rohollahnejad, accused of circumventing U.S. sanctions against Iran and released the day before by Paris, his companion and colleague Fariba Adelkhah remains imprisoned in Iran; her life is a matter of grave concern.

ROJAVA: NEW REPORTS ON TURKISH ABUSES, AUTHORITIES CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF THE EPIDEMIC

Turkish military in Syria has a bad start in Syria for March. After a month of rising tensions between Russians and Turks in February, on 27 February at least 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in Idlib by an air strike. Even though the Turkish Ministry of Defence hastened to announce that it had in retaliation neutralised 309 soldiers of the regime, the president Erdoğan clearly found himself in dire straits. Attempting to force the Westerners to support him, he launched a new blackmail on the 28th by opening its borders to migrants wanting to enter Europe, and ordered new strikes on Idlib on 1st of March. In response, Syria announced the closure of its airspace to planes and drones (of which Turkey makes great use), now liable to be shot down without warning. EU ministers officially “firmly” rejected “the use of migratory pressure for political purposes” by Turkey. The EU could, however,

agree to put in place new aid measures to help Turkey manage refugees it is not ready to accept (there are nearly four million in Turkey, compared to only a few tens of thousands in Europe outside Germany), but it has refused the Turkish president the military assistance he demanded for his Syrian campaign, in which he had embarked totally unilaterally. Russia therefore remained the obligatory partner for Mr Erdoğan. Despite new clashes between Turkish-supported jihadists and Russian-backed Syrian militaries, joint Turkish-Russian patrols continued on the 2nd East of Kobanê. On the 7th, Erdoğan travelled to Moscow, where he and his Russian counterpart concluded a new ceasefire, just as fragile as the previous ones.

Throughout this period, displaced families from Idlib continued to arrive in the area controlled by the Autonomous Administration of

North-Eastern Syria (AANES) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Since the beginning of the Idlib crisis, a total of 1.500 families have found refuge in Rojava.

On the 15th, the joint Russian-Turkish patrols provided for in the Moscow Agreement began along the M4 motorway (Aleppo-Lattaquieh lane) at Idlib. However, they had to be interrupted due to the rejection of the local population and part of the opposition groups. They continued near Kobanê, this time accompanied by Russian helicopters.

These various agreements did not, however, prevent the jihadists in the service of Turkey from continuing their attacks throughout the month against the SDF in several villages near Ain Issa and Tell Tamr. Having been unable to achieve its objective of creating a “security zone” stretching along the border from Kobanê to Iraq, Turkey had to settle for a more

restricted area, between Tel Abyad and Ras el Ayn, and was unable to obtain the complete evacuation of the SDF. But the situation is nevertheless serious for the latter, put under pressure by Damascus and Russia to accept integration into the Syrian army and to cease their relations with the Americans... This prospect is scarcely more pleasing than the Turkish occupation, as the Ba'th Party appears to have learned nothing from these last few years and remains on its Arab nationalist line with regard to the Kurds: on the 5th, the Syrian President described in an interview on a Russian channel the "Kurdish problem in Syria" as an "illusion" and a "lie", also repeating the old propaganda that the Kurds living in the north of the country are in fact from Turkey. This pretext has been used by the Syrian authorities since the 1960s to justify all the political, linguistic and cultural discrimination imposed on the Kurds in the country, including the loss of the nationality of numerous of them. Another point Assad touched on was the American presence: he ruled out any negotiations with the Kurds as long as they maintain contact with the Americans, described as "occupiers". AANES officials were quick to denounce these statements and, to demonstrate the inanity of Assad's assertions, the chief of a Kurdish tribe in Derbassiya published on the internet the identity card of his grandfather, born in that town in 1872. The AANES also blamed the regime for Syria's current situation of division for choosing to respond to claims exclusively by military force. The spokesman for the co-chairmanship of the AANES Executive Council, Bedran Çîya Kurd, suggested that these statements by Bashar Al-Assad may have contained a message to Turkey to offer a deal on the basis of the repression of Kurdish aspirations. On Monday 9th, Erdoğan had claimed to have offered Putin and Trump to manage the oil in the Syrian North-East, currently controlled by the FDS.

In terms of health, the situation in Rojava remains very worrying. As of 12 March, it is true that there were still no cases of CoVid in the AANES-controlled zone, but the health system is in such a state that it would not be able to resist if the epidemic arrived. Seven, then nine quarantine centres have been opened, border entries have been restricted since the end of February, and basic medical examinations are carried out on arriving people. On the 14th, schools were closed and all public events were cancelled. But with the only testing centre, which was in Serê Kaniyê (Ras al-Ain), put out of operation after the Turkish occupation of the city, the AANES now has to send the cases to be tested to Damascus... The regime is dragging its feet, and according to Thomas McClure, a researcher at the *Rojava Information Centre*, in four months only four people were able to get tested... On the 18th, the border with Iraqi Kurdistan was closed. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), there have been at least 62 cases in the part of the country controlled by the regime, probably due to the large presence there of Iranian militia (*Kurdistan-24*).

On the 23rd, a few hours after Damascus announced a first case of CoVid and closed schools, parks and restaurants, the Autonomous administration announced a two-week confinement-with-curfew throughout the area it controls. Concern has been growing due to the number of displaced persons, more than 100.000, in poor conditions. The co-president of the AANES Health Authority, Raperin Hassan, told *Al-Monitor* in a telephone interview: "Our means are really very limited. We only have two normal size hospitals with 200 beds each, which are not fully operational, seven ventilators, and no test kits. We urgently need help". Appeals for help to the WHO, the Americans and Damascus have not yielded any tangible results, she

added. Landlocked since the UN decision taken in January to restrict the arrival of aid, Rojava is also experiencing a shortage of medicines (*La Croix*). On the 25th, the SDF called for a military truce in Syria, in support of the call for a global humanitarian ceasefire made the day before by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. There were still no cases of CoVid in Rojava at that time, but according to McClure, this should not generate undue optimism: this might only be due to the fact that the administration has no testing kit... (*Kurdistan-24*)

As of 31 March, no cases of CoVid had yet been detected in the AANES-controlled areas, compared to nine cases in the rest of the country.

At the same time, several reports have shed light on the abuses committed in Syria, particularly against the Kurds. In a report published on 2nd of March, covering the period from July 2019 to 10 January 2020, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (IICIS) set up in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council, published testimonies from displaced Kurdish families and other civilians accusing Syrian rebels supported by Ankara of committing executions and looting and confiscating property. In particular, IICIS points to the summary execution on 12 October of the Kurdish female politician Hevrin Khalaf and her driver by pro-Turkish rebels. UN investigators also point to an air strike on 12th October on a civilian convoy of 80 vehicles, including families with children and journalists, in which eleven people were killed and 74 injured. The authors also denounce the targeting of "objects necessary for the survival of the civilian population" with strikes near the Aluq water station that interrupted the water supply to 460.000 people (*AFP*).

While the IICIS report also points to

Moscow's responsibility for war crimes related to air strikes in Syria, including two in Idlib and in the Damascus countryside in July and August that killed more than 60 people, it is worth noting that it was a Russian commission of inquiry that for its part accused Turkey of ethnic cleansing in Afrin, speaking of "fundamental changes" in this district. The report in question, published on the 3rd by the "Russian Centre for Reconciliation in Syria", established in 2016 following a Russian-Turkish agreement, indicates that the Turkish forces and their Syrian mercenaries have displaced some 250.000 Kurds from Afrin, but also 135.000 from Sarê Kaniyê (Ras al-Ain) and Girê Spî (Tel Abyad) to replace them with Turkmen. In

Afrin, a vast campaign of demographic change has been going on for nearly two years. A large part of its original Kurdish population now lives in IDP camps in the nearby towns of Tell Riffat, Shahba and Sherawa. In an interview on *Rûdaw*, Bashar Amin, a member of the Syrian Kurdish National Council (ENKS, the opposition to the Rojava administration), confirmed the assessment of the Russian centre. According to Amin, the ENKS tried to raise this demographic change in meetings with American, Russian and French officials, who in response called for intra-Kurdish unity and suggested that they could play the role of guarantors in trying to stop this process. However, skepticism is in order about the effective-

ness of the admonitions made to Ankara, whereas according to another report, that of the Afrin human rights organisation, published in mid-March, the Kurdish population of Afrin, which was once a very large majority, has already fallen to 18%, and a genuine policy of turquification is continuing, including in education: Turkish is taught in schools, street names are being changed to Turkish names, and portraits of the Turkish President are now omnipresent... Furthermore, 6.200 people have been kidnapped, and the fate of 3.400 kidnap victims is still unknown. Finally, women have suffered particularly from the occupation of Afrin, with an unknown number of rapes and assaults.

IRAQ:

STILL IN A POLITICAL CRISIS, THE COUNTRY IS FACING THE EPIDEMIC; KURDISTAN ENTERS LOCKDOWN

This month of March began with the resignation of an Iraqi Prime Minister, the recently appointed one, the withdrawal of another, his predecessor, and ended with rumours of his successor's resignation. More than ever, Iraq seems to be failing to emerge from its political crisis. Faced with this situation, the Kurds are avoiding taking sides, rather concerned about the epidemic engulfing their Iranian neighbour...

On 1st March, Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi finally gave up forming a government. He had already failed three times to win the confidence of parliament, in particular because the Kurds, Sunnis and some Shi'a had blockaded him by boycotting parliamentary sessions. They disagreed on how he had selected his ministers without consulting them. On the 2nd, Iraqi President Barham Saleh held meetings with the leaders of different parliamentary blocs to try to choose a new candidate for the post. On the same day, caretaker Prime

Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, Allawi's predecessor, announced that he was relinquishing most of his government responsibilities, except those related to his role as head of the armed forces. Faced with the absence of a constituted government, the Prime Minister's financial adviser called on the 9th for the adoption of an "emergency budget" that would at least allow managing the fall in oil prices... If they remain below US\$ 30, he warned, the deficit, initially forecast at \$50 billion, could double. On the 10th, the Shi'a parties set up a seven-member committee to select a candidate for prime minister. On the 18th, the Iraqi president appointed the former governor of Najaf, Adnan al-Zurfi, asking him, according to the constitution, to form a cabinet within a month. On the 21st, the *Hikma* bloc announced that meetings between Shi'a leaders had not resulted in an agreement on this candidate, the "Rule of law" and "Fatah" coalitions remaining "irreducibly" opposed to al-Zurfi. The opposition seems to come in particular from pro-Iranian circles, includ-

ing the militias. The leaders of the Kurdistan Region, for their part, have not taken an official position. On the 29th, Al-Zurfi tried to overcome opposition by describing the *Hashd al-Shaabi* (Popular Mobilisation Units) militias as a "legitimate Iraqi force", but it is doubtful this is enough in the face of opponents who see in him "the man of the Americans".

While the Iraqi political class was trying to agree on a Prime Minister, demonstrations – and violence against protesters – continued. On 1st March, at least 83 demonstrators were injured in clashes with security forces in Baghdad. On 4th March, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights reported 160 injured, also in the capital. On 8th and 9th March, further clashes in the centre of the city left three protesters dead and 58 injured, including 11 security personnel.

At the same time, tensions over the US military presence continued to rise. On 1st March, two rockets

struck the Green Zone without causing casualties, followed by two more attacks on the Taji camp near the capital, the first on 11th March, with 15 rockets killing two Americans and a British medical officer, and another on the 14th, with 25 rockets, leaving only wounded. The United States announced that it had launched a series of retaliatory strikes against several locations of the pro-Iranian *Kata'ib Hizbollah* militia, suspected of the previous attacks, resulting in Iraqi civilian and military casualties. Iraq complained to the Security Council and the UN Secretary-General. On the 27th, another rocket hit the Green Zone, without causing any casualties. At the end of the month, US troops evacuated two bases near Kirkuk and Mosul, handed them back to the Iraqi military, and transferred their soldiers to Erbil and the Ain-Assad base on the Syrian border, in a "long planned" redeployment, according to a spokesman.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Daech's jihadists continued their attacks in the territories disputed between Kurdistan and Baghdad, notably in the Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatou, Diyala sectors... On the 3rd, the Kurdish Minister of the Pechmergas complained that the Iraqi Defence Ministry was "still not ready to work together" with them in joint anti-terrorist operations, revealing that a meeting organised for this purpose on 24th February had been unable to reach an agreement. On 8th February, two US Marines were killed in Tuz Khumatu

in a joint anti-Daech operation with the Iraqi military. On 16th February, a motorcycle bomb exploded in a crowded market in the city, injuring seven civilians, including a child. A cemetery of the Kurdish religious community of the Kakais was also attacked in Gwer. Many families of this community, systematically targeted by jihadists who consider them heretics, had already preferred to leave their homes in the Daquq region (*Kurdistan-24*).

In the north, the clashes between Kurdish PKK fighters and the Turkish military, who have since 2019 occupied several villages in Iraqi Kurdistan, continued to increase in intensity. On the 9th, the Balakayati region was targeted by Turkish air strikes, with no casualties. Since the beginning of the Turkish anti-PKK operation "Claws", hundreds of Kurdish villages have had to be evacuated and more than thirty civilians have been killed in Turkish strikes. On the 23rd, the Turkish military neutralised two PKK members in the province of Dohouk. On the 25th, two Turkish soldiers were killed and two others wounded in a mortar attack on Haftanin, provoking retaliatory strikes in which eight PKK fighters were killed or captured according to the Turkish General Staff.

At the same time, the Kurdish Region, which had already closed its borders with Iran and ordered the closure of its educational establishments on 25th February, well before other countries in the region, gradu-

ally put itself in order to fight the CoVid-19 epidemic. The first four cases were reported in Suleimaniyeh on 1st March (travellers recently returned from Iran), and the first death on 4th March. A fifth case was detected in Kirkuk and another in Erbil. The government then closed all its offices, before declaring a 48-hour lockdown-with-curfew on the 14th. At that time there were 28 cases throughout the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The Kurdish authorities banned for two weeks all travel to the rest of Iraq, where there were 93 cases and 10 deaths, and forbade any large gatherings and sporting events (*La libre Belgique*). Prime Minister Masrouf Barzani called on the population to respect health security measures and asked landlords to be accommodating with regard to rents because of this "extraordinary situation". While the number of cases had risen to 34, the curfew was extended on the 15th by an additional 72 hours.

On 18th March, there were 154 confirmed cases throughout Iraq, including 17 in Baghdad, 11 deaths and 41 recoveries, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) again extended the curfew, this time by five days, until 23rd March. On the 19th, there were 39 cases in Kurdistan, one death, and nine recoveries, a number that jumped to 85 on the 24th with a second death. The KRG extended the curfew until 1st April. By the end of the month, there were 161 cases, again with two deaths, and the curfew had been extended to 11th April.

Sunday, March 1, 2020
By David L. Phillips

THE TRUTH ABOUT TURKEY'S ROLE IN SYRIA

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan asked NATO to invoke its mutual defense pact when 36 Turkish troops were recently killed by Russian and Syrian forces in Idlib, Syria. His request is cynical and self-serving. Erdogan betrayed the Alliance, siding with Russia in a war he helped foment.

After the 2011 popular uprising in Dara'a, which marked the beginning of Syria's civil war, Erdogan embraced the Muslim Brotherhood and supported Islamist rebels fighting the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Erdogan envisioned himself the Caliph of Mesopotamia, leading a worldwide community of Sunni brothers.

Erdogan made Turkey the major conduit for weapons and money conveyed to jihadists in Syria. At the time, he thought the victory of jihadists was inevitable. However, Assad's forces were tenacious.

President Barack Obama promised regime change and drew a red line on the use of chemical weapons (CW). More than 1,300 people, including hundreds of children, were killed in the Damascus suburbs of Ghouta, Muadhamiya, Ein Tarma, and Zamalka on 21 August 2013. Obama had no appetite for military intervention. He claimed the red line was a warning, rather than an actual threat to intervene.

Left to his own devices, Erdogan expanded support for the rebels. Turkey's National Intelligence Agency established the jihadi highway from Sanliurfa in Turkey to Raqqa, the ISIS capital in Syria. It assisted 40,000 foreign jihadists from more than 100 countries who transited through Turkey to the front line in Syria.

The presence of Chechens and other Islamists from the Southern Caucasus was deeply unsettling to Russia. Rebel advances presented a risk to Russian bases in Latakia and Tar-



tous, threatening Russia's warm-water port on the Mediterranean. Rebels also threatened Iran's corridor through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon that was supplying Hezbollah with sophisticated missiles to attack Israel.

General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) Quds Force, visited Moscow to meet Russian defense officials in July 2015. Soleimani unfurled a map of rebel advances on Damascus. He assured the worried audience, "All is not lost."

Russian and Iranian officials agreed on a plan to rescue Assad. The IRGC, Hezbollah, and other Shiite militias would join the Syrian Arab Armed Forces on the battlefield. Russia would provide air support. Putin announced Russia's military intervention at the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015.

Turkey and Russia were on opposite sides. Turkey supported regime change and gave weapons to the rebels, while Russia backed the regime.

Differences became disaster when a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian Sukhoi-24 along the Syrian border on 24 November 2015.

Turkey was also alienated from the United States. The US and Turkey had a major falling out after Erdogan alleged America's complicity in the so-called coup that summer. Prag-

matic and transactional, Erdogan forged an alliance with Putin in Syria. Marginalizing the UN and excluding the US, Turkey joined Russia in the Astana process.

Putin agreed to look the other way, while Turkish-backed jihadis and Turkish armed forces targeted the Syrian Kurds, who Erdogan called the "real terrorists."

Turkey invaded Afrin in January 2018. The offensive, called "Operation Olive Branch", killed hundreds of Kurds and displaced nearly a quarter million. Russia controlled the air space west of the Euphrates and was complicit.

Turkey invaded Kurdish lands east of the Euphrates in October 2019. Hundreds were killed and many displaced, including Kurds, Armenians and Syriac Christians. Turkey's jihadist proxies committed atrocities, mutilating the bodies of female fighters.

Erdogan thought he could dissuade Putin from attacking Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria's Northwest. Despite assurances, Syrian ground forces backed by Russian air power intensified attacks, pushing 900,000 people from their homes. Turkey sealed its border leaving displaced Syrians with no place to go.

Turkey presents itself as the victim of actions by Russia and Syria. In fact, it is the aggressor. The violent

conflict between Turkey and Russia in Idlib is a direct result of Erdogan's ill-conceived bravado. Now Erdogan wants NATO to intervene on Turkey's behalf. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Charter stipulates that an attack on one member of the Alliance is an attack on all.

However, Erdogan's appeal has fallen on deaf ears. Erdogan's duplicity has riled the West. His anti-American, anti-European and anti-NATO positions have burned bridges.

For sure, any loss of life is regrettable. It is, however, hard to side with Turkey in its dispute with Russia when Erdogan's actions led to Turkey's woes.

Turkey intensified the civil war by supplying jihadis. Erdogan extorted money from the European Union to manage the refugee crisis, which he helped create. Just yesterday, Turkey was weaponizing refugees by dumping displaced people on the border with Greece. Turkey scorned UN diplomacy by joining the Astana process. It repudiated the US, spending \$3 billion on Russian surface-to-air missiles.

Both Obama and Trump have assiduously avoided a slippery slope in Syria. Years ago, Obama missed an opportunity to intervene when intervention could have saved many lives.

Despite the heart-wrenching suffering of people in Idlib, the Trump administration is unlikely to get involved militarily. US officials should not ignore Erdogan's hubris or excuse his bad judgement.

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01-03-2020
Zhelwan Z. Wali

First cases of coronavirus confirmed in Kurdistan Region

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region- The Kurdistan Regional Government's Health Ministry has announced the first confirmed cases of coronavirus in the Region.

"In the course of the past 24 hours, tests were conducted for 24 suspects. As a result, four people from Sulaimani tested positive for Covid-19 including a family of three and another woman who have all returnees from Iran," the KRG Health Ministry announced in a statement on Sunday.

"All of those tested positive for coronavirus were in quarantine," the ministry said. "They are all in good health and have been put at a hospital designated for those being affected by the disease."

The coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, was first reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan at the end of 2019. The virus has since spread to more than 30 countries and has infected at least 80,000 people. Particular hotspots outside China include South Korea, Japan, Iran, and Italy.

Including the four cases of Sulaimani, Iraq has so far recorded 17 cases of the virus – one case in Najaf, one in Babil, six in Baghdad, and another five in Kirkuk, according to the latest figure from the Iraqi health ministry. All of them had recently returned from Iran – the epicenter of the Middle East outbreak.

Iran has quickly become a hub for the virus, with cases in Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Canada, Georgia, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates tracing back to the country.



Shoppers wear masks in downtown Erbil on February 27, 2020. Photo: Bilind T Abdullah / Rudaw

Eleven people have died from coronavirus in Iran in the last 24 hours, bringing the country's death toll to 54, a health ministry official announced on Sunday, as the country struggles to contain the outbreak.

The total number of confirmed cases in Iran has risen to 978, Ministry of Health spokesperson Kianoush Jahanpour announced at a daily press conference providing updates on the outbreak, with 385 new cases of the virus confirmed since yesterday.

KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has said it was "unrealistic" to expect the Region would remain immune to the virus.

"Unfortunately, coronavirus has become a problem. It has not just reached the region, but entire world. It was unrealistic to expect that it would not reach the Kurdistan Region. We have

done..whatever needed to confront and lessen its influence on the people," Barzani told Kurdish reporters in Amman, Jordan on Sunday.

"Our people have been given instructions by the relevant ministries and I hope everyone commits to them. Self-protection is the best solution to counter it," he added.

Commenting on the four people who have tested positive for the virus, Barzani said "I wish they are safe and other people protect themselves in order to prevent further breakout of the epidemic in the Kurdistan Region.

Local officials assured the people of Sulaimani that they have taken maximum measures to block further outbreak of the disease.

"We are calling on the people of Sulaimani to help inform us of those who return to the Kurdistan Region from Iran through smuggling ways," said Wasta Hassan, head of Sulaimani Asayesh.

"Whoever has returned from Iran has been put in quarantine and no one is let home," Sabah Hawrami, head of Sulaimani General Health Department told reporters.

"Our forces are on full alert on the borders not allowing smugglers to bring in people through smuggling ways back into the Kurdistan Region," Hassan added.

Sulaimani Governor Abu Bakir for his part said they will do their best to keep the area safe through regulations including the closure of public and crowded places.

Kurdish refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani's book 'No Friend but the Mountains' to be made into a film

'The most important thing is that we should share this story, and this story is not just my story,' Boochani said

The award-winning book composed by Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani while he was detained in one of Australia's offshore detention centres is now being made into a film.

The Kurdish journalist, novelist and filmmaker is currently living in New Zealand after six years in detention in Australia's offshore processing centres (first, imprisoned on Manus Island, and last year being transferred to the Papua New Guinea capital of Port Moresby).

Boochani fled Iran and its oppressive regime in 2013. His boat came ashore at Christmas Island, off the coast of Australia, on his birthday, four days after a new agreement was signed with Papua New Guinea ruling that those found in Australian waters would be taken to a detention centre on Manus Island for processing. It meant, despite months of travelling, he would never be resettled in Australia.

His book, *No Friend but the Mountains* was composed during his incarceration, via text message from Manus Island to his friend Omid Tofighian, who translated the work into English from Farsi.

Boochani told *The Guardian* that the film version would begin production in Australia in mid-2021.

"The most important thing is that we should share this story, and this story is not just my story," he said. "What the Australian government has done, in Manus and Nauru and still continues



Behrouz Boochani, Kurdish asylum seeker and whistle blower, wrote a book via WhatsApp from a detention centre on Manus Island. Getty Images

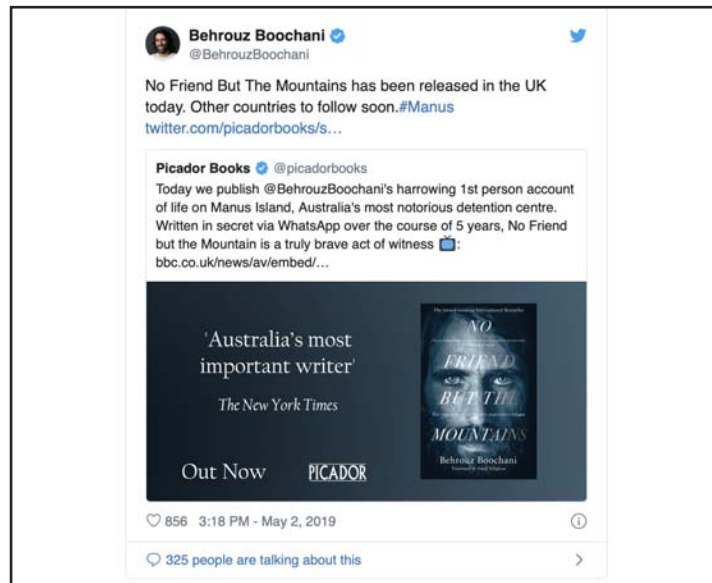
[with] this policy – we should share this story in different languages – and cinema is a very important and powerful language.

"It is a powerful platform, it is a language for everyone. I think more people will engage with this story, and we can take this story more internationally. That

is very important."

No Friend but the Mountains recounts Boochani's journey from Indonesia to Australia by boat, and his ensuing imprisonment by the Australian government, which until his departure, repeatedly refused him entry. Incredibly, it's been a resounding success in the very country it criticises over its 400-odd pages – picking up A\$125,000 (Dh312,000) at the country's richest literary prize, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, among several other prestigious awards.

Boochani arrived in Christchurch, New Zealand, as a guest of the city's [Word Christchurch](#) festival in November.



Syrian Kurds ponder Afrin's recapture in shadow of Idlib crisis

As fighting in Syria's rebel bastion of Idlib rages on, fueled by a Turkish thrust to reverse government gains, a less palpable but related struggle is under way to the north, where the Syrian Kurds are weighing their options on how to wrestle back Turkish-controlled Afrin.

Held by Turkey and its allied groups since 2018, Afrin has been high on the Kurdish agenda in recent weeks, though the escalation in Idlib has overshadowed tensions in the region. In the words of a local Kurdish source, "Preparation of plans to liberate Afrin was already under way, but with the escalation in Idlib, this became an issue of discussion with Russia and the Syrian regime."

Keeping a watchful eye on the preparations, Turkey has been shelling the route to Tel Rifaat, which the Kurds have used to retreat from Afrin and launch countermeasures in the area.

Last month, **Al-Monitor reported** about the prospects of the Kurds joining forces with the Syrian army once it secured the M5 highway and regained control of Aleppo's northwestern countryside to reach the southern boundaries of Afrin. Al-Monitor has learned that contacts took place between the Syrian army and the Afrin Liberation Forces, a group comprised of Kurdish fighters from Afrin, in early February, as the fighting in Idlib intensified. While the Kurds focused on retaking Afrin, Damascus prioritized the prospect of joint action in Idlib. During the contacts, the two sides discussed the terms of Kurdish collaboration with the Syrian army. The Kurds conditioned their involvement in Idlib on a joint thrust on Afrin. The prospect of opening an Afrin front was discussed with the Russians as well.



Internally displaced people ride on pickup trucks near Turkish military vehicles in Afrin, Syria, Feb. 18, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi.

Yet the option of collaboration with the Kurds moved to the back burner as the Syrian army advanced much faster than expected. Kurdish journalist Roj Musa, who is from Afrin and closely follows the issue, told Al-Monitor, "There were talks between the Afrin Liberation Forces and Russia in the area. Since the Afrin Liberation Forces are comprised of experienced fighters, the Syrian army wanted to engage them to fight Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other factions in areas in northwestern Aleppo such as Anadan, Kufr Humra and Haritan. Yet, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the other groups withdrew quickly from the region [in mid-February] after striking a deal with the regime. As a result, many plans in the region changed, including the one on opening a front to Afrin." According to Musa, the Syrian army had a confidence boost after significant territorial gains and came to believe it could march on its own on Afrin.

Two additional factors appear

to have led to postponing the planned collaboration.

The first stemmed from Russia's approach. In the past two years, Russia's posture in the area had sought to prevent Kurdish moves on Afrin, but amid the escalation in Idlib, the Russians have given the Kurds some leeway. Still, the Russians have been reluctant to go too far, wary of giving Turkey the pretext of a "terrorism threat" and "fighting the PKK" in Afrin. Ankara equates the armed Syrian Kurdish groups with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has fought Ankara since 1984 and is considered a terrorist group by much of the international community. Nevertheless, a Kurdish front remains in the cards if the conflict in Idlib expands and Russia's relations with Turkey derail.

Second, the Syrian army turned to southern Idlib **once its push** in the north of the province reached Mount Sheikh Aqeel, to the south of Afrin, on

Feb. 17, probably due to the barrier of the Turkish military presence there. This meant the shelving of plans to advance along the southern periphery of Afrin toward the Bab al-Hawa crossing on the Turkish border or to take control of Afrin to cut the connection between Idlib and the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield pocket. Controlling Afrin would be equally important for the Syrian army in any plans to retake the Bab al-Salam border crossing near Azaz, which is Turkey's main point of entry into the Euphrates Shield pocket and a route to Darat Izza, the gateway to Idlib, via Azaz and Afrin city.

Since last week, however, the battlefield in Idlib has seen dramatic developments, which are raising again the prospect of collaboration between Damascus and the Kurds. On Feb. 27, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and its allies — propped up by strong Turkish backing — managed to **retake Saraqeb**, shortly after the town had fallen, as the Syrian

army focused on the al-Ghab Plain and the Jabal al-Zawiya and Jabal Shashabo areas in southern Idlib, seeking to advance to the M4 highway. Apart from its strategic importance as the junction of the M4 and M5 highways, Saraqeb is an area where four Turkish military outposts have been surrounded by government forces. As Turkey continued to send reinforcements to Jabal al-Zawiya to impede the Syrian army, its forces became the target of a **ferocious airstrike** that left dozens of Turkish troops dead.

With Turkey **launching retribution** on regime targets, while scrambling for **Western support** amid faltering ties with Russia, the Kurdish factor is coming back to the fore in what appears to be a new phase in the Syrian conflict. Washington has **reportedly cautioned** the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), its partner in northeastern Syria, to stay away from the Idlib battlefield. A Kurdish source confirmed that the SDF got a message along

those lines from James Jeffrey, the US special Syria envoy, when he visited last month.

Asked how the escalation in Idlib would bear on the Syrian Kurds, another Kurdish source told Al-Monitor, "Because of the situation on the ground, things are very much in flux and the ground for cooperation is very slippery. Nevertheless, I can say that tacit collaboration with the Syrian regime and the Russians is continuing despite the to and fro. They know that things will be harder for them without the Kurds. And for Afrin, too, they will have to eventually team up with the Kurds."

Stressing that the Kurds had their own preparations for Afrin, the source said, "The Syrian regime, too, wants to take Afrin as soon as possible because it realizes that it accomplish the desired cleansing as long as the connection between Idlib and Azaz via Afrin remains [out of reach]. They will have to take up the issue of collaboration with

the Kurds after a while, whether there is a deal or not."

The Kurds have **made no secret** of their preparations to try to wrestle back Afrin. That is why the Turkish military has kept the corridor between Afrin and Tel Rifaat under fire. Though many locations have been targeted, the focus appears on four villages, namely Burj al-Kas, Zuq al-Kabir, Kaluta and Bashmara, which are situated in the triangle between Afrin, Darat Izza and the two neighboring towns of al-Zahra and Nubl. Along with Afrin, Darat Izza remains under the control of Turkey and Turkish-backed groups, while al-Zahra and Nubl are controlled by government forces and Iran-backed Shiite militia. The triangle area serves as a bridge between Afrin and Tel Rifaat, where people displaced from Afrin have taken refuge. According to Musa, 880 families live in the four villages, including 159 from Afrin.

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) took control of those villages in 2012. Subse-

quently, they became a supply route for al-Zahra and Nubl after the two Shiite settlements were besieged by rebels from the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The four villages remained under FSA pressure until February 2016, when government forces broke the siege. Since March 2018, the roads linking the villages have been controlled by the Syrian army and Iran-linked militia.

Turkish artillery fire (coupled with constant drone surveillance) has targeted also villages around the towns of Shera and Sherawa in the Afrin region and villages around Tel Rifaat. The YPG is no longer present in the area per se, but the Afrin Liberation Forces, comprised of the same Kurdish fighters, have carried out acts of sabotage against Turkish military positions and Turkish-backed groups across Afrin, mostly in Jindires and Bulbul.

LA CROIX

Par Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner,
le 02/03/2020

Analyse

Migrants, Syrie : que veut Erdogan ?

Soutenu par son opinion publique, le président turc assume sa décision d'ouvrir ses frontières avec l'Europe, contrairement à l'accord qu'il avait signé avec elle en 2016.

Recép Tayyip Erdogan se bat sur tous les fronts. Au sud contre le régime de Bachar Al Assad et son puissant allié russe. Et au nord-ouest, avec ses voisins européens à qui il menace d'envoyer des « millions » de migrants. « Depuis que nous avons ouvert nos frontières, le nombre de ceux qui se sont dirigés vers l'Europe a atteint des centaines de milliers. Bientôt, ce nombre s'exprimera en millions », s'est-il félicité lundi 2 mars, **exagérant largement les chiffres**. Mais peu importe. Dans le bras de fer engagé, seul compte la posture. « Nous allons laisser les portes de l'Europe ouvertes. Maintenant, vous allez prendre votre part du far-



Des migrants arrivent sur l'île de Lesbos depuis la Turquie, le 2 mars 2020 en Grèce. Michael Varaklas/AP

deau », a-t-il tonné.

Les coups de menton et les éclats de voix ont une explication simple : « *Erdogan est en mauvaise posture* », résume un bon connaisseur de la Turquie, à propos de la détermination de l'armée syrienne, appuyée par l'aviation russe, à reprendre la poche d'Idlib, dernière province rebelle de Syrie. « *Faire monter la pression nationaliste est donc une bonne méthode.* »

Menace vitale

L'avancée des forces de Bachar Al Assad à Idlib menace l'édifice patiemment échafaudé ces dernières années par le président turc pour résoudre le problème kurde, sa priorité des priorités. «

Erdogan est convaincu que pour contrôler le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), il faut contrôler le nord de la Syrie. Et pour contrôler le nord de la Syrie, il faut contrôler Idlib », explique l'universitaire turc Ali Bayramoglu, également éditorialiste au journal Yeni Sasaki. « Être présent à Idlib est un moyen d'être associé à la reconstruction du pays et aux discussions à Genève sur la future Constitution. Erdogan dit aussi publiquement que si la Turquie se retire d'Idlib, elle devra aussi se retirer de ses autres poches en Syrie (Afrin, Jarablous et la zone de sécurité) ».

Cette « menace vitale », selon la formule de la chercheuse Dorothee Schmid, explique les tentatives désespérées du président turc de rester dans le jeu syrien par le dialogue – des discussions doivent avoir lieu à Moscou jeudi 5 mars avec Vladimir Poutine – mais aussi au moyen de pressions sur ses « alliés ». « Outre un soutien diplomatique, Ankara souhaiterait idéalement obtenir un appui militaire de l'OTAN et de l'UE sous forme de la mise en place d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne à Idlib, explique la politologue Jana Jabbour, enseignante à l'université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth. Er-

dogan pense que l'argument des réfugiés est le moyen le plus efficace pour provoquer une réaction rapide des Européens.»

Respecter l'accord

Le branle-bas de combat suscité par ses annonces suffit à confirmer la pertinence de ce cynique calcul. Lundi, le porte-parole d'Angela Merkel – l'Allemagne a accueilli plus d'un million de migrants entre 2015 et 2016 – a demandé à la Turquie de « respecter l'accord » signé en 2016 visant à empêcher les migrants d'atteindre l'Europe. Et le premier ministre bulgare, Boïko Bo-

rissov, s'est précipité le soir-même à Ankara pour un « dîner de travail ».

« Même si les dirigeants interviennent dans la crise pour des raisons humanitaires, cela arrange Erdogan », constate l'éditorialiste Ali Bayramoglu, qui observe la satisfaction qui s'est exprimée tout le week-end dans les journaux turcs. « Les Turcs apprécient ce qu'ils considèrent comme un partage de responsabilité dans le dossier des migrants. Et la démonstration de force de leur président ».



le 2 mars 2020
avec AFP

Crimes de guerre en Syrie : Russes et Turcs montrés du doigt par l'ONU

(Genève) Des enquêteurs de l'ONU ont accusé lundi Moscou de crimes de guerre liés à des frappes aériennes en Syrie et ont averti qu'Ankara pourrait être tenu pour responsable dans des crimes de guerre visant des Kurdes dans le nord du pays.

Ces accusations, bien qu'intervenant dans un contexte de fortes tensions entre la Turquie et les forces syriennes soutenues par la Russie après l'escalade des hostilités dans le dernier bastion rebelle d'Idlib, ne sont toutefois pas directement liées aux récents affrontements.

Dans un rapport publié lundi, qui couvre la période allant de juillet 2019 au 10 janvier, la Commission d'enquête internationale sur la Syrie (COI) affirme avoir trouvé des preuves de la participation d'avions russes lors de deux frappes aériennes à Idlib et dans la campagne de Damas, en juillet et août dernier, qui ont fait plus de 60 morts.

Russie : bombardements de civils



Des proches de la militante des droits humains kurde Hevrin Khalaf, ont assisté à leurs enterrements, à Derik, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 13 octobre 2019. Mme Khalaf était une des neuf Kurdes assassinés par une milice pro-turque le 9 octobre quand l'armée turque et ses supplétifs ont envahi la zone frontalière de la Syrie kurdophone. PHOTO DELIL SOULEIMAN, AFP

« La Commission a conclu qu'un avion russe a participé à chaque incident », a-t-elle déclaré, ajoutant que « l'armée de l'air russe n'a pas dirigé les attaques vers un objectif militaire spécifique, ce qui équivaut au crime de guerre consistant à lancer des attaques aveugles sur des zones civiles ».

Le rapport indique aussi que la Turquie pourrait être pénalement tenue pour responsable de graves violations commises par ses alliés de l'Armée nationale syrienne (des rebelles pro-turcs), dont l'exécution d'une responsable politique kurde.

Les troupes turques et leurs alliés en Syrie ont envahi une partie du nord de la Syrie, après

avoir lancé en octobre une campagne militaire contre les forces kurdes qui a provoqué la fuite de dizaines de milliers de personnes.

Milices pro-turques : exécutions sommaires

Dans son rapport, la COI, créée en 2011 par le Conseil des droits de l'homme de l'ONU, fait état des rapports de familles kurdes déplacées et d'autres civils qui ont accusé les rebelles syriens soutenus par Ankara d'avoir commis des exécutions et des pillages, et d'avoir confisqué des propriétés.

La COI pointe en particulier l'exécution sommaire le 12 octobre d'une responsable politique kurde, Hevrin Khalaf, et de son chauffeur, par des rebelles pro-Turcs.

La secrétaire générale du parti Avenir de la Syrie, membre de la direction du Conseil démocratique syrien, avait 35 ans quand elle a été arrêtée sur une autoroute venant de Qamishli par des membres de la Brigade 123

de l'Armée nationale syrienne. Ces derniers l'ont sortie de la voiture en la traînant par les cheveux et ont mutilé son corps avant de l'exécuter, selon la COI.

Les enquêteurs de l'ONU évoquent ainsi des « meurtres » ainsi que des « pillages » commis par les combattants de l'Armée nationale syrienne (une milice syrienne soutenue par Ankara).

« S'il s'avérait que des membres de groupes armés agissaient sous le commandement et le contrôle effectifs des forces turques, ces violations pourraient entraîner la responsabilité pénale de ces commandants qui étaient au courant ou auraient dû être au courant pour ces crimes, ou n'ont pas pris toutes les mesures nécessaires pour les empêcher », souligne le rapport.

Colonne de réfugiés ciblée

Les enquêteurs de l'ONU pointent également une frappe aérienne, le 12 octobre, sur un convoi civil de 80 véhicules, incluant des familles avec enfants



PHOTO FACEBOOK / La militante des droits humains kurde Hevrin Khalaf, qui avait aussi des responsabilités dans l'administration de la zone autonome kurde en Syrie.

et des journalistes. Onze personnes ont été tuées et 74 blessées.

Ils dénoncent le ciblage d'« objets nécessaires à la survie de la population civile », avec des frappes près de la station d'eau d'Aluk qui ont interrompu l'ap-

visionnement en eau de 460 000 personnes.

La COI a accusé à plusieurs reprises les différentes parties d'avoir commis des crimes de guerre et dans certains cas de crimes contre l'humanité.

Déclenchée en mars 2011, la révolte contre le pouvoir en Syrie s'est muée en une guerre dévastatrice. Plus de 380 000 personnes ont péri depuis le début de la guerre, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH).

The New York Times

By Carlotta Gall and Andrew Higgins
March 2, 2020

After a Face-Off in Syria, Turkey and Russia Try to Pull Back From the Brink

With the United States scaling back its global role, the two nations are in a contest over which will become the pre-eminent regional power.

Turkey and Russia tried on Friday to step back from the brink of a war that neither side wants, after 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in northwest Syria by forces backing the government in Damascus.

But tensions between the two nations — one a nuclear power, the other a NATO member — remained high, not just because of the fight in Syria, but more broadly as



A Turkish military convoy in the eastern part of Idlib, Syria, on Friday. Credit...Associated Press

a contest over who will be the pre-eminent regional power as the United States scales back its global role.

Turkey wants to protect its border with Syria, while Russia wants show that its military intervention has preserved Syria as a client state. Both sides have said they want to de-escalate, but neither side has been willing to back down, leading to fears of sliding into war. Emo-

tions are running high and the source of their antagonism — the fate of Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria — festers dangerously.

Ivan Konovalov, a Russian military analyst in Moscow, predicted that, with Washington out of the game in Syria, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, would, once again, pull back from open conflict and try to settle Syria's future on their own.

Russia and Turkey, he said, "came to a critical point" but "we retain a relationship on the Syrian problem because we don't have any other option, not for Russia, not for Syria."

Russia and Turkey have been here before — teetering on the edge of all-out war, only to make up — but not with so much of their own blood spilled. Can the Kremlin and NATO's easternmost member once again pull back from the brink?

That is the unsettling question after the deadly attacks Thursday on Turkish troops near Idlib. That is where the forces of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, aided by Russian warplanes and troops, are battling to crush the only surviving remnant of an anti-government uprising that started nine years ago with backing from the West.

Mr. Putin and Mr. Erdogan support opposite sides in a Syrian war that has killed up to 400,000 people, and also in the conflict in Libya. Similar in their leadership styles and tough-guy personalities, they have endured nine years of wary cooperation interrupted by venomous breakups over the war in Syria.



Afghans arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos on Friday. Turkey has said the crisis in Syria will make it harder to control refugee flows. Credit...Aris Messinis/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Now tensions are high following air and artillery strikes on Thursday on Turkish forces that have plunged relations between Moscow, the Syrian government's main backer, and Ankara into a crisis even deeper than a 2015 rupture precipitated by Turkey's shooting down of a Russian warplane near the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkey, desperate to keep Mr. Assad's last foes alive and slow the tide of Syrian refugees flooding across its border, is determined to prevent Idlib from falling. But Mr. Putin is just as determined to see it conquered by Mr. Assad so that Moscow can declare victory and end, or at least scale back, an expensive and increasingly risky military operation that is now

in its fifth year.

That the dynamic between the two leaders has become so decisive in determining the fate of Idlib, and Syria as a whole, is a measure of how far the United States under President Trump has pulled back not only from messy foreign entanglements but also from its former role as a pre-eminent world power.

With the United States on the sidelines, Russia and Turkey have been haggling over Idlib since September 2018, when Mr. Putin met Mr. Erdogan in Sochi, Russia, and reluctantly agreed that Mr. Assad's forces, which are also supported by Iran, would hold off on a long-anticipated final assault.

But Moscow's impatience for an end to the conflict has

grown steadily as the domestic political gains Mr. Putin enjoyed when he first sent warplanes and tanks to Syria in August 2015 have worn thin.

Reluctant to put Russian soldiers, many of them conscripts, in the line of fire in Syria, Russia has increasingly relied on mercenaries, scores of whom were killed by U.S. forces in February 2018, before President Trump ordered American troops out.

As NATO ambassadors met on Friday in Brussels in an emergency session and European leaders called for calm, Mr. Putin spoke by telephone with Mr. Erdogan in an effort to calm tensions. Mr. Trump also spoke by telephone with Mr. Erdogan and the leaders promised "additional steps to prevent the great humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Idlib region," according to the Turkish government.

Asli Aydintasbas, a senior fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, said NATO would offer "plenty of moral support" to Turkey but that "no one wants to get militarily entangled with Russia." This, she added, meant that "Erdogan will have to fix this with Putin."

Russia said on Friday that it was sending two warships equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles toward Syria's coast in the eastern Mediterranean, but insisted that its forces had played no role in the attack on Turkish troops. That contradicted reports from the scene that described a Russian jet striking a Turkish convoy, and then artillery strikes pounding Turkish troops in several buildings.



A prayer for the Turkish soldiers who died in the airstrike was held in Ankara on Friday. Credit...Adem Altan/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images.

Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, sought to calm tempers in his daily briefing on Friday, insisting that Russia had honored a pledge to safeguard Turkish observation posts near Idlib. He said no Turkish servicemen had been hurt in these outposts, while suggesting that it was Turkey's fault that some of its troops strayed beyond these designated areas into territory controlled by rebels.

"The tragic instances of deaths among Turkish personnel happened in the areas where terrorist gangs were conducting offensive operations," Mr. Peskov said.

Turkish planes, artillery and drones retaliated after the attack, pounding Syrian government positions. "Our operations will continue until the bloody hands laid on our soldiers are broken," said Hulusi Akar, Turkey's defense minister.

While he avoided placing direct blame on Russia, Mr. Akar noted that Thursday's attack had been carried out even though Turkey had coordinated the location of its troops with Russian forces on the ground. He also said there were no rebel groups near the scene of the attack, as the Kremlin asserted.

Moscow denied that Turkey had shared coordinates of its troops with Russian forces, and said that it had tried to stop attacks by Syrian government forces as soon as it was told about them.

While Russia appeared eager to dial town tensions, Turkey bristled with fury at the killing of its troops. "We will not leave the blood of our brave soldiers on the ground," Fahrettin Altun, the director of communications in the Turkish presidency, wrote



Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary general, expressed solidarity with Turkey following strikes that killed 33 troops in Idlib, Syria. Credit Credit... Stephanie Lecocq/ EPA, via Shutterstock

in a [thread of comments](#) posted on Twitter.

But no matter how intense its anger, Turkey has limited options. Its NATO allies, with which Turkey has had increasingly strained relations, particularly with the United States, have no appetite for a wider war.

"Turkey cannot fight Russia on its own," said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He said Mr. Putin, fed up with a grinding war that has only weighed on his popularity at home, "was trying to intimidate Erdogan into submission with this attack."

But, he added, "it might backfire on the Russian leader" by pushing Turkey back toward the West.

The two countries, rival empires since the 16th century and adversaries in multiple wars in the 19th century, have in recent years shown a capacity for brinkmanship followed by de-escalation.

Omer Taspinar, who teaches at the National Defense University in Washington, said Turkey's public fury, though perhaps heartfelt, was also theater.

"No one in Turkey wants war with Russia," he said. "It is much more convenient to do this Kabuki dance."

He predicted that while news media outlets loyal to Mr. Erdogan have played up Turkey's strikes on Syrian government positions, Turkey will need to reach an agreement with Russia that could reduce its presence in Syria to an even narrower strip than now exists along the Turkish border.

Today, Turkey briefed on the serious security situation in Syria. Allies offer their deepest condolences for the death of Turkish soldiers in last night's bombing in Idlib, and expressed their full solidarity with Turkey. Allies condemn the continued indiscriminate airstrikes by the Syrian regime and Russia in Idlib Province. I call on them to stop their offensive, to respect international law and to back U.N. efforts for a peaceful solution. This dangerous situation must be de-escalated, and we urge an immediate return to the 2018 cease-fire to avoid further worsening of the horrendous humanitarian situation in the region, and to allow urgent humanitarian access for those trapped in Idlib.

When Turkey downed a Russian SU-24 attack aircraft in 2015, Mr. Putin denounced the action as a "stab in the

back" and a "crime," stirring fears of all-out war.

Following the attack on the Russian plane and the death of the co-pilot, who ejected safely but was killed on the ground, demonstrators attacked the Turkish Embassy in Moscow and a Kremlin-controlled news outlet unleashed a torrent of incendiary abuse on Turkey and its president.

In the end, Russia limited its retaliation to economic sanctions and the storm passed — with Moscow then recruiting Turkey as a customer for Russian weapons. To the fury of NATO, Turkey spurned anti-aircraft systems on offer from the United States and last year took delivery of the sophisticated S-400 air defense system from Russia.

Russia has also found in Turkey an eager partner in the energy business. Just last month, Mr. Putin was in Turkey to [celebrate the opening](#) of a natural gas pipeline running 580 miles underneath the Black Sea from Russia to Turkey, a project that the European Union and United States opposed for years because it undercut Ukraine's energy business.

This week's escalation of tensions between Moscow and Ankara prompted an exasperated we-told-you-so from Washington.

"I hope that President Erdogan will see that we are the ally of their past and their future and they need to drop the S-400," Kay Bailey Hutchison, the Trump administration's ambassador to NATO, told reporters in Washington.

Andrew E. Kramer contributed reporting from Moscow.

March 2, 2020

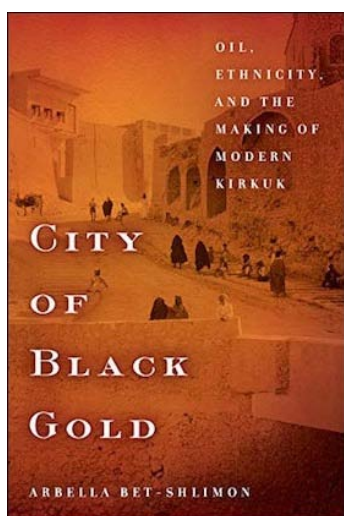
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Review of *City of Black Gold: Oil, Ethnicity, and the Making of Modern Kirkuk*

By **Arbella Bet-Shlimon**
Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019. 275 pp. \$85 (\$26, paper).

Reviewed by **Michael Rubin**

Middle East Quarterly Spring 2020



Bet-Shlimon of the University of Washington delivers a thorough and complete history of modern Kirkuk. This is no mean feat with archives

burned, fraudulent documents circulating, and interested parties snatching up the few legitimate records to keep them from political competitors. She covers political history ably and with broader perspective than many writers while identifying patronage and societal networks and tracing how they evolved against the background of Kirkuk's changing sovereignty: Ottoman, British, and ultimately Iraqi.

Many works about Kirkuk are polemical arguments for the city's domination by one ethnic group or another. Few incorporate a wide range of sources or are willing to challenge political myths. Unfortunately, Bet-Shlimon did no research in Kirkuk itself, but her work is, nevertheless, invaluable. She relies instead on archival collections in the United Kingdom, Greece, and United States, as well as memoirs and other Arabic, Turkish, and English sources.

For much of the twentieth century, Kirkuk was arguably the most important city in Iraq after Baghdad. It was the site of Iraq's earliest oil industry and later the frontline of eth-

nic rivalry between the country's Arab population, restive Kurds, and Turkmen descended from Ottoman elites. The 2003 ouster of Saddam Hussein placed Kirkuk in the crosshairs again, as the autonomous Kurdistan Regional and Baghdad governments clashed politically—and in 2017 militarily—over control of the city and its lucrative oilfield.

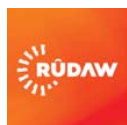
While the Baghdad government and Iraqi Kurdistan squabble over Kirkuk's control, Bet-Shlimon finds that Kirkukis never embraced either nationality. Rather, they developed their own identity against the backdrop of the oil industry even if this identity was never cohesive enough to overcome communal divisions. She wisely calls out those who retroactively extend current ethnic identities back in time, arguing both that identities are fluid and that immigration has changed the character of the city at different times.

Bet-Shlimon's chief weakness is that her study ends before Saddam Hussein's fall. She briefly mentions the Anfaethnic cleansing campaign,

the post-1991 formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the ethnic tensions unleashed after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, but there is no comprehensive survey of Kirkuk's role in post-Saddam Iraq. This is unfortunate, but it reflects her insistence on staying true to the historical method rather than to often inaccurate journalism.

