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**TURKEY:  
THE EPIDEMIC SPREADS TO THE PRISONS, THE GOVERNMENT ARRESTS  
NEW HDP MAYORS**

**A**fter the singer of "*Grup Yorum*", Helin Bölek, who died on 3 April, now the band's bassist, Ibrahim Gökçek, has died in hospital on 7 May, two days after stopping a 323-day hunger strike. Gökçek, who weighed only 40 kg at the time of his death, was buried in Kayseri, despite opposition from ultra-nationalists. The group, trying to be a voice for all

oppressed people and minorities, sang in Turkish as well as Kurdish and Armenian and addressed social issues such as the 2014 Soma mine disaster, where 301 miners died due to lack of security measures. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, one of the prosecution witnesses in the group's trial confessed to giving evidence under threat and indicated that he wanted to retract his testimony. After the death, two

judges, Ayşe Sarısu Pehlivan and Orhan Gazi Ertekin, posted messages of sadness on social networks. The Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) immediately suspended them and launched an investigation, accusing Ertekin of "propaganda for a terrorist organization". As for the Soma tragedy, the Ankara governor banned its public commemoration, planned on the 12<sup>th</sup>, "because of the

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health measures taken against the epidemic". The head of the DISK trade union in the capital, Tayfun Görgün, ironically remarked that the epidemic justified the banning of a gathering of 25 people, while work in the mines went on in deplorable conditions of promiscuity ...

In a catastrophic economic context, the government is clearly concerned about popular protest. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the police cordoned off the DISK headquarters in Istanbul and imprisoned its president Arzu Çerkezoğlu with 25 of its members, banning access to Taksim. The Turkish president said: "We will continue to protect the rights of our workers", which makes think when reading last *TürkStat* statistics on the matter: during the last six years, the number of accidents at work has increased fivefold, with 1.736 victims in 2019 alone (*Bianet*). As for the economic indicators, which were already critical before the epidemic, they have worsened even more: the IMF forecasts a 5% contraction in GDP and an unemployment rate of 17.2% for 2020... As foreign investors are withdrawing massively, eight billion dollars have left the country since January, leading to the collapse of the currency (-17%) while in 2021 Turkey will have to repay 168 billion dollars (*Le Monde*). The costly projects so close to Mr. Erdoğan's heart are increasingly criticized, while tourism revenues have almost vanished. The president continues to sail on sight, stumbling around between sanitary closures and temporary reopenings, short-term policies essentially intended to preserve his grip on power (*New York Times*). Refusing to ask for a loan from the IMF, Erdoğan is now trying to get closer to those

he spent so much time insulting: the European Union and the United States. In a letter to the EU sent on 9 May, he wrote: "We are all in the same boat", and he has delayed the deployment of the Russian S400 missiles... With regard to his internal opinion, he is trying to divert attention by resurrecting the project to return the former Basilica of Saint Sophia to the Muslim faith (*Le Monde*).

Despite statements by the president and the government about a "gradual return to normalcy", Ozgur Karabulut, president of the progressive construction workers' union, told the *New York Times*: "In our workplaces, we are seeing the opposite. [...] From what our members tell us, the disease continues to spread". DISK also notes in a report that its members are three times more likely to be infected than the general population... Moreover, the government, while it has released 90.000 common law prisoners, including extreme-right-wing gangsters, has left in prison elected officials, journalists, lawyers, community activists... whose only fault was to oppose without violence Erdoğan's autocracy. In doing so, Ahmet Insel noted on the 20<sup>th</sup> in an interview with *Orient-XXI*, "the regime is clearly revealing its nature". While the Turkish health system has indeed demonstrated its resilience in the face of the epidemic, conditions in prisons remain scandalous. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, HDP Ağrı MP Dilek Dirayet Taşdemir reported a testimony by former MP Halil Aksoy, 72. Detained at Kandıra, he informed his family by phone that he had not received any hygiene products for protection against the virus, except for a bar of soap two months earlier, while the prison shop had

nothing. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, two different reports from lawyers and human rights defenders reported the spread of the epidemic in prisons and asked the authorities to provide the necessary hygiene products to prisoners and to test them (*Bianet*). The Kurdish journalist Nurcan Baysal denounced in several articles the inaction of the authorities in the Kurdish regions of the country, recalling also that during the recent state of emergency 20.000 Kurdish health workers, including 3.315 doctors, had been dismissed. She also noted that in the Kurdish provinces, all displays of health instructions are in Turkish only. Her articles have led to judicial harassment, which *International PEN* denounced in a press release. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Silivri prosecutor's office announced that 44 prisoners had tested positive. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, Istanbul HDP MP Züleyha Gülüm, criticising the lack of information from the authorities, asked in a parliamentary question to the Minister of Justice when and in which prisons 120 prisoners had tested positive, whether the released prisoners had been tested, and whether the guards had been tested... On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, it was announced that there were now 82 infected prisoners in Silivri and that one had died. On the same day, the Ministry of the Interior reported that in the previous two months, 510 people had been arrested for "unfounded" or "provocative" content posted on social networks about the epidemic. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, Diyarbakir HDP MP Feleknaş Uca asked a parliamentary question about the health situation in Bayburt prison, reporting damning testimonies that the premises are not regularly disinfected, prison officers are in close contact with prisoners, Hygiene supplies are



sold at “exorbitant prices”, hygiene rules are not respected in the distribution of food, and prisoners have not received hot water for the past two months... She reported that due to a shortage of masks, guards had given a single mask to eight detainees, telling them: “The one who speaks wears the mask”... (*Bianet*)

Repression of the HDP continued throughout the month. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, the seven-and-a-half year prison sentence for “membership of an illegal organisation” imposed on Selma Irmak, the former co-president of the Congress for a Democratic Society (DTK), was upheld in cassation (*RojInfo*). On the 15<sup>th</sup>, eight new HDP co-mayors were arrested and replaced by unelected administrators. They are Berivan Helen Işık and Peymandara Turhan (Siirt), Eylem Çelik and Yaşar Akkuş (Iğdır), Ramazan Sarsılmaz and Özden Gülmez (Baykan), and Baran Akgül and Esmer Baran (Kurtalan). All were arrested at their homes. According to the HDP, the government has replaced its mayors in 45 of the 65 cities it won in March 2019. “As always, these new arrests are not the result of a court decision but of an administrative decision by the Interior Minister”, the HDP said in a statement.

For some HDP mayors who do not give enough matter to warrant legal charges, threats and intimidation are used. Kars’ co-mayor, Ayhan Bilgen, received on the 16<sup>th</sup> death threats via *Twitter* signed from “JITEM”, a paramilitary gendarmerie organisation responsible for numerous extrajudicial killings and cases of torture in the 1990s. Co-Mayor Şevin Alaca also received threats (*Bianet*). On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the mayor

of Altınova, Casim Budak, dismissed on the 15<sup>th</sup>, was charged with “propaganda for a terrorist organisation” and arrested. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, the mayor of Iğdır, also revoked on the 15<sup>th</sup>, Yaşar Akkuş, was also arrested. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Ankara HDP cadres, including its provincial co-chairmen, as they were preparing to hold a press conference in front of their offices to denounce the recent dismissals, were beaten by police and imprisoned. At the same time, 43 Kurds, including HDP members, were arrested in Özalp (Van) and three in Nusaybin (*WKI*). On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 18 other members or supporters of HDP or BDP, including women members of feminist groups (including TJA, “Free Women’s Movement”) were arrested in Diyarbakir. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the two HDP co-chairs from Batman province, Ömer Kutlu and Fatma Ablay, were imprisoned after a raid on the party’s provincial office.

Finally, on 29 January, the Ankara prosecutor’s office opened a new “terrorism” investigation against Selahattin Demirtaş for having declared during one of its hearings in January: “You will answer for all this before justice”.

At the same time, exactions against Kurds have increased. At the beginning of the month, a young Kurd was stabbed to death in Ankara by three ultra-nationalists because he was listening to Kurdish music.

While 15<sup>th</sup> of May has been designated by the HDP as “Kurdish Language Day”, the Kurdish language, precisely, was not spared... On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the Governor of Siirt, after he became trustee following the dismissal of the elected mayor of the city, ordered the closure of

the municipal library “Celadet Elî Bedirxan” (or Djeladet Ali Bedir Khan).

On the 31<sup>st</sup>, a mass grave was discovered in a cave in the hamlet of Gulbiş near Dargeçit (Kerboran in Kurdish), in the province of Mardin. This is not the first mass grave to be uncovered in this region where JITEM murdered thousands of Kurds. In 2011, the IHD Human Rights Association has drawn up a map showing the location of 253 sites near 21 towns where the bones of 3.248 missing persons have been found, but the total number of victims of these “murders by unknown perpetrators” (which Kurds derisively call “murders by well-known perpetrators”) is believed to be much higher: around 17.000 ... (*RojInfo*) The day before, the “Saturday Mothers”, who demonstrate every week in Galatasaray to obtain information about their children who disappeared after the 1980 coup d’état and during the 1990s and the trial of those responsible, had just marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their weekly rallies, making their movement the oldest of its kind in the world (*Ahval*).

Other anti-minority threats and attacks were recorded during this month. On 8<sup>th</sup> May, the Armenian church Dznunt Surp Asdvadzadzni of Bakırköy, in Istanbul, was attacked by an individual who tried to set it on fire, without success, before fleeing. A suspect was arrested. On the 12<sup>th</sup> in the United States, the *Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)* requested in its annual report that Turkey be placed on the watch list of countries “engaged in or tolerating serious violations of religious freedom”, denouncing threats and violence, including at least two

assassinations (*Ahval*). In a parliamentary question to the Minister of Justice, HDP MP Garo Paylan asked whether the “hate speech” made on 4<sup>th</sup> of May by the Turkish President, who had referred to Armenians as “those who escaped the sword” (*kılıç artığı*) – a clear reference in Turkey to the Armenian genocide, which is otherwise denied, could have a part of responsibility in such attacks. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the Hrant Dink Foundation, named after the Armenian newspaper editor who was murdered by a Turkish nationalist in January 2007, announced that on the 29<sup>th</sup> it had received several threatening e-mail messages containing the slogan: “We can arrive suddenly

one night” (*Bianet*). The journalist’s relatives had already heard this sentence before he was murdered and it is interesting to note that it was also with these words that Erdoğan announced last October the imminent Turkish invasion of Rojava.

Precisely with regard to military operations, Turkish soldiers continued their desecration of the graves of Kurdish fighters, already numerous during the previous month, in the provinces of Van and Diyarbakir. Moreover, two soldiers were killed and four others wounded on the 2<sup>nd</sup> in fighting with the PKK near Bitlis, and on the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Defence accused this organisation of having killed two civilians in

an attack in Özalp (Van), an operation which was later condemned by the HDP. Finally, on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the chief of naval staff, Rear Admiral Cihat Yayci, who was close to the nationalists and the architect of the Turkish-Libyan maritime demarcation pact concluded at the end of November, was dismissed by presidential decree and transferred to the general staff. Yayci declared that he had been the victim of a “plot” and resigned from his new post three days later. The dismissal of this staunchly anti-Western officer, proponent of a Turkish-Russian rapprochement, may once again be linked to the economy: in this respect, Turkey can hardly expect help from Russia (*Le Monde*).