City of Black Gold is unapologetically academic, but Bet-Shlimon's writing is accessible to the lay reader. It should be mandatory reading, not only for Iraq specialists but also for diplomats, journalists, and military officers who seek a crash course in Iraqi complexities and a deeper understanding of an important city that remains a flashpoint.

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02-03-2020

By **Yasmine Mosimann**

Turkey detains 2 Rudaw journalists covering migrant crisis in Edirne

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Four journalists, including a Rudaw reporter and cameraman, were detained by Turkish authorities in Edirne on Saturday while covering the migrant crisis unfolding near Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria.

Press freedoms monitor Reporters Without Borders (RSF) **named** Rudaw Turkish reporter Rawin Sterk and videographer Mehmet Sirin Akgun, as well as



Rudaw Turkish reporter Rawin Sterk was among four journalists detained by Turkish security forces in Edirne on Saturday. Photo: social media

Mesopotamian News Agency (Mezopotamya Ajansi) correspondents Idris Sayilgan and Naci Kaya, as those detained.

The journalists were detained near the Pazarkule crossing on the Turkey-Greece border.

Hundreds of migrants and refugees from across the Middle East and Central Asia have made a break for Turkey's borders with Europe in recent days.

On February 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lifted the border restrictions he had agreed with European powers in 2016.

Ankara fears another wave of refugees escaping the Syrian regime offensive in Idlib will soon arrive in Turkey, which already hosts 3.6 million displaced Syrians.

It is also possible that Erdogan lifted migration restrictions to pressure European powers to support his new offensive against the Syrian regime.

According to a statement from Mesopotamian News Agency, Sayilgan and Kaya were detained while filming at the Pazarkule border crossing and taken to Edirne Central Gendarmerie Command.

Sayilgan and Kaya, who have been held in police custody since 15:00 local time on February 29, said they were detained for filming "in a forbidden area".

Rudaw Media Network is yet to release a statement about the detention of Sterk and Akgun.



A migrant crosses the buffer zone during clashes with Greek police at the Turkey-Greece border crossing of Pazarkule, Edirne, Turkey, February 29, 2020. Photo: Bulent Kilic / AFP

Turkish authorities have not offered an explanation.

RSF said it has received **several complaints** about the treatment of journalists working in the border area and about the "double-standard attitude towards the media" among Turkish security forces.

"The journalist can neither be a warring party nor be responsible for regional conflicts and humanitarian crises. We want journalists not to be blocked and those

who are in custody to be released #Pazarkule," said **Erol Onderoglu**, an RSF representative in Turkey.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) also called for the immediate release of the journalists.

"The Mesopotamian News Agency and the Rudaw reporters working at the Edirne border gate were detained," the HDP **tweeted** on Sunday.

"The government thinks that it will make Idlib and the refugee tragedy invisible by detaining journalists. The right of people to receive news cannot be prevented, journalists must be released immediately," it added.

At least five journalists have been detained in Turkey in the past week.

Alptekin Dursunoglu, the editor-in-chief of the Near East News, was **taken into custody** on Saturday.

Three reporters from the Russian news agency Sputnik Turkey were also detained in Ankara on Saturday, allegedly for producing a story titled *Antioch: The 'Stolen Province'*.

Mahir Boztepe, Sputnik Turkey's editor-in-chief, was arrested on Sunday after taking responsibility for the article. They have all since been released by prosecutors.

The frequent arrest and prosecution of journalists in Turkey following the 2016 attempted coup has been criticized by human rights organizations. RSF claims Turkey is the "world's biggest jailer of professional journalists."



By Sirwan Kajjo
March 02, 2020

Kurds Determined to Try IS Foreign Fighters in Syria

WASHINGTON - Syrian Kurdish officials seem firm on moving ahead with their plans to put captured Islamic State (IS) foreign fighters on trial in Syria, despite little international support.

Nearly one year after declaring the physical defeat of IS's so-called caliphate in eastern Syria, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led military alliance backed by the U.S., says it is ready to try IS foreign fighters through its local judicial system.

"Since all evidences, witnesses



FILE - Prisoners that are said to be Islamic State fighters by Syrian Democratic Forces(SDF) fighters, are pictured north of Raqqa city, Syria, March 8, 2017. © Reuters

and victims [of IS fighters] are present in our region, we have proposed to hold their trials here." said Kamal Akif, a spokesperson for the foreign relations office at the Kurdish-led administration in northeast Syria.

"We have been discussing this issue with all sides," he told VOA.

The SDF holds about 12,000 IS fighters, including 2,000 foreign fighters who hail from about 50 countries. There are also about 12,000 foreign women and chil-

dren affiliated with the terror group that are held in detention camps in eastern Syria.

Many of the countries IS fighters come from have largely declined to take them back. Thus, the SDF hopes its new proposal would garner enough support from countries such as the U.S., France, Britain and Germany.

“So far we have received positive vibes from our international partners,” Akif said, adding that they “could soon begin practical matters” related to trying IS foreign fighters.

Other Kurdish officials have said that proceedings would get under way as soon as this month.

International reluctance

Western governments, however, have been reluctant to approve this move.

“We believe that foreign terrorist fighters need to be returned to their home countries,” Ambassa-

dor James Jeffrey, the U.S. special envoy to Syria, told reporters in February.

“The policy should be, as we have done with some eight people brought back, is to put them on trial,” he said.

A small number of Americans who had joined IS in Syria have been sent back to the U.S. to face terrorism charges, according to U.S. officials.

But there are no official estimates of American IS fighters currently held by the SDF in Syria.

The George Washington University’s Program on Extremism has reported 80 U.S. citizens or residents who traveled to Syria or Iraq to join IS and other extremist groups since 2011.

Kaleigh Thomas, a Middle East researcher at the Center for a New American Security in Washington, says without action from the international community toward an implementable al-

ternative, the Syrian Kurdish forces will likely proceed with their approach.

“Western countries still appear to remain firmly against the repatriation of foreign fighters, at least in large quantities,” she told VOA.

“Aside from whether any conviction or sentences will be recognized outside of the SDF administration, it also remains a question the extent to which the SDF has the will, the attention, and the resources to carry this out for such a large number of fighters as the landscape in Syria is ever changing,” Thomas said.

Legal obstacles

Despite controlling nearly one third of Syria’s territory, the SDF-led administration is not an internationally-recognized entity. And this, experts said, would perhaps make it tricky for local Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria to carry out such trials.

What makes this even more

complicated is that the SDF autonomous administration doesn’t have formal relations with the Syrian regime, which is at least recognized internationally,” said Sadradeen Kinno, a Syrian researcher specialized in Islamist militancy.

He said that “what the SDF is trying to justify is that these foreign fighters have committed crimes on Syrian territory, therefore it is totally legal to try them for such crimes inside Syria.”

But Kurdish official Akif stressed that, “We want these trials to be in accordance with international law and standards.”

For example, unlike in neighboring Iraq, the Syrian Kurdish administration said it will not impose the death penalty on IS detainees.

SDF-run courts also have been convicting Syrian IS fighters and acquitting those who were found not involved in perpetrating violent acts.



March 03-2020

By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

UN: Turkish-backed groups carry out war crimes, target Kurdish women

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – In a report on Monday, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria accused the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army of carrying out war crimes such as murder, pillaging, and targeting of Kurdish women in Turkish-controlled areas.

The Commission found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Turkish-backed groups “perpetrated the war crime of murder and repeatedly committed the war crime of pillaging, further seriously contravening the right to enjoyment of possessions and property.”

The UN Commission concluded that “if any armed group mem-



Turkish-backed Syrian Arab fighters man a checkpoint in the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin in northwestern Syria after seizing control of it from Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) on March 18, 2018. (Photo: AFP)

bers were shown to be acting under the effective command and control of Turkish forces, these violations may entail crim-

inal responsibility for such [Turkish] commanders who knew.” The Commission was established to document human rights

abuses by all actors in Syria’s civil war.

Turkey occupied the towns of Tal Abyad and Serekaniye in October 2019 after a major offensive against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkish-backed groups took control of Afrin in March 2018.

Widespread Violations

The Commission documented cases of detentions, killings, beatings, abductions, widespread looting, and appropriation of civilian homes carried out by Turkish-backed groups in the towns of Tal Abyad and Serekaniye.

The report said there is a “con-

sistent, discernible pattern previously documented in Afrin.”

“These violations instilled fear among Kurdish residents and caused further displacement.”

Kurdish residents, and members of the religious Yezidi minority, who fled from their villages in Serekaniye in October had their homes looted.

“Schools and businesses, such as bakeries, were also looted or expropriated, along with land for making olive oil, agricultural tools, and vehicles,” the UN report said.

Some Kurdish women who could return to check their properties discovered that the locks had been changed or fighters had occupied their homes.

“This prevented potential returns and further facilitated the transfer of families and communities supported by Syrian National Army fighters to the private residences of displaced persons,” the UN Commission said.

In Afrin, many young Kurdish

men have been victims of abductions, torture, and their homes have been confiscated on a larger scale. In some cases, civilians were abducted several times.

When Kurdish residents complained to senior members of the Turkish-backed groups to reclaim their property, they were met by threats and violence, the report noted.

Women’s Rights

Furthermore, the report underlined that Turkish-backed groups with extremist ideologies have dismantled earlier efforts by the previous local Kurdish administration in Afrin to improve female rights and their role in decision-making.

According to the report, Turkish-backed groups targeted almost every “aspect of Kurdish women’s lives” in areas under their control.

“Armed groups generated a palpable fear of violence and duress among the female Kurdish population,” it added.

This fear increased after the **murder** of Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf on Oct. 12, a crime Turkish-backed groups are responsible for.

As a result, local women in Afrin say they rather remain at home, relinquish their jobs, or wear a headscarf when going out without a male relative.

Sinam Mohamed, the representative of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) in Washington, who is originally from Afrin, welcomed the fact that the UN report recognized that women are under pressure from rebel groups in Afrin, particularly the absence of gender equality in Afrin.

She also said Kurds in Afrin, Tal Abyad, and Serekaniye “have been killed after they were not able to pay these groups ransom money.”

The UN Commission, meanwhile, called on Turkish-backed groups to investigate violations and crimes and punish those responsible.

“Maybe there will be pressure on Turkey to stop these violations, but I don’t think it will work,” Mohamed stated.

Lack of Attention

The SDC representative also underlined the lack of attention from the media and humanitarian organizations for violations in these areas.

Bassam al-Ahmad, the executive director of Syrians for Truth and Justice, similarly told Kurdistan 24 the muted media coverage and lack of humanitarian assistance is because Turkish-backed rebel groups are denying such rights.

Ahmad’s NGO is one of the few organizations that document human rights violations in areas such as Tal Abyad and Afrin.

“Turkey is doing everything to prevent information [from being] disclosed from this area. And this is not a secret,” he said. “That’s why there are not many reports about Afrin.”

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany

Le Monde Par Marie Jégo
le 03 mars 2020

La riposte militaire et migratoire d'Erdogan, acculé en Syrie

La Grèce a refusé ce week-end le passage des réfugiés massés à sa frontière

Mettant sa menace à exécution, le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a ordonné, dimanche 1^{er} mars, l’intensification des frappes aériennes sur la province d’Idlib, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, afin de venger la mort de ses soldats. Une contre-attaque qui bénéficie pour l’instant d’un feu vert implicite de la Russie, qui contrôle le ciel syrien et qui est restée en retrait.

Le président turc doit se rendre jeudi 5 mars à Moscou pour discuter avec Vladimir Poutine de l’escalade des tensions dans la région. « Ce sera sans aucun doute une rencontre difficile, mais les chefs d’Etat



Cette photo tirée d’une vidéo diffusée par le ministère turc de la défense montre une frappe aérienne de la Turquie sur Idlib, en Syrie, le 1^{er} mars. HANDOUT / AFP

confirment leur volonté de régler la situation à Idlib », a déclaré di-

manche le porte-parole du Kremlin, Dmitri Peskov.

La Turquie a perdu cinquante-quatre militaires en février, [dont trente-trois ont été tués jeudi, au cours d’une frappe aérienne menée par des avions syriens et russes](#). En représailles, une nouvelle opération militaire, nommée « Bouclier de printemps », a été lancée. Elle vise à récupérer la dernière poche de la rébellion, enjeu d’une bataille acharnée entre les forces loyales à Bachar Al-Assad, soutenues par la Russie, et les rebelles syriens épaulés par la Turquie.

Dimanche matin, l’aéroport militaire

de Nayrab, non loin d'Alep, a été lourdement bombardé par des drones turcs. Au cours de cette attaque, un des appareils a été abattu. Peu après, la Turquie a effectué, depuis sa province du Hatay, limitrophe de la Syrie, des tirs de missiles antiaériens, abattant deux avions de combat syriens Soukhoï Su-24 et détruisant plusieurs systèmes de défense aérienne. En raison de ces tirs, les compagnies turques ont dû interrompre leurs vols commerciaux vers le Hatay.

Fermeture de l'espace aérien

Parallèlement, la Syrie a annoncé la fermeture de l'espace aérien aux avions et aux drones, susceptibles désormais d'être abattus sans sommation. Selon des experts militaires à Istanbul, les drones turcs pouvaient jusqu'ici voler dans le ciel d'Idlib. Leur présence était prévue par les accords de Sotchi, conclus en 2018 entre les présidents Poutine et Erdogan.

L'offensive déclenchée par M. Erdogan est double, militaire à Idlib, humanitaire le long des frontières occidentales de la Turquie, vers lesquelles des milliers de réfugiés ont convergé ces derniers jours. Ces derniers sont mus par l'espoir d'entrer en Grèce, que ce soit par voie terrestre, via la ville d'Edirne en Thrace orientale, tout près de la Grèce et de la Bulgarie, ou maritime depuis les côtes de la mer Egée vers les îles grecques.

Furieux du manque de soutien de

l'OTAN et de l'Union européenne à sa campagne de Syrie, le président turc se venge en essayant de renvoyer vers le Vieux Continent une partie des réfugiés actuellement hébergés sur le sol turc, soit plus de 4 millions de personnes dont 3,6 millions de Syriens.

Délivré au plus haut niveau de l'Etat, le message est sans détour. « Nous avons modifié notre politique, nous n'empêcherons pas les réfugiés de quitter la Turquie. Compte tenu de nos ressources et de notre personnel, limités, nous sommes ravis sur la marche à suivre pour parer à un nouvel afflux venu de Syrie au lieu d'empêcher ceux qui ont l'intention de migrer vers l'Europe », a rappelé, dimanche, Fahrettin Altun, le chef de la communication de la présidence.

Ce revirement inquiète les dirigeants européens. La présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen, a exprimé, samedi, sa « préoccupation » face à un éventuel afflux de migrants vers la Grèce et la Bulgarie. « Nous sommes prêts à fournir un appui supplémentaire, notamment par l'intermédiaire de Frontex [l'Agence européenne de garde-frontières et de garde-côtes] aux frontières terrestres », a-t-elle affirmé.

Désillusion côté grec

Partis de différentes villes de Turquie par bus, minibus, taxi et parfois même à pied, des milliers

d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants, pour beaucoup des ressortissants afghans, ont décidé de tenter l'aventure, convaincus par les officiels, par les médias au service du pouvoir et par les réseaux sociaux, que les portes de l'Europe leur sont ouvertes.

La voie terrestre est la plus fréquentée. [Treize mille personnes au moins étaient massées, samedi soir, le long de la frontière turco-grecque,](#) longue de 204 kilomètres, selon l'Organisation internationale pour les migrations. Le plus souvent, elles sont arrivées là avec l'aide des municipalités dirigées par l'AKP, le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir, lesquelles ont été promptes à organiser le transport.

Dimanche après-midi, dans le quartier historique de Fatih, à Istanbul, tenu par l'AKP, des centaines de migrants, ont embarqué à bord de bus flambant neufs, garés en file indienne à quelques centaines de mètres du bâtiment qui abrite la préfecture de police. « Des associations syriennes ont payé », a confié un jeune Syrien originaire d'Alep, qui, après quatre ans passés en Turquie, a décidé de se lancer, espérant « aller jusqu'à Berlin ».

Cependant les bus ne vont qu'à Edirne et, après avoir marché jusqu'au poste-frontière de Pazarkule (Kastanies côté grec), la désillusion est grande. La traversée du poste turc se fait facilement, mais

les migrants se font refouler côté grec, ce qu'ils n'avaient pas prévu.

La situation est particulièrement tendue à Pazarkule, dont l'accès, côté turc, vient d'être fermé aux journalistes. Ces derniers ont filmé sans relâche, samedi, les heurts survenus entre les migrants et la police grecque, quand de jeunes hommes, bloqués dans la zone tampon, ont allumé des feux et jeté des pierres sur les policiers et les militaires grecs en faction de l'autre côté. En représailles, les forces de l'ordre ont fait usage de gaz lacrymogènes et de grenades assourdissantes.

Décidés à tenter le tout pour le tout, certains se risquent à traverser [le fleuve Evros, qui sépare la Turquie de la Grèce.](#)

Quand ils y parviennent, ils sont interpellés à coup sûr. Plusieurs dizaines de personnes se sont ainsi fait arrêter par les garde-frontières grecs, dont les patrouilles ont été renforcées.

Les tentatives de passage via la mer Egée sont moins nombreuses. Selon Athènes, environ cinq cents personnes sont arrivées de Turquie par canot pneumatique dimanche après-midi, à Lesbos surtout. Dans cette île aux capacités d'accueil largement dépassées, des résidents locaux en colère ont refusé d'autoriser les nouveaux arrivants – y compris les familles avec de jeunes enfants et des bébés – à débarquer de leur canot.

Le Monde

Par Benjamin Barthe
Publié le 03 mars 2020

Les rebelles contre-attaquent à Idlib dans le sillage des frappes turques

Les forces d'Assad perdent du terrain alors que la Russie, protectrice du régime, reste en retrait depuis jeudi.

Comme un boomerang, l'attaque aérienne qui a causé la mort de trente-trois soldats turcs, jeudi 27 février, dans la province d'Idlib, se retourne contre le camp loyaliste. Non seulement les représailles d'Ankara ont infligé de très lourdes pertes, humaines et matérielles, à l'armée syrienne et à ses suppléants, mais elles ont permis

aux rebelles anti-Assad, qui avaient perdu beaucoup de terrain ces dernières semaines dans leur dernier réduit, de repartir à l'offensive. Cette contre-attaque bénéficie pour l'instant du feu vert implicite de la Russie, protectrice du régime Assad et arbitre du chaos syrien, dont l'aviation est restée en retrait depuis jeudi.

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, la pluie de missiles lâchés par les batteries d'artillerie et les drones turcs sur les positions progouvernementales ont fait plus d'une centaine de morts en trois jours. Parmi ces victimes figurent vingt et un miliciens chiites iraniens, membres des brigades Zeinabiyoun et Fatemiyoun, compo-

sées respectivement de Pakistanais et d'Afghans. Ces hommes ont été enterrés dimanche, en Iran.

La milice libanaise Hezbollah, autre béquille des forces régulières syriennes, de retour sur le champ de bataille après plusieurs mois d'éclipse, a perdu pour sa part au moins douze combattants.

Il s'agit d'une des journées les plus sanglantes pour le mouvement, depuis son déploiement en Syrie, en soutien des troupes régulières, en 2012. Les funérailles de ces hommes ont donné lieu à un vaste rassemblement de militants et de sympathisants du parti de Dieu, dimanche, dans la banlieue chiite de Beyrouth.

« Des centaines de positions, de blindés et d'installations de l'armée syriennes ont été touchées avec succès, a commenté, sur Twitter, Danny Makki, un analyste syrien indépendant. C'est une catastrophe pour l'armée syrienne, qui a démontré une incapacité complète à contrer les drones trucs et qui paraît maintenant paralysée à Idlib. » Dimanche, une colonne de blindés, envoyée en renfort vers le champ de bataille, a été notamment anéantie par des tirs provenant d'avions sans pilote turcs. Dix-neuf soldats syriens ont péri dans les explosions.

Funérailles, dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth (Liban), le 1er mars, de combattants du Hezbollah tués dans la région d'Idlib, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. Hassan Ammar / AP



Funérailles, dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth (Liban), le 1er mars, de combattants du Hezbollah tués dans la région d'Idlib, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. Hassan Ammar / AP

« Nous sommes obligés de dissimuler les véhicules militaires et de réduire au strict minimum les déplacements sur les lignes de front, témoigne le journaliste russe Evgeni Poddubnii, de la chaîne Russia24, embarqué dans la région d'Idlib avec les troupes russes. Les drones turcs travaillent jour et nuit. Tout est devenu plus dur. A moins que le ciel soit débarrassé de ces drones, il sera difficile pour l'armée syrienne de tenir le terrain », ajoute l'envoyé spécial, dans une vidéo postée sur la messagerie Telegram.

De fait, les rebelles, un agrégat de factions, dominé par le groupe djihadiste Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, n'ont pas tardé à profiter de l'aubaine. Dans un mouvement très probablement coordonné avec l'armée turque, les anti-Assad ont regagné une quinzaine de hameaux et de villages du djebel Zawiya, une région montagneuse du sud de la province d'Idlib, qu'ils avaient abandonnée quelques jours plus tôt. « A la minute où l'aviation russe disparaît du ciel, on s'aperçoit que les forces pro-Assad n'arrivent pas conserver leurs gains territoriaux, observe Sinan Hatahet, un commentateur

proche de l'opposition. Les dynamiques du début de l'insurrection réapparaissent. »

Le sursaut rebelle à Idlib se double de violents troubles dans la province de Deraa, à la pointe sud de la Syrie. Des hommes armés y ont mené, durant le week-end, plusieurs attaques contre des positions de l'armée, obligeant celle-ci à déployer des tanks dans la ville de Samayn. Bien que reconquise en juillet 2018 par les pro-Assad, la région de Deraa reste un foyer d'instabilité récurrent. En vertu de l'accord de reddition patronné alors par la Russie, de nombreuses localités ont pu conserver une forme d'autonomie, ce qui a permis aux factions rebelles de garder une partie de leur arsenal.

Les opposants redoutent que l'embellie soit de courte durée. Les Russes sont sous la pression de leurs alliés syrien et iranien pour couper court à la démonstration de force d'Ankara. « Cet Erdogan est un fou, fulmine Taleb Ibrahim, un analyste prorégime, joint par téléphone à Damas. Il veut déclencher une guerre régionale avec la Russie et l'Iran. S'il continue à pousser et que l'armée syrienne ne parvient pas à défendre son territoire, Moscou sera obligé de réagir. »

Violents troubles

Le Monde Par Ghazal Golshiri et Allan Kaval Publié le 03 mars 2020

En Iran, le virus révèle l'incurie des autorités

Le régime aurait minimisé les risques pour ne pas gêner la tenue des législatives du 21 février. Le ton a changé depuis qu'une quinzaine de personnes liées au pouvoir ont contracté le virus.

Des trottoirs déserts, des rues habituellement saturées par la circulation qui se trouvent à présent vides, des écoles fermées, des rassemblements annulés, et, dans tous les esprits, l'inquiétude et la défiance. L'épidémie de Covid-19, considérée comme le résultat d'un « complot de l'ennemi » selon les plus hautes autorités du pays la semaine dernière, s'est abattue sur les Iraniens dans leur quotidien. Sa réalité s'est imposée au régime, qui avait tenté d'en minimiser

l'ampleur après avoir été accusé d'en cacher l'émergence. Cernés par les crises, les dirigeants de la République islamique sont accusés d'avoir voulu sauver les apparences pour l'anniversaire de la révolution de 1979, le 11 février, et surtout pour tenter de favoriser la participation aux élections législatives du 21 février. Le ton a changé depuis que, les uns après les autres, déjà quinze dignitaires et personnes liés au pouvoir ont contracté le SARS-CoV-2.

Cinq en sont morts, dont Mohammed Mirmohammad, un membre du Conseil de discernement – une assemblée chargée de conseiller le Guide de la révolution –, décédé lundi 2 mars. La vice-présidente de la République islamique, Masoumeh Ebtekar, a également été contaminée.

Or, si l'épidémie est bien là, sa véritable ampleur reste inconnue, cachée derrière des chiffres officiels dont de nombreux soignants doutent et que des

députés contestent ouvertement, accusant les autorités de mentir. Le ministère iranien de la santé a annoncé lundi 523 cas et 12 nouveaux décès portant le nombre total de morts depuis le début de l'épidémie à 66. « Leurs bilans sont faux. Je n'ai pas de doute sur cela. Nous avons des malades qui ont contracté le Covid-19 dans notre hôpital, qui ne figurent pas dans les chiffres officiels », a confié au Monde un médecin du nord du pays.

Dans le Gilan, une province du nord bordant la Caspienne, la situation serait particulièrement critique. Lundi, Gholam-Ali Jafarzadeh Imenabadi, député de Rasht, le chef-lieu de cette région, a ainsi qualifié les chiffres officiels de « blague », indiquant que la situation y était plus grave qu'ailleurs avec des hôpitaux « remplis de patients suspects ». Les hôpitaux et les cliniques, débordés, ne seraient plus en mesure d'assurer des soins ordinaires. « Dans notre hôpital, toute opération chirurgicale considérée comme non urgente a été annulée », a indiqué au Monde un médecin de la région du sud de l'Iran. L'ensemble du territoire serait désormais touché.

Les intérêts du clergé

Pour de nombreux représentants du corps médical, des obstacles politiques ont considérablement retardé la prise en charge du problème par les autorités. « Dans le service des maladies infectieuses où je travaille, les premiers cas suspects ont commencé à apparaître autour du 10 février, décrit une interne de Téhéran. Je suivais bien sûr ce qui se passait en Chine, et j'ai commencé à porter un masque. Ma responsable m'a ordonné de l'enlever, il ne fallait pas faire paniquer les gens. » L'étudiante en médecine raconte une très forte tension dans le service à l'approche de la fête nationale et des élections, alors même que les cas suspects se multipliaient, et une pression venant « d'en haut » s'étendant à tous les échelons : « C'est une chaîne... Le message était clair : pas de coronavirus avant les élections. »

Le pouvoir espérait une participation forte. Pourtant, même en bannissant les références à l'épidémie jusqu'à l'avant-veille et en prolongeant le vote de six heures, elle sera la plus basse de l'histoire de la République islamique, à 42,6 %. « En refusant de reconnaître pendant plus de dix jours que c'était bien le Covid-19 qui arrivait, les autorités ont fait des soignants des



Désinfection du mausolée de l'imam Reza, à Machhad, le 27 février. WANA NEWS AGENCY / via REUTERS

vecteurs de transmission, estime l'interne de Téhéran. Nous étions exposés, puis nous retournions dans nos familles, auprès de nos amis. Nous avons pu contaminer des dizaines de personnes. »

Des médecins iraniens estiment également que la situation actuelle est le fruit du refus des autorités de mettre en quarantaine Qom, épice de l'épidémie dans le pays. C'est dans la ville sainte, qui abrite le sanctuaire chiite de Fatima Masoumeh, que sont apparus les premiers cas. Une telle mesure serait entrée en contradiction avec les intérêts du clergé dont certains représentants parmi les plus fondamentalistes rejettent toute mesure de restriction d'accès sur la base d'arguments religieux. Le mausolée de Fatima Masoumeh, à Qom, est un lieu de pèlerinage où de nombreux fidèles chiites iraniens et étrangers se pressent chaque jour, touchant ou embrassant les uns après les autres le moucharabieh qui enclôt sa tombe. L'accès des fidèles a été encadré, mais il reste ouvert, et la mise en quarantaine de Qom reste exclue.

Une modélisation inquiétante

Entre l'irruption de l'épidémie dans le pays et le sursaut des autorités, suivi d'un changement de ton des responsables politiques, le Covid-19 iranien a eu le temps de devenir un problème international, avec une multiplication des cas de personnes infectées après un voyage en Iran, à des niveaux incohérents au regard des chiffres officiels. Le 24 février, une étude de modélisation menée par des scientifiques de l'Université de Toronto avait été réalisée sur la base des trois cas répertoriés de Covid-19 exportés d'Iran entre le 19 et 23 février et des données sur les voyages en provenance et en direction de l'Iran. Les auteurs concluaient que pour que trois cas de Covid-19 aient été exportés d'Iran, il fallait que le nombre de cas à cette période, dans le pays, tourne autour de 18 000. A l'époque, les chiffres officiels du gouvernement iranien faisaient alors état de 43 cas et de 8 décès.

Depuis, les annonces de cas venant d'Iran se succèdent à un rythme soutenu dans les pays voisins et au-delà. Lundi, le gou-

verneur de l'Etat de New York, Andrew Cuomo, a pour sa part indiqué que la première personne atteinte de Covid-19 sur ce territoire avait été contaminée en Iran. D'autres cas liés à des déplacements dans le pays ont aussi été rapportés en Afghanistan, au Pakistan, au Koweït, à Bahreïn, en Irak, au Qatar, à Oman, aux Emirats arabes unis, au Liban ainsi qu'au Canada, selon l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS). Par ailleurs, au moins un cas enregistré en France concerne une personne ayant voyagé récemment en Iran.

Mardi 25 février, le président, Hassan Rohani, promettait que l'épidémie ne serait plus un problème à la fin de la semaine. L'Iran doit désormais se résoudre à accepter l'aide internationale. Lundi, l'OMS a annoncé l'arrivée à Téhéran d'une équipe d'experts chargés de soutenir les efforts du gouvernement iranien et l'envoi d'équipements et de kits de tests supplémentaires. La France, l'Allemagne et le Royaume-Uni ont promis une aide de 5 millions d'euros à la République islamique.

Le chantage d'Ankara place les Européens devant leurs responsabilités

En ouvrant la route vers l'UE aux réfugiés, les autorités turques espèrent une révision des conditions politiques et des contreparties financières de la présence de migrants de Syrie

L'Union européenne (UE) passe à nouveau l'examen de la solidarité. Rattrapés par la guerre en Syrie, les ministres de l'intérieur chargés des migrations, puis ceux des affaires étrangères, vont tenter, cette semaine, de parer au plus pressé.

Incapable de lancer une politique proactive dans la phase actuelle du conflit, autour d'Idlib, l'UE est confrontée au scénario le plus noir – mais pas le plus imprévisible – qu'elle redoutait : une fièvre migratoire sur son flanc sud, en raison de la décision de la Turquie de laisser passer les migrants vers le continent. Celle-ci suscite déjà une forte tension en Grèce, où des milliers de candidats à l'asile végètent, dans des conditions déplorables, notamment sur l'île de Lesbos.

Pour l'heure, les chiffres avancés par Ankara – autour de 100 000 personnes seraient sur la route – ne reflètent pas la réalité des flux. Ils visent surtout à effrayer et à créer un effet miroir par rapport à la crise migratoire de 2015, qui avait profondément divisé l'UE et nourri la poussée des forces populistes. Lundi, la chancelière allemande, Angela Merkel, a jugé « inacceptable » que la Turquie fasse pression sur l'UE « sur le dos des réfugiés ».

Le chef de la diplomatie européenne, Josep Borrell, était attendu à Ankara mardi 3 mars. Pendant ce temps, le président du Conseil européen, Charles Michel, la présidente de la Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, et celui du Parlement, David Sassoli, devaient se rendre dans la ville grecque frontalière d'Orestiada. Les autorités locales y ont suspendu, pour un mois, l'enregistrement des demandes d'asile, sans



A Doyran (Turquie), le 2 mars, des migrants installent un campement de fortune près des rives du fleuve Evros, frontière entre la Turquie et la Grèce. BYRON SMITH POUR "LEMONDE"

base juridique solide, selon les Nations unies.

Appel d'air

Un sentiment d'urgence agite l'UE – surtout les Etats directement concernés –, qui voit les autorités turques créer un appel d'air, en exploitant l'attention que suscite le déplacement de près d'un million de personnes dans la région d'Idlib. « Il y a un manifestement des mouvements migratoires vers la Grèce et la Bulgarie qui ne sont pas spontanés, relève une source diplomatique française. Ils concernent d'ailleurs des migrants déjà présents sur le territoire turc, et qui ne sont pas tous syriens. »

Les ministres des affaires étrangères des Vingt-Sept se réuniront en conseil extraordinaire le 6 mars à Zagreb, la capitale de la Croatie, deux jours après leurs collègues de l'intérieur, à Bruxelles. Ils tenteront de formaliser un soutien à la Grèce et d'adresser un message clair à la Turquie. Il s'agit de renforcer la mission Frontex, avec la mobilisation de 1 500 membres

de patrouilles terrestres et maritimes.

« Tout ce débat sur Frontex est du bluff, s'émeut toutefois Gerald Knaus, président du cercle de réflexion European Stability Initiative (ESI) et spécialiste des rapports UE-Turquie. La police aux frontières n'a pas les moyens légaux d'agir et de repousser les bateaux, voire d'ouvrir systématiquement le feu, ce serait en contravention avec les lois européennes et le droit international. Depuis quelques jours, la détérioration rapide sur le terrain montre ce qui se passe sans accord avec Ankara. C'est le rêve de Trump et d'Orban : plus de droit d'asile, le gaz lacrymogène, les réfugiés repoussés. Il y a quelques années, l'Europe s'en serait étranglée. »

Pour l'heure, la Bulgarie n'a pas formellement requis une aide européenne. Le premier ministre, Boïko Borissov, a été reçu lundi soir à Istanbul par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Emma-

nuel Macron, lui, a exprimé dimanche sa « pleine solidarité avec la Grèce et la Bulgarie ». Malgré les images dramatiques de Grèce, l'Élysée met en garde contre des parallèles hâtifs, alors que le Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés évoquait l'arrivée de 1 200 personnes dans les îles grecques de Lesbos, Chios et Samos, les 1^{er} et 2 mars. « Ce n'est pas une crise migratoire de type 2015 par son ampleur et par son origine, dit-on dans l'entourage de M. Macron. A ce stade, la pression ne s'est pas accélérée massivement en provenance de Syrie, mais il y a une tension politique. »

« Partager le fardeau »

Paris souligne l'opportunité du président Erdogan. Sur le plan militaire, la Turquie essaie aussi d'obtenir des soutiens au sein de l'OTAN, en invitant les Américains – en vain – à lui fournir des missiles Patriot.

Fahrettin Altun, porte-parole de la présidence turque, a accusé, dimanche 1^{er} mars, les Européens de ne pas « partager le fardeau ». « Nous abritons 3 millions de réfugiés, dont 80 % de femmes et d'enfants. L'Europe, elle, a refusé de créer une zone de sécurité au nord de la Syrie, où pourraient retourner une partie d'entre eux, et elle ne fait aucun geste en matière de visas d'entrée ou d'union douanière », commente une source turque à Bruxelles.

L'accord conclu en mars 2016 entre Ankara et Bruxelles pour gérer les migrations irrégulières équivalait à une forme de sous-traitance. Afin d'établir un barrage sur la route de l'Europe, il prévoyait quelques mesures complémentaires au versement de 6 milliards d'euros au total – dont

3 milliards agrées dès 2015 – pour des projets humanitaires. Des facilités pour les voyageurs turcs désireux de se rendre dans l'UE et la modernisation d'un accord d'union douanière étaient promises.

Un « deal 1 + 1 » indiquait, quant à lui, que, pour un migrant irrégulier renvoyé de Grèce vers la Turquie, un demandeur d'asile syrien serait « réinstallé » dans l'UE. Un système qui, selon Bruxelles, a fonctionné correctement. La Commission indique, par ailleurs, que 4,7 milliards d'euros sont engagés à ce stade et 3,2 milliards effectivement versés. « Pas au gouvernement turc, mais à une centaine d'organisations qui ont mis en œuvre une centaine de projets », insiste un porte-parole. Les autorités d'Ankara, qui ont besoin de financements européens



Un migrant afghan à Doyran (Turquie), le 2 mars. BYRON SMITH POUR "LE MONDE"

pour les réfugiés sur son sol, réclament depuis longtemps que cet argent arrive directement dans leurs caisses.

« **Trop, c'est trop** »

Sur Twitter, le porte-parole de la

présidence turque a rejeté toute instrumentalisation de la question migratoire. « Ceux qui se disputent sur la façon de traiter quelques milliers de réfugiés osent critiquer un pays avec

3,7 millions de réfugiés, pour avoir dit que "trop, c'est trop". L'hypocrisie généralisée est malhonnête et honteuse ! », écrivait M. Altun.

Avant l'accord de 2016, le nombre de réfugiés syriens s'était élevé à 1 million. Dans l'année qui suivit, il retomba à 26 000, preuve de l'efficacité du partenariat, rappelle ESI. D'où la nécessité, dans l'intérêt de tous, d'un nouvel accord migratoire avec Ankara. « Nous nous concentrons sur le dialogue avec la Turquie, même si la réponse qu'elle apporte en ce moment n'est pas appropriée », commente-t-on à Bruxelles.

Pour éviter une autre crise majeure, il faudra probablement satisfaire, en partie, les demandes turques, surtout financières.

Le Monde

Par Piotr Smolar
le 04 mars 2020

L'Iran mis en cause pour non-respect de ses engagements nucléaires

L'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique révèle que Téhéran a multiplié par trois ses stocks d'uranium faiblement enrichi, refusant aussi l'inspection de plusieurs sites suspects.

Ne pas rompre, tout en se déroband dangereusement à ses engagements : ainsi se résume l'approche de plus en dure de l'Iran, en matière nucléaire, vis-à-vis de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). A quelques jours de la présentation de son rapport devant le conseil des gouverneurs de l'agence à Vienne, le directeur de l'AIEA, Rafael Mariano Grossi, se trouvait à Paris, mardi 3 mars. Reçu à l'Élysée par Emmanuel Macron, ce diplomate argentin de 59 ans, expert exigeant en matière de prolifération, a confirmé au président français les signaux

alarmants relevés par son organisation. « *Nous devons ramener les Iraniens sur la voie de la coopération avec l'agence* », explique au *Monde* le directeur.

La sortie unilatérale des Etats-Unis de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien (JCPOA), en 2018, a compromis son équilibre et sa philosophie. Elle a relancé le programme de Téhéran, qui aujourd'hui dispose de 1 021 kilogrammes d'uranium faiblement enrichi, soit trois fois plus que la quantité prévue dans le JCPOA. Confirmant les estimations des spécialistes français ces derniers mois, l'AIEA affirme

que le niveau d'enrichissement de l'uranium est passé à 4,5 %, contre 3,67 % fixés dans l'accord. De façon mathématique, l'accroissement en qualité et en masse de ces capacités réduit le délai théorique dans lequel l'Iran pourrait parvenir à l'acquisition de la bombe. Ce délai – ou « *breakout time* » – était d'un an au moins, en vertu de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien.

Conclu à Vienne en juillet 2015 dans un format 5+1 (France, Grande-Bretagne, Etats-Unis, Chine, Russie et Allemagne), l'accord prévoyait de limiter pendant au moins

dix ans le programme nucléaire iranien, en échange d'une levée progressive des sanctions. La sortie des Etats-Unis a brisé son caractère transactionnel. Depuis, les autres signataires s'efforcent de convaincre Téhéran de se conformer à ses engagements, pour ne pas se retrouver en rupture totale, à l'instar de la Corée du Nord. Mais ce n'est pas le chemin pris par le régime.

Escalade graduée

Un deuxième rapport de l'AIEA – une démarche en soi inédite – met en exergue, en effet, le refus de l'Iran, en janvier, d'autoriser des inspec-

tions sur deux sites, considérés comme suspects par l'agence. « Il s'agit pour nous de vérifier l'exhaustivité et l'exactitude des déclarations iraniennes sur leur programme nucléaire », résume Rafael Mariano Grossi. Téhéran a motivé son refus en invoquant l'origine des informations recueillies par l'AIEA : elles auraient été fournies par Israël, donc considérées comme suspectes. « Le protocole additionnel [existant avec l'Iran, qui élargit les capacités d'inspection de l'agence dans le pays] n'est pas à la carte, explique une source à l'AIEA. Soit vous l'observez, soit vous l'abandonnez. »

Israël a consacré beaucoup de temps et de moyens pour documenter la course iranienne à l'arme nucléaire, dans ses moindres secrets. En septembre 2018, à la tribune de l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies, [Benjamin Nétanyahou](#) avait révélé l'existence d'un entrepôt secret, dans les faubourgs sud de Téhéran, où avaient été entreposées des quantités importantes de matériaux et d'équipements, dans le cadre du programme iranien clandestin. Sur la base de relevés effectués sur place, les experts de l'AIEA ont confirmé en novembre 2019 la présence de « traces d'uranium anthropogénique ».

« Les clarifications iraniennes ne sont pas suffisantes, nous continuons à réclamer des informations complémentaires », souligne Rafael Mariano Grossi. Selon une source au sein de l'AIEA, Téhéran a notamment expliqué qu'il pourrait s'agir de résidus dus au transport d'équipements utilisés sur un autre site du programme nucléaire, déjà répertorié.



Rencontre entre des officiels iraniens et une délégation européenne autour de l'accord de Vienne sur le nucléaire iranien (JCPOA), à Vienne, le 26 février. JOE KLAMAR / AFP

Depuis l'été 2019, les autorités ont initié une escalade graduée : franchissement de la limite des 300 kg d'uranium faiblement enrichi, enrichissement au-delà du seuil de 3,67 %, violation des limites imposées sur la recherche et le développement. En novembre, l'Iran a annoncé la reprise des activités d'enrichissement sur le site souterrain de Fordo. Enfin, début janvier, Téhéran a décidé de ne plus accepter aucune limite opérationnelle dans son programme, comme celle sur le nombre et la modernité des centrifugeuses.

« Nous avons demandé des clarifications, sans qu'ils donnent suite, explique Rafael Mariano Grossi. Les Iraniens appliquent les phases précédentes en matière d'enrichissement et de recherche et développement. » Cela signifie, en somme, que les annonces de janvier restent pour l'heure verbales. Mais les progrès déjà réalisés ces derniers

mois en matière d'acquisition de connaissances nouvelles ne sont évidemment pas réversibles.

Mécanisme de règlement des différends

Le 14 janvier, dans une déclaration conjointe, les ministres des affaires étrangères de la France, de l'Allemagne et du Royaume-Uni, le groupe E3, ont annoncé l'activation du mécanisme de règlement des différends, prévu par le JCPOA. Il peut aboutir à un rétablissement de toutes les sanctions devant le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, sans que cela soit automatique. Dans un communiqué publié après la réception de Rafael Mariano Grossi, M. Macron a fait savoir qu'il souhaitait « le strict respect par l'Iran de ses engagements et obligations en termes de vérification, et a appelé Téhéran à coopérer immédiatement et pleinement avec l'agence ».

Le président français a proposé depuis plus de deux ans un accord élargi avec l'Iran, qui prendrait en compte à la fois son programme balistique et les questions de stabilité régionale. De septembre jusqu'à la mi-novembre 2019, et la nouvelle vague de manifestations contre le régime, Emmanuel Macron avait tenté de convaincre Donald Trump et son homologue iranien, Hassan Rohani, de s'entendre sur cette feuille de route, avant une rencontre entre les deux hommes. La tentative avait échoué, en raison de la faible marge de manœuvre dont disposait, en interne, le dirigeant iranien, ce qui n'a guère surpris les experts du dossier. A présent, les élections américaines constituent une nouvelle difficulté. Donald Trump a voué aux gémonies le JCPOA conclu par son prédécesseur, Barack Obama. Mais veut-il et peut-il le remplacer par un autre ?

Syrian Kurds worry IS camp could riot as Turkey weaponizes water

As Turkey and Russia reach an agreement to stop the fighting in Idlib, the Kurdish-run administration in northern Syria has said Ankara's restrictions on its water supply could pose a major threat to security.

Fears of a breakdown in security in al-Hol camp, which houses tens of thousands of families of Islamic State fighters, are growing amid a continuing standoff between the Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northeast Syria and Turkey over the provision of water and electricity to areas under their respective control. The dispute has taken a dangerous twist as Turkey and Russia face off in the northwestern province of Idlib.

Since last month the US-backed Kurdish government has accused Turkey of cutting off water provided by the Alok pumping station in the Turkish-occupied town of Ras al-Ain to the Hasakah region where al-Hol is located. The facility supplies water to approximately 460,000 people, including to tens of thousands of Syrians displaced by the conflict.

"Service delivery and security are intertwined and there is a lot of concern that sustained water shortages could spark off protests in al-Hol, where the security situation is fragile," said a well-informed source familiar with the affair. IS women internees have attacked and injured camp guards and rioted in the past. The lack of water also has a major impact on sanitation and health.

Defusing the crisis has become a priority for the United States and the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the source, who requested anonymity, told Al-Monitor.

Alok was badly damaged during Turkey's October invasion of Ras al-Ain and neighboring Tell Abyad. A technical team from the Syrian government responsible for maintaining the facility has been repeatedly [denied access to it](#), most recently on March 3, independent sources



Women walk through al-Hol displacement camp in Hasaka governorate, Syria, April 1, 2019. Photo by REUTERS/Ali Hashisho.

tracking the situation confirmed. The water supply remains dangerously erratic, with Turkey accused of deliberately sealing the spigot for political leverage.

Ziyad Rustem, the co-chair for electricity in the autonomous administration, told the Rojava Information Center, a newsgathering body in northeastern Syria, that water had been cut off for another three days.

He said Turkey stopped the flow because it was demanding that the Kurdish-led administration provide 25 megawatts of electricity per hour from its own sources to Ras al-Ain in exchange for the water. Rustem said the original agreement mediated by Russia with Turkey was for the administration to provide 5 megawatts per hour. "Water should not be used as a bargaining chip. This is dirty and unethical. As a matter of humanity we will provide electricity, but Turkey should fix the lines they destroyed themselves," he said.

The Mabrouka power station that serviced Ras al-Ain was knocked

out during the fighting in October, leaving [Turkey dependent on the Kurds](#) for electricity «and Turkey hates that,» a second knowledgeable source told Al-Monitor.

The water flow resumed today, Sozda Ahmad, an official with the autonomous administration, told Al-Monitor via the Rojava Information Center. But she remained skeptical that it would continue. "We only know that the technicians at Alok have turned on the water [but] it may be shut off at any moment," she said, commenting on an emerging pattern of pressure on the Kurdish-run administration.

Now that Turkey occupies the large swath of land between Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain it needs to provide services. "They aren't going to bring electricity from Turkey and the networks are all linked to other parts of northeastern Syria that they don't have control over," the second source said. "It's quite easy for the Kurdish-run administration, who sees Turkey as the enemy — and doesn't want Turkey to legitimize their occupation and to establish themselves as a state in control

of the area — to say, 'No, we are not going to help you provide electricity and make everyone think you are this functional administration,' and so they've blocked that."

The source continued, "I think Turkey has clearly been facing discontent from the populations in the areas that it's controlling and it's taken this really drastic measure and said, 'OK, we are going to shut off the water if you don't give us access to the electricity.'"

The United States, which has around 700 forces deployed in northeastern Syria, has been drawn into the row. "The Americans have tried to negotiate with Turkey, telling them that 'You as a NATO ally should turn it back on,' and Turkey has said, 'You need to tell the Kurds to give us electricity.'"

But in recent weeks Turkey has shifted its ire to Russia amid rising tensions over Idlib. They peaked following an Oct. 27 airstrike in which at least 36 Turkish soldiers died. The attacks were widely believed to have been carried out by Russia though both sides have blamed Syrian government forces in a face-saving ploy.

"Turkey is framing [the power shortage] as a Russian issue now," the second source said. Russia has enjoyed growing heft in northeastern Syria ever since it brokered a deal with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in October when US forces withdrew from the length of the Turkish border. The source added, "There's been a really big shift in the power dynamics. The Americans have really been disempowered since October. And [though] Americans still have a lot of influence over the Kurds, Turkey's target is Russia now because of what's going in the northwest."

Les drones tueurs de la Turquie : une arme décisive, mais aussi un business

Dans son offensive contre la Syrie, la Turquie utilise des drones armés qu'elle fabrique et commence même à exporter.

Pour s'affranchir des Américains, pourtant ses alliés au sein de l'Otan, la Turquie s'est lancée depuis une dizaine d'années dans la fabrication de drones armés. [Ankara les utilise massivement en ce moment en Syrie](#) en représailles des frappes aériennes du régime de Bachar al-Assad qui ont tué 34 soldats turcs le 27 février dernier. L'armée du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan possède une centaine de Bayraktar TB2, des drones capables de voler à plus de 7 000 mètres d'altitude pendant 24 heures, avec une charge de plus de 50 kilos. Ils n'effectuent pas moins de 6 000 heures de vol par mois.

Une affaire de famille, puisqu'ils sont fabriqués par le gendre du dirigeant turc, Selçuk Bayraktar. À la tête de la compagnie Baykar, il est désormais le fournisseur privilégié de l'État turc, expliquent nos



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan signe un drone Bayraktar, en septembre 2019. (MUHAMMED ENES YILDIRIM / ANADOLU AGENCY)

confrères du site d'informations américain [The Intercept](#).

Éliminer le PKK

Ces drones armés ont d'ailleurs permis à Ankara depuis quatre ans d'éliminer des membres du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, considérés comme des terroristes. Principales cibles des Turcs dans le sud-est du pays, en Irak et en Syrie, les combattants du PKK sont régulièrement frappés par les drones d'Ankara, relate [The Intercept](#). "Selon des sources officielles,

entre janvier et avril 2018, les TB2 équipés de bombes téléguidées de fabrication turque ont causé la mort de 449 personnes dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. En Turquie, dans le Sud-Est, à majorité kurde, au moins 400 personnes auraient été tuées dans des attaques de drones depuis 2016."

Faire plier Damas et Moscou

Aujourd'hui, ils servent à [bombarder la province d'Idleb dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie](#) et les

TB2 ont déjà infligé de sérieuses pertes humaines et matérielles depuis une semaine. Trois avions syriens abattus, une centaine de chars détruits, les TB2 pilotés à distance permettent à la Turquie de frapper en contournant l'espace aérien syrien, sans craindre de perdre des soldats. Même si Ankara subit des pertes, son drone armé peut se fabriquer en un mois pour un coût de 5 millions de dollars pièce.

Même si le TB2 connaît des limites technologiques (il ne parcourt que 150 kilomètres), pour le président turc ce marché des drones armés doit se développer. Ankara, qui a déjà vendu une quarantaine de TB2 au Qatar, à l'Ukraine et au gouvernement libyen d'union nationale, entend désormais se placer parmi les dix premiers exportateurs d'armes au monde d'ici 2023, l'année du centenaire de la République turque.

Le Monde Tribune. 05/03/2020

Alexandra de Hoo Scheffer En Syrie, géopolitique « fluide »

« La relation avec la Turquie met à rude épreuve la cohésion politique de l'Alliance atlantique »

La guerre en Syrie précipite l'avènement d'une nouvelle ère géopolitique, marquée par la fluidité des alliances sur fond d'une réévaluation des engagements militaires américains

au Moyen-Orient. Le renoncement partiel des États-Unis à leur rôle de gendarme dans la région incite leurs alliés traditionnels à s'autonomiser et à muscler leurs politiques étrangères et leurs

adversaires à tester leurs « lignes rouges » sur tous les fronts. En Syrie, le président Obama puis le président Trump, tous deux soucieux de mettre fin à deux décennies de « guerre contre le ter-

rorisme », n'ont pas voulu voir les avantages diplomatiques d'un levier militaire qu'ils ont sous-traité à la Russie et à la Turquie, devenus les gendarmes régionaux. Ces deux puissances

s'affrontent sur le terrain dans leur ambition de consolider leurs sphères d'influence respectives obligeant les Etats-Unis, les Européens et l'OTAN à prendre position.

Washington voit dans la récente escalade des tensions turco-russes une occasion de faire revenir Ankara dans le giron otanien et de montrer les limites de son rapprochement avec Moscou. Mais ce retournement d'alliance sera en réalité difficile à opérer, car Ankara ne souhaite pas choisir entre la Russie et l'Occident et suit une trajectoire d'autonomisation vis-à-vis des Etats-Unis depuis la guerre en Irak de 2003. Les Etats-Unis devront de plus en plus composer avec des partenaires aux allégeances multiples et parfois contradictoires, et accepter les risques d'une désoccidentalisation de la gestion de crises que Washington a elle-même encouragée.