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## ROJAVA: PROGRESS TOWARDS INTRA-KURDISH UNITY DESPITE TURKISH HOSTILITY

**R**ojava is in existential danger. Threatened by the coronavirus epidemic, almost abandoned militarily by its Western allies, it finds itself caught between the constant threat from the North, now reflected in the fierce Turkish-Jihadist occupation of Afrin and the eastern Euphrates, and the threat from the South, a Syrian regime still stuck on its Ba’thist ideology. In this situation, Kurdish unity is more urgent than ever. The rival Kurdish parties, which have been in conflict for years, have seen the importance of renewing contacts and have been in discussions for six months. Negotiations are certainly far from easy between the PYD, which dominates the Administration of North-East Syria (AANES) and is considered by Ankara as a terrorist group, and the ENKS

(*Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê*, Kurdish National Council of Syria), belonging to the Syrian opposition precisely supported by Ankara, but the stakes more than justify the efforts. Among other things, speaking with one voice could enable the Rojava to overcome the Turkish opposition and finally participate in the discussions held in Geneva under the aegis of the UN to try to find a political solution to the Syrian civil war.

Paradoxically, while Turkey, whose foreign policy is still decidedly directed by its anti-Kurdish obsession, sees these discussions with great hostility, many external actors are interested in a success, which, beyond the Kurds, could benefit Syria as a whole. According to an anonymous source close to the ongoing process, the first direct meetings

between PYD and ENKS took place at the beginning of April in an American military base near Hassakeh, in the presence of the Special Adviser for Syria William Roebuck and the Commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Mazloum Kobanê (*Al-Monitor*). At the beginning of May, several members of the different parties claimed that meetings had also taken place with a French delegation (*RFI*), which had come to Syria, among other things, to advance unity among Syrian Kurds, and, according to the *Middle-East Monitor*, other discussions had also involved the Russians.

In fact, on 25<sup>th</sup> April, when Mazloum Kobanê announced in a press conference held in Qamishli that “remarkable progress” had been made, he gave substance to this hope, saying: “The two sides are

discussing the adoption of a unified political vision for the future of Syria, based on the discussion of a project presented by the American side". According to Kobanê, after holding at least four meetings in the framework of the negotiations, both sides agreed on the following: Syria will be a federal, democratic and pluralist state; the current regime is an authoritarian and dictatorial regime which uses violence against its opponents; the Kurdish areas constitute an integrated political and geographical unit".

On 12<sup>th</sup> May, Turkey described the talks as a "plot to give space for international representation" to the "terrorist organisation in northern Syria". On the same day, the Turkish Foreign Ministry, castigating Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates for the current tensions in the eastern Mediterranean, accused France of being the mentor of this "axis of malevolence" seeking to "establish a state of terror in Syria". Ankara's degree of concern is marked by the unprecedented attack on the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani, accused of having been "commissioned" by France and the United States to implement the plot (*Al-Monitor*). On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the head of Turkish diplomacy, Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, warned the ENKS not to conclude an agreement "with the PKK / YPG" (*Rûdaw*).

Despite Turkish threats, twenty-five Kurdish parties in Syria, including the PYD, announced on the 19<sup>th</sup> in Qamishli in a joint declaration the formation of a unitary organisation, the "Kurdish National Unity Party". In fact, it seems that the Turkish invasion

of October 2019, following the exactions of the occupiers of Afrin, played a decisive role in making this result possible. It remains to be seen whether the new organisation will actually become functional; previous attempts at unity, such as the Kurdish Supreme Council, created in 2014 in Erbil under the aegis of Masoud Barzani, did not bear any practical fruit...

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, Amina Omar, co-president of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), a political emanation of the SDF and the legislative body of the North-East Syrian Administration (AANES) once again situated the intra-Kurdish unity talks within a Syrian national framework endorsed by all ethnic and religious groups in the region. It reaffirmed that the SDC itself, which "includes many political figures and individual personalities from all ethnic and religious groups in Syria, such as Kurds, Arabs, Syriacs and Assyrians and their political parties", is "a national, Syrian and democratic project [...] for all Syrians" (*Rûdaw*). On the 27<sup>th</sup>, after PYD and ENKS met again in Erbil, an ENKS official, Mohammed Ismail, told *Kurdistan-24* that what was aimed at was a "comprehensive agreement" including "all aspects: political, administrative, military and economic", adding that these talks had US support. On the 29<sup>th</sup> Mazloum Kobanê confirmed that the negotiations had moved to a "second phase".

For their part, the jihadist mercenaries of Turkey, in violation of the ceasefire officially concluded in November 2019, and despite the spread of the coronavirus, continue their attacks, particularly to the west of Tell Abyad/Girê Sipî, a region where Turkey is still carrying out

population displacements. At the end of the month, the AANES received more than three hundred inhabitants of the city, driven out by insecurity or forced displacements. On 7<sup>th</sup> May, the occupants cut off the water from the Alouk pumping station for the sixth time, depriving of water again nearly half a million people in Hassakeh province. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, Turkey denied preventing the supply of water to entire regions of northern Syria and accused, in a not very credible manner, the FDS ("the terrorist organisation PKK / YPG") of being responsible for the cuts.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the *Rojava Information Centre* published a 52-page report detailing Turkish attacks, including frequent air strikes on civilian people and infrastructure (*Morning Star*). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (OSDH) also accused pro-Turkish jihadists of burning several fields belonging to Kurdish farmers in Kobanê, Ain Issa, Zagran, and near the Christian town of Tell Tamer. It is disturbing to note that the ISIS jihadists were simultaneously using the same tactics in Deir Ezzor. At the same time, internal fighting between different jihadist factions near Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Ain (*WKI*) intensified. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, an explosion of violence between jihadists from different factions of the so-called "Syrian National Army" (set up by Turkey and at its orders despite its name) caused the death of three civilians in Afrin, including two children. After the clashes, the jihadists of *Jaysh al-Islam* (*Army of Islam*) discovered a secret prison of the *Firqat al-Hamza* (*Hamza Division*), where 11 abducted women, mostly Yezidi Kurds, were being held. The discovery sparked protests by thousands of Kurds in Aleppo

(WKI). The next day, a demonstration reached the governor's office, while some 20 human rights organizations working in the Syrian north, including Syrian Observatory of Human Rights (SOHR), called on the United Nations to set up a commission of inquiry into the violence and more generally into the abuses of the occupiers, to help put an end to the presence of these militias (*Rûdaw*). On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the AANES called in a communiqué on Russia, the United States and the United Nations to assume their responsibilities for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the mercenaries of Hamza Division, denouncing the silence of the international community and its submission to the "refugees blackmail" from Turkey. AANES said it held the Turkish regime responsible for all the abuses committed, particularly those targeting women.

In the United States, the *Commission on International Religious Freedom* (USCIRF) devoted a section of its annual report, published on the 12<sup>th</sup>, to Turkey. Also addressing the situation in the Syrian regions under Turkish occupation, the document calls on the U.S. government to "exert significant pressure on Turkey to provide a timetable for its withdrawal from Syria" and to ensure that neither the Turkish army nor its Syrian allies "extend their zone of control in the northeast" of the country. USCIRF also calls on the Trump administration to prevent Turkey from carrying out "religious and ethnic cleansing" in the areas it occupies, or "otherwise abusing the rights of vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities". The report justifies its concern by pointing out that "in other areas previously seized by Turkey, such as Afrin,

religious minorities continue to suffer persecution and marginalization, particularly Yezidi and displaced Christians". Indeed, in Afrin, the Yezidi complained earlier this month that they are particularly targeted by the exactions of jihadi mercenaries occupying the region on behalf of Turkey. The latter consider them as "infidels" and "Zoroastrians" and have recently destroyed a number of Yezidi graves, including that of a holy man of that religion (*RojInfo*).

At the same time, the coronavirus epidemic continues to spread. On 1<sup>st</sup> of May, the Arab daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported that AANES had isolated and confined Hassakeh the day before after three new cases had been found there, a couple from the town and a resident of Qamishli. The virus could have come from the regime-controlled hospital in that town (WKI). On the 11<sup>th</sup>, WHO announced in a tweet that it had sent 30 tons of medical equipment to the region, including protective equipment for health professionals and resuscitation ventilators. But on the 13<sup>th</sup>, an official of the AANES indicated that the shipment had not been received. Questioned on this subject by the Iraqi Kurdish channel *Rûdaw*, a WHO spokesman replied that it was being inventoried in warehouses in the region and would be distributed quickly. But the *Rojava Information Center*, quoting the Kurdish Red Crescent, said that all the aid had been sent to the city's national hospital, controlled by the Damascus regime.

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the AANES declared a mass amnesty for prisoners sentenced to light sentences for offences, who will see their sentences reduced by one third. Those with incurable or terminal

illnesses will be released. Excluded from the amnesty are "rapists, drug traffickers, terrorists and wanted convicts" unless they surrender (*Rûdaw*). By mid-month, Syria officially had 58 cases of coronavirus and three deaths, and AANES reopened two crossing points with the territory controlled by the regime to facilitate the return of people to their homes (WKI). On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned of the risk of a deterioration of the situation in the AANES-controlled areas, not so much because of the epidemic as because of the poor state of health services, food shortages and water cuts (*France-24*).

ISIS's jihadists continue to be active in Syria. Earlier this month, as jihadist attacks increased, the SDF announced the dismantling of a sleeper cell in Raqqa and the seizure of its equipment. On the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, a group of prisoners from Hassakeh tried for the second time to escape by organizing a day-long mutiny. American helicopters assisted the SDF in regaining control of the prison, which was achieved through negotiations. The prison is located in the area regularly deprived of water by the Turks' cuts, and it seems that fear of the coronavirus played a role in the events (*Kurdistan-24*). AANES once again reiterated its appeal to the international community to help find a solution to the situation of these prisoners. Attacks by ISIS increased during this month, particularly in the province of Deir Ezzor: an attack on the Basira oil field on the 3<sup>rd</sup> was repelled and one of the assailants killed (WKI), an ambush on the 7<sup>th</sup> in which 11 soldiers of the regime were killed, a new ambush on the 17<sup>th</sup> in which passengers of a vehicle, including an officer and two

Syrian soldiers, were killed on a road in Deir Ezzor, then the next morning the bodies of seven pro-Damascus militia fighters killed by the jihadists were found on another section of the same road. At the same time,

seven jihadist prisoners escaped from the al-Hol camp, four of whom were eventually recaptured.

Finally, with the support of the Coalition, the SDF were able to

dismantle a dormant jihadist cell in al-Busriya (Deir Ezzor), confiscating explosive belts, weapons and military equipment. Two Iraqi jihadists blew themselves up during the operation.

## IRAN:

### THE REGIME CONTINUES TO CONCEAL THE FIGURES OF THE EPIDEMIC, MANY KOLBARS SHOT DEAD

**T**he coronavirus epidemic continues to spread in the country, particularly in its prisons, from where alarming reports are beginning to emerge. As for the economic situation, it continues to deteriorate, to the extent that on 4<sup>th</sup> May, the parliament finally authorized a measure which had been planned for years: replacing rial by toman (10.000 rials). This elimination of four zeros on the banknotes will no doubt make counting easier, but is unlikely to bring down the inflation, which is soaring! Drawn down by the return of American sanctions in 2018, and now by the epidemic, the currency has lost 60% of its value... (*New York Times*)

The economic situation is particularly serious in Kurdistan, already a long-standing victim of the authorities' policy of abandonment and now hit by the epidemic. More and more young people have no choice but to turn to the dangerous occupation of cross-border porter, *kolbar*, whose numbers are said to be approaching 70.000. This month, the number of these unfortunate people shot dead by the regime's border guards has been particularly high. According to the human rights organisation *Hengaw*, one of them, a newly married man, was killed near Baneh on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, another, a father of three children, in Sardasht (*Basnews*), and a third seriously

injured near Chaldiran, according to the human rights organisation *Hengaw*. Since early May, 12 *kolbars* have been killed and at least 40 wounded since January. To this must be added the victims of Turkish air strikes, which, as in neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, have already forced thousands of people in border areas to leave their villages: on the 5<sup>th</sup>, two farmers were killed near Oshnavieh (Shino) (*WKI*), and on the 16<sup>th</sup>, a *kolbar* who had gone on the Turkish side, opposite Qotur, to sell cigarettes, was shot down 5 km from the border by an armoured vehicle and a second was wounded; another fell to his death near Shino (*WKI*). On the 24<sup>th</sup>, near Urumieh, another porter was killed and two brothers were wounded. According to the statistics of the *Kurdish Human Rights Network (KHRN)*, in Western Azerbaijan, a province despite its name overwhelmingly populated by Kurds, in only five days, three *kolbars* or cross-border traders were killed and six others injured by Iranian and Turkish border guards. The following week, a second *kolbar* was shot dead by Turkish soldiers near Mako, four others wounded near Nowsud (opposite Halabja) and another in Saqqez (*KMMK*). On the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>, Iranian border guards killed two *kolbars* near Khoy and wounded three others in Piranshahr (*KHRN*). At the end of the month, a new count since January showed 26 dead and at least 57 wounded (*WKI*), which

means there were 14 dead and 17 wounded in May alone...