Impasses syriennes et libyennes

La relation avec la Turquie met à rude épreuve la cohésion politique de l'Alliance atlantique et constitue à long terme un défi fondamental : après la fin de la guerre froide, les Etats-Unis et la Turquie se sont efforcés de définir des intérêts communs. Mais le découplage s'est accentué après la guerre en Irak de 2003, puis avec le soutien américain aux milices kurdes en Syrie, qui a renforcé le sentiment, à Ankara, que les Etats-Unis étaient une force déstabilisatrice au Moyen-Orient et qu'ils ne reconnaissaient pas pleinement ses préoccupations

légitimes en matière de sécurité, en particulier sur la question des réfugiés et sur le terrorisme. Ces désaccords ont incité Ankara à réévaluer sa relation avec Washington, à réduire sa dépendance et à diversifier ses alliances, en se tournant vers la Russie notamment. L'achat des S-400 est moins lié à son désir de s'aligner avec la Russie qu'à sa volonté de démontrer sa capacité à définir une politique étrangère plus indépendante des Etats-Unis, en se positionnant comme une puissance-équilibre.

Erdogan veut que « l'Amérique et la Russie soient [ses] amis ». Washington lui répond qu'il faudra choisir. L'Amérique est « l'alliée du passé et de l'avenir de la Turquie », a ainsi affirmé l'ambassadrice des Etats-Unis auprès de l'OTAN, Kay Bailey Hutchison, tout en demandant à Ankara de renoncer aux S-400 russes. Et cela alors même que les autorités turques demandent le déploiement de missiles antiaériens Patriot à la frontière turco-syrienne. Même si la Turquie et la Russie renforcent leur dépendance mutuelle (TurkStream, S-400, construction de la centrale nucléaire d'Akkuyu), leurs aspirations géopolitiques et leurs visions stratégiques divergentes font que la Turquie ne tombera pas complètement dans l'orbite russe, mais restera arrimée à l'OTAN et aux Etats-Unis. Les impasses rencontrées à Idlib et en Libye face à la Russie ont incité la Turquie à revenir vers les Etats-Unis et l'OTAN, reconnaissant ainsi sa dépendance structurelle

vis-à-vis de l'Alliance.

L'OTAN ne prendra pas le risque, néanmoins, d'une confrontation armée avec la Russie au sujet d'Idlib, qu'elle considère comme un conflit hors zone et hors du champ d'application de l'article 5 de la charte de l'Atlantique. L'usage des termes « déconfliction » ou « désescalade » par toutes les diplomaties occidentales traduisent une volonté très claire de ne pas s'engager sur le plan militaire. En revanche, la demande du président Trump de voir l'OTAN renforcer son rôle au Moyen-Orient, notamment dans la lutte contre le terrorisme, devrait converger en partie avec la demande d'Ankara de voir ses alliés prendre davantage en compte ses priorités sécuritaires sur le flanc sud de l'Alliance. A condition toutefois de se mettre d'accord sur l'ennemi à combattre.

Géopolitique « trumpisée »

C'est ici l'enjeu principal de la réflexion prospective menée aujourd'hui au sein de l'Alliance sur sa finalité et sa stratégie : comment parvenir à une cohérence politique alors que les menaces auxquelles l'OTAN fait face sont de plus en plus complexes et hybrides et qu'elles ne suscitent donc pas le même degré d'importance et d'urgence parmi les Etats membres de l'Alliance ? Le différend sur le plan de défense de la Pologne et de la Baltique est un parfait exemple. Les Etats d'Europe de l'Est considèrent la Russie comme la plus grande menace, tandis que la Turquie considère le sépa-

ratisme kurde à sa frontière sud et les questions migratoires comme la première des priorités. La France a, elle, récemment signifié que la priorité de l'OTAN devrait être le terrorisme.

Ces divergences dans la perception des menaces contribuent à affaiblir les instances multilatérales et à entraver la proposition de solutions coordonnées aux crises : le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU est paralysé par les veto russe et chinois ; l'OTAN manque de cohésion politique ; l'UE est prise au piège du pacte de crise migratoire signé avec la Turquie en 2016, et qu'Ankara brandit comme instrument de chantage dès qu'il le peut. L'UE devrait pouvoir s'impliquer en Syrie sans avoir à céder au chantage d'Erdogan et définir les termes d'un partage du fardeau de la crise migratoire. La diplomatie de crise postoccidentale, menée par la Russie et la Turquie (accords de Sochi et d'Astana), montrent ses limites aussi. La géopolitique s'est « trumpisée » au cours de ces trois dernières années, et le rôle de médiateur endossé par la France ou l'Allemagne ne fonctionne pas. Les alliances se font et se défont au gré d'intérêts politiques et géostratégiques ponctuels, à défaut d'une stratégie cohérente pour le Moyen-Orient.

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Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer (Politiste)



05/03/2020

Kurdish artist freed after three-year sentence for anti-government protest

Kurdish artist Fatoş Irwen has been released from prison in Turkey after spending more than three years behind bars for resisting the police during anti-government protests in 2013, [the Art Newspaper reported](#).

Irwen, an artist known for her performance and installation pieces that deal with subjects including gender politics, was caught between police and protesters during the 2013 protests, which spread around Turkey after police were caught on film violently suppressing a small environmental demonstration in Istanbul.

Irwen was arrested in 2016 at an airport in her hometown, Diyarbakır, the largest city in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast.

Rights group Artists at Risk said the charges against her "were based on evidence provided by an anonymous witness in relation to a protest she attended in 2013" and accused the government of using the charges to silence dissident freedom of expression.



"She was eventually charged with resisting the police, opposition to the law against

demonstrations and assemblies, propaganda for a terrorist organisation, belonging

to a terrorist organisation and sentenced to two years in prison," the group said.

Dorothee Schmid : « Les réfugiés sont avant tout une arme de dissuasion pour Erdogan »

Isolé diplomatiquement et en difficulté avec son allié russe, le président turc réutilise la menace d'un afflux de migrants comme moyen de pression sur les Européens, analyse Dorothee Schmid, de l'Institut français des relations internationales.

Entretien. Spécialiste du monde méditerranéen, Dorothee Schmid dirige le programme Turquie contemporaine et Moyen-Orient de l'Institut français des relations internationales. Elle a notamment écrit *La Turquie en 100 questions* (Tallandier, 2017). Elle revient sur la crise humanitaire à Idlib, où vivent quelque 3,5 millions de personnes, dont 900 000 déplacés. Aujourd'hui, Recep Tayyip Erdogan surjoue l'urgence d'un devoir d'assistance et espère obtenir le déplacement des civils vers les zones sous contrôles turcs au nord et au nord-est.

Qu'espère le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avec son chantage aux migrants ?

Depuis le début de la guerre syrienne la question des réfugiés a été gérée par Recep Tayyip Erdogan comme un atout aussi bien politique qu'économique. Et ce en premier lieu vis-à-vis de l'Union européenne. Les autorités turques avaient négocié, en 2016, avec Bruxelles un pacte migratoire s'engageant à lutter contre les passages de migrants vers la Grèce en échange notamment d'une aide de 6 milliards d'euros. Recep Tayyip Erdogan menace à nouveau l'Europe de l'afflux « de millions » de réfugiés. Il y a certes une part de gesticulation.

Son objectif n'en reste pas moins désormais de se libérer de ce fardeau jugé de plus en plus insoutenable par sa propre population. Il veut donc impliquer les Européens dans la crise, mais il sait aussi qu'il perdrait tout en mettant sa menace à exécution ouvrant une crise majeure avec l'Union. Les réfugiés sont avant tout une arme de dissuasion pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Cette fuite en avant est elle le signe d'un isolement croissant ?

La Turquie veut montrer qu'elle n'a plus besoin d'être accompagnée : elle s'est autonomisée avec la crise syrienne, où elle revendique de défendre d'abord ses intérêts. Depuis 2011, Ankara demandait l'instauration d'une zone de sécurité au nord de la Syrie pour protéger sa frontière, dont elle serait la garante dans le cadre d'une opération internationale. Paris avait soutenu un temps cette idée, mais ni l'administration Obama ni les autres Européens n'avaient suivi. La question se pose aujourd'hui en des termes différents. Grâce à son allié russe, le régime de Damas a gagné la guerre et veut reconquérir l'intégralité de la Syrie : la présence turque en trois points du territoire est mal vécue. L'affrontement avec la Turquie, semblait inévitable et il est désormais ouvert.

L'autre priorité d'Ankara était d'empêcher la création d'une entité kurde syrienne liée au PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), la guérilla kurde de Turquie ; or les Kurdes syriens ont été, sur le terrain, les alliés essentiels des Occidentaux dans la lutte contre Daech. Après la tentative de coup d'Etat de 2016, où les Occidentaux ont manifesté un soutien très frileux à Erdogan, les Russes sont devenus de facto un allié alternatif. L'antagonisme avec l'Occident est consommé. En revanche comment peut être digéré l'affrontement nouveau avec les Russes ? C'est toute la question. Ces tournants successifs ne peuvent qu'inquiéter l'opinion turque.

Qu'est-ce que le rapprochement avec la Russie a apporté ?

Cela a permis à la Turquie de tester sa valeur propre en tant qu'allié pilier du flanc sud-est de l'OTAN. En rappelant haut et fort son rôle géopolitique, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a fait monter les enchères aussi bien avec l'Union

européenne qu'avec les Etats-Unis. Etre associé aux côtés de l'Iran dans le processus lancé par Moscou, à Astana, en 2017, était une réelle valorisation, puisque ce fut le seul cadre efficace sur le terrain. Cela a permis aux Turcs d'avoir leur mot à dire sur l'ingénierie militaire et politique de la crise syrienne. La Turquie devait se rapprocher de la Russie pour ne pas être marginalisée.

A cela s'ajoutait la volonté de l'homme fort d'Ankara de se venger des Occidentaux qui ne l'avaient pas soutenu en juillet 2016 lors de la tentative de coup d'Etat militaire. Mais la Turquie a été piégée par les Russes. Les accords d'Astana prévoyaient quatre zones de cessez-le-feu. Trois ont été déjà reconquises par le régime de Damas avec l'aide des Russes. La quatrième, celle d'Idlib, qui était devenue le réservoir de la rébellion, est en train de l'être.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan va-t-il revenir vers ses alliés traditionnels ?

Alors que l'antagonisme croît avec les Russes, les anciennes alliances sont rassurantes d'où la tentation de les renouer. Mais c'est difficile. Avec l'Union européenne la relation est détestable, et difficilement réparable à cause de la question des réfugiés, mais aussi en raison du contentieux sur Chypre.

Avec l'OTAN c'est un peu différent. L'Alliance a exprimé sa solidarité avec Ankara mais pas au point de s'engager à ses côtés en Syrie. Pourtant la Turquie a démontré avec la crise syrienne sa valeur comme membre de l'Alliance : elle a combattu en trois opérations, avec une efficacité croissante. La « deuxième armée de l'OTAN » en termes d'effectifs est devenue la seule armée active au combat

de l'Alliance dans la région. Sans ce relais, l'Occident serait démuné.

Les Kurdes, alliés face à Daech, perdent de leur valeur une fois ce combat gagné. Ils ne peuvent servir de pivot de stabilisation, puisqu'ils sont par définition même un facteur de décomposition de l'ordre étatique existant. Mais l'OTAN est très affaibli. Trump est le premier problème de l'organisation, et le seul à pouvoir décider d'une « réintégration » symbolique de la Turquie.

Ce fiasco syrien aura-t-il des conséquences politiques ?

Ce n'est pas forcément vécu par les Turcs comme un fiasco. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui est un pragmatique, a eu une gestion évolutive de ce dossier. Au début en 2011, il incitait Bachar Al-Assad à négocier avec les manifestants demandant la démocratie. Puis, face à l'escalade sanglante du régime, il a soutenu la rébellion misant sur la chute du régime. A partir de l'été 2016, Ankara a mené des opérations militaires en territoire syrien, avec l'accord des Russes, pour créer de zones tampons.

Les sondages montrent que la majorité soutient les objectifs de la politique syrienne d'Erdogan : il a réussi à donner un sentiment de fragilité aux Turcs, qui pensent se défendre en adoptant une attitude agressive en Syrie. Cela a à peu près fonctionné jusqu'à présent, mais il y a une obligation de résultat. Les supplétifs ne sont plus en première ligne comme dans les opérations précédentes, et la mort au combat d'un plus grand nombre de soldats turcs peut retourner l'opinion. Dans ces conditions d'urgence, chasser les réfugiés est pour le président turc une option facile afin de montrer qu'il garde la main.

Migrants : l'UE tente de ne pas froisser, Erdogan

Lors d'une réunion extraordinaire, les ministres européens de l'intérieur et de la migration ont tenté de ne pas froisser Ankara tout en soutenant Athènes.

D'une part, ne pas cabrer davantage la Turquie qui « *n'est pas une ennemie* », insistait, mercredi 4 mars, la commissaire aux affaires intérieures Ylva Johansson. D'autre part, soutenir clairement la Grèce, quitte à taire les critiques portées habituellement contre cet Etat membre pour sa gestion chaotique, depuis 2015, de la question migratoire.

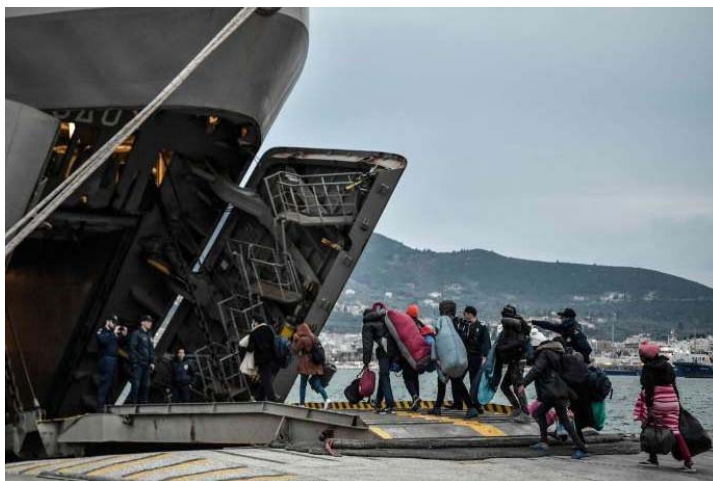
Tel était le double objectif de la réunion extraordinaire des ministres européens de l'intérieur et de la migration, à Bruxelles, mercredi 4 mars, tandis que la diplomatie des Vingt-Sept tente à tout prix d'écarter le risque d'une nouvelle crise de grande ampleur.

Sur l'insistance de l'Allemagne, les ministres n'ont pas « *condamné* » l'ouverture des frontières aux migrants décidée par le président Recep Taayip Erdogan. C'était la formule retenue au départ. Elle a finalement été remplacée par le « *ferme rejet* » de « *l'usage de la pression migratoire à des fins politiques* ».

Discussions avec Recep Taayip Erdogan

Mercredi, le président du Conseil, Charles Michel, et le haut représentant Josep Borrell étaient, eux, à Ankara pour une discussion, qualifiée de « *franche* », avec le président turc. Et vendredi, les ministres des affaires étrangères s'efforceront, à Zagreb, d'adopter une position face au risque de « *confrontation internationale majeure* » que décrit M. Borrell quand il évoque la Syrie.

M. Erdogan, lui, lie en tout cas clairement la question de la migration et celle de la guerre : appelant les pays de l'Union à assumer leur « *part du fardeau* »



Des réfugiés embarquent dans un navire militaire, dans le port de Mytilène, sur l'île de Lesbos, le 4, mars 2020. LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / AFP

dans l'accueil des migrants et des réfugiés, il a redit, mercredi, à ses interlocuteurs européens qu'une solution à la crise migratoire passait par un soutien à son pays dans son combat contre les forces de Bachar Al-Assad en Syrie. M. Borrell a répondu en promettant seulement une aide d'urgence de 170 millions d'euros pour faire face à la situation humanitaire dramatique, née de l'offensive déclenchée, en décembre dernier, par le régime de Damas dans la région d'Idlib.

Bruxelles pourrait, par ailleurs, tenter d'aménager en partie l'accord sur la migration conclu en 2016 avec la Turquie et prévoir de nouvelles mesures d'aide. On relancerait aussi certaines promesses faites, à l'époque, dont une politique de visas plus libérale et « *beaucoup d'autres choses qui étaient prévues et n'ont pas été réalisées* », a indiqué M. Borrell.

Soutenir Athènes

Simultanément, à Bruxelles, l'enjeu était de témoigner à la Grèce la solidarité « *claire et ferme* » réclamée par les trois ministres qu'elle avait délégués au conseil des affaires inté-

rieures. « *Nous n'accusons pas la Turquie parce que nous sommes grecs, mais parce qu'Ankara a instrumentalisé de manière cynique des personnes en situation désespérée* », soulignait, avant la réunion, Georgios Koumoutsakos, le ministre de la migration. Video à l'appui, les trois responsables entendaient démontrer que le régime turc avait planifié de longue date le transfert de milliers de migrants vers leur pays.

Leurs collègues, comme la Commission, ont soigneusement évité de se prononcer sur la légalité de la « *suspension* » du traitement des demandes d'asile décrétée par les autorités d'Athènes. « *C'est absolument légal dès l'instant où des menaces pèsent sur la sécurité et la santé publiques* », justifie Georgios Gerapetritis, ministre d'Etat, contredisant l'avis du Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés.

La question des réfugiés

Les ministres ont aussi acté le démenti formel apporté par leurs collègues grecs quant à l'usage de tirs à balles réelles contre des migrants. Et c'est sans rappeler qu'Athènes a bénéficié, depuis

2015, de 2,4 milliards d'euros pour gérer la migration, qu'ils ont approuvé le projet de la Commission d'accorder 700 millions supplémentaires pour améliorer la situation de cinq centres d'hébergement. La situation du camp de Moria, sur l'île de Lesbos, est le symbole dramatique des carences dans la gestion de la migration et, actuellement, 80 000 demandes d'asile sont en attente de traitement dans le pays. « *Il est exact que l'on n'a pas, depuis 2015, assisté à suffisamment de progrès, dans le traitement des demandes d'asile notamment, mais le temps n'est pas à la polémique* », a quand même glissé la commissaire Johansson.

Réplique de M. Gerapetritis : « *Les montants dont nous bénéficions sont gérés de manière efficace et transparente. Ce qui se déroule aujourd'hui n'est d'ailleurs pas seulement une question d'argent, mais de solidarité*. » Celle-ci se traduira encore par la mobilisation d'une centaine de gardes-frontières et de gardes-côtes de l'agence Fontex et de 160 fonctionnaires du Bureau d'asile (EASO) chargés d'accélérer l'examen des demandes. Les retours des déboutés devraient également être rendus plus faciles.

Cet épisode va-t-il accélérer, ou au contraire, ralentir un peu plus la problématique mise au point d'une politique d'asile cohérente, impliquant l'ensemble des Vingt-Sept ? « *J'ose dire que ce sera notre dernière chance. L'Europe ne peut pas échouer deux fois sur un objectif aussi emblématique* », a commenté Margaritis Schinas, vice-président de la Commission. Il lui faudra toutefois vaincre les réticences de nombreux pays membres, dont ceux de l'est, qui campent sur leur refus catégorique.

The New York Times

By Steven Erlanger
March 5, 2020

A Balancing Act for Europe: Stop the Migrants, Support Greece, Assuage Turkey

Europe bought time after the migrant crisis of 2015. It just didn't use it very well. Now it may pay a price.

BRUSSELS — The European Union still has nightmares about the mismanaged chaos of the 2015 influx of migrants and refugees, which produced horrible pictures of dead children, masses of unregistered people wandering the roads, political divisions and a significant boost to far-right populism across the Continent.

Turkey's vow to let hundreds of thousands more leave for Europe has done more than revive those fears. It has exposed Europe's failure to use the time bought since 2016, when it made [a deal to pay Turkey](#) to house migrants and refugees, to create a coherent migration or asylum policy.

So Europe once again finds itself in a quandary, trying to tread a line between two NATO members, Turkey and Greece, one trying to push refugees forward, the other trying to keep them out.

There is little doubt that Europe, beyond Greece, wants neither the migrants nor another crisis. European Union leaders made that clear enough this week, when they traveled to Greece to display solidarity with sometimes [harsh Greek efforts](#) by a new center-right government to keep any new migrants or refugees away.

"Our first priority is making sure that order is maintained at Greece's external border, which is also Europe's border," said Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president.

For the European Union, it is an awkward moral clash with its professed values of protecting human rights, individual dignity and the right to seek asylum under international law, which Greece says [it has suspended for now](#).



Stranded asylum seekers at Turkey's Pazarkule border crossing with Greece. The New York Times

But it is also a deeply political problem, given the way populists from Viktor Orban in Hungary to Matteo Salvini in Italy and the Alternative for Germany party have profited from the chaos of 2015 and the influx of more than a million people, mostly Muslim. The populists have vowed loudly to defend European and national borders, and identity.

Then there is the problem of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, who has created many of his own difficulties, but who has also, mostly alone, taken on problems the

Europeans have chosen to ignore.

The signs have been building for some time that the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, with Russian and Iranian military support, was bound to move to crush the last redoubt of revolution in Idlib Province, which borders Turkey.

"It shows that Europe's complete holiday from geopolitics always ends up being very costly," said Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Europe again is in full spectator



On the Greek island Lesbos on Tuesday, the police moved to disperse migrants who hoped to leave by ferry. Credit... Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

mode, incredibly passive through the whole Idlib crisis, which was predictable and predicted."

But Mr. Erdogan's manipulations to try to wrench help from the Europeans have done much to alienate his potential allies.

He has tried to leverage relations with Russia against Europe and the United States, even as he has confronted Russian troops and proxies in both Syria and Libya.

He also pleaded for help defending Idlib, to prevent another million refugees pouring into Turkey, while at the same time [weaponizing the migrants](#) and refugees he currently houses against Europe.

None of this has made Mr. Erdogan friends.

Still, Turkey is a key member of NATO. Its forces are preventing what could be a massacre in Idlib. And it is also defending the United Nations-backed government of Libya.

So the dilemma for Europe and NATO is complicated: simultaneously to support Mr. Erdogan, try to pull him back into line against Moscow, and resist what Europeans consider his migration blackmail.

"Erdogan wants to protect the last opposition stronghold in Idlib and wants to avoid another wave of refugees," said Amanda Sloat, a former State Department official dealing with Turkey who is now at the Brookings Institution.

"He's rightly frustrated that the bulk of the Syrian refugee crisis has fallen on him to manage," Ms. Sloat said. "But it's problematic for him to try to blackmail the E.U. to help him by opening the gates, even as at the same time the E.U. and the inter-

national community are not stepping up to the problem.”

Mr. Erdogan’s Turkey is hosting some four million migrants and refugees, and [argues](#) that Brussels is not keeping its promises under the 2016 deal, which set out 6 billion euros in aid for Turkey — though not directly to the government — and promised efforts to resettle legitimate refugees inside Europe.

Brussels argues that it has kept the essence of the deal, so far signing contracts for 4.7 billion euros and disbursing 3.2 billion euros. But Europe has resettled fewer than 27,000 Syrians from Turkey in four years.

European Union officials are quietly talking to Turkey about [providing further help](#), but there is no sign that European nations will provide the military support Mr. Erdogan wants to create a “safe zone” in Idlib and a no-fly zone there.

The bloc’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, announced 60 million euros’ worth of aid for the most vulnerable people in northwest Syria after talks on Wednesday in Ankara with Mr. Erdogan. Senior E.U. officials had announced a much larger sum, 700 million euros, in new aid to Athens to help it tackle the migrant crisis.

European officials point out that the border between Idlib and Turkey is tightly shut and that so far there is no new influx of Syrian refugees.

So did Asli Aydintasbas, a Turkish analyst with the European Council on Foreign Relations in Istanbul. She also noted that there are few Syrians among the thousands of asylum seekers Mr. Erdogan has encouraged to try to get into Greece.

“These are not people from Idlib, and many are not from Syria,” she said. “They are mostly Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians — the Syrians in Turkey are pretty settled there and have not moved back to areas near Syria.”

Ms. Aydintasbas said Mr. Erdogan was trying to secure more funds for his government, which faces mounting economic difficulties. But Turkey



Syrian refugees arriving in Lesbos in 2015. Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

also wants to get European and NATO attention on Idlib, contain the Kurds, and shift a dangerous domestic debate about the costs of Turkey’s war inside Syria to the refugee crisis, she said.

She noted that after [the deaths of at least 36 Turkish soldiers](#) in Syria last week, the Turkish government shut down Twitter for a day, trying to mute criticism.

Mr. Erdogan’s gamble with Russia appears to be failing, too, Ms. Aydintasbas said.

The government annoyed NATO and European allies, she said, by buying the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft system “with much fanfare,

with much talk from the government of Turkish independence.”

“But now,” she said, “when push comes to shove, Turkey needs Western support.”

The footsie with Moscow has done little to stop Russia and Syria’s brutal advance in Idlib. “These are huge blunders that even the man and woman on the street can see,” Ms. Aydintasbas said.

Robin Niblett, the director of Chatham House, a research institution in London, said the use of non-Syrian refugees to try to pressure the Europeans “just feeds into all the cynicism about Turkey.”

“This broader flow of economic migrants just reminds everyone in Europe that you need to fix it,” he said.

But Mr. Niblett also criticized the Europeans for their “active absence from the Syrian conflict, the lack of strategic thinking and involvement.”

He said there seemed to be a quiet European hope that Russia and Mr. Assad would simply finish the job in Syria, no matter how ugly it might get, given that Idlib is also the last refuge for a sizable contingent of Al Qaeda as well as other Islamist opponents to Mr. Assad.

The same may hold for Libya, where France, for example, supports the strongman Khalifa Hifter along with Russia, while Turkey supports the weak U.N.-backed government.

In a sense, Mr. Niblett said, there is the beginning of a more realist European foreign policy, which will continue to pay off Mr. Erdogan to avoid a new wave of refugees.

“But of course you cannot build a formal foreign policy like that and get any support from European parliaments, because it goes against all Europe stands for in its values,” Mr. Niblett said.



Syrian refugees arriving in Lesbos in 2015. Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

The New York Times

By Farnaz Fassihi & David D. Kirkpatrick
March 5, 2020

Iran's Coronavirus Response: Pride, Paranoia, Secrecy, Chaos

Iranian leaders once predicted the coronavirus epidemic ravaging China would not affect their country. Now Iran has among the most coronavirus deaths outside China, and Iranian medical workers have been told to keep quiet.

Nearly three dozen Iranian government officials and members of parliament are infected and a senior adviser to the supreme leader has died.

The Health Ministry has proposed sending 300,000 militia members door-to-door on a desperate mission to sanitize homes. The top prosecutor has warned that anyone hoarding face masks and other public health equipment risks the death penalty.

Iran's leaders confidently predicted just two weeks ago that the coronavirus contagion ravaging China would not be a problem in their country. They even bragged of exporting face masks to their Chinese trading partners.

Now Iran is battered by coronavirus infections that have killed 77 people, among the most outside of China, officials said Tuesday. But instead of receiving government help, overwhelmed doctors and nurses say they have been warned by security forces to keep quiet. And some officials say Tehran's hierarchy is understating the true extent of the outbreak — probably, experts contend, because it will be viewed as a failure that enemies will exploit.

As the world wrestles with the spread of the coronavirus, the epidemic in Iran is a lesson in what happens when a secretive state with limited resources tries to play down an outbreak, and then finds it very difficult to contain.

The authorities seem as worried about controlling information as they are about controlling the virus, according to telephone in-



An Iranian medic treating a patient infected with coronavirus at a hospital in Tehran on Sunday. Credit...Koosha Mahshid Falahi/Mizan News Agency, via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

terviews and text messages with more than a half dozen Iranian medical workers.

Several said security agents stationed in each hospital had forbidden staff members from disclosing any information about shortages, patients or fatalities related to the coronavirus.

A nurse in a northwest Iranian city sent a private message to her family — later shared with The New York Times — describ-

ing a letter from the security service warning that sharing information about infected patients constitutes a “threat to national security” and “public fear mongering.” Such offenses “will be swiftly dealt with by a disciplinary committee,” the nurse said the letter had warned.

The secrecy and paranoia, doctors and other experts say, reflects what they call a counterproductive focus on Iran's public image and prestige



A health inspector checking temperatures outside a mall in Tehran on Tuesday. Credit... Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

that appears to be damaging public trust and hindering more practical steps at containment.

A prominent pathologist in Tehran said laboratory staff members testing for the coronavirus were told that they had been threatened with interrogation and arrest if they provided information to the news media.

“Disgraceful,” the pathologist said in a telephone interview. “By turning this into a national security issue, they are putting more pressure and stress on doctors and medical teams and creating an environment of chaos and fear.”

All spoke on condition of anonymity because of the threats.

In northern Iran's Golestan Province — where Iran has acknowledged about two dozen infections — the top health official railed in a news conference on Sunday about his frustration with Tehran's refusal to acknowledge the extent of the epidemic.

“We were screaming at the health ministry that we have 594 corona patients but the ministry was telling us since you don't have positive test results we won't give you equipment you need,” the official, Dr. Abdulreza Fazel, complained. “They kept saying, ‘wait, wait, wait,’ and then suddenly they announce you are an epicenter.”

“We've known from day one we are an epicenter,” Mr. Fazel said.

The virus, which first appeared in China in late 2019, has struck Iran at a moment of particular vulnerability for its leadership.

Iran's economy has been hobbled by American sanctions. Its security forces have struggled to repress a wave of public protests. Its military has reeled from the assassination of a revered Iranian military commander by an American drone. Domestic credibility of the authorities may have reached a new low with the begrudging admission after days of denials that their own air defenses had mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet full of Iranian passengers.

"They are lurching from crisis to crisis and trying to Band-Aid each crisis," said Sanam Vakil, a researcher on Iran at Chatham House, a London-based research institute. "They underestimated the potential effect of the coronavirus."

Iranian health officials initially boasted of their public health prowess. They ridiculed quarantines as "archaic" and portrayed Iran as a global role model. President Hassan Rouhani suggested a week ago that by this past Saturday life would have returned to normal.

Instead, Iran on Tuesday acknowledged as many as 77 deaths from the virus and at least 2,300 cases of infection. But medical experts say the 77 deaths suggested that, based on the expected death rate, about 4,000 people are presumably infected.

The authorities also said Tuesday that they had temporarily freed 54,000 prisoners considered symptom-free, apparently in hopes of minimizing contagion in Iran's crowded penitentiaries. But it was unclear from the announcement how many prisoners had actually been tested, given the severe shortages of testing kits in the country.

Sign up to receive an email when we publish a new story about the **coronavirus outbreak**.

Because of those shortages, the reality is that no one can guess



Taxi drivers wore masks in Tehran. Credit... Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

how far the coronavirus has spread in Iran. One Canadian study projected a week ago that the true total of infections may have been more than 18,000, "and a week ago is eons when we are talking about an epidemic," said Isaac Bogoch, a Toronto doctor who was one of the authors.

The roster of current or former senior official sickened in the contagion includes a vice president, the deputy health minister and 23 members of parliament. On Monday, Iranian state media reported that at least one official had even died from the virus: Mohammad Mirmohammadi, 71, a member of the Expediency Council, which advises Iran's supreme leader.

It was unclear how recently the adviser had been in contact with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei, 80.

Embarrassed anew by the spread of the disease, the Iranian authorities have responded with a hodgepodge of contradictory measures mixing elements of a crackdown with attempts to save face.

The nation's top prosecutor has threatened to execute anyone who hoards face masks or other supplies — an acknowledgment of the problem.

The health minister, Saeed Namaki, on Sunday announced a plan to dispatch a force of 300,000 plainclothes Basij militiamen that would go house to house to screen residents and disinfect their homes.

Iranian doctors and politicians immediately criticized the plan, saying that untrained militiamen



A pharmacy in Tehran on Tuesday. At least 77 people have died in Iran from the virus, a total total second only to China. Credit. Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

were more likely to spread the virus than to contain it.

"The borders of mismanagement and ignorance are being rapidly redrawn by the health ministry," Dr. Omid Rezaie, a prominent oncologist in Tehran, wrote on Telegram, the social media channel. "I feel sorry for us because we are sitting in a sinking boat that you are managing."

The streets of Tehran, the capital, are deserted as panicky residents stick to their homes for fear of contagion. But in the holy city of Qom, the site of the first and most significant outbreak in Iran, mosques and shrines are still holding mass worship services for visiting pilgrims despite the Health Ministry's advice.

"Frankly, the unwillingness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to restrict large-scale visits to these shrines is criminal in the case of this illness," said Amir A. Afkhami, a medical doctor and historian at George Washington University who has studied the Iranian response to previous epidemics.

"The government is putting religious prestige and public image ahead of public safety," he said of the leadership's overall response. "It is unprecedented even in the annals of the Islamic Republic."

Dr. Mohsen Basiri, an Iranian physician now in Houston, said that in a conference call on Sunday about emergency supplies his colleagues in Iran had said that security agents forced doctors to fill out false certificates for deaths that appeared to be coronavirus, ascribing them instead to lung or heart failure in order to avoid acknowledging fatalities linked to the epidemic.

"They don't have the means, equipment, money, management or trust of the public to combat an epidemic of this scope," Dr. Basiri said.

At least two Iranian lawmakers have publicly raised similar

claims that the authorities are seeking to hide fatalities from the coronavirus by listing other causes on death certificates.

Gholamali Jaffarzadeh Imanabadi, a lawmaker from Gilan Province near the Caspian Sea, told the Iranian news media on Monday that more than 20 people in his constituency had died, hospitals had reached full capacity and the designated center for treatment of the virus was now turning away patients. In some cases, he also claimed, the local authorities had recorded an alternate cause of death for the victims.

“Based on the numbers, testimonies and proof that we have received, the number of dead and infected people is far higher than what is announced,” he complained, calling the official figures “a joke.”

“Our officials are not revealing the whole truth about the situation.”

Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, a lawmaker from Qom, raised similar complaints last week, saying in a Twitter posting that staff at two hospitals were falsifying death certificates to minimize the epidemic.

“The doctors at Kamkar and Foghani hospitals are writing that cause of death is respiratory failure,” Mr. Farahani wrote, “but they know very well that the deaths are happening in the coronavirus quarantine ward.”

A spokesman for the Health Ministry disputed those accusations, suggesting that any discrepancy between local estimates and the official numbers might reflect only a time lag during backup testing to confirm infections. The spokesman, Kianoush Jahanspour, said the ministry double-checks results before adding



Workers disinfecting subway trains in Tehran last week. Credit Ebrahim Noroozi / Associated Press

them to the official tally.

Others complained that sheer shortages of testing kits and other equipment may be contributing to an undercount. “There is no testing kit, disinfectants and preventive equipment available in our country that can match the rapid spread of this

disease,” Bahram Parsaei, a lawmaker from Shiraz, said in a Twitter posting on Sunday. “This is why reality is far more than the official numbers.”

Iran has prided itself for decades on the strength of the public health system, said Dr. Afkhami, the author of a book about Iran’s

past response to epidemics. As recently as 2008, he said, Iran had acted effectively to avert a cholera epidemic from neighboring countries, partly by banning the sale of fresh vegetables and street foods in certain areas.

This time, though, Iran’s health authorities appeared to have let their guard down, he said.



The streets of Tehran are mostly deserted as panicky residents stick to their homes for fear of contagion. Credit Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

Reliant on China as its most essential trading partner in the face of the American sanctions, Iran was slow to restrict travel to and from the country after the first reports of the breakout in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December.

Then Tehran boasted of having sent supplies of domestically produced hospital masks to China, depleting Iranian supplies as other countries were quietly stockpiling their own. Now, Dr. Afkhami said, “its shortage of face masks is self-inflicted.”



Frédéric Loire
le 5 mars 2020

« Nous avons un devoir moral envers les Kurdes »

De retour de Syrie, le député fédéral humaniste Georges Dallemagne demande que la Belgique s'engage aux côtés des Kurdes pour solutionner les problèmes que posent notamment le procès des combattants étrangers de Daech et le rapatriement de leurs familles.



Le député fédéral cdHa a notamment rencontré des djihadistes belges emprisonnés lors de son récent voyage. | © Georges Dallemagne dans le camp de Al-Hol où vivent 68 000 personnes dont de nombreuses femmes radicalisées.

Georges Dallemagne est député fédéral cdH. Très en pointe sur les questions internationales et de sécurité, il voyage depuis plusieurs années en Irak et en Syrie malgré les risques. *Paris Match* l'a récemment accompagné au Rojava, la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan syrien où il est parti se rendre compte de la situation dans cette partie du monde dévastée par neuf années de guerre.

Georges Dallemagne au micro de Paris Match Belgique

Il y a notamment rencontré des djihadistes belges emprisonnés, ainsi que des femmes et des enfants de combattants de Daech installés dans les camps gérés par les Kurdes. Sur place, nous l'avons interrogé au sujet du sort à réserver à ces ressortissants belges. Que pense-t-il de la nouvelle stratégie

des autorités du Rojava qui s'apprêtent à juger elles-mêmes les 3000 terroristes étrangers qu'elles détiennent ? Est-il favorable au rapatriement des enfants sans leurs mères ? Quel est son regard sur le fait que la Belgique et, plus généralement, les pays européens tournent le dos aux Kurdes de Syrie qui ont pourtant été leurs meilleurs alliés dans la lutte contre l'État islamique et qui ont pour ça payé le prix

du sang ?

« Il est évident que nous avons un devoir moral envers les Kurdes qui se sont battus pour leur sécurité, mais aussi pour la nôtre », répond Georges Dallemagne. « Des ressortissants belges sont venus chez eux répandre la terreur, décapiter, torturer, et dès lors nous avons le devoir moral de ne pas les laisser seuls face à tous ces défis ».



By Karwan Faidhi Dri
05-03-2020

Assad: Kurdish issue in Syria is 'illusive and a lie'

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Syrian President Bashar al-Assad claimed Thursday that the “Kurdish issue” does not exist in his country, calling it “illusive and a lie”. He also claimed that Kurds living in northern areas are originally from Turkey.

“Regarding the so-called ‘Kurdish issue’, there is nothing called a ‘Kurdish issue’ in Syria for a simple reason: Kurds have been living in Syria throughout history but some [Kurdish] groups who live the north came [to Syria] during the last century due to Turkish [government] oppression,” Assad told [Rossiya-24](#) in an interview aired on Thursday.

“We hosted them in Syria. Kurds, Armenians, and other different groups in Syria and there have been no problems... Why should there be an issue with Kurds?” he said.

“They took citizenship in Syria although they were originally not Syrians. Therefore, we are always positive towards the subject of Kurds. The so-called ‘Kurdish issue’ is not true but illusive and a lie,” he added.

Kurds in Syria were politically and culturally marginalized for decades. However, the eruption of civil war in 2011 gave the Kurds an opportunity to declare a self-governed autonomous region in the north and expand it eastward for the first time in Syrian history.

The Kurdish-controlled region is now called the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), traditionally known by Kurds as Rojava. It is dominated by Democratic Union Party (PYD) which was founded in 2003 in Syria.

The PYD is seen by Damascus and Ankara as the Syrian offshoot



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad speaks during an interview with Rossiya TV in Damascus, March 5, 2020. Photo: SANA

of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has been fighting the Turkish state for decades.

Although Assad refers to the group as “separatists”, his father Hafez used to provide the PKK with military and logistical support.

“The problem is with those groups who began pursuing separatist ambitions decades ago, especially in the early 80s,” Assad said

A 1996 report by the [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) stated: “In 1962, an exceptional census stripped some 120,000 Syrian Kurds – 20 percent of the Syrian Kurdish population – of their Syrian citizenship. By many accounts, the special census was carried out in an arbitrary manner.”

“Brothers from the same family, born in the same Syrian village, were classified differently. Fathers became foreigners while their sons remained citizens. The number of stateless Kurds grew with time as descendants of those who

lost citizenship in 1962 multiplied; as a result, their number is now estimated at 300,000,” it added.

In the early months of the 2011 uprising, Assad asked a committee to examine the 1962 census and [granted citizenship](#) to between 150,000 and 300,000 Kurds, mostly from Hasaka province in northeast Syria.

The NES and its armed wing, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), enjoy strong relations with the US-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State group (ISIS). The SDF is dominated by the People’s Protection Units (YPG) – the military arm of the PYD.

However, the NES has also maintained contact with Damascus, and Kurdish forces have largely avoided getting embroiled in the anti-regime movement.

The Kurds have held multiple meetings with Syrian government officials but have failed to reach an agreement on the political future of the Kurdish-held areas.

After Turkey invaded northeast Syria in October 2019, the Kurds struck a deal with the Assad government to allow regime forces and Russian military police to secure Syria’s northern border.

Assad has long said he intends to retake every inch of Syria from rebel forces, including Rojava.

“We are in contact with Kurdish political groups who are present in the northern areas in Syria,” Assad said in his interview with Russian state media, without specifying which groups.

“However, the problem is that some of these groups, not all of them, are controlled by the US authorities.”

“We do not mean all Kurds, because a great number of Kurds are from the tribal and national groups in Syria who support the government. These groups have no voice and a small number who allied with Americans are dominant in the area,” he said.

The regime will not strike a deal with the SDF and Kurdish authorities unless they renounce US support, oppose Turkish involvement in Syria, and pledge allegiance to the Syrian government.

“We cannot reach a conclusion in any of our talks with them, although we have held them a thousand times, unless they announce a clear national position and be against the US and invasion, and against Turkey as well because they are invaders as well,” Assad added.

« Russie, Iran et Turquie auront beau multiplier les accolades au sommet, elles n'ont pas les mêmes desseins sur l'avenir de la Syrie »

Les guerres de Syrie ne sont pas terminées, loin de là, et le drame humanitaire à Idlib est le symbole des visions opposées sur la région.

Les guerres de Syrie ne sont pas terminées, loin de là. Imaginer un retour à la « normale », un Bachar Al-Assad régnant « comme avant » – avant mars 2011, début de l'insurrection syrienne – sur un pays gentiment policé par trois armées étrangères est une aimable vue de l'esprit. Puissances occupantes, la Russie, l'Iran et la Turquie auront beau multiplier accolades au sommet et déclarations communes, elles buteront toujours sur cette réalité : elles n'ont pas les mêmes desseins sur l'avenir du pays – pas du tout.

En témoigne, le dernier en date des épisodes du long drame syrien, la bataille d'Idlib, qui voit, depuis la semaine dernière, l'armée turque aux prises avec celle de Damas et avec la chasse aérienne russe. Intervenant en Syrie depuis 2015 à la demande de Bachar Al-Assad, la Russie veut en finir avec la guerre. Et sonner la victoire.

Ultime obstacle : faire tomber Idlib et son massif du nord-ouest syrien qui abrite les restes – 20 000 combattants – d'une insurrection armée, largement islamiste, en bout de course. Depuis deux mois déjà, l'aviation russe et celle de Damas pilonnent la région. Mais Recep Tayyip Erdogan, « l'ami » russe de Vladimir Poutine, son partenaire local, avait prévenu : il était contre cette opération.

Le président turc avait deux raisons. D'une part, ces derniers insurgés arabes syriens sont souvent des protégés d'Ankara. D'autre part, les combats al-

laient faire fuir la population civile de l'Idlib en direction de la frontière avec la Turquie – pays qui abrite déjà plus de trois millions de réfugiés syriens. Erdogan ne voulait pas d'un surcroît de déplacés (ce que l'Europe devrait comprendre). Moscou n'en a pas tenu compte. Tout s'est passé comme l'avait prédit le président turc : 900 000 Syriens, fuyant le blitz russe, c'est-à-dire toute la misère du ciel, se pressent aujourd'hui le long d'une frontière turque hermétiquement fermée par Ankara.

La question « Bachar »

Les responsables de cet exode de proportion biblique, que l'ONU qualifie de plus grand drame humanitaire du moment, sont Bachar Al-Assad et Vladimir Poutine. Ce qui est à l'œuvre ici, c'est la « doctrine Grozny » – du nom de la capitale tchétchène que l'aviation russe a rasée en 1994. On bombarde massivement – comme les Occidentaux l'ont fait à Mossoul et à Rakka, les deux capitales de l'organisation Etat islamique – mais avec une spécificité : on vise hôpitaux, dispensaires, marchés publics etc., bref tout ce qui pousse la population à fuir.

Elle fuit vers la Turquie, pas vers les régions syriennes contrôlées par le régime. Elle fuit Bachar Al-Assad, ce qui est sans doute un point-clé dans cette histoire. Pas plus les réfugiés syriens de Jordanie (plus d'un demi-million) que ceux qui sont au Liban (plus d'un million), les déplacés d'Idlib n'entendent vivre à nouveau sous la dictature du régime de

Damas. Cela limite singulièrement les chances d'un retour à la « normale » en Syrie à la suite d'une « victoire » des forces étrangères, russes et iraniennes, au service du régime. La question « Bachar » est sans doute au cœur de celle des réfugiés syriens.

Cela n'enlève rien au cynisme d'Erdogan qui, plus isolé que jamais, sollicite l'aide de l'Europe en se servant de « ses » réfugiés, ceux qu'il a accueillis en Turquie. Laissant croire à certains que la frontière avec la Grèce était ouverte, le président turc a cruellement envoyé des familles entières se heurter aux gardes-frontières grecs. Episode sinistre.

Poutine, qui devait rencontrer Erdogan jeudi 5 mars à Moscou, trouvera sans doute avec lui un arrangement provisoire au moins sur la Syrie sinon sur la Libye – où Ankara et Moscou sont aussi en conflit. Le président russe rêve d'imposer le fait accompli d'une Syrie toujours à la botte de Bachar Al-Assad – en dépit de centaines de milliers de morts – où Moscou retrouverait la tutelle exercée du temps de l'Union soviétique, conservant ainsi, en point d'appui arabe, les bases militaires qu'elle y a déployées. Ce serait trop simple.

Outre qu'il lui faut amadouer la Turquie, qui occupe une partie de la Syrie, le Kremlin doit s'assurer la bonne volonté de l'Iran. Mais la République islamique – qui a sauvé le régime Al-Assad, auquel elle est liée par un accord de défense – peut torpiller l'ambition

russe en Syrie. Ce pays est pour Téhéran l'un de ses points d'ancrage dans le monde arabe, assurant une continuité territoriale avec ses alliés chiites d'Irak et ceux du Liban : les armes à destination du Hezbollah libanais, le protégé modèle de l'Iran, passent par la Syrie.

Si l'Iran se contentait de la protection de Bachar Al-Assad, tout irait bien. Ce n'est pas le cas. « Nous ne sommes pas des joueurs comme les autres » sur la scène internationale, dit au Financial Times le général iranien Hossein Dehghan ; nous sommes des révolutionnaires. » Dehghan, qui incarne la composante radicale du régime iranien, affirme que Téhéran va rester en Syrie, continuer à armer le Hezbollah et les milices chiites d'Irak et développer son arsenal de missiles (cependant que l'ONU accuse l'Iran d'accroître son stock d'uranium enrichi).

En Syrie, l'Iran veut des bases militaires permanentes, ce à quoi Israël entend s'opposer par la force. En perspective, cela veut dire une guerre israélienne continue contre le Hezbollah et l'Iran sur le territoire de la Syrie – risque majeur qui peut mettre la Russie dans une situation impossible et ruiner la politique syrienne de Poutine.

Trois ex-empires – russe, perse et ottoman – au chevet d'un grand malade arabe, mais avec des potions différentes et des visions opposées sur la région, cela n'annonce ni la fin de la guerre en Syrie ni celle du drame des réfugiés.

Syrian President calls on Kurdish groups to stop cooperating with US: video

Syrain President Bashar al-Assad called on the Kurdish groups cooperating with the US troops in Syria to stand against the occupation, in an interview with 'Russia 24 TV,' in Damascus, Thursday.

The Syrian president said that the government is maintaining "contact with the Kurdish political groups" in northern Syria, and considered the issue to be "small groups acting with the Americans."

"You cannot stand with the police and the thief at the same time, this is impossible. So, we cannot reach results in any dialogue with them, even if we were to meet thousands of times, unless they take a clear position, a patriotic position, to be against



the Americans, against occupation, and against the Turks because they are occupiers too," stressed Assad.

Talking about Turkish military activity in Idlib area, Assad said that "[Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan [is] using all his

power, of course with an order from the United States, no doubt, because the liberation of Idlib means the liberation of the northeastern area, as I have said previously, Idlib is considered [by the Turkish state], militarily speaking, a police station."

"Of course it is possible to repair the relations with Turkey, however, we cannot achieve this unless Erdogan stops supporting terrorists, once he stops supporting them, the relationship will be restored, because there is no animosity between the two nations, the animosity started due to political issues connected to personal interests," concluded the Syrian leader.



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
March 06-2020

Assad: Syria will not deal with Kurds if they work with 'US occupiers'

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told Russian media on Thursday that Kurdish-led groups in the nation's northern regions cannot work with the United States while at the same time trying to reach an agreement with Damascus.

"The problem right now is dealing with the Americans. The Americans are occupiers; they occupied our lands. The Americans are thieves stealing our oil. You cannot play both sides: between those who protect the law and those who break it," he said in an interview with Russia 24.

The Turkish army in early October attacked areas in northern Syria under SDF control. As a result, local Kurdish-led authorities are in a much weaker position since being forced to make a deal with the Syrian government to deploy



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad delivers a speech at a meeting of the local council leaders, Damascus, Feb. 17, 2019. (Photo: AFP/Syrian Presidency)

national forces to protect the border against Turkish and Turkish-backed forces along the northern border.

Turkey's operation came within days of US President Donald Trump's decision

to withdraw US troops from Syria. The White House then agreed in late October to leave between 500 to 600 American forces in Syria to protect oilfields in the provinces of Hasakah and Deir al-Zor.

"You cannot stand with the police [Damascus] and the thief [USA] at the same time, this is impossible. You are either with the police or the thief," continued Assad.

"So, we cannot reach results in any dialogue with them, even if we were to meet thousands of times, unless they take a clear position, a patriotic position: to be against the Americans, against occupation, and against the Turks because they, too, are occupiers."

"Quite simply, this is our demand. This is a national position and, as a government, we are responsible for the constitution and for our national interests."

He said there could only be discussions about the place of Kurdish-led factions in Syria's future if they abandon their

current cooperation with the US.

“This is a Syrian-Syrian dialogue. However, the government in Syria does not own the constitution; the people own the constitution and therefore they are the ones who can change the constitution.”

In recent months, a Kurdish-led delegation has been meeting with Damascus as part of a Russian initiative on the future of northeastern Syria. So far, however, no demonstrable progress has been achieved, despite some claims to the contrary.

The co-chair of the Kurdish-backed

Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), Amina Omar, said on Feb. 19 that negotiations with the Syrian government did not result in any meaningful agreement, reported North Press.

The recent statement again suggests that there is not much hope for a dialogue between the Syrian Kurds and Damascus, given current circumstances.

Also, the Syrian president in his interview said that ethnic Kurds are not originally native to Syria and instead only arrived while fleeing Turkish oppression, remarking “There is no such [Kurdish] cause in Syria for a simple reason.”

Assad also accused the Kurds of not “firing a single bullet” when the Turkish army invaded northern Syria, agreeing instead to withdraw from areas now occupied by Ankara in a deal with the US.

He said that, as a result, he was ruling out a deal between Damascus and Kurdish groups working jointly in Idlib against the Turkish army unless the Kurds would send “fighters so that together we can defend our land.”

“We want to agree on the actions. In their statements, they have said that they are against the Turks, but they are not doing anything against them at all.

They are neutral.”

In a March 2 statement on Idlib, the SDC suggested that Damascus instead is responsible for the Syrian crisis due to adopting a military solution to the Syrian civil war that started in 2011.

Therefore, the group called on Damascus to work in cooperation with the Kurds to reach a resolution, “Not only in standing against Turkish aggression and liberating occupied lands, but also in building up and reconstructing a new Syrian state.”

Editing by John J. Catherine



Fawaz Hussain
Publié le 06/03/2020

Fawaz Hussain : "Le drame syrien s'invite avec force dans mon écriture et se confond avec le malheur kurde"

Je suis né en Syrie, dans une famille kurde, en 1953. Pour ma scolarité, mes parents analphabètes ont préféré m'envoyer dans une école élémentaire catholique et privée. Il faut dire que les chrétiens, et en particulier les commerçants, avaient une excellente réputation, la vie leur souriait de toutes ses dents. Dans cette petite ville d'Amouda située au Nord-Est du pays, nous avions, nous les Kurdes, tout intérêt à copier sur eux, sauf pour la religion, il va de soi.

Chaque été, mollah Ahmad, mon maître enturbanné de l'école coranique, nous répétait que l'islam nous garantissait la clé du paradis, et c'était rubis sur l'ongle ! La foi de Mahomet, le sceau de la prophétie, nous mettait à l'abri des terribles flammes de l'enfer, ce que de toute évidence nous enviaient les juifs et les chrétiens !

Seconde naissance

En Mésopotamie, sur nos terres entre le Tigre et l'Euphrate, j'ai découvert le français en même temps que l'arabe à l'école. On pouvait apprendre toutes les langues, même le martien s'il

existait, mais le kurde que je parlais avec mes frères et sœurs et les enfants du quartier était interdit. J'ai grandi avec cette idée que ma langue maternelle était celle des paysans bouseux, des exclus, des damnés de la terre. Plus tard, à Alep et à Damas, on me martelait le cerveau que je devrais m'en débarrasser pour mon bien car l'Avenir avec un grand A se construisait en arabe. Il se faisait dans la langue officielle, nationale et obligatoire du pays et de la pensée unique du parti Baas panarabe et chauvin.

Après mon bac, obtenu à Amouda, et une licence de littérature française à l'université d'Alep, j'ai atterri à l'aéroport

Charles-de-Gaulle le 28 août 1978. Ce jour-là constitue pour moi une seconde naissance, plutôt l'unique, la vraie, car j'allais enfin vivre, pardi ! En 1988, quand j'ai terminé mes études supérieures à la Sorbonne, il me fallait une langue : l'écrivain n'en pouvait plus de sommeiller en moi. Il voulait dire clairement et sans crainte ce qu'il avait jusque-là pensé tout bas. D'emblée, j'excluais l'arabe qui en bannissant ma langue maternelle l'avait mise en piteux état. Mon choix ne traîna pas, et je ne tardai pas, à l'instar d'Eugène de Rastignac, à lancer mon : "*A nous deux Paris !*", mais à la face de la ville et du monde, urbi et orbi.

chanter la beauté du monde

En 2020, et après avoir écrit une dizaine de romans en français et réalisé autant de traductions en kurde, je me rends compte que mes trois langues ont fait la paix entre elles et qu'elles vivent en une belle entente cordiale. M'identifiant à Kateb Yacine, l'auteur berbère de Nedjma, je considère depuis longtemps l'arabe comme un "butin de guerre", une valeur ajoutée, une richesse de plus.

En voulant écrire, j'aspirais tout bonnement à exprimer mon étonnement devant les petites choses du quotidien, je voulais chanter la beauté du monde. Sans en être vraiment surpris, je découvre que le drame kurde sillonne mon écriture de long en large. Dans tout ce que j'entreprends, mes racines de poussière et de sang dénoncent la supercherie des autorités dominantes, l'hégémonie turque, arabe et iranienne. En témoignant de mon désarroi devant l'hystérie généralisée qui s'empare du monde, je deviens un écrivain engagé. Mon écriture EST mon acte de résistance, mon refus du temps des assassins.



Depuis 2011, le drame syrien s'invite avec force dans mon écriture et se confond avec le malheur kurde

On me dit souvent que c'est étonnant, car tous mes livres comportent des extraits de contes. Cela relève sans doute de mon attachement à mes origines, de mon pacte de fidélité envers une espèce, kurde, en voie de disparition. Les légendes et les contes me fascinent comme si la réalité était boîteuse et qu'elle fût incapable d'avancer sans ses deux béquilles. Enfant, et avant que la télévision fasse son apparition chez ma grand-mère maternelle récemment installée à Amouda, j'attendais impatiemment l'arrivée des çîrokbêj et des dengbêj.

Ces conteurs et troubadours dépositaires d'une langue et d'une littérature kurdes d'une immense beauté me faisaient voyager grâce à la magie du Verbe. Je suis donc originaire de cette partie du monde saturée de poussière, calcinée jusqu'aux entrailles par un soleil omniprê-

sent, mais également bercée par les contes et les épopées les plus extraordinaires. On me parle également d'un autre trait important de mon univers littéraire, de la poésie qui le traverse. En fait, j'ai besoin de ces doses poétiques pour descendre au plus profond de l'âme humaine. Et puis, j'ai souvent recours à l'humour, à la dérision qui déshabille la fausse vertu, dévoile les petites choses chez les grands. Voilà quelques aspects de mon écriture et les marques de fabrique qui font de moi un écrivain kurde d'expression française.

Le drame syrien

Depuis 2011, le drame syrien s'invite avec force dans mon écriture et se confond avec le malheur kurde. Par la faute des islamistes qui ont détourné les revendications du peuple, les villes retournent dans le giron de Damas. Il y a eu Deraa, Homs, Hama, Ghouta, Alep-Est, Raqqa et bientôt ce sera le tour d'Idlib. Quant au rêve kurde d'édifier des cantons démocratiques et prospères à la suisse, il est déjà

mort et enterré. Après Idlib, le Rojava, le Nord-Est, tombera sans la moindre résistance avec ses champs de blé, ses gisements de pétrole et ses populations affamées. Une partie des milices kurdes intégrera les rangs de l'armée loyaliste. Les autres, venus de partout du Kurdistan, retourneront paître de nouvelles utopies dans les montagnes de Qandil au Kurdistan irakien.

En Syrie, dans les années à venir, les armes vont sans doute se taire, mais le pays n'aura pas la paix

Depuis une quinzaine de jours, la ville de Hassaké, au nord-est de Syrie, n'a plus d'eau courante. Ma sœur qui y habite vient de le me l'annoncer : Erdogan a fermé les vannes. Depuis l'opération du "Bouclier du printemps", la guerre du président turc contre son voisin du sud se veut totale. Erdogan empêche les cours d'eau qui prennent naissance dans son pays de franchir la frontière pour se jeter naturellement tout au sud dans

le Golfe persique. S'il le pouvait, il détournerait le Tigre et l'Euphrate aussi, en tout cas, cela fait partie de ses interminables menaces. En attendant, il ferme des vannes et en ouvre d'autres : il menace l'Europe de la faire disparaître sous un océan de réfugiés opprimés et loqueteux. Quant à l'Otan, ménageant la chèvre et le chou, elle est contente d'avoir un allié musulman si ubuesque.

En Syrie, dans les années à venir, les armes vont sans doute se taire, mais le pays n'aura pas la paix. Les plaies resteront béantes, plus étendues que la superficie de la patrie. Le drame syrien et le malheur kurde se prolongeront encore, ils ne diront jamais leurs derniers maux.

Fawaz Hussain

Auteur de plusieurs romans, dont Les Sables de Mésopotamie (Points-Seuil, 2016), Le Syrien du septième étage (Le Serpent à plumes 2018) et Le Kurde qui regardait passer les nuages (Zinédi, 2019). Il habite dans le XXème arrondissement de Paris et se consacre à l'écriture.



06-03-2020
Karwan Faidhi Dri

Rudaw reporter in Turkey officially charged with terror-related offences

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - A Turkish court has charged a Rudaw reporter with allegedly "propagating for a terrorist organization" after detaining him last week while covering the migrant crisis unfolding near Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria.

Rawin Sterk and his cameraman, Mehmet Sirin Akgun, as well as Mesopotamian News Agency (Mezopotamya Ajansi) correspondents Idris Sayilgan and Naci Kaya were [detained](#) on Saturday in Edirne province on the grounds of "filming in a military field."

Akgun was released after four days of detention but Sterk's detention was extended, and he was moved from Edirne to Ankara.

Sterk attended a hearing on Friday in Ankara where he was officially charged with "propagating for a terrorist organization," referring to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - an armed Kurdish group which struggles for Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey. Ankara and its NATO allies consider the PKK as a terrorist organization. The court used recent social

media posts on the ongoing clashes between Turkish forces and Syrian regime forces in Idlib as evidence in the Friday hearing.

"The number of the missing [Turkish] soldiers in Idlib is 21 so far," read one tweet shown in court.

In his defense, Sterk said that his tweet about Idlib relied on an international news outlet, defying the claims he engaged in propaganda.

His lawyer has seven days to appeal the decision. If the

court decides to accept the appeal, Sterk will be released but his trial will continue until his second hearing next month when the court will either acquit him or continue his trial.

On February 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lifted the border restrictions he had agreed with European powers in 2016. Hundreds of migrants and refugees from across the Middle East and Central Asia have made a break for Turkey's borders with Europe in recent days.

Northeast Syrian parties condemn Assad's Kurdish policies

Kurdish and Arab majority parties based in northeast Syria have said in a statement that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's mistaken analysis of the situation in northeast Syria threatened Syria's unity, news agency ANHA reported on Friday.

Assad on Thursday had said there was no Kurdish issue in Syria, calling the matter "illusory and a lie," as relayed by news site Rudaw.

"There is nothing called a 'Kurdish issue' in Syria for a simple reason: Kurds have been living in Syria throughout history but some [Kurdish] groups who live the north came [to Syria] during the last century due to Turkish [government] oppression," Assad was quoted by Rudaw as saying.

"The Syrian government's insistence on an antiquated mentality is not in the interest of the peoples," the statement by northeast Syrian parties said.

In the "9 years of death, pillaging and migration in Syria," Assad has



not changed his narrative, the statement said. "The mentality that has not learned any lessons from so many deaths has deepened the issue, where it should have provided a response to the pains of the Syrian people."

Arabs, Kurds, Syrians and other minorities in northeast Syria had been living in the same lands before the borders of the Syrian state were drawn, the statement said. "When these peoples were abandoned at the hand of dark terrorist forces by the Syrian regime, they defended their dignity and their lands in a national stance."

Syria had stripped tens of thousands of Kurds of their citizenship in

the 1960's, claiming they had been illegal migrants from neighbouring countries including Turkey.

Peace and trust would remain impossible in Syria "until a democratic Syria is established and the rights of every individual living in Syria are secured," the statement said, calling for the widespread implementation of a direct democracy-based autonomous administration model created in the northeast under the umbrella of the majority-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Council.

Armed forces under the autonomous administration were established to "fight terrorism on Syrian lands, and not the Syrian state," as "the regime was no

longer able to defend its own lands," the statement said.

The Syrian government approaches the Kurdish issue in agreement with Turkey, and "acts according to the plans of those who wish to pillage our country's lands, and continuously threaten massacres and the fracturing of the country, like (Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," it said.

Syrian government forces had, for the majority of the decade-long conflict, refrained from direct confrontation in Syria's northeast, majority-Kurdish region as they focused on fighting ISIS and other jihadist groups elsewhere in the country. They reached a limited agreement with the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Council, in the aftermath of Turkey's October incursion into the area, and reinstated the Syrian national army along the border with Turkey.

Le Monde Par Marie Jégo et Benoît Vitkine
le 07 mars 2020

Syrie : Poutine et Erdogan s'entendent sur un fragile cessez-le-feu à Idlib

Convenu la veille au Kremlin entre les deux chefs d'Etat, l'accord est entré en vigueur, vendredi, dans la dernière poche de la rébellion dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie.

L'accord de cessez-le-feu conclu par les présidents russe, Vladimir Poutine, et turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, est entré en vigueur, vendredi 6 mars, dans la province d'Idlib, la dernière poche de la rébellion au nord-ouest de la Syrie. Convenu la veille au Kremlin

entre les deux chefs d'Etat, l'accord, un texte en trois points, apparaît aussi minimaliste que précaire. La durée des discussions – six heures – témoigne de la difficulté à obtenir un résultat.

L'accord prévoit la création d'un

couloir de sécurité de 12 kilomètres de large (6 kilomètres de part et d'autre) le long de la route stratégique M4 qui relie Lattaquié au nord de la Syrie. Cette bande de terre, censée être débarrassée des rebelles qui la contrôlent en grande partie, sera sillonnée par des pa-

trouilles conjointes russo-turques à partir du 15 mars. De fait, les positions de Damas sont consolidées et les rebelles perdent du terrain.

Il est stipulé en termes vagues que le retour des réfugiés doit être facilité dans la mesure du

possible ainsi que l'accès à l'aide humanitaire. Les deux parties réaffirment par ailleurs leur attachement à l'intégrité territoriale de la Syrie.

Le texte n'est qu'une ébauche puisque les paramètres du fonctionnement du corridor de sécurité seront définis d'ici à une semaine par les ministres de la défense des deux pays. « Ces avancées, même minimales, sont dures à avaler pour la partie turque, estime Maxime Soutchkov, expert pour le Moyen-Orient au Conseil russe pour les affaires internationales. Le plus significatif, c'est que le sort de l'autoroute M5 n'est pas mentionné du tout. Cela peut vouloir dire que la Turquie accepte sa perte. »

Vulnérabilité des soldats turcs

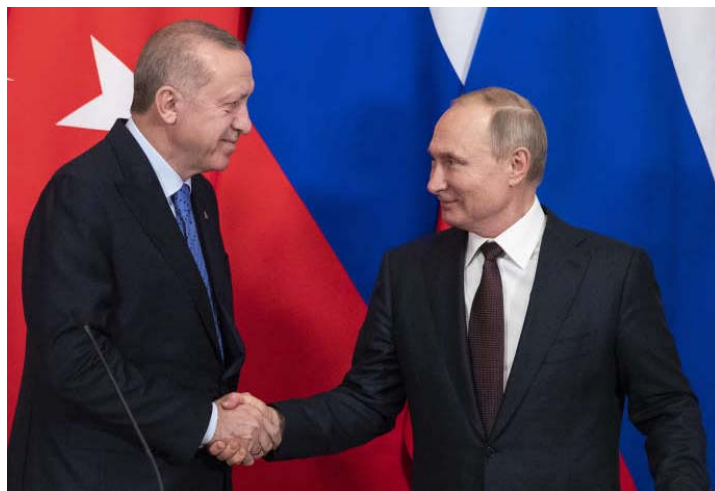
L'axe routier M5, qui relie Damas à Alep, la capitale commerciale du pays, est essentiel au régime pour consolider sa mainmise sur le pays. Signe de ce que le Kremlin entend fermement contrôler cette route, la police militaire russe a été déployée plus tôt début mars dans la ville stratégique de Saraqeb, assise à l'embranchement des deux autoroutes M4 et M5, pour parer à toute tentative turque de la reprendre.

L'accord est un revers pour le président Erdogan, qui voit ses principales revendications ignorées. Rien n'est dit du sort des postes d'observations turcs encerclés par le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, rien n'est prévu pour les réfugiés déplacés par les combats, enfin Damas conserve la possession des territoires nouvellement capturés alors qu'Ankara exigeait le recul des forces du régime.

Etant donné la vulnérabilité persistante de ses soldats à Idlib, laissés sans couverture aérienne, le numéro un turc est arrivé au Kremlin en position de faiblesse, obligé d'accepter

l'agenda russe. Pendant les discussions, les combats continuaient. Deux soldats turcs ont ainsi été tués jeudi par les forces de Damas, ce qui porte à 59 le nombre de militaires turcs morts sur le champ de bataille à Idlib.

Revenir au scénario d'une confrontation militaire était bien trop risqué. Le ministère russe de la défense a récemment mis



Le président russe, Vladimir Poutine, et le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, lors d'une conférence de presse à Moscou (Russie), le 5 mars. PAVEL GOLOVKIN / AP

en garde la partie turque, affirmant dans un communiqué que Moscou « ne peut garantir la sécurité de l'aviation turque dans le ciel syrien ». La Russie, dont la police militaire patrouille à Saraqeb, la ville verrou prise par la rébellion avec l'aide de l'armée turque puis reprise par Damas, a considérablement renforcé son dispositif militaire – défense aérienne et contre-mesures électroniques –, rendant plus difficile l'entrée en action des drones turcs.

Selon l'agence Reuters, la Russie a multiplié l'envoi de renforts dès le 28 février, soit au lendemain de la mort de 33 soldats turcs lors d'une frappe aérienne effectuée la nuit par des chasseurs russes au sud d'Idlib. Cet incident a suscité l'inquiétude à Moscou que la Turquie pourrait fermer le Bosphore aux navires de guerre russes et empêcher les avions de transport militaire

russes d'utiliser l'espace aérien turc.

En six jours, cinq navires de guerre russes ont été envoyés vers la Syrie, via le Bosphore. L'un d'entre eux est le *Orsk*, un navire de débarquement capable de transporter 20 chars, 50 camions ou 45 transports blindés et jusqu'à 400 soldats. Les autres –

datés turcs touchés n'était « pas connue ». Immédiatement après cet incident, Moscou avait offert un premier gage à Ankara en laissant à l'armée turque une fenêtre de tir de vingt-quatre heures durant laquelle les avions russes étaient restés au sol. Assez pour que la Turquie puisse venger ses « martyrs ». La perspective d'une escalade avec Ankara n'était pas non plus une option. Le partenariat noué est trop important pour le Kremlin, politiquement comme économiquement.

Malgré leur rivalité dans le dossier syrien, les deux pays ont accru leur coopération dans de nombreux domaines, notamment énergétiques. La livraison à la partie turque de systèmes de défense antiaérienne S-400 a même permis au Kremlin d'accentuer les divisions au sein de l'OTAN.

Toutefois, l'accord apparaît fragile. « Poutine ne s'est que partiellement extirpé du piège dans lequel il était tombé, note Alexandre Choumiline, directeur du Centre d'études sur le Moyen-Orient de l'Académie des sciences de Russie. La résolution immédiate, qui entérine les récents gains territoriaux de l'armée syrienne, lui est plutôt favorable, mais il n'y a rien pour la suite. Et le statu quo est difficilement tenable pour les deux parties... »

De fait, si M. Poutine et M. Erdogan ont tous deux insisté sur leur capacité à s'entendre malgré les divergences, le dirigeant turc a d'ores et déjà prévenu que son pays ripostera « de toutes ses forces » à toute attaque du régime syrien. L'accord de cessez-le-feu à Idlib, le quatorzième du genre, sera-t-il respecté ? « Je le vois comme temporaire, assure Maxime Soutchkov. Mais dans les circonstances actuelles, un deal durable était impossible. Les ambitions des parties sont trop éloignées et inconciliables. »

The New York Times

By Kamiar Alaei and Arash Alaei
March 6, 2020

How Iran Completely and Utterly Botched Its Response to the Coronavirus

We were doctors in the Iranian health system for years.

This is what happens when you make health policy subservient to politics.

Iran has one of the very best health care systems in the Middle East, a decentralized system with thousands of medical centers across the country that provide primary, secondary and tertiary care with an effective referral system. We worked as doctors in that system for years.

Yet at least [107 people in Iran have been killed](#) by the new coronavirus, the largest number of deaths outside of China. The dead include a senior adviser to the supreme leader. One of the country's vice presidents, 23 members of Parliament, the deputy health minister and several other senior government officials are among the 3,513 people officially confirmed to have been infected.

Lives could have been saved and the scale of the contagion contained if the Islamic Republic had not made health policy subservient to its politics. As the World Health Organization classified the outbreak a "public health emergency" at the end of January, we worried about Iranian authorities not being prepared and not choosing the right approach to battle the virus.

We helped expand H.I.V. prevention and care programs in Iran. The government of the early 2000s supported us, and the program to battle AIDS made great progress. In the fall of 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad replaced the reformist Mohammad Khatami as the president. Mr. Ahmadinejad was suspicious of Iranians working with foreign partners, and he insisted there were no gays in Iran. Soon, restrictions on our work increased.

In June 2008, we were arrested. After a very brief trial, we bro-



A municipal worker disinfecting a street sign in Tehran on Thursday. Credit...Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA, via Shutterstock

thers were sentenced to prison, for three years (Kamiar) and six years (Arash), for "communicating with an enemy government." After our release from prison, we moved to the United States, where Kamiar had earned a master's degree from Harvard.

Our experience made us worry about the Iranian response to health crises, especially given the sense of siege and volatility that has followed increased conflict with the United States, an economy devastated by sanctions, the brutal suppression of mass protests in November.

Iranian authorities showed no signs of being prepared to deal with a coronavirus outbreak and were dismissive of the danger it posed. On Jan 31, Iran's neighbor [Turkey canceled flights to China](#) and started screening foreign arrivals at its airports.

Hundreds of Chinese students and junior clerics study at the seminaries at Qum, which is the most important center of the theological study for Shiite Muslims from across the world and draws pilgrims to its shrines.

Iranian businessmen frequently travel to China. Hundreds of Chinese workers and engineers are employed across Iran. China is an important partner for Iran, and Tehran did not risk slighting Beijing. Flights between Iran and China continued. Iran [donated one million face masks](#) to China.

The first mention by the Iranian government of the disease's arrival in the country was a report of two deaths in Qum on Feb. 19. The first victim is believed to be an Iranian businessman who had traveled to Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus was first detected. A doctor in Qum is believed to be the se-

cond Iranian victim. They are feared to have been sick and infecting others, from their family members to friends and colleagues, for weeks before their deaths.

The contagion spread to all of Iran's 31 provinces. Pilgrims from several countries who had visited Qum were found to be infected. On Feb. 24, officials from the health ministry announced that there were 64 cases in the country and that 12 people had died from the outbreak. Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, a member of Parliament from Qum, contradicted the official accounts and told an Iranian news agency that [50 people in the city were already dead](#).

The official response was glaring denial of the magnitude of the crisis. Iraj Harirchi, the deputy minister of health, denied Mr. Farahani's allegation and

promised to resign if the death toll proved to be even one fourth of his claim. A day later, Mr. Harirchi himself [tested positive for the coronavirus](#), and is under quarantine.

By that time, the fourth week of February, it became evident that a disproportionate number of members of Parliament and senior government officials were infected. Iranian politicians and officials travel frequently between Tehran and Qum, and it is most likely that one of them contracted the virus in Qum and infected colleagues in Tehran, where the newly elected Parliament was in session.

Iranians have a culture of greeting each other by kissing the other person on the cheeks. Politicians often overdo it to show their closeness to power players. In this particular moment, the greeting could have transmitted the virus.

We learned of the officials being infected early on because Teh-

ran made the welfare of the elite a priority and moved them to the front of the line for testing.

Even doctors and medical staff members at the smaller government hospitals were not alerted to take precautions until after the number of cases started to increase rapidly. The results of a test of a nurse from a small village in [Geelan province](#) were communicated [a week after her death](#).

Iran reported the first deaths in Qum two days before the parliamentary elections. The trust in the government was low after its brutal suppression of the protests in November and its cover-up of the accidental shooting-down of a Ukrainian jetliner in the aftermath of Gen. Qassim Suleimani's assassination.

A high turnout in the elections would help improve the legitimacy of the government. Tehran seems to have suppressed information about the coronavirus because it did not want partici-

pation in the elections to be affected.

Although the hard-liners won the elections, voting was the lowest since 1979. The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, accused the country's enemies of exaggerating the threat of the coronavirus right before the elections to keep voters away from the polls.

Iran could have minimized the outbreak by moving swiftly to quarantine Qum, which is very crowded and heavily infected, but it did not. Some measures have now been taken. For instance, subway cars in Tehran have been disinfected, schools across the country are closed and Friday Prayer services are canceled in most provinces.

The authorities must immediately get relatives of all the infected and the deceased tested. They must put out truthful, transparent numbers and make assessments based on those numbers, enhance protections

for health care workers and target the most affected areas. Qum must be quarantined.

Western countries in collaboration with the World Health Organization and other international institutions must take the lead on global medical diplomacy and do more to provide testing kits to Iran. The United States must overcome its belligerent posture toward Iran, provide the medical and technical support that could save lives and ease the difficulties American and European companies face in supplying medicines and medical equipment to Iran.

The most important lesson of the coronavirus crisis in Iran is that health policy must never be politicized, especially in terms of emergency medical response.

Kamiar Alaei and Arash Alaei are Iranian health-policy experts and the co-presidents of the Institute for International Health and Education in Albany, N.Y.



Nurcan Baysal
March 08 2020

Amed, city of forgotten memories and passions

It was a cold but sunny day in Diyarbakır, or with its Kurdish name, Amed. Every lunch hour, I take a break from work and walk to Sur, the old city and the heart of Amed. While walking, I pass the Lise High School at the corner of my street. Yesterday, the students were outside, laughing and talking on the corner. However, when I look at that corner I always remember the same thing: a young man who was killed on that corner in the 90s. 25 years have passed; I still see his image lying on the ground in a puddle of blood. I found myself walking towards the students to ask them, "please don't walk here, someone is lying here". Then I stop. What am I doing? It means nothing to them. These children

do not know the '90s.

After Lise Street, I enter the old city, Sur, from Dağkapı Square. Saraykapı Street was to my left. I crossed the street and entered the İçkale area. İçkale was the administrative centre of the city until the 1950s. Now it is a museum quarter. Three years ago, the government assigned trustee who was appointed in place of our elected mayor, built a beautiful park with flowers, trees and cafes. There were many people in the park. Children were playing, the elderly were trying to benefit from the sun. Many people were taking photos with the Tigris River behind them. It is a nice park, but I hate this park. I asked myself why do I hate this beautiful park.

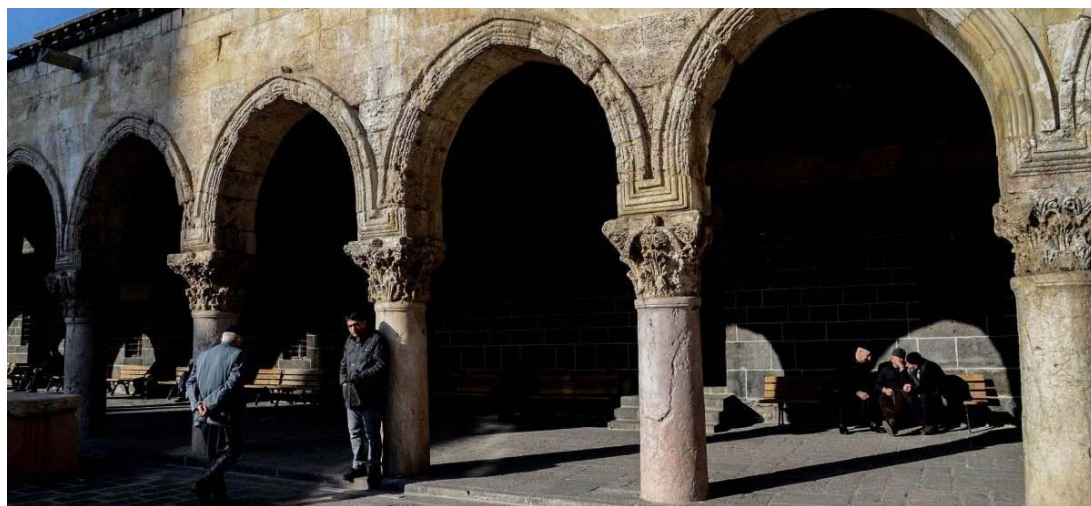
Whenever I see this park, I remember what we have lost here. Before this park, there was a very quaint district filled with residences. It was demolished after the military curfews of 2015 and 2016. When standing in the park I can't see the beautiful flowers, I can't see the trees. I can only see what lies beneath: the rubble of those lives.

Near the park, you reach the curfew area I walk through the barriers in the narrow streets of Sur. I came across two people looking towards the curfew area. They were trying to look at a historical school building. They were talking about how beautiful it is. Yes, it is a beautiful old building. Again, I see something

different. A young man, Hakan Arslan is said to be buried in the garden of the school building. He was only 23 when he was killed on 22 January 2016 during the military operations in Sur. His body has not yet been found. After learning his son was buried in the garden of this school, his father Ali Rıza Arslan applied to the Diyarbakır Governorate several times seeking permission to enter the curfew area to look for the body of his son. He was rejected. I wrote about this old father and his son a few times but nothing has changed. The Diyarbakır Governorate has refused to excavate the area. While looking at the beautiful historical school building, once more I remember father Ali Rıza and his pain.

I continue to walk towards the Diyarbakir Cafe House. On my way is the Dört Ayaklı Minare (the Four-Legged Minaret). I saw some tourists from western Turkey. They were taking photos under the famous legs of the Minaret. I was shocked. I wanted to shout at them: "You can't take a touristic photo here. Brother Tahir is lying here". Tahir Elçi was the chairman of the Diyarbakir Bar Association and my friend. He was assassinated under the legs of the minaret in December 2015 during the clashes and military curfews. How can anyone take a smiling photo here? How can people forget Tahir in only 5 years? How? I was completely depressed.

I storm into the Diyarbakir Cafe House with a red face and tried to calm down. While eating a toast, I looked out across the destroyed area, the ruins of Sur. You can also see some parts of Sırp Giragos Armenian Church, the biggest Armenian Church in the Middle East. The church was re-opened in 2011 after significant renovations funded by the Diyarbakir municipality and the Armenian community. Hundreds



of Armenians from around the world came for the opening. It was a big event. After the military curfews, the church was destroyed and looted. I remember my grandmother's stories about her Armenian neighbours, how they were killed at the beginning of the 20th century. Who remembers the genocide today? What do we remember from our Armenian neighbours today? Nothing, nothing!

We have a saying in Kurdish, "Amed Bajarê Bîr û Evînê". It means "Amed, the city of memory and passion".

Over the last few years, we have not only lost our memories but also our passion. The other day I was with a former mayor. He told me a story of a man who came across him while he was walking. The man said: "Mayor, you (the Kurdish movement) wanted us to march. We marched. You wanted us to close our shops in protest. We did. You wanted our children. We gave them. What more can we give; we have nothing left."

This man is just one of many, who have exhausted their passions. His words stayed with me for many days. While looking at

the ruins and the out-of-place new villas that are under construction in the demolished area, I am afraid we are also losing our memories. How many people will remember the old Sur in the coming years? My children will not know the old Sur.

I am afraid my proud homeland, the unofficial capital of Kurds, Amed, is not the city of memory and passion anymore.

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Sangar Ali I
March 08-2020

International Women's Day: Kurdish officials recognize historic role of women in Kurdistan

The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) three presidencies, including President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and Parliament Speaker Rewaz Faiqa, during a meeting in Erbil, Jan. 8, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Top Kurdish officials on Sunday congratulated women in the Kurdistan Region and the world on the eve of the International Women's Day and recognized their crucial role in the region. "Women in Kurdistan have al-

ways had an influential role in different aspects of the struggle in the past. Today, they continue to have an active role in all the institutions of the Kurdistan Region. The increased role of women in all sectors is an important indicator of the strength of the principles of gender equality in Kurdistan," said President of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, in a statement.

"Women have been the main victims of violence; especially in the wars and tragedies that have befallen our people. Nevertheless, no tragic event has ever

been able to deprive Kurdistan's women of their dignity, nor has it been able to shake their will, honor or resilience," he stated.

The Kurdistan Region annually celebrates the International Women's Day with various activities. But this year, almost all the events have been suspended due to the spread of coronavirus in the region as the local authorities continue to call the public to avoid crowded as a safety precaution.

President Barzani recognized the relentless efforts of all relevant local authorities in contain-

ing the outbreak of coronavirus epidemic. "It is our common duty and responsibility to protect ourselves and our community from coronavirus and prevent its spread in the Kurdistan Region."

His message comes as the Kurdistan Region has confirmed several coronavirus infections, including a case of death from it.

In a statement of his own, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani also highlighted the struggle women have faced in obtaining equality and social justice, and their efforts to put an end to repression.

"Women are vital to building a stronger Kurdistan. As we celebrate #IWD2020 we honor their role in our history, including the fight for equality and justice. My government is determined to empower women to pursue their dreams and reach their full potential. #EachforEqual" Prime Minister Barzani posted on his official Twitter account.

Acknowledging the historical role women played in securing Kurdistan's freedom, Barzani stressed that his government highly values the role of women in the Kurdistan Region, particularly those who have served as Peshmerga and fought bravely against the so-called Islamic State.

He also called on women in the Kurdistan Region to spread awareness about combating the coronavirus.



The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) three presidencies, including President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and Parliament Speaker Rewaz Faiyaq, during a meeting in Erbil, Jan. 8, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Similarly, Rewaz Faiyaq, as a female Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament, extended her best wishes to women in the Kurdistan Region and the world on the eve of International Women's Day.

"As a woman in a leading role, I would like to congratulate all women around the globe for their efforts to make our world a better place. On #IWD2020 I encourage women and men collec-

tively to work on equal rights and opportunities for women in our societies," Faiyaq posted on her Twitter account.

Masoud Barzani, the former President of the Kurdistan Region and the current President of the leading Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), joined other officials in the region to recognize the critical role of women in the region.

"On International Women's Day, I wish the women of Kurdistan and the world a happy and blessed day. The role of the women of Kurdistan was indispensable during the freedom-seeking revolutions of our people. Their support for the Peshmerga has indeed been of immense value," Masoud Barzani wrote on his Twitter account.

Editing by Kosar Nawzad



08/03/2020
Hiwa Shilani

Syrian Kurdish boy burned in Turkish attack in stable condition in Erbil hospital

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) -

Mohammed Hamid, a Kurdish boy who sustained severe burns in a Turkish airstrike in northern Syria, is now in a stable health condition at a hospital in Kurdistan Region's Erbil.

Thirteen-year-old Mohammed returned to the Kurdistan Region over a month ago from France, where he was sent along with his father to receive proper medical care after being injured in an alleged Turkish chemical weapon attack.

"After medical inspection, the results showed that Mohammed had been burned by White Phosphorus, a prohibited chemical weapon used by Turkey during its aerial strikes in territories with civilian residents in northern Syria," the boy's father, Hamid, told Kurdistan 24 on Sunday.



Mohammed Hamid (Left), after treatment and on the right before treatment in Syria. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

"My son has been through seven surgeries. Thankfully his health is stable now and requires no more surgical treatment," Hamid added. He also thanked Masoud Barzani's efforts towards his son's treatment.

Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), arranged for the boy to be transferred from

the town of Sari Kani in northern Syria to Erbil and then to France for treatment after his father pleaded for aid on social media.

Ankara's long-threatened military push into northern Syria, which has the purported aim of confronting the Kurdish element of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the People's Protection Units

(YPG), began October 9.

Turkey's use of "unconventional weapons" in its assault in northeastern Syria was reported by SDF Spokesperson Mustafa Bali on October 17 in a tweet with a video clip of a child who appeared to have chemical burns.

The child was being treated at a hospital in the city of Hassaka—almost 80 kilometers southeast of Sari Kani. A resident doctor at the facility told the local northern Syrian news agency ANHA that preliminary tests had shown that the victims were wounded by "internationally prohibited weapons."

Masoud Barzani, in a tweet on October 22, thanked French President Emmanuel Macron and the people of France for responding to calls to provide life-saving treatment to the Kurdish boy.

Editing by Kosar Nawzad



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
March 08-2020

Assad's 'dangerous' statement on Kurds could be message to Turkey: Official

VIENNA (Kurdistan 24) – A senior official from a local Kurdish-led self-administration in northeast Syria told Kurdistan 24 in an exclusive interview at a conference in Vienna on Friday that recent comments Kurdish groups made by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad may be part of an effort to reach out to Turkey.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told Russian media on Thursday that Kurdish-led groups in the nation's northern regions cannot work with the United States while at the same time trying to reach an agreement with Damascus.

The Syrian president also claimed, "There is no such [Kurdish] cause in Syria," due to the fact the Kurds in Syria were refugees fleeing Turkish oppression are not originally native to the country.

"Once again, with his new statements, Bashar Assad intends to deny the Kurdish question, and that [Damascus] will not engage in dialogue with the Kurds," said Deputy of the Joint Presidency of the Executive Council of Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, Bedran Çiya Kurd.

"Therefore, he wants to continue with the old mindset when approaching the Kurds. This is not a new subject; we know that Bashar Assad and the Baath regime have always thought of Kurds in this manner," he told Kurdistan 24 on the sidelines of a conference on the future of northern Syria that took place in Austria's capital that was organized by European Parliament member Andreas Schieder.

The senior official suggested that it's possible that Damascus



Bedran Çiya Kurd (center), an official from the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, speaks at a conference in Vienna, March 6, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24/Wladimir van Wilgenburg)

is trying to send a message "to remind Turkey that they also do not allow the Kurdish question, so there could be a Syrian-Turkish agreement against the Kurds and their existence."

It could also mean, he continued, that Damascus is threatening to military attack the Kurdish-led, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

"Another meaning could be the fact that he wants to remind the Kurds of [the] Syrian government's recent advances near Idlib, threatening to operate in the eastern Euphrates [areas] afterwards; and there is no need to negotiate with the Kurds or accept their rights."

Kurd stressed that Assad's statement was not only "dangerous," but also unproductive, adding, "If Bashar Assad has a vision for Syria's future, and if he wants to help secure a solution, then he must not issue such statements. Instead, he could offer a political project for resolving all Syrian issues, including the Kurdish question."

Furthermore, president Assad also accused the Kurds of not "firing a single bullet" when the

"If the regime in Damascus is asking us to clear our position towards Turkish occupation - having mentioned the fact above - we have the legitimate right to ask Damascus to clarify its stance when it comes to Turkish occupation in Syria."

Moreover, Kurd suggested that Assad hopes to revive the anti-Kurdish Adana Agreement signed by Damascus and Turkey of 1998, which allows Turkey to enter five kilometers deep into Syrian territory if it deems that Turkish security is threatened.

Turkish army and militias it backs invaded northern Syria in October, agreeing instead to withdrew from areas now occupied by Ankara in a ceasefire deal with the US.

He said that Syrian Kurdish forces did, in fact, resist Turkey said that Damascus is simply not yet willing to "do anything" in areas like Bab and Azaz now under Turkish control.

"The Syrian government's narrative of 'fighting Turkish invasion in Syria' is not true. The Kurds were and have been in the fore frontlines of the fight against the Turkish invasion. It was the YPG [People's Protection Units], SDF and Autonomous Administration who resisted Turkey's aggression, and they sacrificed many lives in that fight, in Afrin, Serekaniye and Gire Spi [Tal Abyad]."

He underlined that the SDF has fought since the beginning against the "terrorist groups" which Turkey supported in Syria, "Yet we have not seen significant actions from Damascus against Turkish occupation in Afrin, Serekaniye, Gire Spi" nor anywhere else in Syria.

The deal came after years of water disputes between the two countries, and Damascus' hosting of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. The Kurdish leader was expelled on Oct. 9 of that year, before his capture one year later in Kenya. Since then, Ocalan has been imprisoned in Turkey.

The Adana Agreement broke down after Turkey supported armed rebel groups who have fought against the Syrian regime in recent years. Turkey now controls several areas in Syria it took over since 2016 in order to prevent local Kurds from creating an autonomous region like in neighboring Iraq.

"Damascus is still investing hope in attempts to revive the Adana Agreement," Çiya Kurd concluded.

"Yet that agreement itself legitimizes Turkish occupation. We will never accept that, and our position is clear here. If Damascus is hoping for Russia's mediation [to revive that agreement] it will only be considered a move to legitimize Turkish occupation of Syria."

Editing by John J. Catherine

Mountain couriers brave bullets along Iran-Iraq border

As the economic crisis deepens in Iran, more people are risking their lives to earn money by transporting goods through the mountains of the Kurdistan region on the Iraq-Iran border.

Work can be dangerous for the Kurds hired to carry goods across the Iran-Iraq border. "Facing harsh weather, topographic conditions and gunfire, we risk our lives to barely provide our family's daily bread," an Iranian Kurd recently told Al-Monitor via a messaging app. Many of these couriers, called kolbars, feel they have little choice.

The couriers traverse snow-covered mountainous routes while wary of Iranian border guards' bullets and schlepping giant loads on their backs, or guiding animals, to make a few dollars a night. On Feb. 16 in Nowsud, guards opened fire on a group of kolbars, killing three and seriously wounding six. Another shooting incident, on Feb. 28, left two kolbars injured.

The number of people working as kolbars is increasing as the long-running economic crisis in Iran continues to deepen, exacerbated by mismanagement, corruption and US economic sanctions. Violence against couriers has also been on the rise.

In January, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) reported that in 2019, Iranian soldiers and border guards killed 57 people. Another 22 died from such tragedies as avalanches, falls from high passes, buried explosives detonating, and vehicular accidents during police chases. KHRN said 66 others had been injured.

Rabin Rahmani, a member of KHRN's managerial board, told Al-Monitor, "In previous years, only locals from the border areas were working as kolbars, either formally or informally, but with the tightening of US sanctions on Iran in 2018, more people from big cities — more than 150 kilometers [93 miles] from



An Iranian Kurdish smuggler packs his horse to transport goods from the Iraq into Iran, Zagros Mountains, Iraq, July 27, 2017. Photo by Martyn Aim/Corbis via Getty Images.

the Kurdistan region's borders — have had to work as kolbars."

"The kolbars who have recently been killed or wounded by Iranian border guards are from big Kurdish cities, far from the border," Rahmani continued. "The systematic killing of kolbars continues, although only a small volume of smuggled goods has been transported via kolbars, and the remaining has gone through southern ports in Iran."

From 2011 to September 2017, Tehran permitted local people from border areas to work as kolbars to reduce the supply problems and other burdens of US and Western sanctions.

"The Iranian state, instead of boosting agriculture and industry, mistakenly made locals stick to being kolbars, and now it is difficult for people to quit this dangerous [job]," Mukhtar Khandani, a Kurdish journalist and activist living in Iranian Kurdistan, told Al-Monitor. "Some big fish on both sides of the Iraq-Iran border are behind this profitable business, made so because the transported goods are untaxed, and kolbars are only receiving a few dollars."

Boys in their teens are working as kolbars, Khandani said, and accord-

ing to Iranian newspapers, a few women are also taking on the risky job, sometimes dressing as men.

By Khandani's count, "Since the start of 2020, about eight kolbars have been killed by Iranian border guards. More than 20 others were wounded, and nearly 40 were injured due to natural accidents." The systematic killing of kolbars continues, he said, even though only 5% of smuggled goods are transported by them, with the remaining 95% passing through official border crossings.

"The Iranian parliament needs to amend the law for using arms that dates back to the era of the shah's regime and allows regular forces to shoot at civilians," Khandani said, offering one way to limit the killing of kolbars. "According to the law, Iranian border guards should caution kolbars three times to stop before shooting, but they often shoot the kolbars without warning and with the intent to kill."

Azad, a pseudonym for a kolbar from Iranian Kurdistan, told Al-Monitor via an encrypted messaging app that couriers often work at night and for a delivery barely earn 300,000 to 400,000 Iranian tomans (\$27 to \$35

dollars), which is the price of 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of meat in Iran. "We don't go every night," he told Al-Monitor, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution from Iranian authorities. "We are doing this dangerous work to avoid starvation."

According to Mabsur Muradi, Kurdish representative in the Iranian parliament for the city of Mariwan, unemployment in Iranian Kurdistan stands at around 50%, and inflation exceeds 45%. "We do not have any other alternatives," Azad added.

International human rights organization have yet to publicly raise concerns about the kolbars being shot. In a 2019 report, UN special rapporteur Javaid Rehman wrote that Iranian border police in some cases have killed unarmed couriers. He cited specific instances from May, noting that the couriers had posed no imminent threat to the officers when they were killed or injured. Such incidents constitute an illegal use of force.

Now kolbars face the added danger of the novel coronavirus, which potentially threatens their health and livelihoods. In an attempt to stem the spread of the virus, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Feb. 22 closed its border with Iran, one of the most severely affected countries thus far. As of March 5, Iran's official news agency reported that 3,517 people had been infected with the virus, 107 had died, and 739 had survived it.

Khandani said KRG security forces and Iraqi federal border guards were not for the moment looking the other way and letting kolbars cross the border. Thus kolbars in both Iran and Iraq are looking for alternative routes so they can continue working.

Libyan Army Hits Turkish Military Targets

The Libyan National Army (LNA), commanded by Marshal Khalifa Haftar, has continued targeting Turkish forces in the country by bombing the military base inside Mitiga International Airport.

For the second consecutive day, violent explosions were heard on Sunday in the vicinity of the base, east of Tripoli.

LNA artillery targeted on Saturday evening an air defense system, destroying a warehouse for military equipment belonging to Fayez al-Sarraj's Special Deterrence Force.

According to the LNA, Turkish forces fighting alongside Sarraj's Government of National Accord (GNA) and their armed militias

are using Mitiga as a permanent base for military operations.

The LNA's Military Information Division released video footage showing civilian homes in Tripoli destroyed in militia attacks.

"After failing to win the battle and losing their bases, the militias once again violated the international ceasefire and targeted residential areas and neighborhoods in Qasr bin Ghashir, breaching human rights laws," the Division explained.

It pointed out that the militias seek to hold the LNA accountable for its actions, which are punishable by international law.

The LNA information office has released footage of what ap-

peared to be an announcement of the participation of Tariq bin Ziyad Brigade in the battle to liberate Tripoli.

It pointed to the "LNA forces' ability to carry out all the tasks assigned to them in a highly efficient and professional manner to defend the country and its sovereignty, and preserve its capabilities and gains."

Meanwhile, local residents and eyewitnesses said Sunday four buses carrying mercenaries loyal to Turkey passed near Tajura neighborhood, east of Tripoli.

Brigadier General Khaled al-Mahjoub, an LNA official, announced Saturday in televised remarks that "about 142 pro-

Turkey mercenaries were killed in Tripoli battles."

He said Sarraj's GNA and Turkey are being secretive.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has reported that the number of pro-Turkish factions killed in the Libyan battles rose to 117.

It quoted sources as saying that they were killed in the clashes on several fronts in Tripoli, indicating that about 150 fighters among those who headed to Libya, are now in Europe.

The SOHR also announced a rise in the number of those arriving in the capital to take part in the battles.

Kurds to Assad: We Are Syrians, Our Roots Are Here

Head of Syria's regime Bashar al-Assad said there was no Kurdish issue in the country, sparking a wave of widespread condemnation among Kurdish officials and citizens. The issue went viral on social media pushing many individuals to share documents and evidence to prove their origin.

"Regarding the so-called 'Kurdish issue', there is nothing called a 'Kurdish issue' in Syria for a simple reason: Kurds have been living in Syria throughout history but some Kurdish groups who live in the north came to Syria during the last century due to Turkish government oppression," Assad told Rossiya-24 in an interview aired earlier on Thursday.

The Kurdish Progressive Party in Syria denounced Assad's statements, saying the Kurdish issue is historic and no one has the right to deny it because it af-



Sheikh of a Kurdish tribe reveals his grandfather's ID, born in Al-Darbasiyah in 1872. AAWSAT AR

fects the lives of 3 million citizens.

For its part, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria also criticized Assad's approach and language against the Kurds.

"Assad's most recent statements testify to the regime's lack of interest in dialogue and hamper

the search for a solution to the crisis," it said in an official statement.

Also, in response to the accusations of separatism raised by Assad, it added: "The autonomous administration calls on the regime to take a look at the recent past and see how areas of the North and East Syria fought for the country's

unity and diversity."

Ahmed Suleiman, a senior member of the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party said Assad's statements were widely rejected by Kurds and have made Russian-mediated political negotiations between the regime and the Kurds more complicated after it witnessed some progress.

Last month, Damascus agreed to political dialogue with guarantees from Moscow to hold negotiations with Kurds. However, no formal talks were held between the regime and Kurdish officials.

Commenting on the issue, Head of the Democratic Union Party Anwar Muslim said: "While we affirm that our people never posed a threat to Syria's unity, we call on the regime to look more thoroughly and see who's dividing and messing with Syria's geography."

Jean-François Colosimo

Face à l'agression d'Erdogan, jusqu'où ira la naïveté des Européens ?

La Turquie n'a jamais renoncé, au cours du XXe siècle, à l'attitude belliciste qu'elle assume désormais ouvertement. Seuls les Européens l'ont oublié et peuvent croire qu'on arrêtera Erdogan par la bienveillance, argumente l'historien et théologien*.

L'Orient commence au Bosphore. Il n'a de vraiment compliqué que les illusions, les méprises et les oublis que l'Europe se complait à entretenir à son sujet. À force de médiocres calculs sur un siècle de son existence, il nous est ainsi devenu naturel de juger la Turquie incompréhensible, puis ordinaire d'en subir les diktats. Aujourd'hui encore, nous refusons de voir avec quelle symétrie elle s'applique à transgresser les frontières au Levant et à agresser l'Union européenne à ses frontières. Nous préférons ignorer qu'user des migrants comme une troupe d'appoint en les faisant passer du statut d'otages au rang de supplétifs et en les convoyant massivement vers l'Ouest ne suppose pas moins une logique d'affrontement qu'intervenir à l'Est en y transportant des blindés pour asseoir un projet d'annexion. Nous nions combien un troc engageant la rétention d'une crise humanitaire contre l'octroi d'un soutien diplomatique à un insensé aventurisme militaire représente un insoutenable ultimatum. Or toute paix que l'on croit pouvoir acheter à un belliciste a pour prix sa surenchère. Les chancelleries et la Commission ont beau protester du droit, l'Europe, à la manière de la dernière Rome, finira par payer un nouveau tribut à la force et, inmanquablement, le montant de la rançon s'aggravera. Pour autant, notre faute la plus essentielle consiste dans notre amnésie consentie.

Il est bien une invariance chez



notre voisin qui, de Lépante (1571) aux Dardanelles (1915) en passant par Vienne (1529 puis 1683), n'aura cessé d'être notre rival. À rebours du modèle de tolérance qu'a mythifié l'irénisme contemporain, l'instrumentalisation des peuples à l'intérieur et le chantage au massacre ou à la déportation de ces mêmes populations face à l'extérieur, autrement dit l'emploi indifférencié du matériau humain à fin d'hégémonie politique, lui ont été une pratique constante. Sautant par-dessus les âges et les régimes, elle s'est étendue de la construction ottomane à la reconstruction turque et a prévalu sous Atatürk comme elle vaut sous Erdogan. L'exécution puis la négation du génocide commis contre les Arméniens par la mouvance des officiers progressistes en 1915, qui faisait suite aux massacres perpétrés par le sultan réactionnaire

Abdülhamid en 1894 et dont la reconnaissance est encore punie par une loi parlementaire en 2020, illustre abyssement cette permanence.

À l'évidence, nous, Européens, avons substitué une double croyance : d'abord qu'une nation turque avait définitivement succédé à un empire, ensuite que cette nation était nécessairement appelée à un devenir démocratique. Or il s'avère que l'instant national turc n'a jamais été qu'une position de repli entre deux moments impériaux, la décomposition et la recomposition ottomane qui l'encadrent. Or il ressort qu'en lieu et place de l'opposition convenue entre deux Turquies, une bonne et une mauvaise au choix, il a toujours été une seule et même Turquie qui, sur cent ans, aura essayé tous les extrêmes. Mais céder aux trompe-l'œil aura disculpé

l'Europe de ses propres abandons et compromissions dont l'addition désormais la rattrape.

Nous avons omis la violence fondatrice de ce pays qui, issu d'une faillite en 1918, a lui-même failli ne pas être et qui, depuis, fuit son angoisse initiale du néant et poursuit sa course hallucinée à la survie. Nous avons mésestimé l'aliénation qu'a causée l'occidentalisation d'Atatürk parce qu'elle nous arrangeait. Nous avons méjugé l'oppression qu'a engagée l'islamisation d'Erdogan tant qu'elle ne nous dérangeait pas. Nous avons opposé, à tort, les deux autocrates qui se tiennent chacun à l'un des bouts d'un identique mirage produit par une unique fabrique identitaire. Ennemis en apparence, frères en réalité, partageant le même culte la régénération démiurgique, leur duel présumé se révèle un duo éprouvé. Nationaliser l'islam et islamiser la nation reviennent au même dès lors qu'il s'agit de créer un citoyen modèle, ethniquement turc, confessionnellement sunnite qui, enrégimenté par la caserne ou par la mosquée, sera mécaniquement usiné et calibré afin de réparer l'injustice de l'histoire et de retrouver le pouvoir de la dominer.