Also in these border areas, there have been numerous clashes this month between Iranian forces and Kurdish fighters. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the *Isna* agency reported the death of three *pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guards), including an officer, near Divandareh (Kurdistan province) during a fight with an unspecified "counter-revolutionary group" (*AFP*). On the 20<sup>th</sup>, state television reported the deaths of two Kurdish fighters in another skirmish near Marivan. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, three border guards were again killed, this time near Sardasht (*Isna*). At the end of the month, all the provinces of Kurdistan (Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Lorestan) suffered numerous cases of arson, in which one soldier (*WKI*) died.

With regard to the epidemic, the authorities continue to try to conceal its extent, both domestically and internationally. Many Iranians no longer have any confidence in the government, whom they accuse of having kept the secret only in order to keep 21 February elections on, even though they were very well aware of the seriousness of the situation. An unnamed witness told *RFI*: "The Iranian regime is only lying. All it cares about is its own interests. To stay in power, it needs to show that it is in control of the situation, even if it means sacrificing everyone"... On 6<sup>th</sup>

February, *Courrier International* published extracts from a frightening report by the Washington-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation on the situation in prisons: it says that the death toll in custody is not included in the official statistics, that the guards are so frightened that they are taking days off without pay... Despite the announcement that 100.000 prisoners have been released (on 240000), many of those normally eligible are still in cell. Deprived of permission for temporary release, some inmates caused riots in several prisons earlier this month, including Khorramabbad and Tabriz. The overcrowded conditions of the inmates do not allow for any individual hygiene, not to mention social distancing! Thus in Tehran there are 1.500 prisoners in three rooms! "For 500 prisoners [...] there were only 14 toilets and showers. Hot water ran for only one hour a day, between 4 and 5 a.m.". In the women's prison in Varamin, south of the capital, there was hot water for only two hours a day and disinfectants were five times more expensive than outside... "Deaths related to COVID-19 in prisons began in mid-March. Some released prisoners have talked about quarantining about 60 people, of whom we have no more news...".

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) has regularly published a count of deaths due to the epidemic in 319 cities across the country: more than 41.000 cumulative deaths on 13<sup>th</sup> May, more than 42.800 on 17<sup>th</sup> May, more than 43.800 on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, and on the afternoon of 31<sup>st</sup> May, more than 48.200: a minimum of 7.200 deaths in twenty days, far from the official figures, which are around 7.800 cumulative deaths at the end of May, or about 1.700 in the month. Why such a difference? On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the newspaper *Jahan-e-Sanat* wrote:

"The daily decrease in the number of reported deaths gives the impression that the situation is normal... In the cities, people with COVID-19 are no longer taken to hospital and are left without adequate care (to die) and sent directly to the cemetery". Those who do not die in hospital are not necessarily listed as having died of coronavirus... Nevertheless, President Rouhani announced on the 24<sup>th</sup> that as of the 31<sup>st</sup>, "all office workers will have to return to work... The holy places and places of worship [...] will be opened the day after Eid al-Fitr in accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Health. He added: "Some people are trying to scare the population [...] about the coronavirus, we will not tolerate it".

According to the WKI, the disease has disproportionately affected Iranian Kurdistan, particularly the province of Kermanshah. For the province of Kurdistan, the CNRI gives the following figures: 660 deaths on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 790 on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 826 on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 920 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May... On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the *Imna* agency quoted Gharib Sajadi, a member of the Sanandaj municipal council: "The situation is critical. Pretending that the situation is normal, under any pretext, aims to conceal the problem. Unfortunately, the death toll... is higher most days than the official figures... Recently, five and sometimes six suspected coronavirus-positive deaths are buried every day at the Behecht-e Mohammadi cemetery". The *Tasnim* agency quoted the same day the vice-president of the Kurdistan Faculty of Medicine: "The growing trend of COVID-19 spread in the cities of Sanandaj, Saqqez and Marivan is very worrying".

But even such an epidemic cannot stop the repressive machine in Iran. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the KHRN expressed its concern for the

Kurdish political prisoner Zeynab Jalalian. Arrested by the Kermanshah *Etelaat* (Intelligence) in February 2007 and accused of belonging to the PJAK, she was sentenced to death in December 2008 for "armed actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and membership of the PJAK", a sentence commuted to life imprisonment in November 2011 thanks to pressure from human rights defenders. After 13 years of detention in Khoy, she was transferred on 28 April to an unknown location for interrogation on new charges against her. Described in 2018 by *Amnesty International* as "seriously ill", Jalalian went on hunger strike in February 2016 to protest against the lack of medical care (*Rûdaw*). Other Kurdish political prisoners were also transferred to secret locations. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, *Etelaat* warned four Kurdish activists in Sanandaj not to criticize the executions of dozens of political prisoners in the previous two weeks. The regime executed three other Kurdish prisoners in Sanandaj and Urumieh in the first week of May. The KMMK also reported that the *Etelaat* had threatened activists planning to organise a May Day action (WKI).

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, political prisoner Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee sent a letter from her cell in Qarchak, near Varamin, revealing that the authorities were increasing the pressure on women prisoners by transferring them away from their families, and in particular for Zeinab Jalalian, who had just been transferred from Khoy to Qarchak. Iraee also mentioned the arrival of another Kurdish political prisoner, Sakineh Parvaneh. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, it was learned that the Franco-Iranian anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah had been sentenced to five years in prison for "gathering and collusion to act against national security" and

“propaganda” against the Islamic Republic. His lawyer, who managed to avoid conviction for “espionage”, said he would appeal. It appears that Iran is seeking to use the researcher as a hostage to obtain the release of one of its diplomats, Assadollah Assadi, imprisoned in Belgium after participating in an attempt to attack a meeting of the People’s Mujahideen in Villepinte in June 2018 (*Le Monde*). Discreet negotiations are already under way with the United States to “exchange” a former US Navy officer held in Iran for two years, Michael R. White, in exchange for an Iranian-American doctor whose name has not been specified, detained in the United States. Suffering from coronavirus, White was provisionally released in March and is now at the Swiss embassy in Tehran which represents American interests in Iran (*New York Times*).

On the 19<sup>th</sup>, the regime also arrested a 17-year-old boy and

another man in Piranshahr. On the same day, Arsalan Khodkam, a political prisoner incarcerated in Urumieh Central Prison for trouble to security, was sentenced to death. His family was warned that he would be executed after Ramadan on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. Originally from Mahabad, a former member of the PDKI, Khodkam had joined the *Pasdaran* in the 1990s before being arrested and tortured to force him to confess. According to *Hengaw*, the regime has executed 25 Kurds since January.

In Kermanshah, four other Kurdish activists arrested earlier this year by *Etelaat* were given nine months in prison for “propaganda against the Islamic revolution” and “membership of Kurdish parties”, and lawyer Suhaila Hijab was arrested on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. *Etelaat* also arrested three other Kurds in Urumiyeh, and in North Khorasan, seven members of the Kurdish Teachers’ Union received between three and five years in prison for their activities.

Finally, on 28<sup>th</sup> in Kermanshah, a 58-year-old woman, mother of seven children, Assieh Panahi, died of a heart attack when municipal officials she was trying to prevent from destroying her house sprayed her with pepper spray. Panahi was one of tens of thousands of Kurds whose homes were destroyed in the November 2017 earthquake and who have still not been re-housed. She was accused of rebuilding her house without permit.

Finally, on the 10<sup>th</sup>, during maritime manoeuvres, a “friendly fire” killed 19 people and wounded 15 on board a logistics support vessel, the *Konarak*, which was probably hit instead of a training target it was too close to due to a firing error by the frigate *Jamaran*. After the destruction in January of the Ukrainian civilian aircraft over Tehran, this incident dealt a further blow to the credibility of the *Pasdaran*, after the successful launch at the end of April of a military satellite.

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## IRAQ: NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE BUDGET OF KURDISTAN...

**I**raq seems to have finally overcome its political crisis to, perhaps, give itself a functioning government... On the night of 6-7 May, the new Prime Minister and former head of intelligence Mustafa Al-Kadhimi obtained the confidence of Parliament. He was generally supported by the Kurdish parties, most Sunnis and some Shiites, despite opposition from several pro-Iranian militias and parties. But only 15 of the 22 ministers he proposed were approved, and the dispute still persists over the as yet unallocated Oil and Foreign Affairs portfolios. This still incomplete cabinet takes the reins of a country hit by several simultaneous crises: an expanding COVID-19 epidemic,

Iran-US tensions on its soil, the persistence of ISIS’s attacks, a budget more than halved by the fall in the price of oil...

It was in this difficult budgetary context that discussions resumed between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In mid-April, the previous government had interrupted the disbursement of funds for the payment of KRG civil servants, even asking for the reimbursement of previous transfers: it reproached the KRG for not having delivered any oil cargoes, despite the agreement reached in December. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, as the new cabinet was to be presented to parliament, KRG Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani visited

Baghdad to try to resume talks. Agreement proved difficult to reach. Three successive KRG delegations visited the capital during the month, as the federal government refused to make a long-term commitment. At the end of May, Baghdad agreed to send the funds needed to pay one month’s salary, with discussions to continue for the following months. During this period, the delays in payments, which have accumulated since February, have led to protests in Kurdistan. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, a teachers’ demonstration was held in Derbandikhan, while in Dohuk, around 100 civil servants, activists and journalists were briefly arrested by the security forces as they gathered to demonstrate. After receiving funds from Baghdad, the KRG pledged at the end of the

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month to pay the February salaries promptly (*WKI*).

In other chapters of internal Kurdistan Region policy, the Suleimaniyeh Provincial Council submitted to the KRG a decentralisation project drawn up with the support of the PUK and *Goran* (*WKI*), and for the first time in its history, on 7<sup>th</sup> September, the parliament of Erbil lifted the parliamentary immunity of one of its members. The MP in question is Soran Omar, of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (*Komal*), whose immunity was put to the vote at the same time as that of three other MPs, Omed Khoshnaw, leader of the KDP block, Ali Hama Salih, leader of the *Goran* block, and Shirin Amin Abdul Aziz, another *Goran* MP. All four parliamentarians concerned were involved in court cases, but only Omar's immunity was lifted. The decision is controversial, as the vote was boycotted by 53 of the 111 legislators, including many members of the PUK, *Goran*, the two Islamic parties *Komal* and *Yekgirtû*, and "New Generation": these parties had all opposed the inclusion of the vote in question on the agenda. Following a complaint against him filed on 2 April by the KRG's legal office, Soran will have to answer in court for his claims that Prime Minister Masrour Barzani owns a company and a bank. Opponents of the vote accuse the KDP of having called for a vote on the immunity of other MPs only to cover up their aim of having Soran (*Rûdaw*) convicted.