Chez les deux chefs providentiels, le parallélisme des destins n'a d'égal que le télescopage des programmes : la pureté du Turc requiert la purification de ses adversaires désignés, c'est-à-dire tous les autres que lui. L'ennemi est intérieur. Armé-

niens, Grecs, Juifs, Dönme, Lazes, Zazas, Yézidis : les communautés ancestrales ont été systématiquement éradiquées. Les Kurdes, minorité ethnique, et les alévis, minorité confessionnelle, continuent de résister au bénéfice de leur nombre, mais au prix de persécutions recommencées. L'ennemi est extérieur. Il réside à Washington, Moscou, Berlin, Paris, Jérusalem, Damas, La Mecque. Les circonstances ont changé induisant des variations à la marge vite résorbées, mais la stratégie demeure : le successeur se veut, comme le prédécesseur, un maître-chanteur planétaire qui monnaie le spectre d'une instabilité générale contre l'assurance de sa propre stabilité.

C'est tout ce sur quoi nous avons fermé les yeux de 1923 à aujourd'hui. Sur la déportation des Grecs d'Asie mineure, les campagnes de bombardement à répétition du pays kurde, l'enchaînement des cinq putschs

militaires en cinquante ans, les prisons incessamment remplies d'opposants, mais aussi l'annexion d'une partie du littoral syrien (1939), l'invasion de Chypre (1974), l'ambition panturque puis panislamique : de notre bouche cousue ne sont sorties que de vagues protestations. Résultat : en 1933 Atatürk réclamait la possession d'Alep et de Mossoul, en 2019 Erdogan y a dépêché l'armée.

L'Europe s'est tue par soumission à l'Amérique, en obtempérant jusqu'en 1945 à l'ordre wilsonien, après 1945 à l'Alliance atlantique. C'est Washington qui a statué que la Turquie était une nation moderne, qu'elle constituait un rôle antisoviétique et qu'elle devait entrer dans l'Union européenne pour en contrarier les ambitions. C'est Washington qui a décidé que la Turquie devait passer du laïcisme à l'islamisme pour mieux contrer le communisme, que la Turquie bénéficierait d'un leader

« islamo-démocrate » qui vaudrait bien les démocrates-chrétiens du Vieux Continent, que la Turquie avait droit à ses différences, même exorbitantes, dès lors qu'elle restait fidèle au pacte. Et ce sont les capitales européennes qui ont eu à traiter de l'instauration récurrente de pouvoirs autoritaires à Ankara, des atteintes répétées aux droits de l'homme, de la partition durable de Chypre, des revendications sur les Balkans, de la complicité avec Daech, du rapprochement avec la Russie et de la mainmise sur l'internationale des Frères musulmans. Le tout, avec compréhension, dans l'attente d'un meilleur lendemain qui n'est pas venu et qui ne viendra pas.

C'est là où nous en sommes. L'Amérique a fait pénétrer le loup dans la bergerie et l'Europe l'a nourri. Divisée, désarmée, désappointée, elle rêve encore et encore de négocier. Mais quoi ? À moins d'un sursaut, il lui

faudra redoubler son habitude à renoncer. Or ce sursaut ne peut venir que de la France, de son retour à une diplomatie réaliste qui, consciente qu'on ne choisit pas ses interlocuteurs et qu'il en est de durs, cyniques ou duplices, renouerait le fil de l'histoire, reprendrait langue avec Moscou et Damas, jouerait des mondes slaves et arabes qui ne sont pas moins orientaux que l'univers turco-ottoman et réveillerait le souvenir de Byzance qui hante tous les protagonistes de cette guerre régionale dont elle ne fait, à cette heure, qu'essuyer passivement les contrecoups. Mais il faudrait pour ce faire qu'elle rompe enfin avec les représentations idéologiques.

*Jean-François Colosimo a publié une dizaine d'ouvrages. Dernier essai paru : « La Religion française - Mille ans de laïcité » (éd. du Cerf, 2019, 400 p., 20 €). Il est également l'auteur du documentaire « Turquie, nation impossible » diffusé sur Arte en octobre 2019.



Fabrice Balanche
Propos recueillis par Tigrane Yégavian
9 mars 2020

Syrie : Turquie et Russie reprennent la main

Géographe et éminent spécialiste de la géographie du Moyen-Orient et tout particulièrement de la Syrie et du Liban, Fabrice Balanche est maître de conférences à l'université Lyon 2. Au début de la guerre civile syrienne, il a fait l'objet d'une omerta de la part de nombreux chercheurs qui l'accusaient à tort de prendre parti pour le camp loyaliste. Son réalisme et sa vision lucide du conflit font de lui l'un des meilleurs analystes du conflit syrien dans le monde. Nous l'avons rencontré de retour d'un voyage dans le nord-est de la Syrie.

En octobre dernier, le président turc a lancé son offensive contre les positions des YPG kurdes dans le nord-est syrien, a-t-il atteint ses objectifs ?

Non, il s'est contenté d'une bande de territoire de 120 km de long et de 30 km de large entre Tel Abyad et Ras el Ayn. Il voulait que cette zone de sécurité s'étende de Kobané au Tigre, soit tout le long de la frontière syro-turque (à l'exception de la ville de Qamishli qui restait sous souveraineté syrienne). Cependant, il a obtenu de la Russie par les accords de **Sotchi du 20 octobre 2019** que les **FDS** (Forces

démocratiques syriennes) évacuent ladite zone de sécurité et que l'armée syrienne et les forces russes les remplacent, ce qui était l'objectif officiel de l'opération turque à l'est de l'Euphrate : l'évacuation des FDS. Cependant, les FDS ne semblent pas avoir évacué la zone, tout au plus, ils portent des uniformes civils. Par conséquent, nous risquons d'avoir une nouvelle offensive turque avec l'aval de la Russie, car Poutine a prévenu les Kurdes que si leurs forces ne s'intégraient pas dans l'armée syrienne et qu'elles continuaient à supporter la présence américaine, il n'hésiterait

pas à laisser la Turquie poursuivre son offensive.

Ankara affirme vouloir renvoyer une partie des 3,5 millions de Syriens réfugiés dans le nord de la Syrie le long d'une « zone de sécurité » dans le nord syrien de 120 km de long, aujourd'hui sous son contrôle. Cette politique d'ingénierie démographique peut-elle s'appliquer ? À quel prix ?

Le plan initial de la Turquie était d'envoyer un million de réfugiés syriens dans la zone, sous-entendu pour remplacer la population kurde qui y réside, comme

cela se produit déjà à Afrin. Le district kurde a été conquis en mars 2018, les maisons abandonnées par les Kurdes sont occupées par des déplacés syriens d'Idlib, mais des réfugiés syriens de Turquie, ces derniers préfèrent rester en Turquie où les conditions de vie sont bien meilleures. À Tel Abyad, des réfugiés syriens sont revenus, car ils sont originaires de la région, mais aucun réfugié d'Alep ou de Homs n'a envie de s'installer dans cette zone désertée et sous-équipée. Pour que le plan d'Erdogan soit viable, il faudrait construire des villes et villages *ex nihilo*, or la Turquie

n'en a pas les moyens financiers et l'Union européenne, qu'elle sollicite, refuse à juste titre catégoriquement.

Cependant, Erdogan peut trouver, comme pour Afrin, des candidats à la relocalisation dans le nord-est chez les déplacés internes de la région d'Idlib, qui vivent dans des conditions misérables dans des camps informels à la frontière turque. Beaucoup ont déjà fui la Ghouta, Homs ou Alep-Est, ils n'ont aucune envie d'être sous le contrôle de l'armée syrienne et ils ne peuvent pas entrer en Turquie. Ce sont les candidats idéaux pour créer une ceinture arabe antikurde à la frontière syro-turque.

S'achemine-t-on vers un « condominium russo-turc » dans le nord de la Syrie ?

Un condominium est un bien grand mot, car cela voudrait dire une souveraineté partagée, or ce n'est pas le cas. Nous avons un accord entre la Russie et la Turquie pour découper la région en zones d'influence et d'occupation. On se rapproche plutôt du modèle **Sykes-Picot de 1916**, mais à une échelle différente. La Turquie veut se débarrasser de ce qu'elle considère comme la menace kurde à sa frontière sud. Elle veut également prendre des gages territoriaux en Syrie pour peser sur le futur du pays. Le gouvernement syrien craint que cela ne soit le prélude à une modification de la frontière, car l'occupation militaire turque s'accompagne d'une politique d'investissements et de turquisation des populations qui pourraient être soumises dans le futur à un référendum ou bien proclamer une république du nord-syrien.

La Russie a besoin de la Turquie pour venir à bout des rebelles syriens, car la fermeture de la frontière turque est la condition indispensable à la victoire en Syrie. Pour cela, il faut accepter de laisser des gages à Erdogan. Mais l'alliance avec la Turquie dépasse le cadre de la Syrie, la Russie a judicieusement enfoncé un coin dans l'OTAN, **l'unité de l'alliance atlantique est mise à mal** comme nous avons



pu le constater avec les invectives croisées d'Emmanuel Macron et de Tayep Recep Erdogan à l'automne dernier.

Peut-on dès à présent dresser un bilan critique du projet politique des Kurdes du PYD (Parti de l'union démocratique, branche syrienne du PKK) en Syrie ? Quel regard portez-vous sur sept ans de confédéralisme démocratique et de municipalisme libertaire ?

Sur le papier, le projet du PYD est séduisant tant au niveau local que pour les Occidentaux qui voient dans le Rojava la projection de leurs fantasmes sur la Syrie. J'ai croisé au Rojava de nombreux Européens, militants de gauche, venus « construire le socialisme ». Il existe un village international à proximité de Malkyeh où ils sont regroupés. Tout cela n'est qu'un écran de fumée destiné à cacher une réalité plus conforme à ce que nous avons l'habitude de voir au Moyen-Orient : un régime autoritaire. L'Administration autonome est contrôlée par le PKK qui a placé des hommes et des femmes à tous les étages : du comité de quartier au sommet de l'administration. Les coprésidents, car ils sont toujours deux, un homme et une femme, n'ont pas la réalité du pouvoir.

Le PYD s'appuie sur les écrits d'**Abdullah Occalan** qui lui-même s'inspire d'un obscur marxiste américain à tendance libertarienne : **Murray Bookchin**. Il part du principe éculé que le

capitalisme va s'écrouler, non pas en raison de la lutte des classes, mais à cause des problèmes environnementaux. Il faut donc revenir à de l'autoconsommation dans un cadre verdoyant, ramener les gens vers les campagnes où ils formeront des unités d'environ un millier de personnes autogérées et qui pourront échanger avec d'autres les produits du travail, puisque l'argent va naturellement disparaître au profit du troc. Heureusement, la guerre et peut-être un certain pragmatisme ont empêché le PYD d'appliquer les préceptes d'Abdullah Occalan, car la région connaîtrait alors une situation économique encore plus désastreuse. Mais cette pesanteur idéologique explique notamment pourquoi l'économie fonctionne au ralenti, que les investissements étrangers sont absents en dehors de l'aide humanitaire, et que des centaines de milliers de personnes aient quitté la région, notamment les plus qualifiées.

En ce qui concerne l'unité entre Kurdes, Arabes, Syriens, Arméniens, Turkmènes, etc., nous sommes là aussi face à une grande illusion. Les Kurdes sont au pouvoir et les autres groupes ethniques sont marginalisés. Les Arabes ne supportent pas l'inversion du pouvoir au profit des Kurdes et attendent leur revanche. Cela explique que l'armée turque se soit emparée aussi facilement de la région de Tel Abyad – Ras al-Aïn, peuplée en grande majorité par des Arabes, car les YPG (le bras

armé du PYD) n'avaient pas de soutien au sein de la population. Les chrétiens sont divisés quant au PYD. Ils ont besoin de protection et par conséquent dans les villages ou les petites villes comme Tel Tamer et Malkyeh, les partis chrétiens sont alliés du PYD, mais à Qamichli, le quartier chrétien est protégé par une milice syriaque pro-gouvernementale, les Sotora, et les portraits de Bachar al-Assad et les drapeaux syriens sont partout.

Les Kurdes n'ont-ils pas surestimé leur poids politique et la viabilité de leur alliance avec les États-Unis, la France et l'OTAN ? Et si oui, pourquoi ?

Les Kurdes du PYD, c'est-à-dire la branche syrienne du **PKK**, avaient comme objectif de créer une région autonome en Syrie qui s'étendrait d'Afrin au Tigre. Dans la stratégie du **PKK**, la Turquie doit exploser un jour et par conséquent, le sandjak d'Alexandrette, considéré comme historiquement kurde, serait le débouché maritime du grand Kurdistan et le Rojava cette autoroute qui mènerait vers la mer. Les territoires kurdes sont séparés par des zones arabes ou mixtes arabo-kurdes, mais qu'importe, les Arabes doivent accepter de vivre en minorité dans des territoires « historiquement kurdes ». C'est ainsi que plusieurs responsables politiques kurdes dérivèrent leur projet. Mais **l'offensive turque d'août 2016**, qui bloqua la jonction entre Manbej et Afrin,

mit le projet en sommeil au profit de la lutte contre l'État islamique, car le PKK pensait naïvement que l'Occident aurait ainsi une dette éternelle à l'égard des Kurdes et qu'il les soutiendrait dans leur projet autonomiste.

Quel avenir pour les combattants des FDS et des YPG ? Vont-ils intégrer les rangs de l'armée régulière syrienne ?

Les FDS sont diverses, elles comprennent une douzaine de milices arabes et les YPG, soit au total plus de 50 000 combattants. Les YPG comptent environ la moitié des combattants et les trois quarts d'entre eux sont kurdes. Les milices arabes sont le plus souvent organisées sur un mode tribal, comme la milice dirigée par le cheikh Hanadi, membre de la puissante tribu des Shammar. Il suffit que le cheikh fasse allégeance au gouvernement syrien pour que ses hommes rentrent dans l'armée syrienne, les cadres pourraient même conserver leur grade. Damas courtise les cheikhs pour qu'ils fassent allégeance. Dans le cas des YPG, c'est plus compliqué, car tout l'encadrement est lié au PKK et il n'est

pas question pour Damas d'intégrer des membres du PKK. Les combattants kurdes peuvent être intégrés à titre individuel, mais pas les bataillons en entier, car cela serait une armée dans l'armée. Je pense que les FDS vont donc se diviser entre Arabes et Kurdes. Les officiers PKK seront renvoyés à Qandil (leur sanctuaire situé dans le nord du Kurdistan irakien) et les troupes kurdes reprises en main par des officiers de l'armée syrienne, kurdes ou non. Mais il faut souligner que de nombreuses personnes ont rejoint les FDS pour les salaires, sans commune mesure avec les soldes dans l'armée syrienne. Il y a donc fort à parier qu'il y ait une forte déperdition.

Les cellules dormantes de l'EI profitent du vide sécuritaire qui s'est installé. Pensez-vous que la Turquie est appelée à devenir leur base arrière ?

La Turquie est embarrassée avec Daesh. Jusqu'en 2015, son attitude a été plus qu'ambiguë. Une grande partie de la logistique et des combattants de Daesh passaient par la Turquie avec la complicité des autorités. Mais ensuite, Daesh a commis

des attentats en Turquie et l'armée turque l'a affronté dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie durant l'automne 2016. Les États-Unis ont abattu al-Baghdadi à 5 km de la frontière turque, dans la province d'Idlib. Il est difficile d'imaginer que les services turcs n'étaient pas au courant. En fait, ce n'est pas tant la Turquie qui sera une base arrière de Daesh, mais les zones occupées par la Turquie en Syrie. À Tel Abyad et Ras al-Ain, les anciens combattants de Daesh ont joué un rôle majeur dans la bataille contre les YPG. Les prisonniers qui se sont échappés du camp d'Ain Aissa en octobre dernier se sont rendus à Tel Abyad, certains ont gagné illégalement la Turquie et tentent de rejoindre leurs pays d'origine ou d'autres terrains de djihad.

L'insécurité profite à Daesh. Lors de l'offensive turque contre les Kurdes à l'automne 2019, les cellules de Daesh se sont immédiatement mises en action dans le nord-est : deux attentats meurtriers ont frappé Qamishli. Dans les zones grises comme Deir al-Zor, Daesh prélève l'impôt, il menace ceux qui travaillent avec l'Administration autonome et assassine les res-

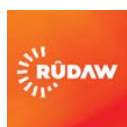
ponsables politiques. Le reste de la Syrie n'est pas à l'abri de ces métastases djihadistes.

S'achemine-t-on vers une solution du conflit syrien « à la tchétchène » ? La reconstruction et la « réconciliation » se feront sans les réfugiés, mais le gouvernement lâchera du lest aux islamistes ?

Oui, c'est un scénario crédible. Peu de réfugiés reviendront en Syrie pour diverses raisons : politique, économique, et aussi pour des vengeances personnelles. Bachar al-Assad a déjà lâché du lest à l'égard des religieux en 2018. Les autorités religieuses sunnites sont restées loyales à Bachar al-Assad durant tout le conflit. Il soutient désormais leur prosélytisme, leur accorde des privilèges en matière de communication avec la création d'une chaîne de télévision et des moyens financiers accrus. En échange, il souhaite que les imams expliquent bien à leurs ouailles qu'islam signifie avant tout soumission.

Fabrice Balanche

Docteur en géographie politique, HDR, spécialiste de la Syrie et du Liban.



09-03-2020

Rudaw calls on Turkey to release journalist Rawin Sterk

Rudaw Media Network issued a statement on Sunday calling for the release of its reporter Rawin Sterk, who was detained by Turkish authorities on February 29 while reporting on the migrant crisis unfolding in Edirne.

Sterk and his cameraman Mehmet Sirin Akgun were detained alongside Mesopotamian News Agency (Mezopotamya Ajansi) corre-

spondents Idris Sayilgan and Naci Kaya near Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria.

Thousands of migrants and refugees have flocked to Turkey's western border with the European Union since Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lifted restrictions on February 28, fearing a new wave of Syrian refugees fleeing Idlib.

Turkish authorities accused the journalists of "filming in a military area".

Akgun was released after four days. Sterk meanwhile was moved to the Turkish capital Ankara where a court formally charged him with "propagating for a terrorist organization" – an offense that can carry up to five years in prison.

"Since their arrest, Rudaw Media Network has made

every legal effort to release the detained Rudaw team, and will continue its efforts legally," the Erbil-based broadcaster said in its statement. Sterk and Akgun were apprehended after crossing into a "forbidden zone" between Greece and Turkey.

"Rawin Sterk Yildiz was arrested while performing his duty as a journalist. Rudaw Media Network is asking for this to be taken into account

and for him to be freed,” the statement added.

Sterk attended a court hearing in Ankara on Friday where he was officially charged with “propagating for a terrorist organization” – in reference to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), an armed group fighting for greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey.

Ankara and its NATO allies consider the PKK a terrorist organization.

Sterk’s social media posts about Syria’s Idlib, where Turkish soldiers have clashed with Syrian regime forces in recent weeks, were used as evidence in Friday’s hearing.

In his defense, Sterk said his tweets about Idlib relied on reputable international news sources. He denied creating and disseminating propaganda.



Rudaw journalist Rawin Sterk was detained by Turkish authorities in Edirne on February 29, 2020. File photo: Rudaw TV

Sterk’s lawyer has seven days to appeal the ruling. If the appeal is accepted, Sterk will be released but will still have to appear before a second hearing next month. If the court does not acquit him at

this second hearing, the case will continue.

Human rights organizations have repeatedly raised concerns over Turkey’s detention and prosecution of journalists. Arrests spiked

in the years following the 2016 attempted coup.

Reporters Without Borders has called Turkey the “world’s biggest jailer of professional journalists”.

Le Monde

Par Thomas Wieder
et Jean-Pierre Stroobants
le 10 mars 2020

Recep Tayyip Erdogan exige la refonte de son accord migratoire avec l’Union européenne

En visite à Bruxelles lundi, le président turc n’a pas pris d’engagement définitif sur le respect du compromis signé en 2015. Il souhaite notamment que les Européens fassent davantage pour le soutenir face au régime syrien à Idlib.

Ce ne fut pas tout à fait une visite de courtoisie, mais pas non plus un moment décisif. Peut-être, juste, le signe d’une petite accalmie entre l’Union européenne et la Turquie. La visite, à Bruxelles, lundi 9 mars, du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a été rapide et a suscité des commentaires convenus de la part d’Ursula von der Leyen et de Charles Michel, les dirigeants de la Commission et du Conseil européens.

Les résultats ? Maigres. Il s’agit désormais, indique-t-on du côté européen, de « tenter de clarifier » l’accord de 2015 sur la migration, qui prévoyait qu’en échange de 6 milliards d’euros, la Turquie abriterait des réfugiés syriens chassés par la guerre, évitant qu’ils tentent de rejoindre l’Union. Une mission confiée au haut représentant Josep Borrell, et qui entraînera, selon Ankara, une véritable révision de cet accord.

La semaine dernière, le président turc a déclenché une crise qui couvait depuis longtemps en encourageant des migrants à se rendre à la frontière grecque. M. Erdogan souhaite que ses partenaires occidentaux fassent davantage pour le soutenir face au régime syrien à Idlib et pour gérer les millions de réfugiés qui ont gagné son pays. Une pression jugée inacceptable par les dirigeants européens, contraints toutefois d’avouer que tous les engagements qu’ils ont pris il y a

quelques années n’ont pas été respectés. Notamment le fait qu’une bonne partie de l’argent promis pour les réfugiés (1,5 milliard) n’a pas encore été versée aux organisations qui s’occupent d’éducation, d’intégration ou de santé.

« **Beaucoup de non-dits côté turc** »

M. Erdogan a-t-il exigé davantage d’argent lors de sa visite ? « *Non* », affirme-t-on du côté turc. M^{me} von

der Leyen et M. Michel, eux, éludent. « Il y a beaucoup de non-dits côté turc. Notamment sur la situation économique difficile du pays », commente une source proche de la négociation. Des non-dits, aussi, en ce qui concerne l'attitude d'Ankara à l'égard des migrants. A la question de savoir si le président turc s'était engagé à empêcher à nouveau qu'ils gagnent la Grèce, tant par la voie maritime que terrestre, M. Michel a répondu que « l'important est de mettre en œuvre l'accord de 2015 ». En clair, aucun engagement de la Turquie n'a été acté.

Pour le reste ? « Le dialogue a repris », se contente-t-on de souligner du côté des Vingt-Sept. Rien de précis sur la levée de certaines barrières commerciales ou une politique de visas plus libérale – qu'Ankara complique en maintenant des lois antiterroristes contestées ou en refusant d'inclure des données biométriques dans ses passeports. Peu d'indications, aussi, sur ce « dialogue politique à court, moyen et long terme », évoqué à l'issue de la réunion.

Les Européens promettent, en revanche, de prendre mieux en compte la préoccupation sécuritaire de leur interlocuteur. M. Erdogan a d'ailleurs aussi rencontré à l'ambassade de Turquie à Bruxelles le secrétaire général de l'OTAN, Jens Stoltenberg. Invité à « montrer sa solidarité, sans discrimination et sans conditions politiques », celui-ci a botté en touche, rendant hommage à un pays qui, plus que d'autres, a, dit-il « souffert d'attaques terroristes et d'un afflux de



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan reçu à Bruxelles, le 9 mars, par le président du Conseil européen Charles Michel et la présidente de la Commission Européenne Ursula von der Leyen. JOHN THYS / AFP

réfugiés ». Il a assuré que le soutien de l'Alliance atlantique se poursuivrait mais exprimé toutefois sa « grande préoccupation » quant aux récents événements à la frontière gréco-turque. Dimanche encore, M. Erdogan a appelé la Grèce à « ouvrir ses portes » aux migrants et à les « laisser aller » vers les autres pays de l'Union. Le premier ministre grec, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, en avait conclu que l'accord de 2015 était « mort ».

M. Stoltenberg n'a rien dit de l'immixtion de la Turquie dans le conflit syrien, où elle a fait face dans l'enclave d'Idlib à l'offensive des troupes d'Assad soutenues par la Russie. Ni sur l'achat par Ankara de systèmes antimissiles russes, incompatibles avec les normes de l'organisation transatlantique. M. Michel, de son côté, a indiqué que l'Union était prête à soutenir « toutes les solutions poli-

tiques » pour la stabilité de la région. Une discussion qui, comme beaucoup d'autres, semble-t-il, « devra certainement se poursuivre », souligne M^{me} von der Leyen.

Prendre en charge des enfants migrants

Il reste le problème dramatique du sort des réfugiés coincés entre la Grèce et la Turquie. Tandis que la Commission dit « se soucier » de leur fournir une aide et que le premier ministre hongrois, Viktor Orbán, estime qu'en réalité l'Union a suivi ses recommandations en fermant ses frontières, le gouvernement allemand a annoncé, de son côté, qu'une coalition de pays « volontaires » envisageait de prendre en charge des enfants migrants bloqués sur les îles grecques, où 38 000 personnes végètent dans des camps surpeuplés. La France,

le Portugal, le Luxembourg et la Finlande ont signalé leur volonté de participer à l'opération.

La position arrêtée par Berlin, dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi, est le fruit d'un compromis difficilement trouvé entre les conservateurs (CDU-CSU) et les sociaux-démocrates (SPD). Au sein de la CDU-CSU, la pression était très forte pour que l'Allemagne affiche la plus grande fermeté, afin de ne pas donner d'argument au parti d'extrême droite Alternative pour l'Allemagne (AfD). Au SPD, à l'inverse, beaucoup estimaient qu'un geste humanitaire devait être fait, afin de ne pas laisser le monopole du cœur aux Verts, qui ont lancé une pétition réclamant l'accueil, par l'Allemagne, de 5 000 mineurs.

Finalement, le gouvernement s'est donc mis d'accord sur la prise en charge de 1 000 à 1 500 enfants, « soit sévèrement malades, soit non accompagnés et âgés de moins de 14 ans et majoritairement des filles ». C'est sur l'insistance de la CDU-CSU qu'il a été décidé que la répartition de ces enfants se ferait au sein d'une coalition de pays « volontaires » au sein de l'UE. Une façon, à la fois, de réduire le nombre de ceux qui seront effectivement accueillis en Allemagne et d'éviter que Berlin ne fasse cavalier seul. Un point politiquement très important afin, là encore, de ne pas réveiller le souvenir de la crise migratoire de 2015, lors de laquelle M^{me} Merkel s'était vu reprocher d'avoir décidé la non-fermeture des frontières du pays sans concertation préalable avec ses partenaires européens.

Le Monde

11/03/2020
Par Benjamin Barthe
et Lorenzo Meloni

Sur la route des damnés d'Idlib, pourchassés par Assad

Reportage « Le Monde » a pu accéder pendant quelques heures, vendredi 6 mars, à la province du nord-ouest de la Syrie. Une enclave peuplée de 3 millions d'habitants, coincée entre les forces prorégime et la police d'Ankara.

Il faut imaginer un raz-de-marée humain. Une vague gigantesque, faite de centaines de milliers d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants, qui s'abat sur un territoire étroit et surpeuplé. La vague inonde les

champs, recouvre les collines, envahit les villes. Elle pénètre dans les écoles et les magasins, s'infiltré dans les bâtiments inachevés, s'insinue dans les moindres recoins, au premier étage d'une mosquée, comme dans

les sous-sols d'un stade de football.

C'est ce qui se passe depuis trois mois dans la province d'Idlib, dernier réduit de la rébellion anti-Assad, situé dans le coin

nord-ouest de la Syrie, en lisière de la Turquie. Un flot de déracinés, chassés de leur terre par les bombardements du pouvoir syrien et de son allié russe, a submergé le paysage. [Les Nations unies évaluent leur nombre](#)

à 1 million. On les reconnaît à plusieurs kilomètres de distance, à la bâche de plastique bleu qui leur sert souvent de toit, petite tache de couleur dans un univers de béton, de pierre et de poussière.

Vendredi 6 mars, avec l'assentiment des autorités turques, *Le Monde* a pu accéder à cette enclave, peuplée de 3 millions d'habitants, coincée entre les forces prorégime, qui espèrent la reconquérir, et la police d'Ankara, qui ne laisse plus personne franchir la frontière. Cette incursion de dix heures, dans ce monde coupé du monde, a été aussi permise par le Gouvernement de salut, l'entité en charge des services dans la zone rebelle, lié au groupe salafiste Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTS), la force dominante à Idlib. Le déplacement a coïncidé avec le premier jour du cessez-le-feu, négocié la veille, à Moscou, par le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et son homologue russe, Vladimir Poutine.

Assise en tailleur dans un camp de déplacés des environs de Sarmada, la première localité après le poste-frontière de Bab Al-Hawa, une vieille femme au visage cuivré épluche des pommes de terre. On l'appelle Hajja Fatma. Elle vit dans une tente de 15 m² avec sept de ses petits-enfants. Des gamins à la tignasse échevelée et aux frusques sales, dont les cris se mêlent au bêlement d'une chèvre, apportée dans sa fuite par l'occupant de la tente voisine. « *La nuit, quand les températures chutent et que l'on n'a plus rien à faire brûler dans le poêle, on enroule les petits dans les couvertures et on se serre contre eux, pour qu'ils restent au chaud* », raconte Hajja Fatma, qui sait que plusieurs enfants sont morts de froid ces dernières semaines.

Le site, établi sur le bas-côté d'une route, composé d'une cinquantaine de tentes, ressemble à un camp de migrants qui seraient venus de l'autre bout du monde. Des habits sèchent sur une corde à linge tiré entre deux bâtons de bois. Des coqs cou-



Le camp de déplacés, devant le stade de foot d'Idlib, le 6 mars. LORENZO MELONI / MAGNUM PHOTOS POUR « LE MONDE »

rent au milieu d'une demi-dizaine de citernes d'eau qui attendent d'être remplies. Aucun chemin n'est bitumé. La seule installation en dur est un bloc-toilettes en préfabriqué. Lorsque de violentes pluies se sont abattues sur la région en février, tout le camp s'est retrouvé à patauger. « *C'était comme vivre dans les égouts* », lâche Hajja Fatma, en triturant ses grosses mains calleuses.

« **Notre futur, c'est la Turquie** » Pour leur subsistance, les habitants dépendent entièrement des distributions d'aide des Nations unies. Du riz, de la farine, de l'huile, des lentilles et du sucre. Quand ces vivres sont terminés, il faut se serrer la ceinture. Il arrive aussi que les déplacés vendent leur panier alimentaire, pour payer, par exemple, l'emplacement de leur tente, un loyer au montant souvent élevé. « *La viande, je n'en ai pas mangé depuis des mois, confie Fatma. Et quant aux fruits, n'en parlons même pas, ajoute-t-elle dans un grand éclat de rire. C'est votre présence qui me met de bonne humeur. J'espère que, grâce à vous, notre*

voix sera entendue. »

Son fils, Mohamed Aboud, quadragénaire sanglé dans un blouson de cuir et une galabeya verte, précise le message. L'accord Poutine-Erdogan ayant consolidé les avancées des troupes loyalistes dans le sud de la province d'Idlib et dans la campagne de l'ouest d'Alep, dont la famille est originaire, tout retour en arrière est exclu. « *Bachar est un porc et un menteur, nous ne lui faisons pas confiance, vitupère-t-il. Des gens qui sont retournés vivre chez eux après avoir fui les combats ont été arrêtés au bout de quelques semaines. Notre futur, c'est la Turquie, ajoute-t-il, en évoquant l'hypothèse d'une traversée clandestine de la frontière, avec un passeur. On n'a que ça et Allah.* »

Khaled Mourad, trentenaire aux yeux clairs et à la voix douce, originaire du Djebel Zawiya, une zone récemment conquise par les prorégime, invite sous sa tente, couverte de tapis et de matelas. Cet ancien rebelle, qui a rendu les armes en 2015, de rage de passer plus de temps à

combattre des factions rivales que les forces de Damas, anticipe déjà la reprise des bombardements. « *Le cessez-le-feu ne tiendra pas car le régime nous considère tous comme des terroristes, prédit-il. Sans un miracle, nous ne reverrons jamais notre terre.* »

En ce vendredi, congé hebdomadaire, la route de Sarmada à Idlib, la capitale provinciale, est totalement fluide. Il y a quelques semaines encore, l'axe était saturé de véhicules : d'un côté les pick-up des rebelles et les blindés de l'armée turque, déployés en soutien, qui montaient au front ; et de l'autre, les familles, entassées dans des voitures ou des camions remplis à ras bord de couvertures et de matelas, qui fuyaient les combats. Aujourd'hui, le paysage défile à toute vitesse, jalonné de ces taches bleues, qui signalent la présence d'un camp de déplacés.

On les distingue au sommet des collines, dans les oliveraies et les champs d'herbes rases, sur les cultures en terrasse et en bordure des villages. Au loin, on

voit aussi les façades grêlées de balles de Foua et de Kefraya : deux villages chiïtes, longtemps assiégés par les rebelles, dont la population a été évacuée en plusieurs vagues, entre 2015 et 2018, contre la levée de l'encerclement de Zabadani et de Mada, deux localités anti-Assad, à l'ouest de Damas.

Les salafistes font profil bas

Sur la route, les nombreux barages militaires ont disparu, de peur probablement d'être pris pour cible par les avions russe et syrienne. Aux rares checkpoints toujours en place, des hommes armés écoulent le trafic d'un geste machinal. L'entrée dans Idlib, le fief de Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham, se fait sans le moindre contrôle. Un grand panneau appelant à la mobilisation générale, sur fond de photo de combattants, est certes dressé sur la place centrale. « *Il n'y a pas d'alternative à la confrontation* », clame l'affiche, avec en dessous de ce slogan martial les numéros de téléphone à composer pour rejoindre les rangs de la résistance armée.

Mais, à l'intérieur de la ville, l'organisation n'est guère visible. Le seul homme en treillis sur la place est le gardien du musée des antiquités. Un établissement célèbre pour sa collection de tablettes cunéiformes, qui a souffert aussi bien des bombardements de l'armée syrienne que du pillage des groupes rebelles et qui est aujourd'hui fermé. Sous la pression du régime mais aussi de l'armée turque et des milices syriennes pro-Ankara, arrivées en masse ces derniers mois, les salafistes font profil bas.

La ville porte les stigmates de neuf années de guerre. Elle est grise, triste, semée de bâtiments éventrés et d'amas de gravats, témoins des bombes qui lui tombent dessus à intervalles réguliers. Mais, contrairement à d'autres cités de la région, rasée et dépeuplée de force, Idlib est encore vivante. Le jardin public est rempli de familles venues savourer les premières heures du cessez-le-feu. C'est l'un des pre-



Dans le centre d'Idlib, le 6 mars. LORENZO MELONI / MAGNUM PHOTOS POUR « LE MONDE »

miers jours depuis décembre 2019 où les sirènes qui avertissent la population de l'arrivée d'un avion restent muettes.

Le Disneyland en profite aussi. Ce restaurant doté d'une aire de jeux, qui a ouvert six mois plus tôt, lors d'une précédente pause dans les combats, accueille une vingtaine de clients. Des adolescentes s'exercent à tirer au ballon de basket, dans une odeur de friture et de viande grillée. Deux jeunes garçons se relaient sur un cheval à bascule électronique. « *Le bonheur des enfants est notre bonheur* », s'exclame le manager des lieux, alors qu'un colosse barbu, en tenue militaire, s'assied à une table, un nourrisson dans les bras. Avant de pénétrer dans le restaurant, l'homme a confié sa kalachnikov au gardien, comme on donnerait son manteau au vestiaire d'une salle de spectacle.

Mais il suffit de pousser une porte, de grimper un escalier, pour retrouver le drame des déplacés. Le premier étage de la grande mosquée de la ville, la salle traditionnellement réservée aux femmes, est empli de cris d'enfants. Une centaine de jeunes rescapés de Saraqeb, une ville plus à l'est, récemment conquise par les pro-Assad, vivent là avec leur mère, harassées de fatigue. Wissal Al-Jamal, une fillette de 10 ans, montre sa main droite, réduite à l'état de moignon. « *On était en train de célébrer l'anniversaire de mon frère chez nos voisins*, raconte-t-elle sur un ton monocorde, avec la

gravité de l'enfant qui a grandi trop vite. *Je suis partie faire une sieste. C'est ça qui m'a sauvé. La bombe est tombée sur ma mère et mon frère qui sont morts. Moi, je n'ai été que blessée. J'ai commencé à apprendre à écrire de la main gauche.* »

Le stade de foot municipal a aussi été réquisitionné. Les naufragés de la guerre s'entassent dans ses travées, ses gradins et ses sous-sols. Seule la pelouse a été épargnée. « *On avait peur, si l'on dressait une grande tente dessus, que ce soit une cible parfaite pour les avions d'Assad* », explique Abdel Razek Awad, le responsable local de l'ONG syrienne Violet, très présente sur le terrain. Dans une grande salle à côté des douches, l'organisation a aménagé un dortoir pour une quarantaine de familles. Bâche en guise de tapis, matelas alignés contre les murs et des poêles à charbon pour le chauffage. « *Ce stade était un lieu de fête, c'est maintenant un endroit rempli de tristesse* », dit Abdel Razek.

« Il n'y aura pas de retour »

Le regard de Samira Dahoul, une vieille dame, emmitoufflée dans un gilet de laine bleu, se voile à l'évocation de ses fils, dont elle a perdu la trace dans sa fuite. « *Je crois qu'ils sont partis au Liban, trois autres sont morts dans les combats, je suis toute seule maintenant* », bredouille-t-elle. A ses côtés, le visage ceint d'un élégant voile vert, Hasna Mustafa, la quarantaine, pleure sa maison du Djebel Zawiya. « *Je*

voulais rester à côté de la tombe de mon fils, qui est mort au combat, dit-elle. *Je ne supporte pas de me dire qu'il sent que je suis partie. Mais je sais que je ne pourrais pas vivre avec ceux qui l'ont tué. Et, de toute façon, le régime ne veut pas de nous. Il n'y aura pas de retour, on le sait bien.* »

Le voilà le message qu'envoient les damnés d'Idlib. Leur exode n'est pas la conséquence malheureuse d'une situation de guerre. Il est le but même de la guerre. « *Le régime Assad veut tous nous mettre dehors*, expose Abdel Razek Awad. *Il sait qu'il ne pourra jamais contrôler cette région tant que cette population, qui lui est fondamentalement hostile, reste sur place. Si personne ne l'arrête, il est capable d'aller écraser jusqu'aux tentes de déplacés.* »

Conscients qu'ils font face à une guerre d'élimination, persuadés tous ou presque que la trêve ne durera pas, certains Syriens d'Idlib tentent le tout pour le tout : la traversée de la frontière turque. Une expédition coûteuse et périlleuse, réservée aux têtes brûlées. La plupart de ceux qui la tentent sont renvoyés à la case départ, avec dans le meilleur des cas quelques marques de coups, infligés par les gardes turcs et, dans le pire des cas, une balle dans le corps. Les autres s'accrochent, se démènent, avec l'énergie folle du désespoir. « *Je préfère manger des cailloux dans mon pays que de partir en Allemagne* », tempête Hasna.

La route d'Idlib, à un moment, enjambe la ligne de chemin de fer Alep-Lattaquié. Depuis le pont, on peut voir que les rails ont été arrachés sur un tronçon de plusieurs centaines de mètres. Les hommes qui ont fait cela ont probablement revendu leur butin à un ferrailleur. Mais surtout, sur le talus où circulait le train, ils ont monté des tentes. Ils ont logé leurs proches. Ce n'est pas le plus beau des emplacements. Mais cette position légèrement surélevée protège au moins le camp des inondations. Idlib ou la survie, obstinée, acharnée.

Turkish police detain HDP co-mayor of Kurdish city

POLICE swooped to detain the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) co-mayor of the largely Kurdish city of Cizre today as the Turkish state continued its attacks on democracy.

Berivan Kutlu was taken into custody following a raid on her home in the early hours of the morning. She was replaced as mayor by a government-appointed trustee.

The reasons for her detention were not immediately known.

Ms Kutlu was first arrested in January last year, along with 21 other female politicians from the HDP, just two months before municipal elections.

They were accused of "terror activities or membership" related to their involvement with feminist or-



HDP co-mayor for Cizre Berivan Kutlu

ganisation the Free Women's Movement, which the Turkish state claims is linked to the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Cizre was run by government-appointed trustees, as was almost 90 other largely Kurdish municipalities, until the HDP won it back in elections last March.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned ahead of the elections that he would dismiss mayors if HDP candidates won, branding them terrorists — a frequent accusation made against the party by the Turkish state.

In August, he removed elected HDP mayors in Diyarbakir,

Mardin and Van provinces and replaced them with trustees loyal to the government.

Since then, 20 HDP co-mayors have been jailed, while 28 co-mayors have been stripped of office on terrorism allegations.

The HDP warned of a "political genocide" against the country's Kurdish population.

More than 15,000 HDP members and activists have been detained since 2015 and 6,000 of them jailed, according to the party.

At least 200 elected officials and seven former HDP MPs are behind bars, including former co-chairs Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas.

AL-MONITOR By Amberin Zama
Thursday, March 12, 2020

Turkey detains Kurdish human rights lawyers on terror claims

Police detained nine human rights lawyers in the mainly Kurdish provinces of Urfa and Diyarbakir on March 12 in what rights groups say is part of an ongoing pressure campaign aimed at covering up abuse in police custody.

At least nine lawyers were detained on terror charges in early morning raids in the mainly Kurdish provinces of Urfa and Diyarbakir today, part of an ongoing campaign of repression targeting human rights defenders, said Abdullah Oncel, the president of the Urfa Bar Association.

Seven of the lawyers were detained in Urfa and two others in Diyarbakir. Three others — all from Diyarbakir — are being

sought, Oncel told Al-Monitor. Several of the lawyers' offices were ransacked by police and their homes raided, he added.

Bunyamin Seker, co-chair of the Jurists for Freedom Association, said a fourth lawyer from Sirnak, a heavily Kurdish province on the Iraqi border, was also being sought in connection with the case that is being overseen by the chief prosecutor of Urfa.

"We have been unable to find

out the details or the exact reasoning of this operation but it's obvious to us that with respect to lawyers, it's to do with their work on abuses, particularly those that occur inside prison," he told Al-Monitor. Another 12 individuals, none of them lawyers, are also believed to be facing charges in the case but their identities remain unknown and it remains unclear whether any have been detained, Seker said.

A secrecy order has been

slapped on the investigation. The lawyers are thought to be accused of aiding and abetting the outlawed [Kurdistan Workers Party](#) (PKK), a rebel group that is waging an armed campaign for political autonomy and is classified as a terror group by Turkey, the EU and the United States.

The charge is liberally dispensed to lock up anyone who demands greater rights for the country's 14 million or so Kurds. They include dozens of



Riot police stand guard as the supporters of the pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party gather to protest the detention of their local politicians in Diyarbakir, Turkey, Oct. 25, 2019. Photo by REUTERS/Sertac Kayar. Mar 12, 2020

democratically elected [Kurdish officials](#), among them Selcuk Mizrakli, the mayor of Diyarbakir, ousted from office in October and jailed.

Mizrakli, who was elected with 63% of the vote in March 2019, was sentenced to nine years, four months and 15 days on Monday on thinly evidenced charges of [“membership of a terrorist organization.”](#)

Oncel denied any of the detained lawyers were connected with the PKK. “These are men and women dedicated to defending human rights and recording abuses. They are a constant thorn in the side of authorities who want to cover them up,” he said.

Torture under detention including sexual abuse, beatings and electric shocks has been on the rise since the failed July 2016 coup, rights groups say.

One of the detained lawyers, Sevda Celikol Bingol, was among a group of 11 lawyers who documented the cases of some 54 men, women and children who were [rounded up in Urfa’s](#) Halfeti district and tortured after a policeman died in a clash there with PKK rebels.

Coming during the Ramadan fast, photos of the detainees lying on the ground, face down with their hands cuffed behind them, provoked an outcry. The president of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, Cihan Aydin, likened the scene to [Auschwitz, Gaza and Abu Ghraib](#) in a tweet.

“There were boot marks on their backs,” Oncel said. Authorities are still investigating a criminal complaint filed against the perpetrators.

Bingol was also representing the family of four men who

were killed in a feud with the tribe of Ibrahim Halil Yildiz, a lawmaker for Urfa from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party. Yildiz made headlines last week when he broke his hand during a [fistfight in the parliament](#) that erupted when an opposition lawmaker criticized Erdogan’s Syria policy.

At least two more of the lawyers detained in today’s sweep have already served jail time on terrorism charges. They include Emin Baran, who practices in Urfa’s township of Suruc, where the Islamic State carried out a 2015 [bomb attack](#) that killed 33 young activists. They had been planning to help rebuild the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani that was wrecked by the jihadis during a months-long siege. Baran spent two years in pre-trial detention in 2016-2019, Oncel said.

“The police have had Baran in their sights before. He was unjustly accused of terrorist propaganda,” said Emma Sinclair-Webb, Turkey director for Human Rights Watch. The New York-based advocacy group published a 56-page report in April 2019, cataloging what it called the systematic abusive detention and prosecution of [human rights lawyers in Turkey](#) since July 2016.

“It’s part of a pattern of targeting lawyers for discharging their professional duties, resulting in an erosion of the right to defense [and] a violation of fair trial. They get accused of the same crimes of the people they sometimes represent,” she told Al-Monitor.

“And Urfa has a very bad record of abuses over a long time.”



Greg Myre
March 12, 2020

U.S. Launches Retaliatory Airstrikes In Iraq After Missile Attack

The United States on Thursday evening launched a series of airstrikes in Iraq against an Iranian-backed militia group suspected of firing an [earlier rocket attack](#) that killed and wounded American and British troops.

"The United States conducted defensive precision strikes against Kata'ib Hezbollah facilities across Iraq," the Pentagon said in a statement.

Officials all but blamed the Shia group for a Wednesday strike at Camp Taji near Baghdad where coalition troops are housed. Two U.S. service members and one U.K. service member were killed in the rocket barrage, and 14 others were wounded.

"You don't get to shoot at our bases and kill and wound Americans and get away with it," Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said.

The Pentagon did not release any information on the number of casualties.

Each of the identified targets in Thurs-



Defense Secretary Mark Esper, pictured on Monday, said the U.S. airstrike in Iraq on Thursday targeted Kata-ib Hezbollah weapon storage facilities. Susan Walsh/AP

day's retaliatory bombing is believed to "include facilities that housed weapons used to target U.S. and coalition troops."

The strikes were "defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia

militia groups," the statement added. The latest round of shellings raise concerns of renewed tensions between the two nations, which became increasingly strained after the Trump administration withdrew from a landmark nuclear agreement with Tehran and reinstated debilitating sanctions.

Relations worsened during a volley of violence that began in [late December](#), when Kataib Hezbollah bombarded a U.S. military base near Kirkuk with rockets. A few days later, American forces struck back at the Shia militia group in Iraq and Syria.

But the two countries came to what could have been the brink of war after a U.S. drone strike killed Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis near Baghdad's airport in January. The Department of Defense justified the attack [by saying](#) the general was "actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region."

The killing subsequently triggered a ballistic missile attack by Iran on the Ain al-Assad air base in Iraq and a second base at Irbil, which houses U.S. personnel.

The strike on al-Assad [injured at least 34 U.S. service members](#).

The New York Times

By Sara Aridi
March 1, 2020

Defiant Iranian Directors Speak Out About Censorship, Onscreen and Off

Mohammad Rasoulof, whose new movie won the top prize at the Berlin Film Festival, is one of several filmmakers who have grown more outspoken as Iran clamps down on artistic expression.

When "There Is No Evil," the new drama by the celebrated Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, debuted at the Berlin Film Festival on Friday, it was a bittersweet moment for Rasoulof.

Speaking through an interpreter before [the film won the Golden Bear](#), the festival's top prize, he explained that he could not attend the premiere because he had been banned from leaving Iran and faces a year in prison, the result of the government's re-

action to his previous film, a sharp critique of the country's clerical leadership called "[A Man of Integrity](#)."

Punishment like Rasoulof's is an all-too common story in contemporary Iranian cinema, a thriving, internation-

ally respected scene. Yet despite the government's repressive measures — its approval is required for shoots and screenings — he and other directors have grown more emboldened to speak out, in formal letters, on awards stages, through

social media and on film.

Their protests have landed against a backdrop of rising tensions throughout Iranian society.

The distrust was running high in January when the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, was killed by an American drone strike. That set off fears of a war with the United States, exacerbated by the Iranian military's accidental attack on a Ukrainian airliner, which killed all 176 people on board; the government, in disarray, [denied responsibility](#) for three days.

And now, rising numbers of coronavirus cases and conflicting information have called the government's credibility into question again.

The most recent period of unrest goes back to November. When Iran's citizens staged demonstrations across the



Rasoulouf debuted his new film at the Berlin Film Festival but he did not attend because he was barred from leaving Iran. Credit...Loic Venance/Agence France- Presse — Getty Images

country over a gasoline price increase, [security forces used firearms](#) to quell the uprisings. Hundreds of protesters were killed, but mourners were warned [not to hold public funerals](#).

That same month, more than 200 Iranian film professionals, including the Oscar-nominated Asghar Farhadi ("[A Separation](#)"), signed an open letter condemning state censorship of "[The Paternal House](#)," a drama about an

honor killing that was banned less than a week after screening in Iran. The protest letter was described by a film critic in Iran as one of [the most explicit and harshest of its kind](#).

Since then, a number of filmmakers have defied the government and spoken out about the unrest and the downed plane. At the [Iranian Film Critics Awards](#) on Jan. 30, Homayoun Ghanizadeh, an actor and director, dedi-

cated his award to an engineer killed during the November protests and urged artists not to forget the fallen demonstrators. [Rakhshan Bani Etemad](#), the country's most prominent female filmmaker, was detained for posting a call for a nationwide vigil for the victims of the plane downing. She was held and interrogated for a few hours and eventually retracted her statement.

"It's a very difficult environment to be an artist in and remain true to your vision," said Jasmin Ramsey, the director of communications at the Center for Human Rights in Iran, a New York-based non-profit organization.

Ghanizadeh's statement — made on a public stage with government officials in the audience — was a "huge risk," Ramsey said. "There's all kinds of dangers for him."

Meanwhile, more than 100 actors and directors had announced they would boycott the annual, government-sponsored [Fajr Film Festival](#) in February, in protest of the country's handling of the plane incident. The festival is considered the most prestigious event in Iranian cinema.

"Filmmakers are trying to address the collective trauma that everyone has experienced," Ramsey said. "The entire society is kind of convulsing right now."

The widespread outrage spurred by the plane downing is unlike anything Rasoulouf has seen, he said, and suggested to him that his fellow Iranians were gradually becoming more outspoken.



Kaveh Ahangar in Rasoulouf's new movie, "There Is No Evil." Cosmopol Film

“For the first time, people overcame the culture of keeping things quiet,” he said. They “have come out against lies, against hypocrisy, and they are no longer able to hide their anger.”

His own career mirrors the growing fury. Rasoulof resorted to allegorical stories in earlier work like “White Meadows,” so as not to “directly confront power,” he said. But he eventually felt that was “a form of accepting the tyrannical regime,” he added.

His more recent films, like “[Manuscripts Don’t Burn](#),” based on the [government’s attempt to kill prominent writers](#) in the 1990s, are much more direct in its criticism.

Yet his rebellion comes with a price. In 2010, he and the prominent director Jafar Panahi were detained while working on a project related to the [2009 Iranian presidential election](#) and each sentenced to six years in prison. The sentences were later reduced to one year, which neither has served yet. Panahi was banned from filmmaking for 20 years, yet he has made several [award-winning movies](#) since.

Rasoulof was held in solitary confinement for eight days and could not communicate with his family, he said. He believed his work could endanger them, so his wife and daughter moved to Germany soon after.

In 2017, his “Man of Integrity”



A scene from Rasoulof's 2014 drama, “Manuscripts Don’t Burn.”Elle Driver

won the Un Certain Regard Award at the Cannes Film Festival. When he returned to Iran, authorities confiscated his passport, charged him with propaganda against the state and in July sentenced him to a year in prison. ([Cannes](#) and [others](#) issued a statement condemning the sentence soon after.)

Some filmmakers, like the Istanbul-based Iranian-Kurdish director Bahman Ghobadi (“[No One Knows About Persian Cats](#)”), have chosen to leave the country to work. But there are lesser-known artists who don’t have the means to emigrate or the status to generate international attention when the government subjects them to harsh punishment.

[Hossein Rajabian](#), for example, was held in solitary confinement for two months over his movie about women’s right to divorce in Iran. Later, he was convicted on three

charges, including spreading propaganda against the state, and imprisoned for nearly three years.

That film was never screened in Iran; Rajabian uploaded it to YouTube before his imprisonment, but it was removed at the request of the Iranian Film Council. He recently completed [a new movie](#), which he plans to release online through BBC Persia to avoid the government’s censors. Speaking through an interpreter, Rajabian said the film conveys the disillusionment of young Iranians who feel trapped in their own country.

“The previous generation had promised to bring us freedom” after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, he said. “But what we have, in effect, is Iran’s total isolation.”

Rasoulof emphasized a stark reality: All Iranians — not just vocal public figures — can face jail time for the most

minor offenses. As for his own sentence, he said being behind bars isn’t much different from ordinary life in Iran. The country is just “a relatively large prison,” he said.

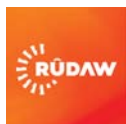
The inner turmoil that festers in people living under oppression is a recurring theme in “There Is No Evil.”

Commenting on that movie, Carlo Chatrian, the artistic director of the Berlin Film Festival, said, “politically, aesthetically and ethically, the film is engaging and powerful.”

Rasoulof was inspired after returning to Iran from Cannes in 2017, he said. All his friends had asked why he came back, and he could think of only one answer.

“This is my home,” he said. “I belong here.”

sara Aridi writes about film, television and the arts for the Culture section.



12-03-2020
Fazel Hawramy

President Barzani condemns rocket attack on coalition forces, warns of 'dangerous development'

Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani has condemned last night's rocket attack on coalition forces at Taji military base north of Baghdad, warning such attacks endanger Iraqi national interests at a time that the Islamic State (ISIS) remains a "serious threat".

Three coalition personnel – two American and one British – were killed and approximately 12 were wounded during a barrage of rocket attacks on the Iraqi base housing coalition advisors on Wednesday night, according to a statement from the anti-ISIS coalition.

"We condemn last night's rocket attack that targeted the Global Coalition Forces in Taji military base in Baghdad in the strongest terms," President Barzani said in a statement on Thursday.

"While I offer my condolences to the families of the victims and their countries, I reiterate that this attack is a dangerous development and damages the interests of Iraq and endangers the situation in the country. In particular at a time that the threat of terror is real and Daesh poses a serious threat on the peace and security of Iraq and the region and eradicating them requires the cooperation and support of the global coalition," Barzani added, referring to ISIS by its Arabic acronym.

According to the coalition statement, around 18 107mm Katyusha rockets struck the base near Baghdad. It added that Iraqi Security Forces found a "rocket-rigged truck" a few miles from the site.

Prime Minister Masrour Barzani



US forces at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad. File photo: AP

also released a [statement](#) strongly condemning the attack, saying it would "strengthen extremist groups."

"I strongly condemn this attack on our Coalition partners and express condolences to the victims' families and wish the wounded a speedy recovery. Our joint efforts should be focused on defeating the terrorist threat. Iraq already faces health, economic and security obstacles. Any further escalation will simply harm Iraq and the whole region," said the prime minister.

The office of Iraqi President Barham Salih, a Kurd, labelled the strikes a "terrorist attack" and said the perpetrators were targeting Iraq's already fragile security situation.

"We emphasize the importance of a thorough investigation to...find those responsible for this attack..."

and call on every party to exercise restraint," read an emailed statement.

The attack comes just over two months after the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani near Baghdad airport by US forces, prompting Iran to fire around a dozen ballistic missiles at the Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar province, wounding over hundred American personnel.

While no one has claimed responsibility for the Wednesday attack, Iranian backed Shia militias, part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have repeatedly vowed to avenge the death of their commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed alongside Soleimani on January 3.

Hours after the attack, three aircraft carried out airstrikes on two PMF bases near Albu Kamal in Syria's Deir ez-Zor governorate.

26 fighters were killed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted that those responsible will be held accountable for the Taji attack.

The United Nation Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) also [condemned](#) the attack and called on the Iraqi government to exercise its full powers and hold perpetrators accountable.

"These ongoing attacks are a clear and substantial threat to the country, and the risk of rogue action by armed groups remains a constant concern," UNAMI said.

"Maximum restraint on all sides is the only way forward. The Government of Iraq must exercise its full powers to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent future attacks," it added.

The Turkish poet imprisoned for 26 years for a crime he did not commit

Memories of freedom, love and companionship fill the poems of İlhan Çomak, who was arrested at the age of 22

The good news is that last year the Turkish poet İlhan Çomak won a major award, the Senur Sezer poetry prize, for his eighth and most recent book of poems, *Geldim Sana* (I Came to You). The bad news is that he is in prison and has been in prison for 26 years, since his arrest as a geography student at the age of 22. All his books have been written in prison.

How did he come to be there? One factor, most likely the main factor, is that he is Kurdish. That is not a crime in itself, but belonging to, or even associating with a Kurdish political organisation is. There is also the specific matter of starting a forest fire, but no serious evidence has ever been brought to prove that. The only "proof" was his confession under torture and this has been highlighted in any appeals to free him.

It is not unusual in Turkey for writers to be imprisoned. There have been, and still are, too many to mention here but none has been incarcerated for as long as Çomak. Some have published from inside, some with great success. One of Turkey's greatest poets, Nâzım Hikmet, who died in 1963, spent much of his life in prison or exile.

Putting aside writers, there remain the students. Following the Gezi Park environmental protests of 2013 there were over 70,000 students in Turkish jails and total numbers will



Çomak was arrested as a student of Istanbul University. Photograph: Mike Pellinni/Alamy Stock Photo

have swollen since the attempted military coup of 2016. The precise number is unknown.

After the abortive 2016 coup some 53 newspapers were shut down. Many more media organisations were outlawed. There is regular pre-trial detention for those writing or sharing social media messages thought to be even faintly or indirectly subversive. Above all, perhaps, it is the the Kurdish population and Kurdish writers who have been most affected.



İlhan Çomak ... appeals against his sentence have been constantly delayed

dom, love and companionship. As he writes in "Life Does Not Lie", translated by Caroline Stockford:

I am between the moon and the tide.

Between the whisper and the scream.

As a child I still had the script of a child, I was hostage to my mother's pomegranate smile.

When I looked from the window to the full light of the garden

Watching the philosophy of hands plucking the fruit tree,

In those times when we still heard the sounds of frogs,

When women passed through my life, the lake was blue

And I knew the value of blue. I understand pain too, on the steps of life.

A fellow poet, Haydar Ergülen, suggests the poems could have been written inside or outside prison walls. And of course we must remember it wasn't for his poetry that Çomak was imprisoned.

His contacts with the outside world are very limited. He has been shifted from prison to prison to prevent his parents having access to him, but they have followed him each time. It is worth noting that Britain has strong economic ties with Turkey and could demand the immediate release of Çomak as a precondition to any agreement. Appeals against his sentence have been constantly delayed but his poetry, rightly, reaches ever more readers.

Arabic press review: Egypt helping Kurdish-led troops in Syria fighting Turkish forces

Meanwhile, in efforts to avoid the spread of coronavirus, rights groups call for the release of political prisoners in Egypt, Saudi Arabia 'isolates' banknotes and Qatar suspends public transport

Egypt support for SDF in Syria

Egypt has opened a communication channel between the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his main Kurdish opposition militant group in a bid to confront the Turkish role in northern Syria, a report by the London-based [Al-Araby Al-Jadeed](#) newspaper said on Friday.

According to unnamed Egyptian sources, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have provided "major military assistance" to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to aide them in their battle against Turkish troops in northeastern Syria.

The sources added that the SDF received significant financial support from both the UAE and Saudi Arabia with Egyptian coordination.

The paper earlier revealed that the Egyptian government had been providing political support to the SDF, such as opening a diplomatic office and a TV channel for them in Cairo.

As part of the coordination between Egypt, its Gulf allies and the Syrian government, nearly 3,000 Syrian fighters are due to join the battles in Libya, the newspaper said, without specifying whether they belonged to the Syrian army.

The transfer of Syrian troops will take place "after an expanded agreement between the Syrian regime and militia commander in eastern Libya, retired Major General Khalifa Haftar and Cairo", according to the paper.

"They will be airlifted to Egypt, and then will enter Libya via the Egyptian-Libyan land borders," the re-



Egypt and its Gulf allies have provided 'significant military support' to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria, says Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (AFP)

port said.

Free prisoners to avoid coronavirus

Four human rights organisations called on the Egyptian government to "take the necessary measures towards avoiding the infection of detainees with the coronavirus", according to [Arabi21](#) online newspaper.

The rights groups said in a joint statement that authorities should immediately release prisoners and detainees, and take the legal measures stipulated in the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Among the alternative measures authorised by Egyptian laws and suggested by the groups are house arrests and travel bans.

"Prisoners have a right to a healthy environment and permanent medical care, which is difficult to find in Egyptian jails as a result of overcrowding and lack of necessary conditions appropriate for community protection from this

virus," a statement added.

Egypt has [reported](#) 80 cases of coronavirus infections and two deaths, while 27 cases have recovered.

The human rights organisations noted that Egyptian authorities should pay attention to "the high level of overcrowding in prison cells, headquarters and places of detention, as well as poor ventilation and sanitation, as there are many cases suffering from various chronic diseases". Adding that "all these issues can lead to a humanitarian disaster that can be difficult to remedy".

Saudi banknotes on quarantine

The Saudi Arabian monetary authority (Central Bank) has isolated all Saudi currencies coming to the branches of the institution from outside the kingdom through banks and money transfer companies, as a precautionary measure against coronavirus infections, according to the Saudi newspaper [Alsharq Alawsat](#).

'Banknotes, coins and other payment methods are not different from the daily elements that we deal with ... that can transmit viruses'

- Saudi monetary authority

Saudi Arabia reported 17 new coronavirus cases, also known as COVID-19, bringing the total number [in the kingdom](#) to 62.

The monetary authority explained that "banknotes, coins and other payment methods are not different from the daily elements that we deal with, such as door and wagon handles, or purchased items on the market, or at airports or other public surfaces that can transmit viruses".

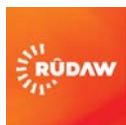
The authority pointed out that it was following up and coordinating with the relevant authorities inside and outside the kingdom, to take all preventive and precautionary measures followed by the central banks to deal with the currency or other means of payment at the time of a pandemic, according to [Alsharq Alawsat](#).

Qatar suspends transport

Qatar's ministry of transportation has announced a temporary three-day suspension of the Doha subway service and public transport bus service as a precautionary measure against the [spread of coronavirus](#), according to the New Khalij website.

The ministry stated that metro and public transport bus services would be suspended from Thursday evening until Sunday morning.

Meanwhile, the ministry of reli-



13-03-2020
Karwan Faidhi Dri

Kurdish academic recognized for his 'highly cited' chemistry research (SEE CORRECTION)

Editors note: Please see the bottom of this article for a correction posted on March 26 at 6:10 pm. The article has otherwise been left as originally posted on March 13.

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region -- A Kurdistan Region academic, originally from Iran, has been named by an international analytics institution as a "2019 World Highly Cited Scientist" for his research in chemistry. Clarivate Analytics, which owns and operates analytics-related services and has offices in Philadelphia and London, sent an [email](#) to Kurdish academic Mohammed Sajadi on Thursday, congratulating him for being recognized as one of the top 1% of cited scientists in his field.

"Congratulations on being named a 2019 World Highly Cited Scientist. Your research ranks among the top 1% most cited works in your field...earning the mark of exceptional impact. It is truly an honor to recognize researchers like you for your dedication and focus to extending the sphere of human knowledge," read the email shared by Sajadi.

"Very few researchers earn this distinction - writing the greatest number of reports, officially designated by Essential Science Indicators as Highly Cited Papers," added the



Mohammed Sajadi with President of Soran University Muslih Mustafa.
Photo: Social Media

email from the company. Born in the Iranian city of Saqqez in 1981, Sajadi received his Bachelor's Degree in pure and applied chemistry in 2005 and his Masters Degree in phytochemistry in 2009.

"I am really very happy to obtain such an excellent position in the international scientific community," he told Rudaw English on Friday. He added that the Kurdistan Region has a great number of "excellent academics" at universities and scientific institutions who can contribute to the progress of scientific research in the Region.

Sajadi moved to the Kurdistan Region in 2010, seeking employment at a university. He now teaches at Soran University.

Muslih Mustafa, President of Soran University, who was the first person to announce the news, [said](#) on his Facebook page that they opened doors

to Sajadi ten years ago when others would not.

"When Sajadi came to Kurdistan, other universities closed doors in his face due to various reasons. However, Soran University embraced him and paved the way for him to develop [his] skills," wrote Mustafa.

Sajadi published 180 research papers between 2006 and 2019 which mainly focus on environmental factors and sustainability, including green nanotechnology, environmental pollution and pharmacognosy - related to medicine derived from plants- among others.

Clarivate Analytics was unavailable for further comment. **CORRECTION:** This story was based on an email purportedly sent to Sajadi by Clarivate Analytics on March 12, then posted by Soran University on its Facebook page. The email congratulated Sajadi on being recognized as a "2019 World Highly Cited Scientist".

However, in an email sent to Rudaw English, Clairvate Analytics denied having sent Sajadi such a message.

"The letter [email] which was posted on [Sorani University's] Facebook was not issued by Clarivate Analytics and we asked that it be taken down," Lisa Hulme, Head of Global Communications at Clarivate Analytics told Rudaw English in an email on March 24. "We do not have a Highly Cited Scientist award."

Though a "Highly Cited Scientist award" is not offered, Hulme pointed Rudaw English towards a [public access list of Highly Cited Researchers](#) powered by the Web of Science Group, which forms part of Clarivate Analytics. The list is described as "recognizing the world's most influential researchers of the past decade, demonstrated by the production of multiple highly-cited papers that rank in the top 1% by citations for field and year in Web of Science." Sajadi cannot be found on the list.

However, in an email on March 18, Hulme said that Sajadi "is the author of some highly cited papers in our Essential Science Indicators database - that appears to be evident and correct."

The email of Sajadi's recognition as a "2019 World Highly Cited Scientist" has been removed from Soran University's Facebook page, but Sajadi insisted to Rudaw English that the story remains accurate.



avec AFP
14/03/2020

Coronavirus curfew shuts down cities in Iraq's Kurdish region

Arbil (Iraq) (AFP)

Pigeons are the only visitors to Arbil's citadel, normally buzzing with tourists, and security forces in masks and gloves have emptied cobblestone streets below as the Iraqi city goes into lockdown.

Overnight Friday to Saturday, Arbil and the city of Sulaimaniyah, both in Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdish region, began a 48-hour curfew to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"Moving around is banned and people must stay home," the region's interior ministry said in a statement.

Iraq has registered at least 10 deaths and more than 90 cases of COVID-19. The first recorded fatality was a 70-year-old imam in Sulaimaniyah, and 28 others

in the region are confirmed to have been infected.

On Saturday in Sulaimaniyah, about 200 kilometres (125 miles) southeast of Arbil, men in protective gear and with green disinfectant tanks strapped to their backs sprayed down sidewalks and store fronts.

Ambulances and fire trucks could be seen driving through the city streets, which were otherwise clear of activity.

Iraq has been particularly worried about a spread of the virus from neighbouring Iran, which has been one of the worst-hit countries.

More than 600 people have died and over 12,000 have been infected by the novel coronavirus in Iran, which shares a border of around 1,500-kilometres (over 900 miles) with Iraq.

Iraq has officially closed its crossing points along the entire frontier with Iran, but authorities fear that people can still use smuggling routes and informal crossings to travel undetected.

About a third of the shared border is with Iraq's Kurdistan region.

In a broader move, Kurdish authorities have banned travel to federal Iraqi provinces for two weeks starting Saturday and have barred large gatherings and sporting events.

The decision is likely to cripple Kurdish new year celebrations, set to take place from around March 19.

Iraq's federal authorities have announced bans on non-Iraqi travellers coming from around a dozen countries facing COVID-19 outbreaks.

While authorities have not imposed a nationwide curfew, the province of Nineveh, which neighbours the Kurdish region, announced its own 48-hour lockdown from Saturday night.

Federal authorities have shut schools, shopping centres and movie theatres across the country, and government agencies have slashed their opening hours.

Shiite Muslim shrines in the south have remained open, under pressure from religious and political authorities.

A massive COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq would likely overwhelm the country's health system, worn down by years of conflict, inadequate investment and chronic shortages.

© 2020 AFP

La Libre.be le 14 mars 2020

Au Kurdistan irakien, un couvre-feu décrété

La citadelle d'Erbil déserte, des tours de bureaux vides et des militaires masqués et gantés bloquant les rues: au Kurdistan d'Irak, les autorités ont décrété 48 heures de couvre-feu pour tenter d'endiguer l'épidémie du nouveau coronavirus. Vendredi à minuit, les deux grandes provinces kurdes du nord irakien ont été placées sous couvre-feu. "La circulation est interdite, les gens doivent rester chez eux (...) pour que les équipes médicales puissent faire leur travail" de désinfection, a annoncé dans un communiqué le ministère de l'Intérieur de la région, autonome depuis 1991. Jusqu'ici, l'Irak a recensé 10 morts du nouveau coronavirus et 93 contaminations. Parmi eux, un imam de 70 ans, qui visitait



mosquées et fidèles très régulièrement, est mort à Souleimaniyeh, la deuxième ville du Kurdistan irakien. Au total, 28 personnes ont été contaminées dans la région. L'épidémie de Covid-19 inquiète particulièrement les Irakiens car elle a durement frappé l'Iran voisin, y faisant

plus de 600 morts et 12.000 contaminés. Le Kurdistan partage des centaines de kilomètres de frontière avec la République islamique, ainsi que de nombreux postes-frontières pour biens et personnes et surtout, des dizaines de points de passage informels où continuent de transiter voyageurs, pèlerins, hommes d'affaires et marchandises. Les fêtes du Nouvel An persan tombent cette année du 19 mars au 3 avril et qui sont

habituellement célébrées dans les montagnes du nord irakien. Elles pourraient faire les frais des annonces des autorités d'interdire les rassemblements, alors que des Kurdes d'Iran viennent traditionnellement participer aux festivités. Aucun couvre-feu n'a été déclaré dans le reste de l'Irak mais les provinces sont désormais fermées aux non-résidents. La plupart des vols vers l'Irak ont été annulés et les écoles, cinémas et centres commerciaux sont tous fermés. Mais de nombreuses exceptions subsistent. Des mausolées chiites dans le sud sont restés ouverts sous la pression de dignitaires religieux ou politiques ainsi que des restaurants et magasins dans un pays où pots-de-vin et clientélisme sont courants. (Belga).



Hiwa Shilani I
March 15-2020

KRG extends curfew by 72 hours as authorities report more coronavirus cases

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) –

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Sunday issued a 72-hour extension on a curfew order in Erbil and Sulaimani provinces that was due to expire midnight Sunday.

This comes as the Health Ministry reported on Sunday five more coronavirus infections in Sulaimani Province, totaling 34 cases across the Kurdistan Region.

The curfew began at midnight on Friday and would continue till midnight Wednesday, March 18, Kurdistan interior minister Rebar Ahmed said during a press conference on Sunday.

Ahmed reiterated that inter and intra-provincial travel in both Erbil and Sulaimani would also be prohibited for the same period.

In an online "Situation Report," the KRG said that it had directed the governors of Erbil and Sulaimani "to reorganize the supply mechanism of people's needs" while abiding by the curfew order.

The KRG affirmed that the final deadline for people's return to



Rebar Ahmed, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Minister of Interior, March 15, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

the Kurdistan Region from Iran is midnight of Monday, March 16, 2020, "beyond which all crossing points will be closed to travelers except for trade at the following designated border crossings: Parwezkhan, Haji Omran, Ibrahim Khalil, and Bashmakh."

The KRG has previously stated that anyone who has recently returned "illegally" to the Kurdistan Region from Iran "must immediately report to the medical

teams" for appropriate health checkups. "Failing to do so will lead to mandatory quarantine and prosecution under the law for the intentional spread of the virus and illegal border crossing."

The Iran warning comes as the country has been the epicenter of the outbreak in the Middle East, with Tehran having reported close to 14,000 infections and over 700 deaths. Reports indicate that those numbers are

much higher amid allegations that Iranian authorities are underreporting cases.

The disease, officially known as COVID-19 and recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global pandemic, has infected over 167,000 and killed nearly 6,500 worldwide since first appearing in China in late 2019.

Editing by Kosar Nawzad



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
March 15-2020

Kurdish-led administration in northern Syria ill-prepared for coronavirus outbreak

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) –

The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria (AANES) is poorly prepared for the coronavirus

crisis due to an already over-taxed and fragile health system that has no testing facilities, according to international organizations and experts.

On Saturday, local authorities announced the closure of schools and the cancellation of public events due to the threat posed by the coronavirus. Since Feb. 26, the administra-

tion had already been restricting civilians recently in Europe from entering through the Semalka border crossing.

In the cities of Tabqa and in

Manbij, those coming from outside AANES-controlled areas are also being checked by medical teams for symptoms before being permitted to enter and additional mobile teams are working to spread information about the virus and make recommendations aimed at curbing contagion.

Thomas McClure, a Syria-based researcher at the Rojava Information Center, told Kurdistan 24 that problems faced by many nations grappling with coronavirus are magnified tenfold for the administration in northern Syria.

“With the sole testing facility in Sere Kaniye (Ras al-Ain) put out of action by Turkey’s invasion and occupation of that city in 2019, the AANES has no option but to send test cases all the way to Damascus where the facilities exist,” he said. “This is scarcely possible in practice, with Damascus dragging its feet – only four people have been sent for testing in the last fortnight.”

The administration announced on Friday that there had been no reported cases of the virus in the region under their control.

According to a [report](#) published on Tuesday by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the public health system in Syria is fragile due to ongoing conflicts and will require considerable support to reinforce its capacity to support any efforts to counter a potential outbreak of the virus.

“Overall, only 57 public hospitals (64 percent) are fully functioning in the country, and a considerable shortage of trained staff and a high turnover rate, all of which reduce its ca-



A medical team checks civilians for symptoms of the coronavirus before allowing them to enter the northern Syrian city of Manbij. (Photo: Manbij Civil Administration)

capacity to detect and manage cases,” read the report.

The WHO also suggests that Syria is at particularly high risk due to the large number of vulnerable civilians, such as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and large-scale population movements, including religious tourism.

Moreover, in the northeast, the situation has become even more difficult after Russia forced the UN Security Council to close the UN’s Yaroubiyeh border crossing operation that had previously supplied 40 percent of the medical provisions in the northeast.

According to the UN, the border crossing in the past enabled support to an estimated 1.4 million people in northeast Syria.

This leaves the local administration dependent on aid coming from Damascus.

“This means that little or nothing arrives to North and East Syria, home to hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people

and IDPs – plus ISIS-linked individuals held in prisons and Hol Camp,” said McClure, the researcher.

It’s expected that it will take at least another week before a highly-anticipated delivery of basic medicines, masks, and sanitary supplies arrives in the autonomous region.

The Syrian government’s Ministry of Health is also preparing isolation and quarantine units in all six hubs where WHO has a presence, including Qamishli, located on the Turkish border.

“What can be done has been done, with quarantine in place, a state of emergency shutting down public events and mobile medical teams on the go,” McClure added.

“But with many people already dying in North and East Syria from preventable diseases due to the embargo enforced on the region, it is hard to expect anything other than a disaster as coronavirus sweeps through.”

The Syrian government has denied any cases of the novel

coronavirus in their territories, despite reports suggesting otherwise.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), which cited local medical sources, there have been at least 62 people infected with the virus in the regime-controlled provinces of Damascus, Tartus, Latakia, and Homs.

The local news website Deirez-zor 24 claimed that one woman from Deir al-Zor died from the virus in the al-Assad hospital last Friday.

Infections are suspected to have been brought over by Iranian military personnel who had returned to Syria after trips to their home country, now the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East and its primary regional exporter.

There have been also unconfirmed reports of cases in Abu Kamal, also in Deir al-Zor province, where Iranian-backed militias are active.

Editing by John J. Catherine



Hiwa Shilani |
March 16-2020

Top Kurdistan Region officials commemorate 32nd anniversary of Halabja genocide

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) –

Senior officials in the Kurdistan Region extended their condolences on Monday while commemorating the 32nd anniversary of the Halabja genocide.

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani called on the Iraqi government to compensate the families of the Anfal genocide and chemical bombing that the people of Kurdistan were subject to by the former regime.

“As we commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the chemical bombardment of Halabja which was an extension of a chain of atrocities against the people of Kurdistan in pursuit of their complete eradication, I pay my utmost respect to the families and loved ones of the victims.” (1 to 2,) the KDP leader tweeted.

We have the right to demand reparations from the Iraqi state, and it is imperative that the Iraqi government does not continue to neglect this matter and to begin to compensate those af-



A Kurdish woman visits the graves of her relatives, who were killed in the chemical attack in 1988, on the anniversary of the attack at a memorial site for the victims in the town of Halabja. (Photo: AFP)

ected by the genocidal Anfal campaign and the chemical attacks (2 of 2).

Meanwhile, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani also expressed his regret that the federal government had not taken any steps to compensate the governorate of Halabja for



Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region. (Photo: Archive)

the damage the chemical attack caused to the province and its residents.

“As we mark this unforgettable crime, we honor those who made sacrifices for our nation, particularly the fallen heroes who lost their lives in the attack,” President Barzani stated.

He also stressed “the need to extend further support to the surviving victims and their families,” adding that “much more is needed to be done for the great

province of Halabja and its proud residents.”

“We urge the Iraqi government to implement its legal and moral obligations in this regard,” the Kurdish leader said, while emphasizing that the “victims of [the] Halabja chemical attack continue to live in our memory.”

“As we salute and remember the fallen heroes, we look to the future with a stronger will and optimism.”

 **Masoud Barzani** 
@masoud_barzani

As we commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the chemical bombardment of Halabja which was an extension of a chain of atrocities against the people of Kurdistan in pursuit of their complete eradication, I pay my utmost respect to the families and loved ones of the victims. (1 of 2).

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 **Masoud Barzani** 
@masoud_barzani

We have the right to demand reparations from the Iraqi state, and it is imperative that the Iraqi government does not continue to neglect this matter and to begin to compensate those affected by the genocidal Anfal campaign and the chemical attacks (2 of 2).

Elsewhere, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani reminded of the “major crime” that remains “a deep wound in the history of the people of Kurdistan and a form of injustice and persecution toward our nation.”

Prime Minister Barzani noted that the KRG, “which is the fruit of the blood of the martyrs and the heroic resistance of our people, is doing its best to provide the best services to the families of the martyrs and the Anfal.”

“We must make this tragic occasion as a catalyst for motivating



Masrour Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). (Photo: Archive)

and joint action to end tragedies and unite in facing challenges

and difficult circumstances,” Prime Minister Barzani stressed in his message.

The Halabja chemical attack took place in March 1988 and killed roughly 5,000 people and injured almost 10,000 more. Kurds commemorate the massacre annually by holding special ceremonies to pay respect to the victims.

The Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as an act of genocide on March 1, 2010.

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany

LE FIGARO

16 mars 2020
Georges Malbrunot

Le régime iranien dépassé par la catastrophe sanitaire

En Iran, troisième pays le plus frappé après la Chine et l'Italie, les religieux ont retardé pendant un mois la fermeture des sanctuaires, foyers de la contamination.

MALGRÉ le virus qui continue de se répandre, Abdolfaz tient à fêter le Nouvel An iranien (Norouz) qui approche. « Je suis à mon dépôt dans le sud de Téhéran, je porte le masque, mais j'ai voulu être avec mes employés », affirmait dimanche après-midi cet industriel, à la tête d'une entreprise de 70 salariés, qui vend des panneaux lumineux. Depuis plus de trois semaines, ses deux filles ne sont pas sorties « de notre appartement même une heure », répond-il au téléphone. Sa femme, qui a perdu un beau-frère de 31 ans, porte, elle aussi, un masque. « Mes fournisseurs chinois m'ont envoyé 450 masques que j'ai distribués à mes salariés et à leurs familles », ajoute Abdolfaz. « Nos autorités sont débordées, dit-il. Le gouvernement, frappé par les sanctions américaines, était déjà pauvre. La situation a empiré avec le virus. »

L'Iran révolutionnaire n'a eu d'autre choix que d'abjurer certains de ses dogmes. Jeudi, la



A Téhéran, dimanche, le Basij, une branche des gardiens de la révolution islamique, distribue des kits de protection contre le coronavirus. STRINGER/AFP

République islamique a sollicité un prêt de cinq milliards de dollars auprès du Fonds monétaire international (FMI), une institution d'ordinaire honnie pour sa proximité avec le « Grand Satan » américain. Dans un tweet, Javad Zarif, le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, a réclamé cet argent « immédiatement », implorant le FMI de « se placer du bon côté de l'histoire et d'agir avec responsabilité ».

Alors que le guide suprême et numéro un du régime, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, qui a annulé son discours de Norouz, accuse l'Occident d'avoir déclenché une « attaque biologique » contre l'Iran, le vice-ministre de la Santé l'a publiquement contredit. Pour le professeur Reza Malekzadeh, l'épidémie de Covid-19, qui a tué 724 personnes, dont 113 dimanche - ce qui marque la forte augmentation de morts en une journée - et en a infecté 14 000,

est due à un retard dans l'annonce du début du virus et à la poursuite des vols vers la Chine.

Pékin est l'un des tout derniers fournisseurs d'une économie iranienne asphyxiée par les sanctions américaines depuis que Donald Trump s'est retiré, en mai 2018, de l'accord nucléaire signé trois ans plus tôt par Téhéran et la communauté internationale. « Nous avons 900 étudiants chinois dans les séminaires religieux chiites à Qom », confiait il y a deux semaines au Figaro un responsable iranien. La ville sainte, siège du mausolée de Masmouh, a été l'épicentre de la propagation du virus. Mais l'accès au mausolée n'a été fermé que ces derniers jours pour désinfection.

La semaine dernière encore, on continuait de voir sur des vidéos des centaines de pèlerins embrasser le tombeau sacré. « À Machhad aussi, le mausolée de l'imam Reza vient seulement d'être fermé », regrette le

chercheur au Céri Clément Terme. « Le gouvernement l'avait réclamé il y a un mois, dit-il, mais il y a eu un débat. Des ayatollahs s'y opposaient, il a fallu un mois pour que la science l'emporte sur la religion. » En attendant, sur les réseaux sociaux, les témoignages de détresse se sont multipliés - tel ce jeune étudiant en religion en pleurs, après être venu secourir des patients dans un hôpital de Qom, alors que son épouse et leurs deux jumeaux sont morts. Des images satellites ont même montré le creusement de deux longues tranchées, nouveaux emplacements funéraires dans un cimetière à la périphérie de Qom. Dans la capitale, d'autres images montrent des lits installés dans le parking d'un hôpital pour traiter le trop-plein de patients.

Deux mois après son apparition, alors que les voisins ont fermé leurs frontières avec l'Iran, chacune des dix provinces est touchée. Les écoles et les uni-

versités ont été fermées, les déplacements entre les villes limités. En début de semaine dernière, 70 000 détenus ont même été relâchés pour contenir la propagation du virus. L'épidémie frappe le sommet du pouvoir. Mohammed Mirmohammadi, conseiller du guide suprême, est mort du virus. En charge de la diplomatie autour d'Ali Khamenei, Ali Akhbar Velayati est contaminé, de même que le premier vice-président de la République, Eshaq Jahangiri, ainsi que deux ministres et 23 députés.

Face à une épidémie qui a fait de l'Iran le troisième pays le plus touché après la Chine et l'Italie, les personnels hospitaliers décédés ont été, sur ordre du guide suprême, élevés au rang de « martyrs » afin que leurs familles bénéficient d'une aide financière. L'appel des autorités à rester à la maison a été peu entendu. « Au nord, dans les quartiers aisés, les gens ne sortent guère, reconnaît Abdolfaz.

En revanche, dans les quartiers pauvres du sud de Téhéran, il y a beaucoup de monde dans les rues. »

Javaid Rehman, rapporteur des Nations unies pour les droits de l'homme, a regretté la semaine dernière que « l'État ait fait trop peu et trop tard », le premier cas d'infection ayant été officiellement reconnu le 19 février seulement. Certaines sources proches de l'opposition iranienne estiment qu'il y a, en fait, dix fois plus de morts et de personnes contaminées.

Alors que le pouvoir a été accusé d'avoir caché l'ampleur de l'épidémie, Ali Khamenei a annoncé vendredi que les forces de sécurité allaient prendre en main la lutte contre le virus. Ordre a été donné à 100 000 membres de l'armée et des gardiens de la révolution de « vider les rues, les magasins et les routes » sous 24 heures, a déclaré le chef d'état-major le général Mohammad Hossein

Baqeri. « Au cours des dix prochains jours, a-t-il ajouté, l'ensemble de la nation iranienne sera surveillée, soit à travers le cyberspace, soit par téléphone, et si nécessaire, en personne. Et les personnes soupçonnées d'être malades seront identifiées ».

Un millier de cliniques mobiles devrait être installé. L'armée devra produire des masques et des gants, tandis que 6 000 lits des hôpitaux militaires seront libérés. Une mobilisation d'un État - pourtant décrié pour sa mainmise tenace sur la population - appelée de ses vœux par de nombreux Iraniens. « C'est assez logique, estime Clément Terme. L'armée et les gardiens maillent le territoire, ils viennent au secours d'un système médical saturé, et pour un pouvoir contesté dans la rue depuis des mois, c'est aussi un moyen de se légitimer de nouveau. »

Le Monde

Par Hélène Sallon
le 16 mars 2020

En Irak, les sadristes face à leurs divisions

Après avoir échoué à prendre la tête du grand mouvement de contestation populaire irakien, le leader chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr a multiplié les revirements politiques. Ses échecs stratégiques et ses hésitations face à Téhéran l'ont fragilisé sur la scène irakienne tout en déstabilisant ses fidèles.

Depuis octobre 2019, Abdallah ne regagne qu'au milieu de la nuit la modeste demeure familiale située dans une ruelle cahoteuse du quartier de Sadr City dans la banlieue de Bagdad, égayée de fanions colorés et de portraits de l'imam chiite Ali. Une fois terminés ses cours d'administration à l'université, l'Irakien de 23 ans, coiffé d'une houppette travaillée au gel et vêtu d'un jean « slim » comme tous les jeunes de son âge, passe plusieurs heures avec les manifestants de la place Tahrir qui réclament la « chute du régime ». Même quand pleuvent les grenades lacrymogènes et les balles. Même quand Moqtada Al-



Bagdad, le 11 février. Des sadristes manifestent en faveur du pouvoir sur la place Tahrir, lieu symbolique de la contestation. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR "LE MONDE"

Sadr poste des tweets rageurs pour critiquer la tournure que prend le mouvement ou enjoindre ses partisans à quitter le sit-

in. Abdallah s'est mis à suivre à la lettre les injonctions du chef populiste chiite et les directives

relayées par ses cadres à Sadr City dès l'âge de 15 ans. Mais la « révolution d'octobre » a éprouvé sa loyauté, ainsi que celle de nombreux sadristes de sa génération qui ont épousé, corps et âme, ce large mouvement contestataire parti des quartiers défavorisés chiites de Bagdad et du sud du pays. Chantre nationaliste et réformiste autoproclamé, devenu en 2018 la première force politique du pays grâce à sa base de plusieurs millions de chiites marginalisés, Moqtada Al-Sadr n'aura apporté au mouvement qu'un soutien en demi-teinte, sans jamais réussir à en prendre la tête.

Les contestataires réclament la refonte du système politique instauré après l'invasion américaine de 2003 et le renouvellement de la classe politique

Un pied dans le pouvoir, un autre dans l'opposition : cette stratégie a montré ses limites face à des revendications de plus en plus radicales. Car ce que les contestataires réclament, ce n'est rien de moins que la refonte du système politique instauré après l'invasion américaine de 2003 et le renouvellement de la classe politique, dont la gabegie, la corruption, le confessionnalisme et la soumission aux ingérences étrangères – surtout de l'Iran – sont perçus comme autant de causes de la faillite de l'Etat. « *Moqtada Al-Sadr n'a jamais été un révolutionnaire*, analyse l'expert Renad Mansour dans [une note pour le centre de réflexion Chatham House](#). *Il veut se tailler un rôle à la fois de trouble-fête et de stabilisateur pour maximiser son influence politique. Cette stratégie tend à la préservation du système politique, non à son renversement. Forcé de choisir entre les deux rôles, il a opté pour le second.* »

Ce chef de milice devenu leader politique est coutumier des revirements et des coups d'éclat, mais [après l'assassinat par une frappe de drone américaine](#) à Bagdad, le 3 janvier, du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes, ses volte-face au sujet de la « révolution d'octobre » sont devenues légion, divisant ses propres rangs sadristes. Le jeune Abdallah n'a pas obtenu le mandat qu'il attendait quand M. Sadr a demandé à ses partisans de quitter les sit-in, le 24 janvier. Il n'a pas davantage répondu à ses appels, une semaine plus tard, à revenir encadrer les sit-in.

« *Je l'aime toujours, mais je ne lui obéis plus aveuglément,*

comme le font certains. C'est ma décision d'y aller ou pas. Sayyed Moqtada change d'avis tout le temps, c'est énervant. Il a fait des choix qui ne sont pas justes », dit Abdallah. Ce libre arbitre, le jeune homme dit l'avoir acquis sur les bancs de la fac. « *Au lycée, je le suivais avec passion, comme ces gens qui continuent à dire que le Sayyed [titre honorifique signifiant « descendant du Prophète »] ne peut pas avoir tort. Beaucoup de mes amis à*



Bagdad, le 11 février. Deux jeunes sur la place Tahrir, lieu symbolique de la contestation anti-pouvoir en Irak, narguent des manifestants sadristes venus y défilier. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR « LE MONDE »

Sadr City sont comme ça, ils ont l'esprit étroit. Moi, mon esprit s'est ouvert à l'université, en discutant avec d'autres, en échangeant nos opinions », poursuit-il. Il assure que la moitié des jeunes de Sadr City, parmi ceux qui sont étudiants ou jeunes diplômés, pense comme lui. « *Le quartier change* », dit-il.

« Tombé en passion »

Comme beaucoup des 3 millions d'habitants qui s'entassent dans la cité-banlieue chiite, Abdallah est « *tombé en passion* » à l'adolescence. « *J'aime le Sayyed Moqtada et son père* », confie-t-il. L'ayatollah Mohamed Sadeq Al-Sadr fut l'une des plus hautes autorités chiites d'Irak, jusqu'à son assassinat avec deux de ses fils, en 1999. Après le soulèvement chiite de 1991, qu'il a écrasé dans le sang, Saddam Hussein avait pris ombrage de la vénération que suscitait l'ayatollah chez les populations chiites défavorisées, friands de ses ser-

mons fustigeant les Etats-Unis, Israël et la dictature. En 1980, le président irakien avait déjà fait exécuter le patriarche du clan, l'ayatollah Mohamed Bakr Al-Sadr, fondateur du mouvement islamique chiite Al-Da'wa qui prônait un chiisme conservateur et social face à l'idéologie laïque du parti unique Baas.

Quand Moqtada Al-Sadr reprend le flambeau familial en 2003, c'est un jeune homme

Contrairement aux opposants rentrés d'exil et cooptés par les Américains pour diriger la transition politique, lui n'a jamais déserté le pays sous la dictature de Saddam Hussein. Il s'impose, par la force et dans le sang. Ses miliciens opposent une résistance farouche aux forces coalisées, avant de multiplier les exactions contre les populations sunnites sous couvert de lutte contre Al-Qaida durant la guerre civile de 2006-2008. Les rapports de force jouent en sa défaveur. Acculé, il se réfugie en Iran en 2007, et démantèle l'Armée du Mahdi en 2008. Mais pour ses millions de partisans, qui l'ont fait élire au Parlement dès 2005, l'homme, devenu un héros de la résistance, a gagné ses galons de leader.

Changement de stratégie

Revenu d'Iran en 2010, Moqtada Al-Sadr opte pour un changement de stratégie. Face à la dérive autoritaire et sectaire du premier ministre chiite Nouri Al-Maliki, il adopte une ligne plus modérée. Il s'insurge contre le confessionnalisme, source du dysfonctionnement de l'Etat et de la corruption, et prône un nationalisme inclusif. Il prend ses distances avec l'Iran, dont il dénonce l'ingérence dans les affaires de l'Irak. Le divorce d'avec son ancien protecteur est accentué par le soutien qu'apporte Téhéran aux milices nées de scissions au sein de l'Armée du Mahdi, à l'instar de la Ligue des vertueuses (« *Asaïb Ahl Al-Haq* ») de Qaïs Al-Khazali. Les discours du « *Sayyed* » sont moins virulents à l'encontre des forces américaines, qui se retirent d'Irak fin 2011.

C'est à cette période qu'Abdallah rallie le courant sadriste. Il est chargé de sécuriser la prière hebdomadaire qui réunit chaque vendredi des milliers de fidèles à Sadr City. Il aide les associations caritatives sadristes qui fournissent services sociaux, médicaux et éducatifs dans ce quartier délaissé par l'Etat. Lorsque, en juin 2014, l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) s'empare de Mossoul, puis du tiers de l'Irak, Abdallah s'engage dans

les Brigades de la paix (« Saraya Al-Salam »), la milice sadriste forte de 12 000 hommes aujourd'hui, créée pour défendre les lieux saints chiites de Samarra, à 125 km au nord de Bagdad.

A partir de l'automne 2015, à chacune de ses permissions, Abdallah répond présent quand les cadres sadristes appellent à participer aux manifestations anticorruption et pro-réformes sur la place Tahrir. Le soutien de Moqtada Al-Sadr et l'afflux de milliers de sadristes donnent un second souffle à ce mouvement chapeauté par la société civile laïque, né à l'été, sur fond de pénuries d'eau et d'électricité. Abdallah répond encore présent quand les sadristes sont sommés, le 30 avril 2016, d'occuper la Zone verte – le quartier ultra-sécurisé de la capitale irakienne où siègent les ambassades et les institutions du pays –, pour faire pression sur le Parlement, réticent à voter un plan de réformes. Le jeune militant ne se formalise pas quand, le lendemain, son chef leur intime l'ordre de se retirer, après avoir obtenu de vagues promesses.

Le statut de « faiseur de rois »

Moqtada Al-Sadr a su capitaliser sur ce mouvement de contestation et parvient à former une alliance inédite avec le Parti communiste et une partie de la société civile laïque aux premières élections législatives de l'après-EI, en mai 2018. La coalition Sa'iroun (« En marche »), unie autour d'un programme anticorruption, pro-réformes, nationaliste et social, arrive en tête, conférant à Moqtada Al-Sadr le statut de « faiseur de rois », à défaut d'une majorité. Il s'entend avec ses rivaux, les chefs des milices pro-iraniennes, pour désigner le chef du gouvernement, en octobre 2018.

Pourtant, lorsque la contestation redémarre, un an plus tard, l'ampleur du mouvement le prend de court. Cette mobilisation d'un genre nouveau, avec des manifestants plus jeunes, plus apolitiques et impulsifs qu'en 2016, le défie ouvertement, au même



Un portrait de Ali Al-Sistani sur le « restaurant turc », l'immeuble occupé par les manifestants pacifiques depuis le mois d'octobre 2019, place Tahrir. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR « LE MONDE »

titre que les autres leaders politiques et religieux. Et sans attendre ses ordres, des milliers de jeunes sadristes ont déjà rejoint le mouvement. Leur présence en nombre, notamment parmi les victimes de la répression sanglante menée par les forces de sécurité et des milices chiites pro-Iran (au moins 600 morts en cinq mois), le décide à soutenir le camp des « révolutionnaires ».

Mi-octobre, il appelle ainsi à la démission du gouvernement et des élections anticipées. « La stratégie de M. Sadr alors était de soutenir les manifestations et de les utiliser pour pousser à la réforme au sein du système. En prenant la tête d'un large mouvement populaire, il comptait renforcer sa position face aux autres forces politiques, qui n'ont pas de base populaire et

se reposent principalement sur leurs avantages clientélistes et leurs branches armées pour survivre », analyse Harith Hasan, expert au Centre Carnegie Moyen-Orient, dans [une note pour l'Emirates Policy Center](#). C'était sans compter le rejet, par les manifestants, de toute récupération politique.

Après la multiplication des attaques et des enlèvements de manifestants, des volontaires sadristes, identifiables par les casquettes bleues, sont déployés pour sécuriser les sit-in. « Les gens de Sadr City ont afflué à l'ancien bureau de l'Armée du Mahdi et à la mosquée Abdel Jamaa Al-Mohsen, raconte Abdallah. Les chefs de quartier ont géré les tours de garde : un jour plein, suivi d'un jour de repos. Je l'ai fait dix jours en novembre. J'ai



Un portrait de Moqtada Al-Sadr sur un tuk-tuk, le 1er février, à Bagdad. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR « LE MONDE »

encadré la circulation des tuk-tuks dans le tunnel de Tayaran. On était quatre-vingt, rien qu'à cet endroit ! »

Leur présence rassure les contestataires et dissuade les forces de sécurité et les milices chiites de démanteler le sit-in, mais elle crée des conflits. « Les manifestants pacifiques ne nous aimaient pas, il y avait souvent des disputes. On opérait des contrôles de sécurité autour de la place Tahrir et on confisquait les mauvaises choses que certains apportaient, comme l'alcool et les drogues », explique Abdallah. Le jeune homme a déjà renoncé à ses tours de garde en « casquette bleue » pour préparer ses examens, quand survient l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant.

Un « complot américain »

Leur mort produit l'effet d'un tremblement de terre. Le camp politique chiite lié à l'Iran, déjà déstabilisé par la vague de colère populaire qu'il considère comme un « complot américain », mise alors sur le regain du sentiment anti-américain, et remet à l'ordre du jour sa demande d'un départ des Américains d'Irak, en espérant, au passage, étouffer la contestation. Pour y parvenir, le soutien de Moqtada Al-Sadr, rival jugé peu fiable mais seul à disposer d'une réelle capacité de mobilisation, est nécessaire. Des pressions sont exercées sur le leader, pour l'heure en séjour à Qom, en Iran, où il suit un séminaire religieux, pour ressouder les rangs chiites.

« Les Iraniens se sont servis de l'assassinat de Soleimani pour le persuader que la contestation populaire était un projet américain ciblant le mouvement islamique et la classe religieuse en général », analyse Harith Hasan du centre Carnegie Moyen-Orient. D'autres experts mettent en avant l'esprit calculateur de M. Sadr, qui a vu dans le vide politique créé par le double assassinat dans le camp chiite une opportunité pour reconquérir du terrain face à ses rivaux. « Pour lui, l'important est de conserver son influence et sa

des contestataires. Le retour des « casquettes bleues » s'est accompagné de violences, parfois meurtrières : plusieurs blessés sur la place Tahrir à Bagdad, sept manifestants tués et plus de 150 blessés sur le sit-in de Nadjaf, le 5 février. Le lendemain, les manifestants de Kerbala sont à leur tour attaqués à balles réelles. Les sadristes ont nié toute responsabilité, accusant une « tierce partie », en référence aux milices chiites pro-iraniennes.

« Nous sommes intervenus en nombre pour rétablir le côté pacifique des manifestations et protéger les gens. Certains manifestants ont brûlé des bâtiments, fermé des routes et des écoles. Ils ont un agenda étranger, nous nous voulons la sécurité, la paix et pas le chaos, le terrorisme et le confessionnalisme », a alors justifié Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, chargé de l'organisation du sit-in au sein du bureau de Moqtada Al-Sadr à Bagdad.

Parmi les sympathisants



Des « casquettes bleues » des Brigades de la paix, la milice de Moqtada Al-Sadr, contrôlent l'entrée du sit-in de la place Tahrir, deux jours après la nomination du nouveau premier ministre, le 3 février. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR « LE MONDE »

sadristes, l'argument moral et religieux d'un « retour à la pureté » nécessitant leur intervention convaincant. Le thème est même rassembleur. « J'étais content que les casquettes bleues reprennent le contrôle du "restaurant turc" [tour désaffectée devenue lieu emblématique de la contestation]. Beaucoup

de manifestants dormaient dehors à cause de ce qui s'y passait : les mafias, l'alcool, les drogues et les femmes de mauvaise vie », assure ainsi Abdallah.

Face à la montée des critiques à l'encontre de ses « casquettes bleues », Moqtada Al-Sadr a an-

noncé leur dissolution, le 11 février. Les sadristes se sont à nouveau fondus, incognito, dans la contestation. Aux yeux du politologue Harith Hasan, cette tentative de désescalade a révélé la défaite de Moqtada Al-Sadr, incapable d'imposer sa direction sur le mouvement contestataire, qui s'est maintenu grâce à la mobilisation, notamment, des étudiants. L'échec de Mohammed Taoufiq Allaoui à former un gouvernement, le 1^{er} mars, constitue un autre revers pour le chef chiite, qui n'a pu imposer son candidat aux autres formations politiques.

Le courant sadriste est arrivé à un tournant, estime Renad Mansour du Chatham House. Son alliance avec la société civile a volé en éclats. Il pourrait être en terme isolé par l'Iran, qui ne voit pas en lui un partenaire solide. Il aura beaucoup de difficultés à s'imposer aux autres factions armées chiites. Cependant, prévient l'analyste Farhad Alaaldin, rien n'est joué : « M. Sadr est un bon tacticien et il

Le Monde Par Hélène Sallon
le 16 mars 2020

En Irak, les milices chiites poussent au retrait des troupes étrangères

Les repréailles de Washington après une attaque contre une base de la coalition internationale relancent le débat sur la présence américaine.

La consternation domine en Irak après des raids de repréailles américains contre une milice pro-iranienne. Les frappes qui ont visé, vendredi 13 mars, cinq dépôts d'armes des Brigades du Hezbollah ont tué six Irakiens – trois militaires, deux policiers et un civil – et en ont blessé 12 autres, selon un bilan provisoire de l'armée irakienne. Le général Franck McKenzie, à la tête du commandement central de l'armée américaine, a salué le « succès » de l'opération menée en réponse à l'attaque, la veille, imputée aux Brigades du Hezbollah, contre une base abritant des troupes de la coalition internationale, qui a tué deux

Américains et un Britannique. Pour les autorités de Bagdad, elle constitue une nouvelle « agression américaine » et une « violation de la souveraineté irakienne » qu'elles entendent dénoncer devant le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. Deux roquettes ont de nouveau visé samedi la base militaire de la coalition internationale.

Les partis et les milices chiites proches de l'Iran ont exigé de nouveau le départ des forces américaines d'Irak. Cette escalade est, pour elles, un argument supplémentaire dans le débat lancé après l'assassinat dans une frappe de drone

américaine à Bagdad, le 3 janvier, du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, le chef de la force Al-Qods des gardiens de la révolution, et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes. Dans une rare démonstration d'unité, la majorité chiite au Parlement avait voté, le 5 janvier, une résolution non contraignante pour demander au gouvernement de bouter hors d'Irak les forces étrangères. Quelque 6 000 troupes – dont 5 200 Américains – ont été redéployées depuis 2014 pour lutter contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI).

« Comme des forces d'occu-

patation » Les tenants de la ligne dure sont tentés par l'escalade alors que la crise politique bloque l'avancée de ce dossier. La nomination d'un successeur au premier ministre Adel Abdel Mahdi, qui a démissionné en novembre sous la pression de la rue, n'est toujours pas actée. L'envoi annoncé de batteries de missiles Patriot, pour protéger les bases où sont stationnés des Américains, attise leur impatience.