Iraq is still facing the COVID-19 outbreak. While the spread of the epidemic appeared to be slowing down, the strict containment decreed in mid-March was partially lifted in April, which could be the cause of the outbreak of new infections observed in May... At the end of April, the KRG also relaxed health measures, in particular by authorising again travel within the

Kurdistan Region, although subject to prior request.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, after two months of closure of educational institutions, which were scheduled to reopen on 10<sup>th</sup> May, a few weeks before the summer holidays, the KRG Ministry of Education began to bring distance learning courses online on the Internet, which are also broadcast on the Ministry of Education's educational channel, pending a broadcast via the *NileSat* satellite. In addition, several telephone and internet providers have offered free access to students (*Rûdaw*). On the 5<sup>th</sup>, with the support of UNICEF, satellite broadcasting of lessons for 1,5 million students was launched on a channel called *Kanalî Perwerde* (educational channel). The programmes also address health instructions, such as handwashing and respect for social distancing. Satellite broadcasting makes these programmes accessible to people without internet, such as displaced families in camps (*Kurdistan-24*).

Also on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the KRG Ministry of Health announced six new cases of COVID-19, all in Soran district (Erbil), for a total of 387 since the beginning of the epidemic, resulting in five deaths and 330 recoveries. The Ministry also announced that 1.307 people were still under quarantine, out of 9.681 to whom this measure had been imposed (*Kurdistan-24*). In the middle of the month, the ban on travel to other Iraqi provinces was extended at least until the end of Ramadan on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Fearing a spike in contamination if the festivities were allowed, the Federal Government imposed a curfew for Eid throughout the country while the KRG took a similar measure by introducing a 3-day containment. In Kirkuk, despite the gradual reopening of businesses, the containment was extended by one week after the discovery mid-month of seven new cases in the province (*WKI*). On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Iraqi

Ministry of Health announced 197 new cases in 24 hours out of a total of 4.679 with 160 deaths, while the KRG announced 20 in Kurdistan out of a total of 496... While Iraq conducted 6.500 tests in the last 24 hours, Kurdistan conducted 1.300. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, there was a clear and worrying acceleration of the spread, since the federal government announced 287 new cases in 24 hours and the KRG 25. Baghdad alone accounted for 1.426 cases, a third of those in the whole country. In the afternoon, the KRG Ministry of Health decided to extend the travel ban between the Kurdistan Region and the rest of the country until 15<sup>th</sup> June (*Kurdistan-24*).

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the total number of infections was 5.135 throughout Iraq, including 175 deaths and 2.904 recoveries; in Kurdistan it was 532, including five deaths and 407 recoveries. But on the 29<sup>th</sup>, the curve jumped again with 322 new cases in the whole of Iraq in one day and 34 in Kurdistan, for totals of 5.457 and 566 cases respectively. Kurdistan then decided the end of the school and university year, with the abolition of final exams. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, while Iraq announced 416 new cases, Kurdistan announced only 9, but this low figure should not lead to complacency, as it could partly reflect insufficient testing capacity (*Kurdistan-24*). During the last week of May, in fact, about 250 new cases, most of them in Suleimaniyeh province, were counted in Kurdistan, which reacted by imposing a new one-week confinement... There were then 745 cases, 434 recoveries and eight deaths (*WKI*).

At the same time, ISIS continued to expand its activities. On 1<sup>st</sup> May, the jihadists launched an attack on several checkpoints in Samarra, 100 km north of Baghdad, on a scale not seen in months. The fighting, which lasted for several hours and required reinforcements, left 10 *Hashd al-Shaabi* (Popular Mobilization



Units) dead. According to estimates, the organisation has 2.500 to 3.000 fighters, reinforced by returnees from Syria, in the province of Anbar and especially in the corridor separating the Iraqi military from the Kurdish peshmergas. After the attack on 1<sup>st</sup> May, the *Hashd* said they had suffered others in the provinces of Diyala, Salahaddin and even in Jurf Al-Sakhr, 60 kilometres south of Baghdad. ISIS has also multiplied sabotage of electrical infrastructures (*Le Monde*). Jabar Yawar, chief of staff of the Pechmergas ministry, confirmed the seriousness of the situation by declaring on *Rûdaw* that ISIS's activities "are intensifying from day to day": 85 attacks since January, resulting in 70 deaths and 161 wounded, and 41 kidnappings for ransom, usually of well-to-do civilians... Most of these attacks took place in April, a sign of increasing power. Yawar complained about the lack of coordination with the Iraqi army, while ISIS has been calling on his supporters to exploit the epidemic to escalate the attacks.

On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>, two Kurdish farmers abducted while harvesting their fields the day before were found dead near Khanaqin (Diyala). The farmers are trying to harvest as quickly as possible to escape the burning of their crops by the jihadists, some even going to their fields at night. In Kirkuk province, too, Kurdish farmers have suffered numerous fires, particularly on the 14<sup>th</sup>. While some of the fires were caused by jihadists from ISIS, the village chief of Palkana accused members of Arab tribes of seeking to drive out Kurdish landowners to appropriate their land, a return to the old Ba'ath arabization policy. A report by the Iraqi Ministry of Civil Defence listing all known fires between 21 April and 14 May listed 88 incidents; the provinces most affected were Salahaddin (25 fires), Wasit (15), Diyala (9) and Babil (9), and those with the largest areas destroyed were Diyala and Kirkuk. ISIS

claimed responsibility for the fires in Diyala on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but many others were attributed to electrical causes. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the *Kurdistan-24* channel complained that one of its teams covering the fires in Kirkuk, a correspondent and a cameraman, had been arrested near the village of Zangar. An officer threatened them with charges of "reporting ISIS's activities" before accusing them of "lighting the fires to say the area is not safe". The two journalists were released only after signing a written pledge not to return. Two journalists' defence associations have called on the Federal government to open an investigation. The jihadists also set fire to several fields in Makhmur, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> in Qaratapah (Diyala) and Daqouq (Kirkuk). Some Arabs coveting land belonging to Kurds are trying to take advantage of the situation, as in Dibis (Kirkuk).

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the Anti-ISIS Coalition, in coordination with the Pechmergas, launched near Makhmur, on the Qarachukh Mountains, several air strikes targeting the tunnels used as a base of operation by the jihadists to set their fires (*Kurdistan-24*). On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, a Kurdish policeman was found decapitated in his vehicle in the Askari district of Kirkuk. His family thinks it was an attack by ISIS. At the end of the month, faced with an increase in the number of attacks, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence finally deployed reinforcements in the disputed territories area (*WKI*). On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the KRG Ministry of Agriculture denounced in a communiqué the "systematic fires" to which Kurds-owned fields have been subjected for weeks in the disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil and asked that Kurdish farmers be protected from these "hate fires" repeated every year, the number of which has increased as the harvest period approaches (*Kurdistan-24*).

Violence resulting from the fighting between Turkey and the PKK has also hit the Kurdistan Region again this month. For two days between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, intense Turkish artillery fire hit the entire border area of Dohuk province. A Pechmerga commander told *Kurdistan-24*: "In the last two days, the bombardments have intensified from the Zakho district on the border to the Amedi district, under the pretext of attacking the PKK in these territories, and have caused extensive damage to the property of the inhabitants, preventing them from working and going out in fear for their lives". For several years, the continuous Turkish bombardments have caused the evacuation of more than 400 villages in this region, he added. After Turkey announced on the 13<sup>th</sup> that it had "neutralised" four PKK fighters in the areas of Khwakurk and Metina (Dohouk) with an air strike, the PKK attacked the Turkish military base of Kani Masi in the same province on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The fighting, which lasted for an hour, caused power cuts in the area. The presence of the PKK in Kurdistan continues to cause tensions between the KDP and the PUK. Last month, after a deployment of PKK peshmergas in Zini Werte, a PKK area of operations, the PKU sent its own peshmergas into the area to intervene (*Al-Monitor*)... On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish state agency *Anatolia* announced air strikes against the PKK in the province of Suleimaniyeh, near the Iranian border, which is quite rare, the strikes being aimed rather at targets further North. Five Kurdish fighters were also reportedly killed near Mount Asos, about 55 km North of Suleimaniyeh. The Turkish Ministry of Defence also announced the "neutralisation" of five other fighters in the Haftanin and Hwakurk (*Al-Monitor*) regions. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, another Turkish strike near Amêdi (Dohuk) killed a farmer and his son and wounded another person (*Kurdistan-24*).

## Règlements de compte au sein de la famille Assad

**L**es tensions au sein du clan dirigeant en Syrie, d'une virulence sans précédent, sont aggravées par des « révélations » dans la presse russe.

En cette dixième année de guerre, les Syriennes et les Syriens ont pourtant un autre sujet de conversation que le conflit toujours en cours, entre autres à Idlib, les millions de réfugiés interdits de retour dans leurs foyers ou le risque de diffusion du coronavirus dans le pays. La « révélation » par un journal russe que le président Bachar al-Assad aurait offert à son épouse Asmaa une toile de David Hockney, « The Splash », d'une valeur de plus de 27 millions d'euros, a en effet provoqué la stupeur dans une population qui croyait avoir tout vu en matière de corruption de ses dirigeants. Que le dictateur syrien ait effectivement acheté cette toile à Sotheby's importe désormais moins que la « révélation » d'un tel scandale par un média proche du Kremlin, sur fond de règlements de compte entre Bachar al-Assad et son cousin Rami Makhlof, l'homme le plus riche de Syrie, hier pilier du régime, aujourd'hui cible de campagnes « anti-corruption ».

### RIEN NE VA PLUS ENTRE LES DEUX COUSINS

Rami Makhlof a été le principal bénéficiaire de la « libéralisation » économique menée par Bachar al-Assad une fois que celui-ci avait succédé, en 2000, à son père Hafez al-Assad, lui-même maître absolu de la Syrie durant trente années. Makhlof s'est alors constitué un véritable empire, accaparant à son profit les « privatisations » d'entreprises publiques, investissant dans les nouvelles



Bachar al-Assad et son cousin Rami Makhlof, hier son homme-lige, devenu son adversaire acharné (photos d'Assad par Michael Klimentyev et de Makhlof par Ammar Abd Rabbo)

banques « privées » et, avec Syriatel, prenant une position dominante dans la téléphonie mobile. Avec une fortune évaluée en milliards de dollars, de 3 à 7 suivant les sources, Makhlof est devenu le grand financier des milices pro-Assad, dont le rôle dans la répression du soulèvement populaire de 2011 a été déterminant. Makhlof a aussi veillé à soutenir généreusement les activités « charitables » d'Asmaa al-Assad, l'épouse du despote syrien, notamment par le biais de son association Al-Boustan.

La montée en puissance de nouveaux profiteurs de guerre dans l'entourage présidentiel a entraîné, à partir de 2018, des tensions de plus en plus palpables entre Bachar al-Assad et son richissime cousin. Elles se sont accentuées avec le retour sur le devant de la scène d'Asmaa al-Assad, en août 2019, « totalement » guérie d'un cancer du sein contre lequel elle avait bataillé durant une année. La reconquête par le régime de la majeure partie du

territoire syrien a entraîné une redéfinition du partage des dépouilles dans un pays ruiné, dont Rami Makhlof fait à l'évidence les frais. Une partie de ses biens sont mis sous séquestre, des arriérés d'impôts très conséquents sont exigés, mais surtout le tabou de l'immunité du clan Assad est tombé. Tout récemment, quatre tonnes de haschich ont été saisies en Egypte dans une cargaison de lait d'une société de Makhlof, tandis que les biens d'une autre société, Abar Petroleum, déjà visée par des sanctions américaines en 2018, ont été saisis, mais cette fois par le régime Assad. Makhlof affirme, sans vraiment convaincre, avoir investi dans la société Abar d'hydrocarbures, sans lui être légalement lié.

### LA RUSSIE JETTE DE L'HUILE SUR LE FEU

Ces tensions sans précédent entre les cousins Assad et Makhlof ont été exacerbées par la publication de « révélations » très embarrassantes pour le

dictateur syrien dans des médias proches du Kremlin, au premier rang desquelles le supposé « présent » de Bachar à Asmaa d'une valeur de 27 millions d'euros. De là à affirmer que de telles « révélations » constituent des représailles de Makhlof à la campagne menée contre ses intérêts, il y a un pas que certains franchissent, rappelant que Mohammed et Hafez Makhlof, le père et le frère de Rami, se sont tous deux installés à Moscou (Hafez Makhlof était jusqu'en 2014 l'un des chefs des services syriens de sécurité). Mais le malaise est plus profond, avec mise en cause de la capacité d'Assad non seulement à reconstruire la Syrie, mais même à la gérer de manière « normale ».

Alexandre Aksenenok, vice-président du Conseil russe des affaires internationales (CRIA), et lui-même un diplomate chevronné ayant servi, entre autres, en Syrie, a ainsi publié sur le site du CRIA une analyse sévère pour le régime Assad: « il est de plus en plus évident

que le régime est réticent ou incapable de développer un mode de gouvernement qui limiterait la corruption et le crime et permettrait la transition d'une économie de type militaire vers des relations commerciales et économiques normales ». Plus grave encore est la publication par l'agence russe Ria Fan d'une « enquête d'opinion » (sic) qui aurait été menée en avril 2020 auprès d'un millier de Syriens. 71,3% des sondés considèreraient la corruption comme le principal

problème du pays, 53,1% voteraient contre Bachar al-Assad à la présidentielle de 2021 (32,1% pour) et 70,2% voudraient « l'émergence de nouveaux hommes politiques ». Ces chiffres n'ont naturellement aucune valeur en tant que tels et ne servent que de ballon d'essai pour une politique russe de plus en plus frustrée face à l'incapacité d'Assad à sortir, même superficiellement, d'une pure logique de guerre civile.

Déjà en 1984, Hafez al-Assad et son frère Rifaat s'étaient déchirés, alors qu'ils avaient sauvé, deux ans plus tôt, leur régime menacé par une insurrection islamiste, doublé d'un soulèvement populaire. Les deux frères n'avaient évité de s'affronter en plein Damas que grâce à la médiation de l'URSS, qui avait « exfiltré » Rifaat al-Assad sur son territoire. Le bras de fer entre Bachar al-Assad et Rami Makhlof n'a pas aujourd'hui la même dimension militaire,

mais il est révélateur, une fois de plus, des contradictions constitutives de cet « Etat de barbarie » qu'est le régime Assad, pour reprendre l'expression du regretté Michel Seurat. La guerre que Hafez, puis Bachar al-Assad ont menée contre leur propre peuple est bel et bien au cœur de leur dynamique de pouvoir, quelles que soient les querelles qui agitent désormais le clan dirigeant.



1er mai 2020

Par Sami Boukhelifa & Oriane Verdier

## Coronavirus: Iran, le régime avant le peuple?

La scène est surréaliste. Le 24 février, le vice-ministre iranien de la Santé apparaît à la télévision lors d'une conférence de presse. Iraj Harirchi tente de rassurer sur l'épidémie de coronavirus. Échec. Il est lui-même fébrile, transpire à grosses gouttes et présente tous les symptômes d'une grippe. Le lendemain, il est testé positif au Covid-19. À ce moment-là, l'Iran figure déjà au deuxième rang des pays les plus touchés par la maladie, derrière la Chine. Mais trois jours auparavant, et malgré les risques encourus, la République islamique a maintenu les élections législatives.

Désormais confiné chez lui à Téhéran, le jeune Mirza\* n'en démord pas. « Nos dirigeants étaient au courant des risques épidémiques. Et pourtant, ils nous ont demandé d'aller voter il y a un mois, le 21 février, sans aucune protection, ni aucune mesure de distanciation sociale. C'est à ce moment-là que le virus s'est répandu partout dans le pays », s'insurge celui qui a tenu à garder secrète son identité, pour des raisons de sécurité.



Une Iranienne portant un masque et des gants marche devant un graffiti à Téhéran, le 13 avril 2020. ATTA KENARE / AFP

« Le régime iranien ne fait que mentir. Tout ce qui lui importe, ce sont ses propres intérêts. Pour se maintenir au pouvoir, il a besoin de montrer qu'il contrôle la situation, quitte à sacrifier tout le monde », affirme le jeune homme. Exaspéré, il dit ne plus faire confiance aux autorités de son pays. « En novembre dernier,

les gens ont manifesté contre les dirigeants iraniens et quelle a été la réponse du pouvoir ? La répression. Ensuite, il y eu l'affaire du général iranien Qassem Soleimani, éliminé par les Américains. Et là encore, quelle a été la réponse du régime ? En voulant se venger, il a abattu l'avion d'Ukraine Airlines, avec à son bord près d'une centaine d'Iraniens !

Comment voulez-vous avoir confiance en ces gens ? », peste-t-il.

Mirza n'a quitté son appartement qu'à deux reprises depuis le début du confinement et communique via messagerie cryptée. Il se sent « terrifié » à l'idée de contracter le coronavirus. Et redoute surtout d'être hospitalisé, alors que son pays



manque cruellement de matériel médical.

Aujourd'hui, amer, il se remémore encore ce mois de février et cette fameuse conférence de presse du vice-ministre de la Santé. Iraj Harirchi, visiblement malade, en train de consciencieusement démentir des rumeurs colportées par un député iranien de Qom. L'élu ultraconservateur tentait en réalité d'alerter les autorités. Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, avait évoqué la mort de cinquante personnes dans sa ville, décédées des suites « d'une pneumonie virale ». Le vice-ministre avait alors « Une Iranienne portant un masque et des gants marche devant un graffiti à Téhéran, le 13 avril 2020. ATTA KENARE / AFP mis de démissionner » si ce chiffre était confirmé.

Les villes saintes, épicentres du coronavirus en Iran

Machhad et Qom sont les deux principales villes saintes d'Iran. Chaque année, des millions de pèlerins chiites se recueillent dans les sanctuaires de l'imam Reza (Machhad) et de Fatima Maasoumeh (Qom). Religieux, hommes, femmes et enfants se pressent sur les tombeaux de ces descendants du prophète de l'islam.

Comme tous les lieux de pèlerinage, ces deux villes sont également considérées comme des places fortes commerciales. Les échanges avec les pays de la région, et notamment avec la Chine, y sont très importants.

Ce même 24 février, alors que Téhéran tente de rassurer, le Koweït, Bahreïn, le sultanat d'Oman et l'Irak annoncent avoir détecté leurs premiers cas d'infection au coronavirus. Il s'agit alors de personnes ayant voyagé en Iran. Le ministère de la Santé du Koweït précise même que les trois ressortissants testés positifs au virus rentraient de Machhad.

Les jours passent et les autori-

tés iraniennes entretiennent toujours le flou. Au sommet de l'État, le cafouillage est total. Certains responsables politiques finissent même par accuser « des clandestins entrés illégalement dans le pays depuis le Pakistan, l'Afghanistan et la Chine », d'avoir importé le virus. D'autres évoquent « un commerçant de Qom ayant effectué plusieurs voyages à Wuhan », principal foyer de l'épidémie en Chine.

Manque de transparence, dissimulation ? Le lanceur d'alerte, le député ultraconservateur de Qom, laisse publiquement éclater sa colère. « Malheureusement, le coronavirus est arrivé à Qom depuis trois semaines et cela a été annoncé trop tard », dénonce finalement Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, fin février.

Beaucoup, en Iran, accusent les autorités d'avoir gardé secrète la crise du coronavirus, dans le but de maintenir les élections législatives du vendredi 21 février.

Jour de vote à Téhéran

Ce vendredi d'élections, le coronavirus ne fait pas les gros titres en Iran. L'avant-veille, les autorités ont reconnu du bout des lèvres l'existence de quatre cas, à 150 km de la capitale iranienne. Alors, dans la ville la plus peuplée du Moyen-Orient, personne ne se sent vraiment concerné. Il faut dire que les Téhéranais ont d'autres préoccupations. Étranglée par les sanctions américaines de plus en plus sévères depuis deux ans, une partie de la population met désormais en cause les autorités iraniennes. La rue dénonce la corruption d'une élite déconnectée de la misère du peuple. Et le taux d'abstention record annoncé promet une nette victoire aux conservateurs. Ce serait le début d'un virage politique, après deux mandats du président réformateur Hassan Rohani, en poste jusqu'en 2021.

Tôt ce matin-là, les citoyens

les plus convaincus se rendent tout de même aux bureaux de vote. Journalistes, électeurs et candidats se bousculent. Il n'y a pas d'isoloir. Chacun discute avec son voisin des candidats, quel nom inscrire sur le bulletin à glisser dans l'urne. Aucune mesure particulière n'est mise en place pour limiter la propagation du coronavirus. Une jeune fille en tchador présente son acte de naissance. Comme tout le monde, elle trempe son doigt dans le pot d'encre. « C'est la première fois que je vote », nous explique-t-elle. « C'est important pour moi, car je veux lutter contre la corruption qui gangrène le pays. Je vais voter pour les conservateurs », confie-t-elle, pleine d'espoir.

Non loin, dans un parc, l'ambiance est tout autre. Des familles flânent sous un doux soleil hivernal. Désabusées, elles n'iront pas voter.

Bref, c'est un jour d'élections comme n'importe quel autre à Téhéran. La vie suit son cours, comme si de rien n'était. Pas une fois nous n'avons entendu parler du coronavirus lorsque la nuit tombe sur la capitale. De retour dans un bureau de vote désert, une jeune femme en charge de l'organisation des élections hésite pourtant avant de nous serrer la main. « On nous a dit de faire attention à cause du coronavirus ». Le début d'une prise de conscience tardive ?

Le confinement volontaire

Une fois la séquence électorale passée, les écoles converties en bureaux de vote garderont portes closes. Téhéran semble enfin prendre la mesure de la gravité de la situation. Des décisions sont prises : interdiction de rassemblements, télétravail, ou encore présence partielle des fonctionnaires dans les administrations.

Le confinement de la population reste volontaire. Objectif : ne pas aggraver la crise économique qui touche le pays.

Le 5 mars, le ministre iranien de la Santé apparaît à la télévision. « Écoles et universités resteront fermées jusqu'à la fin de l'année (iranienne), le 19 mars », ordonne Saïd Namaki. « Tout va bientôt rentrer dans l'ordre », tente de rassurer régulièrement de son côté le président Hassan Rohani.

Mais son gouvernement paraît hésitant. L'exécutif iranien donne des consignes ambiguës. Dans un premier temps, les déplacements dans le pays sont déconseillés, mais pas interdits. Malgré les risques de propagation du virus, des millions d'Iraniens prennent alors la route à l'occasion des vacances de Norouz (le nouvel an iranien), le 20 mars.

À la fin du mois, le pays est prostré. Une personne meurt toutes les dix minutes du coronavirus.

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Je m'abonne

Chaque jour, le bilan officiel fait état de cent cinquante décès. « Ces statistiques, ces chiffres ne sont pas fiables. Ils sont loin de la réalité. Ici, personne n'y croit », assure Mirza, notre premier témoin.

Le confinement se prolongera finalement jusqu'au 11 avril. Depuis, les autorités ont permis la réouverture progressive des commerces et les déplacements interrégionaux.

Mais aujourd'hui encore, les écoles, les universités, les mosquées, les sanctuaires chiites, les cinémas, les stades et autres lieux de regroupement restent fermés dans tout le pays, qui vit au rythme du ramadan et de la distanciation sociale.