« Nous devons expulser toutes les troupes américaines du Moyen-Orient, réclame le porte-parole de la milice des Brigades

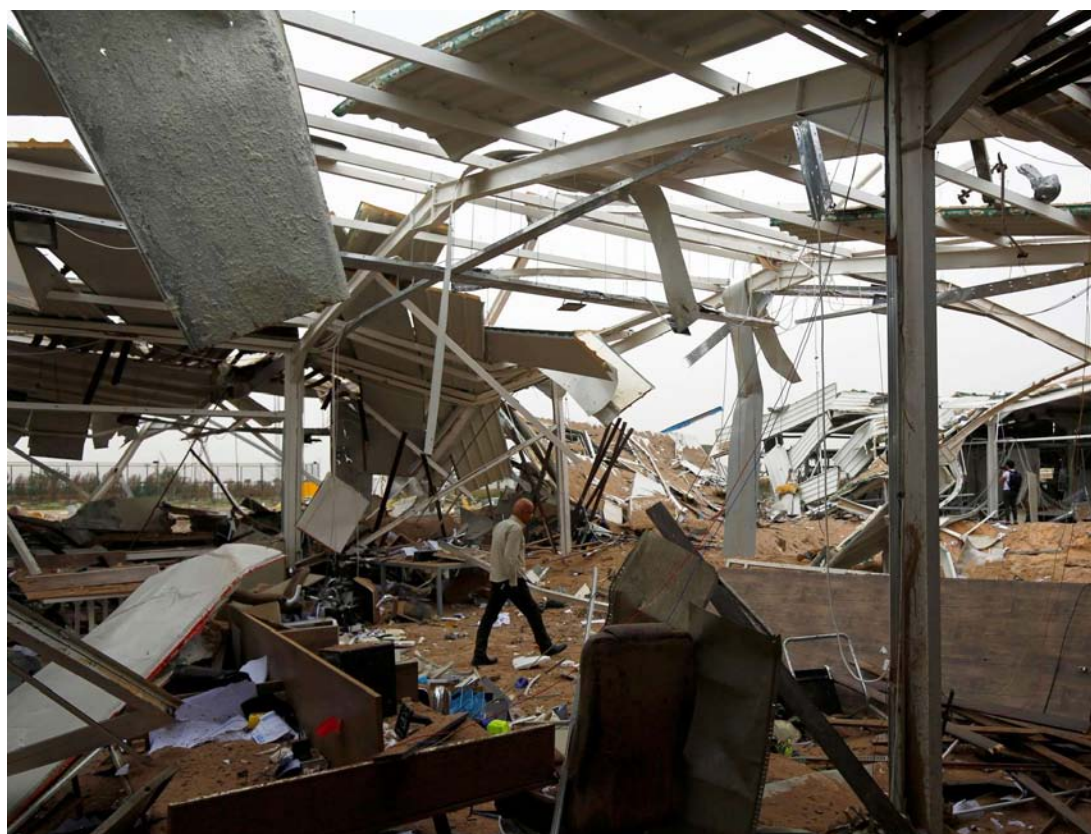
du Hezbollah, Mohamed Mohie Eddin. *Les Américains ne sont pas là pour aider l'Irak.* » « *Les hélicoptères Apache, les F-16 et les tanks Abrams restent sous leur contrôle, que ce soit pour les armements ou les pièces détachées. L'Irak peut sécuriser son territoire et ses frontières sans eux, et on doit pouvoir négocier des armes et des formations avec d'autres pays* », poursuit-il.

Le discours porte parmi une majorité de députés chiites, dont ceux du courant sadriste, la première force politique au Parlement. « *Les forces américaines se comportent comme des forces d'occupation. Elles utilisent notre territoire pour combattre l'Iran et attaquent nos bases. Avec la fin de la guerre contre l'EI, leur mission est terminée. Elles doivent partir. Nous pourrions renégocier ensuite les termes de nos relations dans le respect des deux pays* », estime le président de la Commission parlementaire de défense, le sadriste Mohamed Reda.

Une véritable gageure

Suspendues début janvier, les opérations conjointes entre la coalition internationale et les forces irakiennes, tout comme les missions de formation de l'OTAN, n'ont repris que de façon limitée. « *Ils ont arrêté de nous demander des frappes ou des formations après la mort de Soleimani. Certains généraux ont été choqués, ça a changé la relation. Certains sont proches des milices. La plupart reconnaissent toutefois l'importance de notre présence et ils ne veulent pas que nous partions* », analyse une source au sein de la coalition internationale, qui plaide pour faire profil bas le temps que les relations s'apaisent.

Formation, investissements, technologies, soutien aérien, renseignement, surveillance et reconnaissance, logistique... : remplacer l'apport des forces de



L'aéroport de Kerbala (Irak) détruit, selon les autorités religieuses irakiennes, par des frappes américaines, le 13 mars 2020. ALAA AL-MARJANI / REUTERS

la coalition est une véritable gageure, reconnaissent de nombreux haut gradés et responsables politiques irakiens. « *On a besoin de bombes, de missiles, de maintenance sur les avions et les tanks, de pièces détachées, de soutien médical...* Tout cela vient de la coalition. On n'a pas le renseignement. Ils ont une plus grande force de frappe aérienne que nous et des technologies de pointe que l'on n'a pas », énumère le général Tahsin Al-Khafaji, le porte-parole du centre de commandement conjoint. « *On peut se débrouiller pour le moment mais comment continuera-t-on la lutte contre Daech à terme sans cela ? A-t-on même de l'argent pour bâtir seuls notre armée ?* », s'inquiète-t-il.

« Une tactique pour gagner du temps »

Le projet de transférer, sous bannière de l'OTAN, une partie des missions de la coalition anti-

EI, ne résout pas tout. Le mandat de l'Alliance atlantique se limite à la formation des troupes irakiennes, et exclut tout appui à la lutte antiterroriste. « *L'OTAN ne peut pas remplacer la coalition. C'est juste une tactique pour gagner du temps* », estime l'expert Sajad Jiyad du centre Bayan, à Bagdad, qui écarte également la piste d'un engagement plus grand de la Russie, que des politiciens chiites invoquent comme alternative. Le maintien des forces de la coalition, sans présence américaine, serait aussi inenvisageable. « *Si les Américains devaient partir, les autres pays de la coalition ne resteraient pas* », assure la source au sein de la coalition.

« Si les forces de la coalition partent, les djihadistes reprendront pied dans les villes », Mohamed Al-Khaldi, président de la Commission parlementaire aux affaires stratégiques

Les députés sunnites et kurdes du Parlement, qui ont boycotté le vote du 5 avril, se disent déterminés à empêcher le départ des forces étrangères d'Irak. « *Il n'y aura jamais une majorité qualifiée pour un tel vote, car 99 % des sunnites et des Kurdes sont contre* », explique le député sunnite Mohamed Al-Khaldi, président de la Commission parlementaire aux affaires stratégiques qui est convaincu que « *75 % des chiites voteraient contre s'ils ne faisaient pas l'objet de pressions* ».

Outre le soutien militaire qu'elles fournissent aux forces irakiennes, dont les tribus sunnites et les Kurdes, le parlementaire souligne l'enjeu de leur présence dans l'Irak post-EI. « *Si les forces de la coalition partent, les investisseurs partiront, ainsi que les organisations internationales qui aident les déplacés et font la reconstruction*, dit-il. *Et, les djihadistes reprendront pied dans les*



16-03-2020
Paul Iddon

Kurdistan's proactive response to coronavirus pandemic

The science is clear. Because this novel strain of coronavirus — now [classified](#) with the epidemiological name "SARS-CoV-2" — is so infectious, reducing the number of people infected can prevent an exponential jump in the number of people they are able to infect. Therefore, swift action is needed to "flatten the curve" of spiking infection numbers — waiting too long is deadly.

Too many countries are now seeing the results of failing to listen to medical experts, who have from the beginning stressed the need for early action to prevent the outbreak from spreading out of control. Taking a "wait and see" attitude, out of fear of doing too much too soon is the most likely course to end up in a situation where efforts will be too little, too late to save the lives of some.

One region stands out in the Middle East in its response to the global outbreak — in stark contrast to the poorly managed scramble that several governments are struggling with, the Kurdistan region has shown strong leadership in tackling the novel coronavirus early and effectively.

Take the example of Iran, Kurdistan's neighbour, where the government [downplayed the virus](#) until it could no longer hide the fact that several public officials got sick.

Data: Professor Mick Roberts, Massey University

Iran is struggling through an outbreak that has now become



Erbil and Sulaimaniyah are quiet under a 5-day curfew. Photo: Bilind Tahir / Rudaw

worse than in China, where the outbreak first began. Iran's pandemic began in the holy city of Qom, which has been so affected that the city is building secluded mass graves for coronavirus victims which literally be [seen from space](#). Over 700 Iranians have perished as a result of the new contagion.

Kurdistan promptly shut its borders with Iran [on February 25](#) — more than a week before the first death was recorded, [on March 4th](#).

The decision immediately impacted trade and travel on a high-traffic border — but it was the right decision. Had the KRG acted later, the risk of infecting thousands people could overwhelm the healthcare system and lead to total chaos. But it didn't — and the region has a much better chance of weathering this storm.

Kurdistan ordered the closure of its schools and universities in late February, far earlier than most other countries, and be-

fore it even had any recorded cases.

All religious ceremonies and congregations have also been cancelled. Free disposable gloves were handed out to shoppers in malls which remained well-stocked amid the rush to stock up before a complete curfew lasting 48 hours.

As a result, the Kurdistan region has managed to keep the number of infection in the double digits with one confirmed death, an elderly cleric in Sulaimani. Proactive measures taken by the KRG more likely than not contributed to the limited spread of the virus.

All this happened ahead of a major two-week spring holiday, Nowruz — which is in many ways equivalent to cancelling Christmas for most people in the West.

The curfew has produced an eerie quiet in the deserted streets or major cities Erbil and Sulaimani. The only sound au-

dible in Erbil's usually-bustling bazaar and citadel were birds singing. Congested roadways are also almost completely empty. Nature seized the opportunity to offer a cleansing rain.

This is the first time a generation in this region country have experienced a quiet like. Lengthy and costly war against the Islamic State, as well as the brief sectarian skirmishes October 2017, have made it seem as though life in the cities of Kurdistan could go on so serenely. This time feels different.

Of course, it's presently unclear if these measures will ultimately prove enough to prevent an outbreak. That being said, despite the fact it is not a full-fledged independent country, Kurdistan has been a leading nation in taking preventive measures to stop the spread of this global pandemic and deserves recognition for that fact.

On March 14, Kurdistan's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani [addressed the people of Kurdistan](#), praising them for following restrictions aimed at limiting any potential outbreak and protecting public health. He also called upon property owners to be more lenient on rent wherever necessary due to the extraordinary situation "so we can share the burden together and alleviate the impact."

One hopes that Kurdistan learns from this experience and develops similar civil defence measures as contingencies for dealing with any future emergencies, terrorist attacks, or wars.

La police française et néerlandaise arrête un réseau de contrebande de 10 000 Kurdes au Royaume-Uni

Les autorités françaises et néerlandaises ont arrêté 23 personnes dans le cadre d'un réseau de trafic de personnes qui aurait aidé environ 10 000 Kurdes à entrer illégalement au Royaume-Uni.

Eurojust, l'unité européenne de coopération judiciaire, a annoncé les arrestations plus tôt cette semaine dans un communiqué disant: "Dans une action conjointe des autorités françaises et néerlandaises, coordonnée par Eurojust, 23 personnes ont été arrêtées pour suspicion de trafic de migrants à grande échelle."

Treize des 23 personnes arrêtées ont été appréhendées mardi dans la ville française du Mans et quatre autres ont déjà été arrêtées aux Pays-Bas près

de La Haye, rapporte Ouest France.

Les enquêteurs ont également effectué des perquisitions dans cinq résidences distinctes utilisées par le réseau et disent que les passeurs ont facturé jusqu'à 7 000 euros par migrant et ont peut-être profité à hauteur de 70 millions d'euros au total.

L'enquête sur le réseau a commencé en août 2018, les autorités françaises citant des activités suspectes de personnes conduisant des voitures avec des plaques d'immatriculation néerlandaises sur une base assez régulière.

L'activité des migrants dans la Manche a augmenté au cours de la dernière année avec 2 358 migrants pris en charge par les autorités britanniques ou françaises

en 2019, en hausse de 400% par rapport à l'année précédente.

Le nombre de migrants tentant de traverser la Manche a augmenté de 400% par rapport à 2018 <https://t.co/hR7cZNeIPY> – Breitbart London (@Breitbart-London) 2 janvier 2020

David Wood, ancien responsable de l'application des lois en matière d'immigration au ministère de l'Intérieur, a commenté la recrudescence des tentatives de traversée au début du mois, déclarant: «Plus il y a de coupeurs des forces frontalières dans la Manche, plus ils sont attrayants pour ceux qui partent en petits bateaux. Ils savent qu'ils seront ramassés et emmenés au Royaume-Uni. Pour eux, c'est la mission accomplie.»

Malgré les mesures prises par les autorités françaises et belges pour accroître leur surveillance des zones côtières en déployant des drones, le nombre de migrants tentant de traverser le canal reste élevé avec 49 migrants débarqués au Royaume-Uni le lendemain de Noël uniquement.

Le ministre britannique de l'Intérieur, Priti Patel, s'est engagé à réduire les délais d'attente pour l'expulsion afin de lutter contre l'augmentation du nombre de nouveaux arrivants, avec un porte-parole du ministère de l'Intérieur disant: «Lorsqu'il y a une incitation, les gens trouveront des moyens de se rendre ici, que ce soit dans des camions, petits bateaux ou tout autre moyen. S'ils savent qu'ils vont être rapidement renvoyés,



Hiwa Shilani
March 17-2020

Kurdistan's political, business leaders donate to support anti-coronavirus efforts

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) –

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Tuesday that multiple local business leaders and individuals have responded to a challenge by the Kurdistan Region's top official to financially support efforts to combat the coronavirus and assist low-income families affected by measures enacted to curb its contagion.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani released a statement in which he urged government officials, mer-

chants, and others with substantial resources to use their means for the public good, including personal donations and for landlords to bear financial losses to reduce the burden on small businesses.

In response to Barzani's request, several people from both the private and public sectors stepped up to meet the challenge, joining Barzani who donated his own government salary to the cause.

In Erbil, the owner of Shar Private Hospital announced that he will be repurposing

the facility to be used to treat patients diagnosed with coronavirus and several individuals provided financial support to build new hospitals to treat patients in both Erbil and Sulaimani, where the new building will be turned over to the Ministry of Health when complete.

The owner of Mega Mall pledged to cancel all rent payments for March owed by his roughly 150 tenants and a local Erbil businessman donated 10,000 liters of fuel to security (Asayish) and police in Erbil to support them in

their various duties, including enforcing curfews in Erbil and Sulaimani provinces. The Rwanda Foundation also began a campaign to provide hot meals for Erbil security forces.

Doctors and volunteers from various professions from all over the Kurdistan Region have been chipping in for days or weeks.

"Masrour Barzani sincerely thanks all those who participated in the fundraising campaign in support of the efforts to combat the coronavirus

and assist families with low income,” read another statement.

“On this basis, the Prime Minister decided to donate his salary and financial dues to support preventive measures and efforts to combat the coronavirus, as well as assisting vulnerable families.”

The KRG has been one of the governments in the region and the world that began enacting precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease early on, as it became clear that it was likely on its way to be-



The Erbil Citadel, located in the center of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region's capital. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

coming a pandemic. Measures have included temporarily closing schools, declaring extended public holidays for government workers, cancel-

ing all religious services, and announcing a temporary curfew in the provinces of Erbil and Sulaimani.

Iraq's Ministry of Health and Environment said that its laboratories have conducted 96 new tests and showed positive results for 22 patients, recording the highest rate of infections recorded in one day in the country, 17 in Baghdad, three in Karbala, and one in Basra. It also announced a new death in Wasit province.

According to a ministry statement, the new cases have brought the total number to 154 confirmed cases, including 11 deaths and 41 recoveries.

Editing by John J. Catherine

Kurdistan au féminin 17.03.2020

ROJAVA. La population kurde d'Afrin tombée à 18% après l'occupation turque

En deux ans d'occupation turque, la population kurde d'Afrin est tombée à 18%. L'organisation des droits de l'Homme d'Afrin a présenté un rapport sur le nettoyage ethnique et d'autres violations des droits commis par la Turquie et ses gangs à Afrin.

En mars 2018, Afrin a été occupée par l'État turc et ses gangs alliés. L'organisation des droits de l'Homme d'Afrin a présenté un rapport sur les violations des droits au cours des deux dernières années. Le rapport a été lu publiquement par Heyhan Ali dans le camp de Serdem à Shehba.

Selon le rapport, plus de 300 000 habitants d'Afrin ont été déplacés par l'invasion turque vers le canton voisin de Shehba et d'autres endroits en Syrie. La population kurde d'Afrin est tombée à 18%. Au cours du changement démographique, des djihadistes d'Idlib et d'autres régions ont été installés avec leurs familles à Afrin.

Politique de turquification

Heyhan Ali a expliqué que la « politique de turquification » progressait à Afrin. Des endroits et des rues ont reçu des noms turcs. Par exemple, le carrefour Kawa, dont le nom fait référence au Kawa le forgeron du mythe du Newroz, a été renommé le Carrefour des rameaux d'olivier. « Rameau d'olivier » était le nom que la Turquie avait donné à son opération d'invasion il y a deux ans, ce qui était contraire au droit international. Aujourd'hui, des cours de turc sont dispensés dans les écoles d'Afrin. Selon le rapport, les nouveaux uniformes scolaires représentent « la culture turque ». Des portraits du président turc Erdogan sont accrochés à de nombreux lieux publics. Des cartes d'identité turques sont imposées aux habitants d'Afrin.

6 200 personnes enlevées

À Afrin, selon l'organisation des droits de l'Homme, 6 200 personnes ont été enlevées de

force. Le sort de 3 400 victimes d'enlèvement est inconnu.

Viols/agressions des femmes

Les femmes sont particulièrement touchées par le régime d'occupation à Afrin. L'organisation des droits de l'Homme a documenté 61 cas d'agressions de femmes. Le taux de suicide des femmes a également augmenté depuis l'occupation. Trois femmes se sont suicidées après avoir été agressées par des djihadistes.

Selon le rapport, 553 civils ont été tués par des attaques directes de l'État turc et de ses mandataires djihadistes. 55 des victimes ont été tuées sous la torture.

200 000 oliviers abattus

Le rapport indique que non seulement la population civile et ses biens sont touchés par les attaques systématiques, mais aussi la nature, les sites historiques et les lieux de cultes.

Heyhan Ali a déclaré que plus de 200 000 oliviers ont été abattus et 11 000 hectares de terres cultivées brûlées: « La nature verte d'Afrin est devenue un désert. Les troncs d'arbres ont été amenés en Turquie pour être recyclés. »

75 sites historiques pillés

Selon le rapport, 75 sites historiques ont été pillés par les forces d'occupation. Des dizaines de mosaïques ont été supprimées. En outre, 15 tombes, qui étaient sacrées pour diverses communautés religieuses, ont été détruites.

Sous les yeux de la communauté internationale

Heyhan Ali a conclu en soulignant que ces crimes ont lieu aux yeux du public mondial. L'organisation des droits de l'Homme a appelé l'ONU à assumer sa responsabilité et à retirer l'État turc avec ses mandataires djihadistes de Syrie.



March 17-2020

Child among 7 wounded in Salahuddin bombing

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – A motorcycle bombing in a disputed town in Iraq's Salahuddin Province wounded several civilians, a security source said on Monday, in the latest such incident to rock the area amid nationwide measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The source told Kurdistan 24 that at least seven civilians were wounded when a bomb-laden motorbike exploded. The incident occurred in a popular marketplace in the middle of Tuz Khurmatu, which is an ethnically-diverse area the control over which is contested by the federal Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The explosion occurred Monday morning.



The site of a motorcycle bombing that wounded seven people in the disputed town of Tuz Khurmatu on March 16, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

The national military communications center, known as the Security Media Cell, described it as a "terrorist attack." It said in a statement that a child was among the wounded, and all were transported to a hospital.

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombing, but

sleeper cells of the so-called Islamic State have occasionally carried out such attacks along with other insurgency-style operations.

The terrorist organization's activities continue despite the passage of over two years since the Iraqi government declared a

final victory over it after the group's territorial collapse in late 2017.

Last week, Islamic State remnants carried out an armed assault on a military unit made up of Iraqi soldiers and Hashd al-Shaabi militias, killing three members in total, according to a security source.

On March 9, Iraq's military communications center announced that anti-terrorism forces, backed by the US-led coalition against ISIS, killed 25 members of the terrorist group in an extended combat operation south of the disputed district of Makhmour in Nineveh Province.

Shortly after, the US Department of Defense said that two American soldiers had been killed in the military operation.



March 17-2020

Iraqi Human Rights Commission condemns attack on sanctity of Kakai cemetery

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Iraqi Human Rights Commission on Monday condemned an assault on a cemetery belonging to the Kakai religious community in the Safiya area of the Gwer sub-district, a region disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq.

Sources in the area said unidentified men sabotaged several sites on Sunday evening at the Pankan graveyard, which belongs to the Kakai minority, located within the borders of the disputed areas between Erbil and Baghdad.

"Such incidents aim to stir conflict

and compromise peaceful coexistence between the different components and factions, and the Human Rights Commission will form a special team in its office in Nineveh to investigate the events," Basma Mohammed, a member of the Human Rights Commission council, said in a statement.

Mohammed emphasized the need for an "independent and transparent investigation to find those who violated human and moral norms and bring them to justice."

Earlier on Monday, Jalil Tufiq, the Head of the Kurdish Kakai Cultural Center in Erbil, called on the KRG

and central government in Iraq "to conduct an urgent investigation" into the incident.

Meanwhile, the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs strongly condemned the incident, calling on authorities to arrest those responsible as soon as possible.

Kakais follow Yarsanism, a religion founded in the late 14th century in what is now western Iran. The Kakais primarily live in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Members residing in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq's disputed territories are usually considered to be Kurdish.

Having suffered religious persecu-

tion from multiple directions, both historically and in recent years, members of the Kakai community have often sought to avoid attention by keeping their practices secret.

The Kakais are among the many minorities in Iraq the so-called Islamic State systematically targeted during the terror group's rise in 2014. However, their plight did not receive the same level of news coverage and general awareness as other groups. A significant number of Kakai families evacuated their villages in Kirkuk's Daquq district in response to the Islamic State's emergence.

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany



Mar 18, 2020

Shelling by Kurdish forces kills five in Syria's Afrin

Five people, including two children, were killed and 15 wounded in shelling by Syrian Kurdish forces in Syria's Afrin on Wednesday, UK-based Syrian Observatory Human Rights (SOHR) said.

"Two children and an officer of the Turkish-backed 'Free Police' among five persons were killed in the shelling, while 15 others sustained various injuries, including children and women," SOHR said.

The attack was carried out on the second year of the invasion of the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

Turkish armed forces and their Syrian rebel allies took control of Afrin in early 2018 in a cross-border military operation against the Syrian Kurdish People's Pro-



tection Units (YPG), which the Turkish government considers a terrorist organisation due to its links to militants fighting for Kurdish self-rule within Turkey.

"We want this to be known: We are not war lovers, but the occupation of our country will always be a reason for revenge and war. The enemies of our people understand nothing but war. On this basis, we reiterate once

again our determination in fighting the invaders," Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE), the Afrin branch of the YPG, said in a [statement](#) after the attack.

Syrian Observatory activists have documented a spike in death toll due to Kurdish rocket attacks on Afrin. Two children and an officer of the Turkish-backed "Free Police" among five persons were killed in the

shelling, while 15 others sustained various injuries, including children and women.

Hours ago, SOHR sources reported that that Kurdish forces fired several rockets on places in the Turkish-controlled city of Afrin, north-west of Aleppo. The shelling killed two persons at least and injured 12 others, including children and women. The shells also caused material damage in the targeted areas.

Turkish forces responded to the Kurdish shelling by shelling several places in the Kurdish-controlled township of Shirawa, north-west of Aleppo city.

On March 6, Kurdish forces shelled residential neighborhoods in Afrin city, leaving three persons wounded.



Mar 18, 2020
Paul Iddon

Turkey's actions in Syria's Afrin amount to ethnic cleansing - Kurdish analysts

Turkey's invasion of the northwest Syrian district of Afrin two years ago led to widespread ethnic cleansing of its Kurdish inhabitants and their replacement by Syrian Arabs displaced from fighting elsewhere in the country, Kurdish analysts said.

Turkish troops, backed by mostly Syrian Arab Islamist militias, seized the town of Afrin on March 18, 2018, after a two-month campaign carried out to combat what Turkey said was the threat posed to its territory by the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian Kurdish group that had controlled the district

since Syrian government forces withdrew in 2012.

The Turkish operation displaced some 180,000 Kurds, fundamentally upending the region's long-established demographics. Before the invasion, Afrin was home to Syrians of all backgrounds. Afterwards, Turkey's proxies fast-tracked [the resettlement of displaced Syrian Arabs](#) in vacated Kurdish homes.

"The case of Afrin can be described as the most recent example of an ethnic cleansing that our modern times have witnessed," said Washington-based Kurdish affairs analyst Ceng Sagnic.

Before the Syrian conflict began in 2011, Afrin was estimated to have a population of 400,000, but that increased significantly when between 200,000 and 300,000 displaced Syrians sought sanctuary in the region. Syrian Kurdish officials said Afrin's population was 85 percent Kurdish before the invasion, but said two years later, the Kurdish population had been reduced to [20 percent](#).

The invasion and occupation of Afrin destroyed what was hitherto one of the safest and most diverse regions of Syria, said Mohammed A. Salih, a doctoral student and graduate associate

at Perry World House of the University of Pennsylvania's Global Affairs Institute.

Minorities in Afrin before Turkey's invasion included Christians, and even a small number of Yezidis. Now those communities [have largely vanished](#) and most Yezidis from Afrin are displaced and living in camps in neighbouring Tel Rifaat, [fearful of what will happen to them](#) at the hands of Turkey's proxies if they try to return to their villages. There have also been reports of abductions of Afrin Yezidis and the [desecration](#) of their shrines by Turkey's militia proxies.



“That such a project of colonial occupation and ethnic cleansing could happen in the 21st century is difficult to grasp,” Salih said.

On the eve of the invasion, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Afrin was 55 percent Arab, 35 percent Kurdish and the rest mostly Turkmen, figures hotly disputed by Syrian Kurdish officials. The president repeatedly declared his intention of handing Afrin back to what he called its real owners.

“By real owners, he specifically means the Arabs, as if the Kurds, who had lived in the region for over a millennium, are some sort of aliens who have come from another planet,” said Namo Abdulla, Washington bureau chief for the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw.

Erdoğan, he said, never minced words “when talking about his ethnic cleansing intentions in Syria ... In Afrin, which had no Turkish residents, Turkey has replaced the Kurdish-language road signs, names of hospitals and schools, with Turkish and Arabic names.”

But while the invasion had caused big changes to Afrin’s demography “nobody knows the

extent of it with much specificity”, said Kyle Orton, an independent Middle East analyst.

Turkey and its proxies deny any deliberate ethnic cleansing or intention to expel the Kurdish population, but say the displacement was a by-product of the fighting.

“But in preventing the return of the displaced, and moving in Arabs displaced from other areas of Syria, it comes to the same thing,” Orton said.

The Turkish government says the YPG is part of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) that has been fighting for self-rule in Turkey’s mainly Kurdish south-east since 1984, but nevertheless Ankara provided [scant evidence](#) to back up its claim that the YPG had used Afrin as a launchpad for more than 700 attacks on Turkey in a year.

The demographic re-engineering of Afrin nevertheless helps Turkey control the area, Orton said.

“The changed demographics give the PKK/YPG a smaller support base for its insurgency to challenge the Turkish presence,” he said.

The Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE), founded immediately after the district’s capture, has launched a string of hit-and-run attacks on Turkish and allied Syrian forces in Afrin and elsewhere in Aleppo province.

International reaction to the Afrin operation and the ensuing abuses was muted, especially compared with the outcry over Turkey’s invasion of Kurdish-controlled northeast Syria in October 2019.

Salih said that was due to Europe’s unwillingness to challenge Turkey, over fears that Erdoğan would again send hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees towards European countries, and because Russia had sold out Afrin to Erdoğan so Syrian government forces could recapture other territories from Syrian rebels.

“So, all in all, this has worked well for Erdoğan and to the great detriment of hundreds of thousands of Kurds who have lost their lives and livelihoods overnight,” he said.

Also, while the United States backed the YPG in northeast Syria against Islamic State, it never coordinated or worked

with the Afrin-based YPG.

Sagnic predicted that if Russia does not choose to put an end to Turkey’s presence in Afrin, it could become like northern Cyprus, where Turkish troops have been stationed since their 1974 invasion.

The Syrian Kurds are not capable of recapturing Afrin on their own, but Russia could exert great pressure on Turkey to eventually leave the region and permit President Bashar Assad’s forces to return. Under such a scenario, Afrin is highly unlikely to revert to Kurdish self-rule, and would rather come under the centralised control of Damascus.

While this is still an undesirable outcome for them, Salih believes most Kurds would prefer that over Turkish occupation.

“Assad’s regime has been oppressive to the Kurds, but between an oppressive regime and one bent on ethnically cleansing them, Kurds would certainly prefer the former,” Salih said.

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



Hiwa Shilani |
March 18-2020

KRG extends curfew another 5 days, now across entire Kurdistan Region

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) –

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Wednesday that the curfew now imposed in Erbil and Sulaimani provinces that is part of ongoing efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus will be extended for an additional five days and will now be in effect across the entire Kurdistan Region.

“After the initial 48 hours on March 13, we extended the curfew for another 72 hours, today we decided to extend the curfew for another five days,” said KRG Interior Minister Reber Ahmed at a press conference in Sulaimani.

Ahmed explained that the decision will come into effect at midnight Wednesday night and would continue until March 23, adding that “if necessary, the curfew will be extended yet again,”

The minister also pointed out that the curfew will now be enforced in all four provinces in the region, including rural districts and sub-districts, to now include



Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Interior Minister Reber Ahmed announces a five-day extension on an anti-coronavirus curfew during the press conference in Sulaimani, March 18, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Duhok and Halabja for the first time. He then thanked the people of Kurdistan for abiding by the regulations and staying at home while stressing that the next 14 days will be crucial in containing the spread of the virus.

The decision was made, he added, after “consulting with Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, his deputy Qubad Talabani, and discussing it with all the governors in Kurdistan Region,” and that it was also based on “the Ministry of Health recommenda-

tion early Wednesday that the lock-down will be the best course of action and will have a positive impact on reducing the spread of the coronavirus.”

During the curfew, no one is allowed to drive except for police, and security forces, and others who have special permission. All public places, including mosques and other religious sites, are closed, and only certain markets and bakeries remain open. Residents are allowed to walk only in their own neighborhoods.

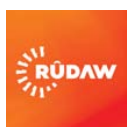
Drivers violating the curfew will face a 100,000 Iraqi dinar (\$84) fine by police. For the second offense, they will have to pay 300,000 dinars (\$251) and will have their vehicle confiscated for five days.

Early Wednesday morning, Erbil's Traffic Police Directorate announced that it had fined 50 drivers for using their vehicles and had seized 27 cars or trucks and 12 motorcycles on Tuesday.

The Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Health reports that, so far, there are 39 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Kurdistan, including one dead and nine fully recovered.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), which declared it a global pandemic last week, the coronavirus has so far infected over 216,000 worldwide and killed nearly 9,000 since first appearing in China in late 2019.

Editing by John J. Catherine



Hiwa Shilani |
March 19-2020

After floods, Kurdistan leaders pledge \$2.52 million in emergency funds

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Senior officials from the Kurdistan Region pledged on Thursday to provide three billion Iraqi dinars (\$2.52 million) in emergency relief for families in the cities of Duhok and Zakho who sustained property or other damage from devastating flash floods that swept through the area over the past two days. Duhok province has been experiencing heavy rains since Monday, which

caused a rise in the water level in rivers and around population centers. This led to surprise flash floods that damaged some 400 homes, dozens of vehicles, and hundreds of shops, in addition to killing two individuals in Zakho district.

A statement from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said that it had “allocated two billion Iraqi dinars as compensation for the fami-

lies severely affected by the flood in Duhok and Zakho city.”

The other one billion dinars were pledged in a statement released by the office of Nechirvan Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Region

According to initial reports, the heavy rain also resulted in the collapse of four small bridges connecting the city of Duhok to other districts. On

Wednesday evening, civil defense teams in Duhok rescued 21 families as flash floods swamped their houses while a dozen other citizens were extracted from vehicles they had been unable to escape from on their own.

Post-rain floods are a perennial issue in the country as a whole, caused in large part by chronically inadequate infrastructure, including

inefficient or poorly maintained urban rainwater management and sewage systems.

Local media has also reported that flooding further south in the disputed town of Baquba, located in Diyala province, resulted in significant damage and the death of five displaced females.

The Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Health on Thursday confirmed the first case of coronavirus in the province of Duhok.

The infected person in Duhok is reportedly a 50-year-old man who recently returned from Germany, the Ministry announced in a statement without providing further details.



(photo) The aftermath of flash floods that swept through Duhok, March 19, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

The ministry has so far confirmed 40 cases of the coronavirus in total and one fatality amid multiple KRG pre-

cautionary measures enacted to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the region such as temporarily clos-

ing schools, declaring extended public holidays for government employees, and canceling all religious services and other public gatherings.

A delegation headed by regional Interior Minister Reber Ahmad will visit multiple areas within Duhok province on Friday to assess the rules and regulations needed to prevent the spread of the disease.

The novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has infected 192 people across Iraq including the Kurdistan Region.

Editing by John J. Catherine



March 18-2020

Heavy rain kills five women in Diyala province

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - A member of Iraqi parliament announced the deaths of five women in a family of displaced people living in Baqubah city, Diyala province after their house collapsed due to heavy rain on Wednesday.

Raad Dahlaki, the MP representing Diyala province, said these women "have been the victims of the government's continual marginalization of the displaced after their house - made of clay bricks - collapsed due to heavy rain."

"This incident is clear evidence of the size of the humanitarian issue of displaced people, which the previous government cast to the side," he added.



Observers gather by the victims' house. Photo: social media

Heavy rains hit the northern provinces of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, Tuesday night and

into Wednesday causing major flooding.

Dahlaki said that they will follow the case, as the family is survived by two girls, Banin and Hanin.

He stated that this incident is a "humiliation for all governments."

The rains have also caused distress for many in Duhok.

Yusef Mousa, Rudaw's reporter in Zakho, says that a 20-year-old man, Salim Abdullah was with his family by the Khabur River in Zakho, Duhok when he fell in. His body is yet to be recovered, and he is assumed dead.

A father and son were stuck on a hill after being engulfed with the flood but they called the emergency teams who soon rescued them.

Bzhar Munib, the head of Zakho's municipality told Rudaw, that "water

has flooded a number of shops and houses in Zakho."

He added that 124 ml of rain has fallen in the last 24 hours.

The flooding has also damaged cars and houses in Duhok city.



Rubble at the site. Photo: social media



Water enters a house in Duhok on March 18. Photo: Rudaw



20/03/2020

Confinement sévère au Kurdistan irakien pour enrayer la propagation du coronavirus

A sso, habite un village proche de la frontière iranienne : « *Tout le monde appelle tout le monde. Il y a deux semaines, un ami m'a appelé pour me dire qu'il y avait un cas de coronavirus dans le village. Qu'il fallait trouver qui c'était. On a essayé de l'identifier pour le bien de tout le monde. Un membre des forces de sécurité m'a appelé. Pour me demander si j'avais plus d'informations. Mais franchement, je lui ai dit que je ne savais pas.* »

Cet habitant du Kurdistan irakien admet que les forces de sécurité sont très sévères et que la circulation est presque à l'arrêt. « *Il y a des checkpoints partout sur les principales voies des grandes villes comme Souleymanieh et sur les routes nationales qui relient une ville à une autre. Mais en même temps, un ami qui vit en Allemagne me disait que là-bas, ils ne peuvent pas faire respecter à ce point le confinement, avec autant de sévérité qu'au Kurdistan. Il disait que finalement la manière forte était peut-être la meilleure.* »

Près de la frontière avec l'Iran, la peur domine

C'est par le Kurdistan irakien que passent un bon nombre de camions venus d'Iran.



Le Kurdistan irakien, qui partage une frontière avec l'Iran, a mis au moins un confinement drastique pour tenter d'enrayer la propagation du coronavirus. REUTERS/Ari Jalal

Alors que le grand voisin est l'un des pays les plus touchés par le **coronavirus**. Dans les grandes plaines proches de la frontière iranienne, la peur domine. La peur du virus, mais aussi la peur des forces de sécurité qui viennent armées pour escorter les cas suspects jusqu'à l'hôpital.

« *Vous savez ici les gens ont l'habitude de l'usage de la force. Sans cette force, ils vont se cacher, ils n'iront pas à l'hôpital. Aujourd'hui, je vous jure les gens ont tellement peur qu'un frère pourrait dénoncer son propre frère. Une fois, ils ont*

souçonné quelqu'un qui rentrerait d'Iran d'être contaminé. Ils ont donné son nom, celui de toute sa famille et de tout son entourage. Personne n'est épargné », explique un villageois.

Un contrôle accru sur la population

Dans une région où les manifestations anti-gouvernementales sont violemment réprimées, une telle démonstration de force inquiète Baktyar, lui-même manifestant.

« *Ces derniers jours au Kurdistan les forces de sécurité*

ont renforcé leur contrôle sur la population. Elles vont de plus en plus loin. Elles n'ont peut-être pas planifié cette tragédie, mais finalement ça leur permet de faire des essais pour plus tard, pour mieux contrôler la société. Cela ne fait que renforcer leur autorité. Voilà où nous en sommes. S'ils décident de s'en servir plus tard, les citoyens ne pourront pas résister. »

Pour l'heure, les habitants du Kurdistan irakien se concentrent sur la **propagation du virus**. Ils le savent, leurs hôpitaux sont loin d'être prêts à faire face à l'épidémie.



March 23, 2020

Turkey backed rebels again cut water to Kurds in northeast Syria – report



Northern Syrian authorities accused Turkish-backed groups of preventing access to a water plant in Hasakah province, effectively cutting off water to the area controlled by the Kurdish-led local government, Syrian-Kurdish news agency ANHA [said](#) on Monday.

"It was assumed that the Russian state was the guarantor of supplying the city with water, but they did not play their role well," ANHA quoted Suzdar Ahmed, co-chair of the administration's directorate of water, as saying.

"Turning off the station is consid-

ered a catastrophe, as more than a million people in the city are without water," Ahmed said.

Turkish-backed Syrian rebels cut supply to the Hasakah region for more than a week in February in defiance of a Russian-Turkish deal that guarantees

water to Kurdish-led areas in exchange for power supply, ANHA said.

Turkey took control of an area between two border towns of Ras al Ayn and Tel Abyad after a military operation launched in October.

ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

Monday, 23 March, 2020
Qamishli – Kamal Sheikho

Exclusive – ISIS Children Slowly Regain Normal Life at Kurdish Rehabilitation Center

“I dreamed of being a great boxer like Denis Lebedev, Russia's most famous boxer,” said Nicolai as he recounts how he quit his homeland for Syria six years ago.

When Nicolai's father chose to join ISIS in 2014, he traveled with his family from the cold of Russia's Saratov to the hotbed that is the Syrian conflict. The family first flew to Istanbul and made the journey by land to the border city of Antakya.

Afterwards, they were smuggled to the Syrian city of Idlib. The father dreamed of achieving an illusion. The family soon lost contact with him as he surrendered to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) during ISIS' last stand in Syria in the battle of Baghouz in March 2019.

Nicolai, his mother and siblings soon found themselves seeking refuge at the sprawling al-Hol displacement camp in Syria.

“My father heard about the ‘caliphate’ on the internet and decided to join it,” Nicolai told Asharq Al-Awsat. “My mother agreed to travel with him. I was only 10 at the time and didn't understand what was happening.”

According to Nicolai, his father worked at a reception department for ISIS where foreigners and displaced were received and their doc-

uments processed. The mother stayed at home and the family moved around from one Syrian city to the other, including al-Tabqa, Raqqa and the towns of the northern Deir Ezzor countryside.

While living in ISIS-held territories, Nicolai witnessed indescribable brutality at a very young age. “Months after our arrival, I was leaving a mosque when the imam told us to gather in al-Tabqa's square. There,

they killed and beheaded a detainee. The corpse was later hung. It was the first time I witness such an atrocity," he recalled.

This was one of many horrific images that are seared into his memory. ISIS also sought to terrorize the locals with its harsh rulings and field executions, which it carried out in public squares.

ISIS had swept through Iraq and Syria, seizing large swathes of territory and imposing its harsh rule before being driven out completely in spring 2019.

Nicolai, with some 120 children whose ages range between 12 and 17 years old, now spend their days at the al-Ahdath prison in the town of Tall Marouf in Qamishli in the northeastern most point in Syria. The facility is a rehabilitation center overseen by the autonomous authority in northern and eastern Syria. The detainees, former members of the so-called "cubs of the caliphate", spend their days receiving lessons and vocational training.

Director of the Hourri Center for the Protection and Education of Children, Sarah Afrini, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the facility is divided into a section for children of ISIS fight-



A boy looks at the camera near Baghouz, Deir Ezzor province, Syria, March 5, 2019. (Reuters)

ers. It currently houses between 70 and 130 children from 17 countries. The second section is dedicated to children – currently around 50 - who have committed crimes and hail from northeastern Syria. The center receives children between the ages of 12 and 17. When the turn 18, they are usually transferred to the prison where ISIS fighters are held. A new batch of children is then admitted to the center.

Each child is given his own bedroom, which equipped with an air conditioner and surveillance camera. The children are barred from using the internet, mobile phones or

tablets.

Widodo, 17, came to Syria from Indonesia with his father. He joined the "cubs of the caliphate" in early 2015 just days after arriving in Syria. He explained that he was eager to join the group when he realized that many Indonesians were also members. "I believed that I would earn an education that I was forced to abandon when my father decided to join the organization," he told Asharq Al-Awsat.

They ended up living in one of the world's harshest conflict zones.

Widodo's life changed when his mother fell ill after she could not tol-

erate living in Syria. "I was forced to quit the faction and remained home. People thought I had lost my mind."

He will soon be transferred to the prison holding ISIS fighters. He spent two years of rehabilitation at the center. Two younger sisters, residing in al-Hol camp, and his father, who is detained by the SDF, are all that remain of his family.

Afrini told Asharq Al-Awsat that the majority of the children are usually illiterate when they arrive at the center. Instead of teaching them how to read, ISIS made them sit through lessons on ideology and weapons training. "The greatest challenge is how to eliminate such ideology and introduce them to knowledge, learning and music and return them to a normal life," she said.

She said that progress has indeed been achieved. "We are talking here about children who dreamed of becoming fighters or suicide bombers. They were forced to see the world as black, now, they must see all the colors," she added. Syrian children are more receptive to the rehabilitation program than foreigners, she revealed. "The children's only sin is that they are here through the fault of one of their parents."



REUTERS MARCH 23, 2020

Turkey detains five Kurdish mayors as crackdown continues

ISTANBUL (Reuters) -

Turkish authorities detained mayors of five municipalities in Kurdish-majority areas on Monday as part of a widening government crackdown against the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the party's co-leader said.

Mithat Sancar told reporters security forces had besieged municipality buildings in the southeastern province of Batman, as well as those in the Egil, Silvan, Lice and Ergani districts of Diyarbakir province on Monday morning.

He said five co-mayors in four municipalities were detained. He did not give details about the mayor of Lice but said another co-mayor who had previously been dismissed was also being held.

President Tayyip Erdogan and his government accuse the HDP of having links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group, leading to prosecutions of thousands of its members and some leaders. The HDP denies such links.

The HDP appoints one male and one female as mayor to promote gender-equality, calling them co-mayors, although only one is recognized by the central government.

Sancar said the measures on Monday morning were similar to those taken when Ankara appointed trustees in other municipalities, adding that the party had not received official notification from the central government.

"We reject with hatred this vile attempt that does not shy away from showing enmity against Kurds even in these difficult days

when the whole world is battling an epidemic," he said.

The Interior Ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Ankara has appointed trustees to 31 municipalities won by the HDP in March 2019 local elections, an HDP source said, adding that 21 co-mayors had been formally arrested so far, in addition to the six detained on Monday.

The former co-leaders of the HDP have both been jailed since 2016 on terrorism charges, with several other prominent members accused of supporting terrorism over what the government says are links to the PKK.

Reporting by Ezgi Erkoyun and Ali Kucukgocmen; Editing by Jonathan Spicer and Ed Osmond;

Kurdish-led northeast under lockdown as Syria announces first coronavirus case

The Kurdish-led autonomous administration declares a two-week curfew in an effort to keep the coronavirus out of northeast Syria; Turkey cuts off water supply to Hasakah.

The Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northeast Syria announced a lockdown in the broad swath of territory under its control today, just hours after the Syrian government confirmed its first case of the coronavirus.

The autonomous administration has declared a two-week curfew. It said in a statement this could be extended “in case of necessity and the public interest.” The administration said no cases of COVID-19 had been detected in the northeast so far. The area lying east of the Euphrates bordering Turkey to the north and Iraq to the east is home to between 4 million to 5 million people, among them hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians and Islamic State prisoners.

The real number of coronavirus cases in Syria is widely believed to far higher because of its proximity to Iran, which is among the worst affected countries worldwide. The Kurdish-led administration has sealed all its borders save for humanitarian and coalition deliveries and set up additional checkpoints to monitor people’s movements.

Mazlum Kobane, the commander in chief of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which provides security for the area, appealed in a video posted on his Twitter account for people to abide by the new rules and called medical staff “our new leaders.”

“We must adopt these decisions and unite in implementing them, and because our capabilities are few, we must take the necessary preventive measures that are important to protect ourselves, our families, and our friends,” the



A member of the Kurdish-led Asayish security organization stands near a man in a wheelchair along an empty street, as restrictions are imposed as a measure to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Qamishli, Syria, March 23, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Rodi Said.A

militia leader, who is also known as Mazloum Abdi, said.

Videos posted by the Hawar News agency showed rows of shuttered shops and empty roads in the SDF-controlled zone today.

“There is 100% compliance with the curfew,” said a Kobane aide, speaking not for attribution.

The co-chair of the administration’s health authority, Raperin Hassan, told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview, “Our means are truly very limited. We have only two normal size hospitals with 200 beds each and they aren’t fully in service, seven ventilators, and no [COVID-19] testing kits. We urgently need help.”

Hassan’s colleagues had reached out to the World Health Organization. “They haven’t been cooperative and we don’t know why,” she said. “They told us they would send us kits for each suspected case we report.”

She said the administration had also contacted the US-led coalition and the central government

in Damascus for assistance. “We haven’t heard back from any of them. We are basically on our own in this,” she said.

The coalition did not respond to Al-Monitor’s request for comment.

The UN and relief agencies have aired worries that the pandemic could be particularly devastating in Syria, where a decade of war has wrecked infrastructure, including hospitals, which are frequently targeted by regime and Russian warplanes in Sunni rebel-held areas, most notably the northwestern province of Idlib.

The central government in Damascus placed a ban on public transportation Sunday after a 20-year-old woman was identified as a carrier of COVID-19. Schools, parks and restaurants have been shuttered, moves that were mimicked by the Kurdish-led administration in the northeast. The autonomous administration has not, however, announced a prisoner amnesty to relieve congestion nor has it halted conscription. Damascus did both and has taken the additional measure of shutting down

bakeries as well, Reuters reported.

Fabrice Balanche, an associate professor at France’s Lyon II University with deep knowledge of Syria, said the regime’s claims that its hospitals are equipped to deal with the coronavirus “are all false.” Balanche told Al-Monitor in emailed comments, “Moreover, it’s impossible to quarantine people as it’s been done in Europe or in China. People have to queue for bread, for gas, and other products. Hence, people cannot be distanced from each other.”

Balanche added that while the Kurdish run region had taken preventive measures following the example of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, where a curfew has been in place since March 12, it will be difficult to sustain. “The pauperization of the population forces people to work,” he noted.

Matters have been made worse by Turkey’s cutting off of water yet again for the Alok pumping station in Ras al-Ain, one of two border towns it seized from the SDF in October. Turkey has repeatedly halted the flow of water to SDF-controlled Hasakah, which is home to over 400,000 people, including tens of thousands of internally displaced persons and the notorious al-Hol camp where jihadi women and children are being held.

Sozdar Ahmed, the co-chair of the water authority in Hasakah, told Hawar News on Sunday, “Since yesterday, the Turkish occupation and its mercenaries cut off water to the people of the city of Hasakah and its environs. It is assumed that the Russian state was the guarantor of supplying

the city with water, but they did not play their role well.”

Ahmed was referring to Russia's role in mediating between Turkey and the SDF over Alok.

Turkey is demanding that the SDF provide electricity to areas under its occupation and is using

water as a bargaining chip.

A spokesperson for the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs confirmed the water had been cut. Danielle Moylan told Al-Monitor in emailed comments, “We understand that the water supply from Alok station — a source of

clean water for nearly half a million people in north east Syria — has again been interrupted. The UN and humanitarian partners are advocating to parties to ensure that this critically important water source flows again to ensure the health and wellbeing of families living in the area.”

Hassan, the health co-chair, said

an abiding worry was the likely impact of the water cuts, particularly on al-Hol. “A lot of the people there are living in poor sanitary conditions, making them even more vulnerable than most.” The other concern is the potential for violence in the camp. “It's a really bad situation,” said Hassan.

AL-MONITOR  March 24, 2020

SDF calls for humanitarian truce in Syria amid coronavirus crisis

Following the lead of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces call for a cease-fire in order for all warring parties to combat COVID-19 instead.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which partnered with the US-led coalition in the fight against the Islamic State, has called for a humanitarian truce and committed to suspending most military operations in northeast Syria so that warring parties can deal with the coronavirus.

“The Syrian Democratic Forces calls on all parties of the Syrian conflict to refrain from any military initiatives or actions,” the SDF said in a statement late today.

“We hope that this humanitarian truce will help to open the door for dialogue and political solution and to put an end to the war in the world and Syria,” the US-backed group said, while adding that its members would defend themselves in the event of an attack. On Monday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate global cease-fire “to focus together on the true fight of our lives” and allow humanitarians to reach populations most vulnerable to COVID-19.

The SDF announcement came a day after the Kurdish-led group marked the one-year anniversary of its territorial defeat of the Islamic State in the group's final stronghold of Baghouz in March. In the time since, the SDF has been stretched thin, fending off attacks from Islamic



A fighter of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stands on the back of a pick-up truck, with a weapon installed on it, in Qamishli, Syria March 30, 2019. Photo by REUTERS/Ali Hashisho.

States sleeper cells and Turkish forces.

In October, US President Donald Trump announced a sudden withdrawal of American troops from Syria, opening the door for Turkey to launch a long-planned military operation south of its border.

The White House decision was widely viewed as an abandonment of the SDF, elements of which Ankara views as terrorists because of their ties to an insurgent group inside Turkey.

The Turkish military offensive displaced more than 200,000 Syrians, many of whom are now

living in crowded camps and are especially vulnerable to a coronavirus outbreak, the health authority in the Kurdish-led autonomous administration said today.

Of the 16 hospitals in northeast Syria, only one is fully functioning, according to the International Rescue Committee. Just two doctors are trained to use the 11 adult ventilators available to the hospitals.

The co-chair of the administration's health authority, Raperin Hassan, told Al-Monitor on Monday her government had received little support from the World Health Organization. They had contacted the US-led coal-

ition and the central government in Damascus for assistance, but hadn't heard back.

In an attempt to prevent the coronavirus from reaching northeast Syria, the local authorities announced the closure of schools and the cancellation of public events, and recently imposed an indefinite curfew on the region.

In a video posted to Twitter on Monday, Gen. Mazlum Kobane, the commander in chief of the SDF, urged residents to obey the new regulations and be “vigilant, safe and secure.”



24 mars 2020

Huit prisonniers politiques kurdes en grève de la faim à Oroumieh

CSDHI - Le prisonnier politique kurde « Bashir Pirmawanah » est en grève de la faim depuis le 25 janvier pour protester contre le refus des responsables de la prison de lui accorder une libération conditionnelle.

Sept autres prisonniers politiques, Kamran Darvishi, Siamak Ashrafi, Kamran Ghasemi, Keyvan Rashozadeh, Omid Saeedi, Keyvan Zarei et Reza Ismail sont également en grève de la faim à la suite de leur demande de transfert dans une cellule séparée des prisonniers pour crimes ordinaires détenus dans le quartier des jeunes.