\* Le prénom a été modifié

## Kurdish Administration Isolates Hasakah over Virus Cases

The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) has isolated al-Hasakah city after three new coronavirus cases were reported there.

In an official statement on Thursday, the Health Authority said the test results of two people confirmed their infection, adding that one lives in Hasakah and the other in Qamishli.

The Administration's Presidency of the Provincial Council called on citizens to remain home, avoid gathering and abide by the measures to fight the spread of the pandemic on a large scale.

Head of the Health Authority Joan Mustafa said two samples were sent to Damascus and returned with positive results.

"The samples were taken from a man and his wife who live in

al-Hasakah," he added, noting that the woman was sent to the quarantine facility in the National Hospital in Qamishli, while her husband was requested to stay at home in self-isolation.

Mustafa urged people to inform the local authorities and contact medical teams on any suspected case.

One patient has died in Hasakah and three others were reported infected in the city's al-Omran neighborhood.

Authorities have isolated the neighborhood and imposed full quarantine on its citizens and partial quarantine on the city.

Meanwhile, Kurdish internal security forces (Asayish) requested 14 families, who are neighbors and relatives of the reported cases in the neighborhood, to stay at home.

Head of the Hasakah Provincial Council Abdul Ghani Osu



pointed out that the Administration will provide necessary support and aid for quarantined families in Omran.

"Bread, food and essential items will be provided for the families in the neighborhood every three days, in light of the total ban imposed on them," Osu explained.

Areas run by the Autonomous

Administration suffer severe medical shortages after incoming cross-border aid was suspended.

Administration officials expressed concern over the virus outbreak in areas under its control, especially in the camps.

## Syrian Kurdish parties resume talks, in secret

Rival Kurdish parties in northeastern Syria have begun US-sponsored reconciliation talks after repeated delays in the past and in the hope of joining the UN-sponsored peace process to resolve the Syrian conflict.

For the first time since Oct. 28, 2019, when Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazlum Kobane announced an initiative to resolve inter-Kurdish differences, the Kur-

dish National Council (KNC) and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) kick-started secret, direct talks. The initiative is seemingly designed to include all the Kurdish parties in the PYD-ruled autonomous administration in northeast Syria, paving the way for the autonomous administration to join the UN-sponsored negotiations in Geneva to end the Syrian conflict.

Despite the stakes involved,



Fighters of the Manbij military council, allied to Syria Democratic Forces (SDF), take an overlook position in the southern rural area of Manbij, in Aleppo Governorate, Syria June 1, 2016. Photo by REUTERS/Rodi Said/File Photo.

success is not guaranteed given the tense political relations between the two negotiating parties following years of political conflict and media spats. The KNC is an official part of the Istanbul-based Syrian opposition in exile, while Turkey views the PYD, which espouses the ideology of the Abdullah Ocalan-led Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), as its top foe in Syria. Meanwhile, the PYD is also part of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political arm of the Kurdish-led SDF fighting alongside the US-led international coalition.

Speaking to Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity, an informed official source revealed the origins of the negotiations process. "The first direct negotiating round between the KNC and PYD was held in early April at a US military base on the periphery of Hasakah, in the presence of the US special adviser to the global coalition forces in Syria, William Roebuck, and SDF commander Mazlum Kobane."

The attempted détente is reportedly taking place under US supervision. Roebuck has had multiple meetings with the KNC in the past three months to discuss developments in the Syrian arena and to support the initiative to unify Kurdish ranks in Syria.

At an April 25 press conference in Qamishli, Kobane said, "Remarkable progress is being made in the process to unify the Kurdish ranks. The parties, the PYD and the rest of the political parties are being responsive to the initiative."

Commenting on the agenda for the negotiations, the source told Al-Monitor, "The two sides are discussing the adoption of a unified political vision for Syrian's future based on discussion of a draft presented by the US side. After holding at least four meetings as part of the negotiations, the two sides agreed on the following: Syria will be a federal, democratic

and pluralistic state; the current regime is an authoritarian and dictatorial regime that uses violence against its opponents; the Kurdish areas consist of an integrated political and geographical unit."

He also said that the parties agree on building positive relations with neighboring countries and resolving the Syrian crisis in accordance with UN Resolution 2254. Both sides seek to include recognition of Kurdish national, cultural and political rights in the Syrian constitution as well secure constitutional recognition that Syrian Kurds are an indigenous people. They also agree to advocate for the return of refugees and other displaced persons to their homes and for a democratic opposition.

In Qamishli, SDC spokesman Amjad Othman told Al-Monitor, "The motives behind the agreement are much stronger than reasons preventing its conclusion. The parties to the dialogue have the single option of coming to an agreement despite the considerable challenges and difficulties which will only be resolved if the parties are serious."

Othman said the negotiations can only succeed if the parties remain independent. "The regional influences and agendas need to be ignored, and priority needs to be given to the public interest and a joint vision to address the situations in Afrin, Ras al-Ain/Sari Kani and Gire Spi/Tell Abyad. The Kurdistan parties agreeing to and supporting the initiative would improve the odds of success."

The KNC is allied with the Kurdish nationalist project led by Massoud Barzani and his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq, having been formed in 2011 with the KDP's support. As noted, the PYD bases its political and organizational projects on the PKK's ideology.

Tensions between the PYD and KNC took a turn for the

worse when the PYD became the most influential player in northeast Syria in 2012. The KNC viewed the PYD-led autonomous administration as a fait accompli and has refused to apply for a permit to engage in political activity there. The autonomous administration responded by exiling the KNC president, shuttering its offices and arresting dozens of its leaders and members during 2016-17.

Meanwhile, the KNC's affiliation with the Istanbul-based Syrian opposition has served to exacerbate tensions between the two sides following multiple Turkish military operations launched against the Kurds in Syria. In fact, the PYD has accused the KNC of subordination to the Turkish state at the expense of the Kurdish people.

Kamiran Hajo, chairman of the KNC's Foreign Relations Committee told Al-Monitor by phone from Sweden, where he resides, "We have always called for the unification of Kurdish ranks. The current circumstances seem to be right for practical steps to be taken in this direction. Following the relatively longstanding feud, the two sides are in need of an agreement that lays the foundations for the Kurds' future in Syria."

Hajo fears, however, that any new agreement with the PYD will suffer the same fate as previously ones reached by the two sides under Barzani's auspices: collapse at the implementation stage. "Negotiations are not going to be easy, and there will be multiple challenges before an agreement is reached," Hajo said. "The agreement's implementation phase could be harder than the dialogue and agreement phase in itself. That's what happened with the previous deals."

Commenting on the US role in the negotiations, Ahed al-Hindi, a Washington, DC-based political analyst, told Al-Monitor by

phone, "I believe that the US efforts to unify the Kurdish ranks in northeastern Syria are a part of [a broader] project designed to unify the entire Syrian north, namely the northwest controlled by the Turkish-backed [opposition] and the northeast controlled by the US-backed [Kurdish-led forces]. This project aims to build a strong position against the [Bashar] al-Assad regime and deny it the areas' wealth, which could be used to revive the regime."

Hindi believes the United States is determined to unify the ranks of the Syrian Kurds. He asserted, "The repeated visits Roebuck and his team made lately and his long stays in the region confirm that the US is serious in resolving inter-Kurdish differences and subsequently have the autonomous administration taking part in the Geneva talks to resolve the Syrian crisis and be represented in the opposition delegation."

Over the course of the nine-year Syrian civil war, the Kurds in Syria have paid exorbitant prices in military and social terms. In 2018 and 2019, they lost the regions of Afrin, Ras al-Ain/Sari Kani and Gire Spi/Tell Abyad to Turkey and Turkish-backed militias, resulting in the displacement of most Kurdish residents in these areas. In addition, in the fight against Islamic State, the SDF, whose backbone is the Kurdish People's Protection Units, lost 11,000 fighters and saw 22,000 wounded.

Despite controlling nearly 20% of Syrian territory, the SDF does not have political representation in the Geneva talks because of Turkish opposition to their presence. With Ankara continuing to reject any project that would lead to Kurdish autonomous rule in Syria, unifying to jointly pursue Kurdish interests is the only option the Kurds have left.



## PEN international demande la fin du harcèlement judiciaire de la journaliste kurde, Nurcan Baysal

**P**EN international est profondément préoccupé par le harcèlement judiciaire dont fait l'objet la journaliste et défenseur des droits humains, Nurcan Baysal, lauréate d'un prix, ancienne écrivaine en résidence à PEN anglais.

TURQUIE / BAKUR – [La journaliste kurde] Nurcan Baysal est accusée d' « incitation à la haine et à l'inimitié du public » après que deux enquêtes distinctes aient été ouvertes contre elle ces trois dernières semaines.

Le 30 mars 2020, Nurcan Baysal a été convoquée au commissariat de police concernant des commentaires sur les précautions prises par le gouvernement turc contre COVID-19 et leur application dans les villes kurdes.

Moins de trois semaines plus tard, le 20 avril 2020, Nurcan Baysal a été à nouveau convoquée au poste de police de Diyarbakir. Elle s'est rendue au poste de police avec son avocat où on leur a dit qu'une nouvelle enquête avait été ouverte concernant deux messages qu'elle avait postés sur son compte Twitter. Le premier message, tweeté plus de deux ans plus tôt en février 2018 et épinglé sur son profil Twitter, se lit comme suit :

« Nous avons commencé à reconstruire notre maison démolie à Sur.

(...)

Envoyez une carte à ceux qui sont en prison, soyez solidaires avec leurs familles restées au pays, Sur, Cizre, Şîrnak... soyez avec ceux dont



les maisons sont détruites (...)

Le deuxième tweet, d'octobre 2019, était une réponse à un post concernant l'offensive militaire turque en Syrie.

En plus de ce harcèlement judiciaire permanent, Nurcan Baysal et sa famille ont également fait l'objet d'autres formes d'intimidation. Plus récemment, en octobre 2019, alors que Baysal était au Royaume-Uni pour sa résidence avec le PEN anglais, sa maison a été perquisitionnée aux petites heures du matin par la police armée, laissant ses deux fils terrifiés.

Nous demandons instamment aux autorités turques de mettre fin au harcèlement permanent de Nurcan Baysal et de veiller à ce qu'elle et d'autres écrivains et défenseurs des droits de l'homme puissent s'exprimer librement sans la menace constante d'une enquête et d'une incarcération.

Contexte

Nurcan Baysal est l'auteur de quatre livres : O Gün (Ce jour-là), qui explore le développement rural à Kavar ; Kürdistan'da Sivil Toplum (La société civile au Kurdistan), un aperçu de la situation de la communauté kurde au Kurdistan turc co-écrit par Şeyhmus Diken ; Ezidiler : 73. Ferman (Ezidis : 73rd Verdict), basé sur des entretiens approfondis avec des Yazidis qui avaient fui l'ISIS ; et O Sesler (Those Voices), un compte-rendu détaillé des couvre-feux dans sa ville natale de Diyarbakir. Ce dernier est disponible en traduction anglaise auprès de l'éditeur ici. Nurcan a écrit pour des médias tels que open Democracy et T24 ainsi que pour son propre blog. Elle est actuellement chroniqueuse pour Ahvalnews.

Pendant de nombreuses années, Nurcan a travaillé pour les droits de la population kurde et dans le développement rural. Elle est l'une des fondatrices de la Plateforme pour sauver les femmes kidnappées par Daech/ISIS et l'Institut de recherche politique

et sociale de Diyarbakir (DISA), membre de PEN anglais et de PEN Turquie, et conseillère auprès de plusieurs organisations à but non lucratif.