Le Réseau kurde des droits de l'homme (KHRN) a été informé que Bashir Pirmawanah a souffert d'une perte de poids et d'étourdissements durant cette période, mais qu'il poursuit sa grève de la faim jusqu'à ce que les responsables de la prison répondent favorablement à ses demandes.



Bashir Pirmawanah a été arrêté en mars 2016 par les forces de sécurité à Oroumieh et condamné à cinq ans de prison pour collaboration avec un parti d'opposition kurde. La peine de cinq ans d'emprisonnement a ensuite été réduite à quatre ans en vertu

de la loi de « soumission au verdict ». Par ailleurs, trois prisonniers politiques, Keyvan Rashouzadeh, Kamran Qasemi et Kamran Darvishi, ont été transférés en isolement depuis le 23 février, menottés et attachés aux pieds, en plus d'être

privés de tout contact et de toute visite avec leur famille.

Ces trois prisonniers et quatre autres prisonniers politiques Siamak Ashrafi, Omid Saeedi, Keyvan Zarei et Reza Esmaili souffrent de la faim depuis le 22 février, car ils protestent contre le non-respect de la loi sur la séparation des crimes dans la prison et l'absence de cellule séparée pour les prisonniers politiques du quartier des jeunes.

Lundi 24 janvier, il y a eu un affrontement entre les [prisonniers kurdes](#) et azéris provoqué par Sayyed Fatemi (l'officier en charge du quartier des jeunes). Cependant, pour soutenir les prisonniers de droit commun, les gardes spéciaux ont battu les prisonniers politiques kurdes au lieu d'apaiser la situation et ont transféré les prisonniers dans la section de quarantaine.

Source : Le Réseau des droits de l'homme du Kurdistan – le 8 mars 2020.

LA CROIX

avec AFP
24 mars 2020

Coronavirus: en Syrie, les zones kurdes seules face au danger d'une épidémie

Frappées par des pénuries de médicaments et privées d'aides cruciales, les régions sous contrôle kurde dans le nord-est de la Syrie en guerre risquent d'être particulièrement vulnérables et sous-équipées face au nouveau coronavirus, avertissent responsables locaux et ONG.

Si dans une Syrie morcelée, le régime a officiellement recensé un cas de la maladie Covid-19 dans les territoires gouvernementaux, aucun patient atteint

du virus n'a été enregistré dans le nord-est du pays.

Mais les autorités locales kurdes s'inquiètent, d'autant que leurs régions accueillent plusieurs camps de déplacés où s'entassent au total près de 100.000 personnes, dont des familles du groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI).

«Même avant l'apparition du nouveau coronavirus, nos besoins étaient énormes», plaide Jawan Moustafa, en charge de

la santé publique au sein de l'administration semi-autonome kurde. «Avec l'épidémie, il nous faudra un soutien encore plus important».

La situation est d'autant plus précaire que les régions kurdes ne peuvent plus bénéficier des aides transfrontalières de l'ONU, contrairement au nord-ouest par exemple, où l'ultime grand bastion jihadiste et rebelle d'Idlib peut compter sur ces aides acheminées via la Turquie.

Pour les régions kurdes, ce dispositif a été stoppé, après le vote en janvier d'une résolution de l'ONU entérinant de nouvelles restrictions.

Alors pour recevoir des aides, les Kurdes doivent obtenir une autorisation du régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Mais la minorité entretient des rapports compliqués avec Damas, même si fin 2019 les troupes gouvernementales se sont déployées dans le nord-est

à la demande des forces kurdes, confrontées à une offensive de la Turquie voisine.

- Moyens limités -

Pour éviter le pire, l'administration semi-autonome kurde a imposé lundi deux semaines de confinement dans ses territoires.

Neuf centres ont été équipés pour accueillir et isoler les patients soupçonnés d'être potentiellement atteints du nouveau coronavirus, d'après M. Moustafa.

Mais selon le Comité international de secours (IRC), trois hôpitaux seulement peuvent servir de centres de quarantaine, dont deux qui ne sont pas totalement équipés.

Par ailleurs, les unités intensifs de ces trois hôpitaux ne comptent que 28 lits et seuls deux médecins sont formés à l'utilisation des rares respirateurs disponibles, selon IRC.

M. Moustafa rappelle par ailleurs que les autorités ne disposent pas de kits de diagnostic.

A défaut d'alternative, des échantillons prélevés sur des cas suspects ont été envoyés dans des laboratoires à Damas pour être analysés.

Certains craignent une dépendance accrue des zones kurdes vis-à-vis du régime, qui reste hostile à l'autonomie de facto acquise par la minorité.

Et les camps de déplacés surpeuplés restent la principale préoccupation: il est quasi-impossible en raison de la densité de population d'y faire appliquer les mesures de distanciation suivies dans le monde entier.

Pour minimiser les risques, les autorités ont restreint l'intervention des travailleurs humanitaires aux cas d'urgence, explique M. Moustafa.



Un homme désinfecte des rues dans la ville à majorité kurde de Qamichli, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 24 mars 2020 / AFP

En cas d'épidémie, une grande tente dans chaque camp pourrait être transformée en zone de quarantaine. «A part cela, nos

moyens sont limités», dit-il.

Une propagation du nouveau coronavirus risquerait d'être dra-



Un homme marche seul dans un marché déserté de la ville à majorité kurde de Qamichli, le 23 mars 2020 / AFP



Un policier syrien porte un masque de protection dans la ville à majorité kurde de Qamichli, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 24 mars 2020 / AFP

matique pour le camp d'Al-Hol par exemple, où s'entassent près de 70.000 personnes, y compris des milliers d'enfants et femmes affiliés à l'EI.

«L'ONU n'étant plus en mesure de fournir des aides médicales transfrontalières, les capacités de nombreuses organisations humanitaires pour répondre aux besoins médicaux dans des camps comme celui d'Al-Hol ont déjà été compromises», avait alerté IRC.

- Coupures d'eau -

Lundi, le Fonds de l'ONU pour l'enfance (Unicef) a aussi averti que des centaines de milliers de personnes dans le nord-est de la Syrie étaient exposées au nouveau coronavirus en raison de coupures d'eau.

Depuis plusieurs jours, la station d'approvisionnement en eau d'Allouk à Ras al-Aïn, contrôlée par la Turquie et ses supplétifs syriens, ne pompe plus d'eau à destination des zones kurdes.

Cette interruption a été décidée par la Turquie, ont accusé dimanche l'agence de presse syrienne Sana et l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH).

Un Syrien portant un masque chirurgical, porte des provisions, dans la ville à majorité kurde de Qamichli, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 24 mars 2020 / AFP

La station d'Allouk fournit habituellement de l'eau à environ 460.000 personnes dans le nord-est.

«L'interruption de la distribution d'eau, en plein effort face à la propagation du nouveau coronavirus, fait courir des risques inacceptables pour des enfants et des familles», a dénoncé l'Unicef dans un communiqué. Les installations liées aux ressources en eau «ne doivent pas être utilisées pour des gains militaires ou politiques».

Un séisme frappe l'est de la Turquie, faisant plus de trente morts

La terre a tremblé, vendredi vers 20 h 55, dans les provinces d'Elazig et de Malatya. Les autorités font état d'au moins 1 600 blessés.

Les secouristes étaient à la recherche de survivants sous les décombres, alors qu'un séisme avait frappé vendredi l'est de la Turquie, et causé la mort d'au moins 31 personnes selon un nouveau bilan annoncé dimanche 26 janvier par les autorités.

La terre a tremblé dans la province d'Elazig, vers 20 h 55 locales (18 h 55 à Paris), selon l'Agence gouvernementale des situations de catastrophe (AFAD), qui a précisé qu'au moins trente répliques du séisme avaient été enregistrées dans la journée de vendredi. L'institut américain USGS a, lui, mesuré la secousse à 6,7.

Le nombre de personnes blessées dans les provinces d'Elazig et de Malatya s'élève en outre à 1 607, a indiqué dimanche l'agence gouvernementale des situations de catastrophe (AFAD). En outre, 41 personnes ont été extraites en vie des décombres.

Capture d'écran du site de l'Institut d'études géologiques des Etats-Unis, montrant la zone touchée par un tremblement de terre de magnitude 6,8 en Turquie, le 24 janvier.

En signe de solidarité avec les sinistrés, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a assisté aux funérailles, à Elazig, d'une mère et de son fils tués dans le séisme. Il s'est ensuite rendu dans le quartier de Mustafa Pasa, où deux immeubles résidentiels se sont effondrés, affirmant que l'Etat ferait « tout ce



Des secouristes après le séisme à Elazig. BULENT KILIC / AFP

qui est en son pouvoir » pour aider les habitants.

« C'était très puissant »

Vendredi soir, la télévision turque a diffusé des images d'habitants paniqués se ruant à l'extérieur des bâtiments, et d'au moins un immeuble dont le toit était en feu. Le séisme a aussi été ressenti dans plusieurs régions de l'est de la Turquie, dont Tunceli, a précisé la chaîne NTV.

[Vidéo]

[#Turquie](#) : [#Séisme](#) de magnitude 6,5 à

[#Elazig](#)<http://v.aa.com.tr/1712969>

« C'était effrayant, les meubles nous sont tombés dessus. Nous nous sommes précipités dehors, a déclaré à l'AFP Melahat Can, 47 ans, habitant d'Elazig. Nous allons passer les prochains jours dans une ferme à l'extérieur de la ville. »

Zekeriya Gunes, 68 ans, a pour sa part expliqué avoir vu un bâtiment s'effondrer à deux cents mètres de son domicile, sans pouvoir dire s'il était habité. « Tout le monde est descendu dans la rue, c'était très puissant, très effrayant », a-t-il témoigné.

La Turquie, située sur plusieurs lignes de failles, est fréquemment touchée par des séismes. En 1999, un tremblement de terre de magnitude 7,4 avait touché l'est du pays, faisant plus de 17 000 morts, dont un millier à Istanbul. En septembre 2019, un séisme de magnitude 5,7 avait touché la capitale économique du pays. Les experts estiment qu'un tremblement de terre majeur peut à tout moment toucher cette ville de plus de 15 millions d'habitants, où l'habitat, souvent anarchique, n'est que rarement aux normes antisismiques.



afp
24-03-2020

Water cuts in northeast Syria raise virus risk: UNICEF

AFP BEIRUT, Lebanon — Hundreds of thousands of people in northeast Syria are at greater risk of contracting the novel coronavirus because of repeated interruptions to their main water supply, UNICEF warned on Monday.

The Allouk water station in Sari Kani (Ras Al-Ain), a border town controlled by Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies, has not pumped water to the Kurdish-held northeast for days due to an interruption a Britain-based war monitor blames on Ankara.

UNICEF on Monday said the pumping station supplies water to around 460,000 people, including residents of Hasakah city and the overcrowded Al-Hol camp, which is home to thousands of relatives of Islamic State group fighters.

"The interruption of water supply during the current efforts to curb the spread of the Coronavirus disease puts children and families at unacceptable risk," Fran Equiza, the agency's represen-



A child looks on as a member of the Asayesh checks a woman's temperature in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province, on March 23, 2020. Photo:Delil Souleiman/AFP

tative in Syria, said in a statement.

"Uninterrupted, reliable access to safe water is essential to ensure children and families in the area don't have to resort to unsafe sources," she said.

"Water and water facilities must not be used for military or political gains."

Northeast Syria, home to IS prisons and sprawling displacement camps housing tens of thousands of people, has not yet recorded a single coronavirus case.

But Damascus on Sunday declared the country's first coronavirus case, prompting deep concern among Kurdish officials who have warned that their embattled region is ill-equipped to deal with an outbreak.

Amid the alarm, Turkish forces around the Allouk station have deliberately cut water supply to Hasakah and surrounding areas for the second time in recent weeks, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Sunday.

The war monitor said Ankara and its Syrian proxies had cut water in the past to pressure the Kurdish administration into supplying more electricity to a power plant under their control.

With taps still dry, the Kurdish administration on Monday enforced a 15-day lockdown over fears of a coronavirus outbreak.

"The risk of a virus outbreak here is very high," warned Mazlum Abdi, the head of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the region's main military outfit.

He urged residents to abide with lockdown measures "in light of the weak capabilities" of the Kurdish authorities in the face of the global pandemic.

TÉLÉOBS

Par Nebia Bendjebbour
le 24 mars 2020

« Autopsie d'un triple meurtre », à qui profite le crime ?

Depuis sept ans, les familles de trois militantes kurdes assassinées à Paris attendent des réponses de la justice. Ce documentaire minutieux retrace le parcours de ces femmes et analyse ce crime politique impuni. Le 10 janvier 2013, les corps de Sakine Cansiz, 54 ans, cofondatrice avec le leader Abdullah Ocalan, du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), de Fidan Dogan, 30 ans,

responsable du centre d'information du Kurdistan, et de Leyla Saylemez, 24 ans, chargée de recruter de nouveaux combattants, sont retrouvés criblés de balles au siège du centre d'information du Kurdistan, dans le 10e arrondissement. L'enquête, analyse ADN à l'appui, désigne le meurtrier : un jeune Turc de 34 ans, Omer Güney, chauffeur de Sakine Cansiz. La police découvre

qu'en Allemagne, Güney était proche des milieux nationalistes turcs qui vouent une haine viscérale aux Kurdes. Il s'était aussi introduit dans les locaux d'une association kurde à Villiers-le-Bel (Val-d'Oise), pour photographier un fichier recensant plus de 300 adhérents.

A qui profite le crime ?

En janvier 2014, un enreg-

istrement vocal est posté sur YouTube depuis l'Allemagne : on y entend Güney discuter avec deux hommes d'assassinats ciblés dans le milieu des activistes kurdes en Europe. Mais, en décembre 2016, l'accusé meurt d'un cancer du cerveau : fin de la procédure. Une question demeure : à qui profite le crime ? Le président Erdogan s'empresse d'affirmer qu'il s'agit d'un règlement de



« Autopsie d'un triple meurtre » (© BR/Ahmet Senyurt 2019)

comptes entre Kurdes. En janvier 2013, l'Etat turc avait entamé des pourparlers de paix avec Abdullah Ocalan, leader du PKK, pour tenter de mettre fin à un conflit qui a fait plus de 40

000 morts depuis 1984. Mais l'enquête se dirige vers une implication des services secrets turcs (MIT) que la justice française soupçonne d'avoir commandité ces crimes. Les

familles des victimes ont déposé une plainte avec constitution de partie civile en 2018. Le parquet de Paris a donc relancé l'enquête dans une affaire qui embarrasse à la fois les services

français, allemands et turcs. *Mardi 24 mars à 22h25 sur Arte. « Sakine, Fidan, Leyla, militantes kurdes ». Documentaire d'Ahmet Senyurt (2019). 50 min. (Disponible en replay jusqu'au*

WWW.UNIDIVERS.FR
LE WEB CULTUREL BRETON



24/03/2020

Kurdistan : Fragments du pays qui n'existe pas... Café de la gare La Forest-Landerneau

Du jeudi 12 mars
au jeudi 9 avril

Rendez-vous
au café de la gare pour
l'exposition :
**Kurdistan :
Fragments du pays
qui n'existe pas...**

Gaël Le Ny a rencontré les kurdes pour la première fois, dans sa ville, à Rennes et ils l'ont pris par la main pour découvrir le Kurdistan, le pays qui n'existe pas.

En vingt ans et une trentaine de voyages plus tard, il a essayé de mettre en images la vie et la lutte de ce peuple au coeur ouvert et vaillant qui résiste à une assimilation et l'aliénation en proposant un projet ou démocratie et justice sociale, tout le monde aurait les mêmes droits, kurdes, turcs, yézidis, alévis, chrétiens, musulmans shiites ou sunnites, athés, gays, lesbiennes, queers, transgenres, femmes, hommes.

Dans ces images, vous verrez les habitants de Ben U Sen, kurde de Turquie, qui ont été chassés de leurs villages de hautes montagnes par l'armée

turque dans les années 90 pour collusion avec la guérilla kurde, donner des couleurs à leur bidonvillage au pied de la muraille de la vieille ville de Diyarbakir et qui résistent encore.

C'est de ses quartier que la jeunesse kurde s'est insurgé et battu arme à la main pendant l'hiver 2015-2016 contre l'armée turc.

Gaël a documenté la vie quotidienne des jeunes miliciens se préparant à une nouvelle attaque des forces gouvernementales dans la ville de Nussaybin. La ville est séparée de sa soeur jumelle Qamishlo par la fron-

tière, elle qui auto-administrée par les kurdes.

Enfin il y a aussi, le Rojava, le Kurdistan de Syrie, ou les kurdes tentent au-delà de toutes les menaces de construire une vie libre.

Rendez-vous au café de la gare pour l'exposition de Gaël Le Ny, café de la gare 11 Route de Beg ar Groas, 29800 La Forest-Landerneau La Forest-Landerneau Moulin de la Palud Finistère

Syrian Kurdish officials setting up court to try foreign IS fighters

As European countries have failed to try their nationals from among Islamic State (IS) members detained by Syrian Kurds, Kurdish authorities intend to establish a special court to try them.

HASAKAH, Syria — Amid ongoing operations to find and eliminate remnants of the Islamic State (IS), the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria plans to begin public trials for accused members of the extremist organization.

The [Social Justice Council](#) of the Syrian Kurdish administration is setting up a special court to prosecute foreign IS militants whose home countries refuse to allow their return and to try them.

Council member and lawyer Faisal Sabri told Al-Monitor, “We asked the European countries to assume their responsibilities toward IS detainees by establishing an international court on Syrian soil and sending international judges to try them, but they did not respond to our request. We have to set up public trials for them in accordance with international laws and human rights covenants and treaties.”

“We have yet to determine when the trials will start,” Sabri continued. “We called on European and Arab countries to accept the extradition of their nationals from among IS children, orphans and wives residing in al-Hol camp. They have been posing a threat in the camp, which has turned into a hotbed of terrorism.”

In recent operations, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on March 11 [raided a refugee camp](#) in the town of al-Shuhail, east of Deir ez-Zor, and arrested four members of a family displaced from Hama for alleged past involvement with IS. The raid, using mil-



Foreign prisoners suspected of being members of the Islamic State sit inside a prison hospital in Hasaka, Syria, Jan. 7, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Goran Tomasevic.

itary helicopters provided by the US-led international coalition against IS, came a day after SDF [arrested suspected members of IS cells](#) in the town of al-Basira, in Deir ez-Zor province. Those detained possessed medium and light weapons and modern communications equipment, according to the SDF. Several other IS suspects were arrested in separate raids.

SDF officer Sarkhbon Ali said of the detainees from the sleeper cells, “Many of them are dangerous, have committed war crimes, and must be tried.”

On Feb. 23 at a [press conference](#) in Qamishli, Fener al-Kait, co-head of the administration’s External Affairs Department, had called on the international community to provide support and legal advice for the trial of 12,000 IS militants, including 3,000 foreigners of 50 different nationalities. In attendance was the Belgian parliamentary deputy [George Dalman](#), who noted that there were 15 Belgians among the detainees and said that careful

study is needed to determine how their trials should be conducted.

In Raqqa, Al-Monitor met Salem Ali, a farmer whose son was killed by IS four years ago. “When IS controlled the city of Raqqa, it confiscated our crops,” he said. “Our lives under IS went to hell. My son Muhammad tried to escape, but IS militants caught him and beheaded him ... for treason. Most of those who carried out these executions were foreigners of various nationalities.”

A number of European and other countries have taken in some IS children. In early February, Rojava handed over to Russia [35 children](#) with Russian citizenship. The children [had been](#) living in al-Hol, which holds tens of thousands of wives and children of accused IS members. Kamal Akef, spokesman for the External Affairs Department, said that in the past year, the self-administration had handed over 100 women and children to the government of Kosovo, five children to France, seven children from

one family to Sweden, 30 women and 70 children to Kazakhstan and five children to Sudan.

Al-Hol is one of the largest refugee camps run by the Kurdish self-administration. It shelters around [74,000 Syrians and Iraqis](#), and some 40,000 wives and children of IS fighters occupy a separate section of the camp.

Birvan Omar, an administrator for the self-administration’s Office of Humanitarian Organizations Affairs, also oversees the camp. “The al-Hol camp has experienced murders by IS women,” she told Al-Monitor, “Most of these crimes are carried out by members of all-female IS morality police, known as the Hisbah. Everyone who rejects IS beliefs in the camp is destined to die at the hands of these women.”

She said the children are being brought up in a [horrifying environment](#). On March 14, Kurdish security forces at Al-Hol camp found the body of an [Iraqi refugee](#) who had been killed with a hammer. In an incident in February, another Iraqi man died after [being stabbed](#). His body was found in the section of the camp housing IS families. There have been [other killings](#) with sharp objects, and tents have been set on fire with people in them.

“The children end up embracing IS ideology, and when they grow up, they will be a danger to the world,” Omar said. She called on the international community to rescue the children and deprogram and rehabilitate them to integrate into society.



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
March 25-2020

Kurdish-led SDF calls for truce in Syria amid coronavirus pandemic

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) - The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on Tuesday voiced support for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call the previous day for a global ceasefire in order to focus on fighting the coronavirus.

"The General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces declares its commitment to global efforts which aim to combat coronavirus with support and effective response to this situation," the SDF Command said in a statement.

Based on this, the SDF leadership called on all parties in the Syrian conflict to refrain from military actions and make an immediate commitment to a humanitarian truce.

The [appeal](#) issued by Guterres on Monday urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the immediate battle against the coronavirus. Such a global ceasefire, said the UN, "would allow humanitarians to reach populations that are most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19," as the virus is officially named.

In its statement, the SDF underlined that its fighters would only defend themselves and against outside attacks and would avoid engaging in military actions.

"We hope that this humanitarian truce will help to open the door for dialogue and political solution and to put an end to the war in the world and Syria."

The SDF warned that, as a result of Syria's health system being ravaged by almost a decade of war, any renewal of hostilities would cause more displacement that would severely affect the remaining health infrastructure and lead to an increased spread of the virus.



A member of local Kurdish security forces stands guard near shops in the northern Syrian city of Qamishli that have been closed as part of efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, March 23, 2020. (Photo: Reuters / Rodi Said).

Syria reported its first infection on Sunday. Up until then, Damascus has denied any cases in territories under their control, despite reports suggesting otherwise.

There have been no confirmed cases in areas under SDF control.

Thomas McClure, a Syria-based researcher at the Rojava Information Center, told Kurdistan 24 that this is likely because the local administration in the SDF-held northeast of Syria does not have access to a single testing kit.

The local administration has taken several precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic such as [closing](#) the border crossing, shutting down public places, and imposing a curfew earlier this week.

McClure added that the situation is dire in the northeast, with 40 ventilators to serve a population of millions, under-equipped hospitals, and Turkey cutting the water flow to thousands of civilians living in the northeast.

"The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) has rightly recognized that coronavirus threatens to overwhelm the

civilians living under their jurisdiction," McClure said.

The Health Department of the local administration on Tuesday called on the EU, United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), and international organizations to provide medical aid to prevent a potential crisis.

Also, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) on Monday warned that the coronavirus in Syria could lead to one of the most severe outbreaks in the world. IRC spokesperson Misty Buswell warned in a public statement that, in northeast Syria, only one out of 16 hospitals is functioning at full capacity.

"(This) means that two of the three hospitals that have been identified to quarantine and treat suspected cases are not fully equipped."

"There are only 28 beds available in Intensive Care Units across these three hospitals, only 10 adult ventilators, one paediatric ventilator - and only two doctors trained in how to use them."

Syria-based researcher McClure stated to Kurdistan 24 that the SDF's call for a ceasefire "throughout the Syrian conflict

serves as an acknowledgment that, once again, it will be ordinary Syrians who suffer most if geopolitics are allowed to override humanitarian need."

After Turkey intervened in north-eastern Syria in October 2019, Russia and the US reached separate ceasefire deals with Turkey which allowed Turkey to control the area between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain. Despite the ceasefire deals, Turkish-backed groups continue to occasionally shell areas held by the SDF.

As recently as Tuesday, Turkish-backed groups reportedly shelled SDF-held villages near Tal Tamir.

Moreover, Syrian regime reinforcements continue to arrive at the frontlines of Idlib, where a Russian-Turkish ceasefire deal in March halted weeks of fighting between regime and Islamist groups.

On Monday, the first anniversary of the liberation of the Syrian city of Baghouz, which marked the territorial defeat of the Islamic State, US Senator Lindsey Graham spoke with SDF head Mazloum Abdi to stress the importance of a continued US-SDF partnership.

"Concern was expressed about Russian aggression along Turkey-Syrian border," Graham added in his tweet, "and potential efforts by Russia to grab oil," said Graham in a tweet that described the call, highlighting the complex security situation in Syria that often includes international actors with their own interests.

"Unfortunately," McClure concluded, "we are unlikely to see the desperately-needed ceasefire materialize."

Editing by John J. Catherine



Memo Middle East Monitor
March 25, 2020

Trump displays confusion by claiming Erdogan signed deal with Syria Kurds

US President Donald Trump has claimed that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is ready to make a deal with Kurdish groups in Syria, in a confusing television exchange on the coronavirus yesterday.

When Trump was asked about the issue of social distancing – a practice used and enforced around the world in a bid to prevent infections of the virus – he used the conflict and dealings between Turkey and the Syrian Kurdish militias as an example.

In an interview with the US news channel *Fox News* yesterday, he said that “With Turkey – I give this as an example – and Syria, I said ‘sign a deal with the Kurds, make peace.’ Erdogan, he didn’t want to – he’s a man who loves Turkey, and I have a very good relation – I said ‘sign a deal.’ He didn’t really want to, the Kurds didn’t really want to. And it went on, you know, the so-called safe zone... All of a sudden they start fighting... and it was vicious and other countries got involved.



US President Donald Trump holds a press conference in Washington DC, US on 26 February 2020 [Yasin Öztürk/Anadolu Agency]

Now I say: ‘let’s sign a deal,’ and they said ‘OK, we’ll sign a deal.’”

The incident Trump mentioned was the lead-up to and commencement of Turkey’s **Operation Peace Spring** in north-east Syria. This third military incursion by Turkey into Syria – launched on October 9 and aimed to both push back the US-backed Kurdish militias such as

the Peoples’ Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from the Turkish-Syrian border and establish a 32 kilometre-deep safe zone to house around two million Syrian refugees – was the issue that Trump attempted to explain.

Apart from having little or nothing to do with the US’ handling of the spread of coronavirus,

Trump also claimed that Turkey struck a deal with the Kurdish militias in Syria as the operation ended, but there was, in fact, no such deal between them but only a **deal** between Turkey and Russia. Trump’s comments sparked confusion between journalists regarding the comparison and caused speculation on whether he is fit for office as US president.

Some of his other bizarre comments in the interview included his plan to have the strict preventative measures implemented in the US lifted by Easter on 12 April – less than three weeks away – and to have “packed churches all over our country.”

This is despite top health officials, the World Health Organisation, and his closest advisors warning against such a move at an early stage, predicting that the outbreak and spread of the virus would not be curbed by then.



Avec Reuters
le 26/03/2020

Irak: La Turquie dénonce la mort de deux soldats dans une attaque kurde

Alors que le calme est revenu à la frontière syrienne après avoir négocié une trêve avec la Russie, la Turquie porte désormais son regard sur l’Irak où les forces kurdes viennent de mener une attaque.

Deux soldats **turcs** ont été tués et deux autres blessés dans une attaque au mortier de combattants kurdes dans la région de Haftanin, dans le nord de l’**Irak**, a rapporté mercredi soir le ministère turc de la Défense, précisant qu’Ankara avait ordonné des représailles.



Des combattants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK),

organisation qu’Ankara considère comme terroriste, ont lancé une « **attaque d’intimidation** » contre les forces turques, a déclaré le ministère dans un communiqué.

En représailles, a-t-il ajouté, des « **cibles identifiées dans la**

région » ont été immédiatement frappées et détruites.

Par la suite, dans un nouveau communiqué, le ministère turc de la Défense a indiqué que des avions turcs ont frappé quatre cibles dans la région et tué huit combattants du PKK.

Syrian Kurds still fight for rights on unrecognizable battlefield

Nine years into the Syrian war, much has changed for the Kurds, but conditions seem riper today than ever for them to obtain their rights.

Kurds have long borne the weight of the Syrian civil war, which this month entered its [ninth year](#). [Kurdish cities](#) are home to several militias and military factions, in addition to the [Syrian regime](#) and [opposition factions](#) backed by Turkey. The [Russian army](#) is also deployed in specific Kurdish areas, while the [US military](#) has set up its own bases. The US-backed [Syrian Democratic Forces](#) (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab alliance, partnered with the international coalition in the fight against terrorism.



Syrian Kurds are surrounded on all sides by conflicting forces, but their internal division has also held them back. Could they finally be ready to unite their efforts to build a workable autonomy?

Meanwhile, in light of mounting Turkish pressure to establish a [safe zone](#), the United States implemented a [partial withdrawal](#) in October. A few days later, Turkey launched its [Operation Peace Spring](#) from Ras al-Ain to Tell Abyad in northern Syria. But in November, [US forces](#) redeployed to protect oil wells in the region extending from Rumailan and al-Malikiyah to Deir ez-Zor.

Following the offensives of Syrian opposition military factions and Turkish military operations such as [Operation Olive Branch](#) in 2018 and last year's [Peace Spring](#), Kurds ended up losing swaths of land. Hundreds of thousands of citizens were [displaced](#) from Kurdish areas. Millions of Syrian Kurds fled to other Kurdish regions, Turkey and Europe. Thousands of them lost their lives in battle, especially against the Islamic State.

Meanwhile, the [Kurdish National Council](#) (KNC) in Syria obtained [independent status](#) as a member of the Syrian opposition's main negotiating body and gained [representation](#) on the

[Syrian Constitutional Committee](#) in Geneva.

On Jan. 10, the [KNC and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces](#) (SNC) reached an agreement on the return of those [displaced](#) from Syria's Kurdish areas.

Al-Monitor talked to [Faisal Yusuf](#), coordinator of the KNC-affiliated [Kurdish Reform Movement](#). He said, "We agreed with the [SNC](#) to return the displaced and guarantee their security and safety in Afrin, Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain, and to make sure they get back their properties."

In a separate development, the rift widened between the [KNC and the Democratic Union Party](#) (PYD) over administration of the Kurdish area. The KNC views nationalism as a solution to the Kurdish issue in Syria, while the PYD advocates decentralized cantons.

In May, [France](#) launched an initiative for a Kurdish-Kurdish rapprochement, but it failed. The [United Kingdom](#) also [tried](#) to bridge the points of view

in August, but was unable to mend the rupture.

[Nashat Zaza](#), a member of the political bureau of the [Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria](#), believes the Kurds, like all components of the Syrian political scene, are divided between supporters and opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"The rift between the Kurds has undermined their political standing. It killed the chances of the federation project," Zaza told Al-Monitor. He argued that the Syrian opposition's lack of a political project encompassing all Syrian components has strengthened the government again after it came close to falling.

Zaza said, "The SDF lost several Kurdish areas and did not receive any [military support](#) from its allies. In exchange for support, the regime required the SDF to [surrender](#) to it. Meanwhile, Turkey and the [military factions](#) it backed practiced ethnic cleansing and committed [atrocities](#) against the Kurds in those areas."

Zaza continued, "In light of [field](#)

[changes](#) in the Kurdish areas and other Syrian areas, the Kurds should reposition themselves on the field and politically. The KNC's membership in the negotiating body and the [Constitutional Committee] has weakened the SDF's position politically and popularly. We now have a good opportunity for rapprochement to save the rest of the Kurdish areas and defend the rights of the Kurdish people. Mazlum Kobane, the SDF chief, should strive for international endeavors for a true partnership between the Kurds."

In the meantime, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, often referred to as Rojava, continued its efforts to obtain political gains from the Syrian government, to no avail.

Ilham Ahmed, co-chair of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), [explained](#) in January 2019 to local media outlets the failure of the discussions that month between the SDC and Syrian government. Damascus refuses to recognize the autonomous administration and only approves of decentralization under [Legislative Decree 107](#). The government has threatened to take [military action](#) against the Kurds.

In the last days of December, a Russian delegation and representatives of the Syrian government met with representatives of the [Kurdish area](#) including the [PYD](#), the [Kurdish National Alliance](#) in Syria and the [Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party](#) in Syria.

However, the scope of disagreement between the autonomous administration and Damascus

has continued to widen. The SDF's **Kobane** has repeatedly rejected a military solution in Syria and stressed the impossibility of reaching any solution to the Syrian war without resolving the Kurdish issue.

PYD senior official **Fawza al-Yusuf** said the Kurds have achieved great accomplishments during the past nine years.

"Kurds are protecting their areas from the terrorist Islamic State. They established a self-administration with the participation of all components in northern and eastern Syria, including Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians and Armenians. The SDF, which represents

all the components of the Kurdish area, liberated 30% of the Syrian territories from the terrorist forces. The Kurds formed a democratic model and achieved civil peace and stability in their area, with full equality among men and women in all institutions and complete freedom to practice beliefs and languages," she told Al-Monitor.

Commenting on the current field situation, she said, "Turkey supports IS and radical forces while it fights Kurds. Turkey is a non-democratic country that attacked our areas and occupied Afrin, Ras al-Ain and Tell Abyad. Its goal is to strike at stability in Syria and prevent any democratic de-

velopment in the region."

Yusuf continued, "The Kurds tip the balance of power for any side with whom they ally. We demand a decentralized state that guarantees the rights of all components. We want the constitution to give the Kurds their due rights. Syria is plagued by a structural crisis and won't be able to fix its problems with simple reform measures. The existing political regime requires a radical change. The objective and subjective circumstances are riper today than ever for such change. I am optimistic that serious steps will be taken in the near future."

Baz Bakkari, a Syrian Kurdish

journalist based in Paris, believes most of the countries with interests in Syria want to seize the Kurdish card to exploit it in the future. He told Al-Monitor by phone, "Russia is pushing to reconcile Kurds and get them to agree with the Syrian regime. ...

The US' steps, however, seem slower than those of its Russian rival, but it also seeks to form a bloc representing the components of Syria's Jazeera canton, spearheaded by Kurds. This would ensure the US a foothold and a legal presence in Syria. Meanwhile, Turkey is trying to win over the KNC to rebut allegations that it is anti-Kurds and to support its theory that it is only hostile to the PYD."



Nurcan Baysal
March 28, 2020

Dealing with coronavirus in Turkey's unofficial Kurdish capital of Diyarbakır

Although there has been slight improvement in coronavirus treatments in Turkey's unofficial Kurdish capital of Diyarbakır over the past four or five days, they are still not adequate.

In upper-middle class districts of the southeastern city, such as Diclekent, cafes, restaurants, and salons have closed down, but many other businesses such as furniture stores, electricians, and toyshops remain open. Densely populated districts such as Bağlar, and Sur, the heart of the city, continue to be crowded, and over half of businesses are open.

Why are people refusing or unable to take precautions? Is information about precautionary measures not reaching people? I am thinking through all of this, and trying to understand the state of mind of people in my hometown. An important issue here is the problem of trust.

For a long time, Kurdish people have not had leaders and institutions to reassure us in crisis situations like this. The ruling Justice



and Development Party (AKP) has repeatedly made promises about peace, fixing the economy, recognising our identity, and respecting democracy.

But AKP ministers and politicians have consistently failed to follow through on their promises. Kurdish people have no reason to believe their most recent announcements.

Our own institutions are in disarray. We do not have a mayor in Diyarbakır to speak out on our behalf in such a life-or-death crisis, because our mayor (who also happens to be one of the best doctors in the city), Selçuk Mızraklı, is in prison.

Many of our other institutions have lost their effectiveness as a result of years of pressure, especially over these past two years. Their ties to the public have weakened, and the institutions that were most closely engaged with the people have been shut down. As a result, people here are gripped by a general feeling of abandonment.

There is of course an issue of leadership and dialogue as well. Currently, there is no leader to speak to the Kurdish people in a time of crisis. The strongest leader who could speak to us is Selahattin Demirtaş, the former co-chair of the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), who is in prison. Although

he sends messages from prison from time to time, these messages would be more effective in person.

A lack of dialogue is a serious problem. The government trustee assigned by the central government to replace the mayor has not established any dialogue with the residents of the city. The city residents do not have much of an expectation of dialogue from the trustee. But if the city had a leader that we had elected, whom we trusted, believed, loved, respected, and embraced, people would probably listen to that person and be more willing to take necessary precautions against the coronavirus.

Instead, today we are a people who do not even trust our municipalities. We avoid government buildings unless strictly necessary, who are separated by police barriers from their government.

Another problem is the fact that executive orders have closed down most of the city's non-profit organisations over the past four

years. We no longer have the grassroots that can convey messages to the public. We do not have institutions that can act as intermediaries. Our women's organisations, children's organisations, anti-poverty organisations, youth organisations. Virtually all of them have disappeared.

The Sarmaşık (Ivy) Association for Combating Poverty, which was shut down through executive order in September of 2016, used to provide food and support every month to the city's most impoverished 4,500 families. If Sarmaşık were still open today, the organisation would have provided the necessary support for those families.

Instead, former leaders of Sarmaşık, like Mızraklı and Şerif

Camcı, are instead accused of supporting terrorist organisations because of their work combating poverty, and are put on trial. The pressures, firings, and court cases that have been brought against members of organisations like the Turkish Medical Association and the Healthcare Workers Union have weakened institutions that serve important functions in pandemics. In the past five years, the government has tried every tactic to weaken non-profit organisations in Kurdish cities, from closures to arrests and firings.

Kurdish society is an organised and connected society, but the government has worked hard to destroy institutional unity in the past few years through executive diktats. It has been partially successful.

Another reason behind the apathy towards the coronavirus is of course the fighting and destruction that we lived through in 2015-2016. This state of mind is evident in many Diyarbakır residents, from children to the elderly. After what we have seen - the bodies left in the streets, Sur collapsing on us, after months of bombing - it is hard to push people into taking sufficient coronavirus precautions.

We have been at home for a week with the children, and we have run out of cheese. Braided cheese, a regional delicacy, is important for the people of Diyarbakır. I go to the dairy behind our house, which is open and busy. Coronavirus is nowhere to be found.

Without fully entering the shop,

trying to maintain my distance, I ask the young person working at the shop to give me two kilograms of braided cheese. I say, "I wish you would wear gloves and a mask." Strange glances are exchanged. In the packed shop, an elderly man calls out to me: "Daughter, forget about coronavirus. After all that we have seen, *koronavirüs çî ye?*"*

Laughter takes hold of me ...

* Kurdish for "What is the coronavirus?"

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20 minutes
Actualisé 29.03.2020

Iran

Nouvelle évasion massive: 54 détenus en cavale

Les forces de l'ordre iraniennes sont à la recherche de 54 détenus en cavale après une nouvelle évasion collective dans une prison de l'ouest de l'Iran.

Au total 74 détenus se sont échappés vendredi de la prison de Saqqez, dans la province du Kurdistan, mais 20 ont été repris ou se sont rendus, écrit l'agence en citant un responsable du parquet militaire régional. L'agence officielle Irna a ajouté que quatre gardiens de la prison avaient été arrêtés en lien avec cette évasion.

Le 20 mars, premier jour de l'année iranienne, Irna avait rapporté l'évasion de 23 détenus d'une prison de Khorrabad, capitale de la province du Lorestan, à l'occasion d'une mutinerie nocturne pendant que les gardiens recensaient les prisonniers concernés par une mesure de grâce décrétée pour le Nouvel An.

L'autorité judiciaire iranienne avait annoncé deux jours plus tôt qu'«environ 10'000 détenus» devaient être libérés dans le pays à l'occasion de cette mesure d'am-



L'Iran est un des pays les plus touchés par l'épidémie de Covid-19. La maladie y a fait officiellement plus de 2'600 morts. Selon Irna, trois autres mutineries ont eu lieu depuis le 21 mars dans des prisons de l'ouest du pays, à Hamédan, Tabriz, et Aligoudarz (Lorestan). Keystone/AP/Vahid Salemi

nistie, validée par le guide suprême iranien Ali Khamenei.

Une mesure prise pour «diminuer le nombre des prisonniers, compte tenu de la situation sensible dans le pays», avait indiqué le pouvoir judiciaire, sans faire explicitement référence au nouveau coronavirus.

Permission de sortie pour 100'000 détenus

L'Iran est un des pays les plus touchés par l'épidémie de Covid-19. La maladie y a fait officiellement plus de 2'600 morts. Selon Irna, trois autres mutineries ont eu lieu depuis le 21 mars dans des prisons de

l'ouest du pays, à Hamédan, Tabriz, et Aligoudarz (Lorestan).

L'ordre a été ramené et aucun prisonnier ne s'est évadé, mais un détenu a été tué et un autre blessé à Aligoudarz, a écrit l'agence.

Le porte-parole de l'Autorité judiciaire, Gholamhossein Esmaïli, a déclaré dimanche à la télévision d'Etat qu'un total de 100'000 détenus avaient bénéficié d'une permission de sortie pour les deux semaines du congé de Norouz, le Nouvel An Iranien (cette année du 19 mars au 3 avril), afin de désengorger les prisons et d'y réduire le risque de propagation de la maladie.

Cette permission, a-t-il annoncé, a été prolongée jusqu'au 19 avril, date du dernier jour du premier mois de l'année iranienne. (afp)



March 29 2020

State-appointed mayor in Turkey's Batman province removes Kurdish from municipality website

The government-appointed municipality in Turkey's eastern city of Batman has removed the Kurdish language from its website, just leaving Turkish language content, *Gazete Duvar* said on Sunday.

Turkish authorities on March 23 removed the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) co-mayors of Batman on terrorism charges and replaced them with appointees.

The total number of HDP mayors removed from their posts since the local elections in March 2019 has reached 40.

The government escalated its crackdown against pro-Kurdish politicians after launching a military offensive against Kurdish-held territories in northern Syria last October.



The Turkish government accuses the HDP of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting for self-rule in southeast Turkey for more than 30 years.

The government-appointed ad-

ministrators in predominantly Kurdish regions have reportedly taken measures to reverse previous positive steps taken by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) towards recognising the Kurdish identity shared by millions of Turkish citizens.

These measures included shutting down organisations promoting Kurdish language and culture, removing Kurdish names from public parks and streets, and destroying Kurdish cultural monuments.

LE FIGARO

avec AFP
le 29 mars 2020

Syrie: mutinerie et évasions d'une prison où sont détenus des djihadistes de Daech

Une mutinerie a éclaté dimanche en Syrie dans une prison des forces kurdes où sont détenus des personnes accusées d'appartenance au groupe jihadiste État islamique, ont rapporté une ONG et un responsable de sécurité, précisant que des prisonniers se sont évadés.

Le responsable des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), coalition dominée par les combattants kurdes, n'était ni en mesure de donner le nombre de fuyitifs ni leur nationalité. L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) a parlé de «quatre fuyitifs au moins».

Tard dimanche soir, la situation reste tendue dans la prison de Ghouran, dans la ville de Haskaké (nord-est syrien) et les recherches se poursuivent pour rattraper les évadés, ont précisé ces deux sources.

La «mutinerie» a été menée par «des éléments du groupe État islamique», selon l'OSDH, qui indique que la prison accueille près de 5.000 prisonniers «de différentes nationalités» et accusés d'appartenance à l'EI. L'ONG dispose d'un vaste réseau de sources à travers le pays en guerre.

Sur son compte twitter, un porte-parole des FDS, Mustafa Bali, a reconnu qu'une «mutinerie» a eu lieu, précisant que les prisonniers ont «cassé des murs et arraché des portes intérieures». «La situation est toujours tendue à l'intérieur de la prison (...), les forces tentent de reprendre le contrôle», a-t-il dit tard dimanche soir, évoquant l'envoi de renforts.

De son côté, un responsable des FDS s'exprimant sous le couvert de l'anonymat a indiqué à l'AFP que des «éléments de l'EI s'étaient révoltés» dans la prison. «Certains d'entre eux ont pu sortir dans la cour de la pri-

son», a reconnu cette source. «Les forces de sécurité sont sur haute alerte. Des avions de la coalition internationale (anti-EI) survolent la prison et la région», a précisé le responsable.

Un an après avoir proclamé le 23 mars 2019 l'éradication du «califat» de l'EI en Syrie, les forces kurdes détiennent toujours quelque 12.000 djihadistes dans plusieurs prisons du nord-est syrien, selon leurs statistiques.

Campaigns demand freedom of ‘forgotten’ Kurdish journalist after 18 years behind bars

CAMPAIGNERS are demanding the release of Turkey’s “forgotten journalist” as the government is set to free 100,000 prisoners amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hatice Duman, the former editor of socialist newspaper *Atilim*, is believed to be the world’s longest-jailed reporter.

She was arrested in 2002 and sentenced to life in prison for alleged crimes including “management of a terrorist organisation,” though she has always denied the charges.

Campaigners argue that, in reality, Ms Duman was targeted for being Kurdish and speaking out against the Turkish state’s repressive policies.

Journalists for Democracy in Turkey & Kurdistan and Turkey & Kurdistan Solidarity Initiative, British-based groups advocating for human rights in Turkey, have



Kurdish journalist Hatice Duman (left) has been in prison since 2002.

now launched a campaign to win Ms Duman’s release.

“Hatice Duman is Turkey’s forgotten journalist,” they said in a statement.

“Despite being behind bars for nearly 20 years, there has been no high-profile campaign demanding her release, with the international press freedom organisations remaining silent.”

The groups are calling on people to show solidarity with Ms Duman by sending cards for her birthday on April 5 and by joining a social media Twitter “storm” on the same day.

They hope the campaign will raise the profile of her case, along with those of the 50,000 political prisoners languishing in Turkish jails.

Ankara announced last week that

100,000 prisoners will be eligible for temporary release to prevent the spread of coronavirus behind bars.

But the provision doesn’t cover any of the country’s jailed journalists or activists, most of whom have been sentenced for terrorism offences without substantial evidence to prove the charges.

People can write to Hatice Duman, Gebze Women’s Closed Prison, Arapcesme Mah, Sehitonbasi Ontay Cd No:2, 41400 Gebze/Kocaeli, Turkey, with “birthday card” clearly marked on the envelope.

On April 5 people are encouraged to upload video messages and/or photographs using the hashtags #HappyBirthdayHatice #JournalistsNotACrime #MutluYillarHatice #GazetecilikSuçDeğildir.



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
March 30, 2020

Turkish-backed militias shell north Syria, yet again cutting off water supply to nearly a half million civilians

Shelling by Turkish-backed armed groups on Thursday caused severe damage to a water pipeline, one of their many recent intentional actions to block the crucial resource for some 460,000 civilians in Syria’s northern Hasakah province, controlled by a local Kurdish-led self-administration.

“It’s true. Today at 3 pm afternoon, mercenaries targeted Al-louk pipeline, which supplies

Hasakah with water, with mortar shelling,” local official Suzdar Ahmed told Kurdistan 24.

“Currently, there is no water in Hasaka and we don’t have information to what extent the pipeline is damaged. Tomorrow at 7 pm, our group will investigate the damage and estimate how many days they need to fix it.”

Ilham Ahmad, the president of the

executive committee of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), accused the Turkish-backed groups of hampering the fight against the coronavirus on social media.

She said that, rather than preventing the spread of the highly-contagious disease in Syria and Turkey, “Turkish backed mercenaries shelled the main pipeline that provides water to 500,000 people.”

She added that four civilians were injured in the shelling. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that one civilian was “slightly” injured.

During the past week, Turkish-backed groups bombarded several areas in northern Syria amid a UN appeal for a [ceasefire](#), supported by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Earlier on Thursday, two Syrian government soldiers and one civilian were killed when Turkish groups shelled positions of the Syrian government near the villages of Abosh and Qabr in the eastern countryside of Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye).

Under Russian mediation, though, northeastern Syria has been providing electricity to the Turkish-occupied areas in exchange for water flow, as agreed upon.

The militias have regularly cut off water to Hasakah province, demanding that Kurdish-led authorities in northeast Syria provide more electricity to areas under their control.

The Allouk station is located near the border town of Serekaniye, which Turkey and its militant proxies took control of in October, during its so-called Peace Spring Operation.



Turkish troops and fighters from the Free Syrian Army wave flags on Mount Barsaya, located outside Syria's northern city of Afrin, Jan. 28, 2020. (Photo: Reuters/Khalil Ashawi)

The last time the water was cut was between Saturday and Monday, according to the Rojava Information Centre (RIC).

UNICEF and human rights organizations have criticized the interruption of water to civilians in Hasakah, many of which are displaced and desperately need the resource.

On March 23, UNICEF Representative in Syria Fran Equiza said the interruption "during the current efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease puts children and families at unacceptable risk."

"Handwashing with soap is critical in the fight against COVID-19," he stressed.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) in a report released on Tuesday said, "Turkish authorities' failure to ensure adequate water supplies to Kurdish-held areas in Northeast Syria is compromising humanitarian agencies' ability to prepare and protect vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic."

Also on March 27, 49 Syrian civil society and human rights organizations condemned the water interruption in a jointly signed statement, calling it a war crime.

The action, they argued, inexcusably "denies the population of northeast Syria safe and potable water."

Editing by John J. Catherine

(Hisham Arafat contributed to this report).

LE TEMPS avec AFP
lundi 30 mars 2020

Mutinerie et évasions d'une prison où sont détenus des djihadistes de l'EI en Syrie

Une mutinerie a éclaté, dimanche, en Syrie dans une prison des forces kurdes où sont détenues des personnes accusées d'appartenance au groupe djihadiste Etat islamique (EI), ont rapporté une ONG et un responsable de sécurité, précisant que des prisonniers se sont évadés.

Le responsable des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), coalition dominée par les combattants kurdes, n'était en mesure de donner ni le nombre de fugitifs, ni leur nationalité. L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) a parlé de « quatre fugitifs au moins ».

Tard dimanche soir, la situation restait tendue dans la prison de Ghouran, dans la ville de Haskaké (nord-est syrien) et les recherches se poursuivaient pour rattraper les évadés, ont précisé ces deux sources.

Des murs cassés et des portes arrachées

La « mutinerie » a été menée par « des éléments du groupe Etat islamique », selon l'OSDH. D'après

ses informations, la prison accueille près de 5000 détenus « de différentes nationalités » et accusés d'appartenance à l'EI.

Sur son compte Twitter, un porte-parole des FDS, Mustafa Bali, a reconnu une « mutinerie » lors de laquelle les prisonniers ont « cassé des murs et arraché des portes intérieures ». « La situation est toujours tendue à l'intérieur de la prison (...), les forces tentent de reprendre le contrôle », a-t-il dit tard dimanche soir, évoquant l'envoi de renforts.

De son côté, le responsable de sécurité des FDS, s'exprimant sous le couvert de l'anonymat, a indiqué à l'Agence France-Presse (AFP) que des « éléments de l'EI s'étaient révoltés » dans la pri-

son. « Certains d'entre eux ont pu sortir dans la cour de la prison », a reconnu cette source. « Un certain nombre d'éléments de l'EI ont pu s'enfuir de la prison, les opérations de recherche se poursuivent. »

Quelque 12 000 djihadistes dans plusieurs prisons du nord-est syrien

Interrogé par l'AFP, un porte-parole de la coalition internationale anti-EI, a assuré que « des membres des bas échelons de l'EI » sont enfermés dans cette prison. « La coalition assiste ses partenaires des Forces démocratiques syriennes avec une surveillance aérienne au moment où elles répriment une insurrection » dans la prison, a assuré le colonel Myles Caggins III.

Un an après avoir proclamé le 23 mars 2019 l'éradication du « califat » de l'EI en Syrie, les forces kurdes détiennent toujours quelque 12 000 djihadistes dans plusieurs prisons du nord-est syrien, selon leurs statistiques. Il y a des Syriens, des Irakiens mais aussi 2500 à 3000 étrangers originaires d'une cinquantaine de pays.

Si les Kurdes réclamaient au départ le renvoi vers leur pays d'origine des combattants étrangers, ils se sont résignés à l'idée de devoir les juger en Syrie, face aux tergiversations des gouvernements occidentaux qui évitent les rapatriements.