Comme beaucoup d'autres écrivains et militants en Turquie, Nurcan a été fréquemment prise pour cible par les autorités en représailles de son travail et de ses écrits sur les droits de l'homme. Elle a été détenue à deux reprises – en 2018 et 2019 – et a fait l'objet de raids sur la maison qu'elle partage avec ses deux jeunes fils.

En 2017, Nurcan Baysal a reçu le « Prix des femmes journalistes courageuses » décerné par l'Association italienne des femmes journalistes et en 2018, elle a été nommée lauréate mondiale pour les défenseurs des droits de l'homme en danger par nos collègues de Front Line Defenders. Vous pouvez voir une vidéo de Nurcan s'adressant au Sommet de Genève pour les droits de l'homme et la démocratie de 2019 ici. »



2 mai 2020

## Le pétrole dévisse, mais est-ce une bonne nouvelle pour le climat ?

La pandémie de coronavirus n'épargne pas le marché de l'or noir, bien au contraire. Lundi, le prix du baril du WIT a plongé dans le négatif sur les contrats de mai, une situation inédite.

Les autres marchés pétroliers accusent le coup. La pandémie de coronavirus et les mesures de confinement associées ont entraîné une baisse de la demande de l'ordre de 30 %.

Reste à savoir comment le pétrole se remettra de cette crise inédite. Les prix, très bas actuellement, pourraient lui permettre de redémarrer d'autant plus vite lors de la reprise. Pas forcément une bonne nouvelle, donc, pour la transition énergétique.

L'effondrement du prix du baril du WTI (West Texas Intermediate), un type de pétrole américain coté à New York, a marqué les esprits lundi. Et pour cause, il a dégringolé dans le négatif, jusqu'à atteindre -37 dollars (-35 euros) sur certains contrats spécifiques. En clair, les investisseurs qui souhaitaient se débarrasser de leur baril de pétrole n'avaient d'autre choix que de mettre la main à la poche pour trouver preneur.

Impensable encore il y a quelques semaines. Jamais le baril de WTI n'était tombé en dessous de 10 dollars, et il s'échangeait encore à 60 dollars en début d'année. Entre-temps, le coronavirus est passé par là, entraînant un effondrement mondial de la demande de pétrole. Ce n'est pas seulement le WTI qui est tou-



Une usine de raffinage du pétrole à Houston, Texas, le 20 avril 2020. — Mark Felix / AFP

ché, mais l'ensemble du marché mondial de l'or noir.

De quoi l'affecter durablement ? Et est-ce seulement une bonne nouvelle pour le climat ? Guy Maisonnier, économiste à l'Ifpen (Institut français du pétrole et des énergies nouvelles), et Philippe Chalmin, professeur d'histoire économique à l'université Paris-Dauphine, répondent à 20 Minutes.

Pourquoi ne faut-il pas surinterpréter l'importance de ce plongeon historique du WTI de lundi ?

Plus que l'effondrement de la demande mondiale de pétrole en ces temps de confinement, c'est surtout l'arrivée à échéance de contrats à terme qui explique l'effondrement du prix du baril de pétrole américain, lundi. Comme d'autres matières premières, le brut est

un produit spéculatif coté sur un marché « à terme ». On se met d'accord sur un prix aujourd'hui pour une livraison à une date ultérieure. « Ces contrats à terme se négocient de mois en mois, explique Guy Maisonnier. Beaucoup de traders avaient leur contrat de mai qui arrivait à terme ce mardi, si bien qu'ils devaient déboucler leurs positions. » En clair : trouver un acheteur en mesure de prendre physiquement possession de la marchandise.

Quand l'acheteur se fait rare, l'alternative est de stocker ce pétrole. Or aux Etats-Unis, le stockage est limité et arrive d'ores et déjà à des niveaux élevés. « On parle de 70 % des capacités utilisés aujourd'hui, indique Guy Maisonnier. La pression est moins forte pour le brent, produit en mer du Nord, où l'on a encore de la

disponibilité en termes de stockage. » D'ailleurs, le baril de brent, principale référence du marché mondial, même s'il dévisse lui aussi, résiste mieux que le WTI. Il était tombé ce mardi sous les 20 dollars, soit tout de même son plus bas niveau depuis décembre 2001.

Vue satellite de Cushing, dans l'Oklahoma, principal hub de stockage du brut WTI aux Etats-Unis. Le cours négatif du baril pour les livraisons de mai, c'est surtout une crise du stockage (Cushing est plein à 75%).

[pic.twitter.com/GExsR9UXIH](https://pic.twitter.com/GExsR9UXIH)

— Philippe Berry (@ptiberry)  
April 21, 2020

A quel point l'industrie du pétrole est-elle touchée par la pandémie ?

Pour s'en rendre compte, « il



suffit de comparer le prix actuel du pétrole sur ses principaux marchés – moins de 20 dollars donc pour le Brent – à celui auquel il s'échangeait en début d'année, soit entre 50 et 70 dollars le baril, indique Philippe Chalmin. Grossièrement donc, le prix a été divisé par deux.».

Cette chute des prix est d'abord liée à l'effondrement de la demande provoquée par la pandémie mondiale de Covid-19 et des mesures de confinement associées. On ne prend plus nos voitures, les avions sont cloués au sol, l'économie est à l'arrêt... « Avant le confinement, nous consommons 100 millions de barils de brut par jour, rappelle Philippe Chalmin. Cette demande devrait chuter de 30 % en avril selon l'Agence internationale de l'énergie. »

Or, de l'autre côté du pipeline, les pays producteurs peinent justement à s'entendre pour réduire leurs productions. Après d'âpres discussions, les pays de l'Opep +\*, qui regroupe les principaux producteurs de pétrole, se sont entendus sur une diminution de leur production. « Mais seulement de 10 millions de barils par jour et seulement à partir de mai », détaille Guy Maisonnier.

Insuffisant, donc, pour arriver à un équilibre entre l'offre et la demande. Et pas sûr que les pays pétroliers fournissent plus d'efforts. « Beaucoup dépendent de leurs exportations de pétrole et, même à 20 dollars le baril, continuent à produire pour maintenir leur économie, explique Philippe Chalmin. S'ajoutent aussi parfois des difficultés techniques qui font que réduire la production peut se révéler l'option la plus coûteuse. En Russie, sur certains gisements, fermer maintenant les vannes, c'est prendre le risque

de se faire piéger par le gel et de ne plus pouvoir rouvrir avant longtemps. Ou alors à un coût exorbitant. »

La pandémie marquera-t-elle durablement l'industrie du pétrole ?

« En 2014 déjà, le marché pétrolier mondial avait connu une situation proche de celle que nous connaissons aujourd'hui, à savoir un excédent d'offre par rapport à la demande, rappelle Guy Maisonnier. Cela s'expliquait alors par le boom du pétrole de schiste américain. Il avait fallu trois années pour que cela se rééquilibre. »

Cela pourrait être tout aussi long ce coup-ci, d'autant que cette pandémie de coronavirus ajoute un risque supplémentaire pour le secteur pétrolier : celui que la demande de pétrole ne revienne pas de sitôt, voire jamais, aux 100 millions de barils par jour. « Le secteur aérien ne devrait pas revenir de sitôt à sa consommation d'avant crise, illustre Guy Maisonnier. Soit 8 millions de barils par jour. »

Mais difficile de faire des prédictions sur un marché de l'or noir où de nombreux paramètres entrent en jeu. Les regards seront notamment tournés sur l'industrie du pétrole et du gaz de schiste américain, qui reposait déjà, avant la crise, sur un modèle économique fragile. « On peut s'attendre à des faillites, au point que les Etats-Unis perdent leur place de premier producteur mondial d'hydrocarbures », reprend l'économiste de l'Ifpen. De quoi alors faire baisser la production mondiale ? « Oui, mais de l'autre côté, des pays aujourd'hui écartés du marché mondial – comme l'Iran, sous le coup d'un embargo – pourraient revenir », poursuit-il.

La pandémie devrait égale-

ment impacter les capacités d'investissements des compagnies pétrolières. Dans la recherche de nouveaux gisements, par exemple. « Cela pourrait se traduire à moyen terme par une hausse des prix du pétrole, si jamais la demande repart à la hausse et que le secteur n'a pas fait les investissements pour y répondre », explique Guy Maisonnier.

Les difficultés du secteur pétrolier, une bonne nouvelle pour le climat ?

« Le confinement est une bonne nouvelle pour le climat, mais pas la baisse du prix des pétroles », corrige Philippe Chalmin.

Là encore, il faut se projeter dans l'après-confinement et dans la perspective de la relance de nos économies. Un prix historiquement bas du pétrole pourrait être de nature à ralentir la transition énergétique en impactant la compétitivité des énergies renouvelables. « Cela risque de remettre en cause le développement des biocarburants ou l'électrification de nos véhicules », précise Philippe Chalmin.

Guy Maisonnier nuance toutefois : « On est dans une situation inédite, les prix du pétrole ne resteront pas éternellement bas, estime-t-il. Et ils le resteront encore moins longtemps, avec la sortie de crise et la relance économique qui entraînera une relance de la demande de pétrole dans le monde ».

Tout dépendra aussi de la volonté des Etats à associer transition énergétique et relance économique dans leur plan de relance. En France, plusieurs ONG environnementales, dont Greenpeace France, Les Amis de la Terre ou Oxfam, s'en inquiètent. Sa-

medi, peu après le vote sur le projet de loi de finances rectificative à l'Assemblée Nationale, elles dénonçaient « le refus du gouvernement et des députés de la majorité de conditionner l'aide financière, en cas de recapitalisation d'entreprises polluantes, à un changement en profondeur de leur modèle économique ». « Cela s'apparente à un chèque en blanc aux grands pollueurs des secteurs aérien, automobile et pétrolier », écrivent-elles.

\*L'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (Opep), emmenée par l'Arabie Saoudite, et ses alliés, Russie en tête

Et l'effondrement du prix du gaz naturel ?

Dans sa chute, le pétrole entraîne aussi son énergie jumelle, le gaz naturel, même si son prix est moins indexé aujourd'hui sur celui de l'or noir qu'il ne l'a été autrefois.

Là encore, la question se pose de savoir quel impact auront des prix durablement bas du gaz naturel sur la transition énergétique. L'Ifpen fait une réponse nuancée. D'un côté, la baisse des prix de cette énergie fossile, utilisée notamment pour produire du chauffage, pourrait faire de l'ombre à des solutions alternatives moins émettrices de gaz à effet de serre, comme le biogaz.

De l'autre, ces prix bas du gaz naturel pourraient accélérer la sortie du charbon, les centrales à gaz naturel remplaçant celles au charbon, plus émettrices de CO2. Une bonne nouvelle donc, cette fois-ci.



May 2, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Kurdistan's Health Ministry reports six new COVID-19 cases

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region's Health Ministry announced on Saturday it had recorded six new cases of the coronavirus disease, all in Erbil's Soran district.

A ministry statement said the new cases included five men and a woman residing in three different neighborhoods in Soran. This brings the total number of confirmed cases in the Kurdistan Region, as reported by the authorities, to 387, including five deaths and 330 recoveries.

The ministry also said that its specialized laboratories had conducted 1,082 coronavirus tests across the autonomous

region in the past twenty-four hours: 412 in Erbil, 206 in Sulaimani, 300 in Dohuk, 15 in Halabja and 149 in Erbil's Soran district.

The statement added that 9,681 individuals have been quarantined so far, with 1,307 still under the restriction.

As the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) began easing lockdown measures in late April, the Interior Ministry launched a webpage through which citizens have been able to obtain permits to travel among the provinces and administrative units of the Kurdistan Region.

The ministry said in a state-



"We will follow health instructions" is seen written on the back of a medical worker's uniform at a COVID-19 treatment center in Erbil. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ment on Saturday that the public can apply for the necessary travel documents seven days a week from eight in the morning till 3 in the afternoon.

Despite the low rate of new

COVID-19 cases, KRG officials have stated that disease remains a public health risk and that the authorities will continue implementing preventive measures to curb its spread.



2 mai 2020

## Des soldats turcs profanent des tombes de combattants kurdes à Bingöl

**U**n grand nombre de tombes appartenant à des combattants kurdes ont été détruites dans les villages des zones rurales dans la province de Bingöl.

La campagne d'attaque de l'armée turque contre les tombes des combattants kurdes tombés au combat s'accroît de plus en plus au Nord-Kurdistan (Turquie). Suite à une importante recrudescence des destructions systématiques, en avril dernier, dans les provinces de Van et Amed (Diyarbakir), les mêmes actes se répandent désormais dans

d'autres régions. Un grand nombre de tombes appartenant à des combattants kurdes ont été détruites dans des villages des zones rurales dans la province de Bingöl.

La tombe de la combattante Sevda Serinyel a également été vendredi la cible de la campagne d'attaque turque.

La famille de Serinyel a été convoquée au commissariat le 14 avril. Le commandant demanda à la famille l'identité de la personne ayant érigé cette pierre tombale et ayant fait marquer les inscriptions des-

sus. Il a ensuite été demandé à la famille de retirer cette pierre tombale. La famille refuse les demandes du commandant, affirmant qu'il n'y avait aucune inscription sur la pierre tombale qui constituait quelque crime.

Suite à cela, les soldats turcs profanèrent la tombe de Serinyel et retirèrent les inscriptions « Mercan » (corail, en turc) et « Nous sommes morts parce que nous aimions tellement la vie ».

Après cet incident, les soldats ont appelé à maintes reprises la famille en les pressant de

tirer la photo de la pierre tombale. Les membres de la famille de Serinyel ont dès lors commencé à veiller sur le cimetière pour prévenir une autre attaque.

D'autre part, les soldats turcs ont profané quelques tombes des guérilleros des HPG dans les villages de Gözeler (Ibrahiman), de Karer et dans 9 autres villages habités par des Alévites. Les soldats ont par la suite appelé les familles et leur ont demandées de « retirer les pierres cassées ».

## Les Yézidis d'Afrin : « D'abord ils nous ont chassés et maintenant ils détruisent nos tombes »

**D**epuis le début de l'invasion turque dans la région kurde d'Afrin, les exactions commises à l'encontre des Kurdes par les mercenaires turcs se poursuivent sans cesse.

Accusés d'être des « infidèles » et des « zoroastriens », Les Kurdes yézidis de la région d'Afrin sont particulièrement pris pour cible par l'État turc et ses mercenaires djihadistes.

Récemment, les tombes des

Kurdes yézidis de la région d'Afrin ont été détruites par les mercenaires djihadistes.

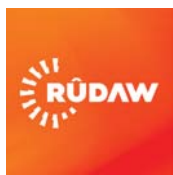
« D'abord ils nous ont chassés et maintenant ils détruisent nos tombes », ont déclaré à l'agence de presse kurde ANHA les Yézidis de la région d'Afrin déplacés à Tall Rafat.

Une Yezidie kurde d'Afrin du nom de Henen Naro exprime ses émotions : « Nous expulser ne leur a pas suffi, maintenant ils détruisent nos tombes;



Ils ont détruit la tombe du saint religieux yézidi Shek Ali, à Basûfan. Les instances juridiques internationales devraient veiller

à ce que cette injustice cesse. Nous exigeons la protection de nos lieux saints ».



May 2, 2020  
By Zhelwan Z. Wali

## Fears grow for Kurdish political prisoner transferred to 'unknown location' in Iran

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region — An online campaign is calling on the Iranian government to reveal the whereabouts of a Kurdish political prisoner who was transferred to “an unknown location” last week.

Zeynab Jalalian from Deim Qeshlaq, in Iran's Eastern Azerbaijan province, was initially arrested in February 2007 by the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau on charges of being a member of the outlawed Kurdistan Life Free Party (PJAK), according to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The 38-year-old was senten-

ced to death in December 2008 on charges of “armed actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and membership in PJAK” in addition to “possessing arms and engaging in armed action against the Islamic Republic of Iran” by a revolutionary court judge.

Jalalian has served 13 years of her life sentence in Khoy Prison, West Azerbaijan. On April 28, she was transferred to an unknown location - said to be Tehran - by Iranian security forces for questioning on new charges against her, according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN).



Photo: Kurdistan Human Rights Network

Jalalian has been in poor physical condition since 2014, suffering from various diseases

including pterygium and oral thrush, according to KHRN.

Using the #WhereIsZeynabJalalian hashtag, civil society groups and political activists have taken to Twitter to call on Amnesty International and Human Rights Organizations to pressure the Iranian government to reveal Jalalian's fate whereabouts.

"Kurdish political prisoner Zeynab Jalalian has been transferred from Khoy Central Prison to an unknown location. There are many concerns about the health of this political prisoner," Alan Kurd wrote.

"No one knows where she is! Save Zeynab save humanity!" Aram Amed wrote. "Where is she? Why was she transferred to another location?" added Ferda Demirel.

Jalalian has been on hunger strike since February 2016 in protest to the lack of medical treatment for her eye condition and gastrointestinal disease, according to KHRN.

Describing Jalalian as "critically ill" in June 2018, Amnesty International called for a swift end to her "unjust treatment"

by Iranian authorities, accusing Tehran of depriving her of her basic rights, including access to medical care.

Following several attempts by lawyers and human rights activists to repeal Jalalian's death sentence, her sentence was reduced to life imprisonment in November 2011. Three years later, she was transferred to Khoy prison.

Tens of thousands of political prisoners are jailed in Iran over various charges including advocating for democracy and

promoting women's or workers' rights.

Amid growing fears of the outbreak of the coronavirus, the UN has already urged Iran to include political prisoners in its temporary release of inmates.

Ethnic minority groups including Kurds and Azeris are disproportionately detained and more harshly sentenced for acts of political dissidence, according to a July 2019 report from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran.



May 2, 2020  
By Zhelwan Z. Wali

## ISIS attacks kill 70 in disputed territories since January: Kurdish official

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region -The Islamic State terror group (ISIS) has carried out 85 attacks in disputed areas claimed by Erbil and Baghdad in the past four months, a top Peshmerga official said on Saturday.

"Daesh (ISIS) activities are on the rise day by day, in which they have carried out 85 terrorist activities in the past four months, killing 70 people and wounding 161 others," Jabar Yawar, chief of staff of the Peshmerga Affairs Ministry, told Rudaw on Saturday.

Yawar told Rudaw English that those killed include Kurdish Peshmerga forces, Iraqi Army soldiers, Shiite Hashd al-Shaabi or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) as well as Iraqi Federal Police members.

The extremist group abducted 41 other people for ransom during the period, he added.

"The bulk of those kidnapped are civilians from affluent families and [are] ambushed in remote areas by the militants," Yawar said.

He said that the majority of the attacks were launched in April.

"This is evidence that their activities increase month by month," he added.

According to Yawar, talks with the Iraqi Army to find a solution to fill the security void in large parts of the disputed territories "have not borne fruit".

"We have given them two suggestions; either we protect the security of these

areas or we do it jointly with the Iraqi government," the chief of staff said, saying the Iraqi army has turned down both ideas.

"The Iraqi government is neither capable of protecting the security of the disputed areas nor do they let us do it," he added.

The territories disputed by the two governments are comprised of areas in Nineveh and the entire provinces of Kirkuk, Saladin, and Diyala. An absence of security forces in the area has created a fertile breeding ground for ISIS to regroup.

Between January 1 and April 15, the ISF carried out 1,060 operations and killed 135 ISIS targets, Iraqi defense ministry spokesperson Yehia Rasool said last week.

Iraq declared military victory over ISIS in December 2017, but the group has remained a threat, returning to insurgency tactics of ambushes, kidnappings, executions of suspected informants, and extortion from vulnerable rural populations.

Ten members of the PMF were killed in an ISIS attack in Saladin province on Friday night. Multiple attacks against Iraqi forces in Saladin province, killing 10 members of the PMF.

In recent weeks, ISIS militants have launched a new wave of attacks on Iraqi and Kurdish security forces who are part of government efforts to enforce COVID-19-related lockdowns.

ISIS has urged its followers to exploit the global pandemic and step up attacks.





May 2, 2020

## May 2 - Latest COVID-19 updates from the Kurdistan Region and beyond

### Government institutions will remain closed 'until further notice' : KRG

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s education ministry began on Saturday providing online education to students more than two month after schools were closed due to the novel coronavirus lockdown. The health ministry on Saturday recorded six new cases of the virus bringing the region-wide tally to 387.

Schools and universities were closed on February 26 as part of the KRG's measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. The education ministry had previously announced that they would begin online education in mid-April and open schools on May 2 "if the virus is control-

led." The number of cases continues to rise and schools and universities have remained closed despite easing of restrictions of movement under the lockdown.

The online tutorials are not mandatory. They are available on the internet and via the education ministry's local television channel which is expected to be aired on Nilesat late this afternoon. Telephone and internet service providers are offering free internet for students to access the tutorials.

Kurdistan Region is home to 6,429 schools with 1,707,249 students enrolled this year.



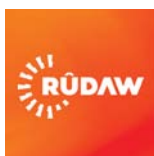
Officials initially said last week that parliamentary sessions would resume after May 2. Photo: Kurdistan Region Parliament.

Universities and some private schools have already begun online education.

ded to May 10, just a few weeks before the end of classes.

The lockdown has been exten-

By *Zhelwan Z.Wali*



May 2, 2020

## KRG launches online education for students under lockdown

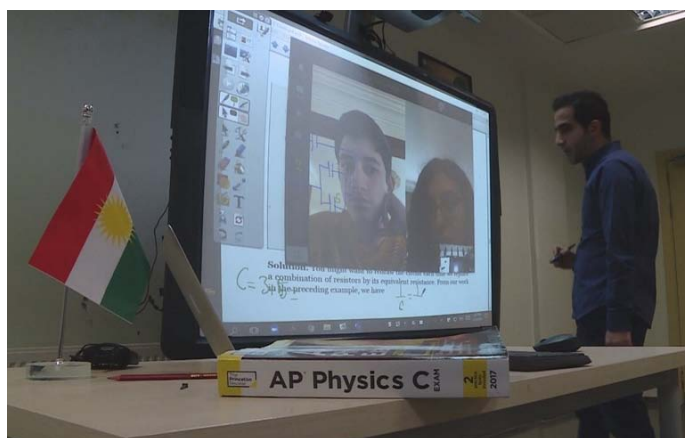
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A teacher at a Kurdistan Region private school speaks with students online during COVID-19 lockdown. Photo: Rudaw

Universities and some private schools have already begun online education.

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The lockdown has been exten-

By *Karwan Faidhi Dri*



May 2, 2020

## Six new COVID-19 cases reported in Kurdistan

The Kurdistan Region's Health Ministry announced six new coronavirus cases on Saturday, five of which are from the Soran district of Erbil province.

Kurdistan Region saw a string of days with no new cases in mid-April, giving the impression to the public that the threat of contagion was coming to an end. More than 25 cases have been reported in the last week,

however, primarily in the capital city of Erbil which has confirmed more than 200 cases.

The total number of cases in the Kurdistan Region is now

387. Of this, 327 have recovered and five people have died.

By Karwan Faidhi Dri



May 2, 2020

## May 2: Latest COVID-19 updates from the Kurdistan Region and beyond

How are you coping under the lockdown? Send your comments and photos to our Facebook and Twitter pages.

The Kurdistan Regional Government advises anyone in the Kurdistan Region dis-

playing coronavirus symptoms to call its emergency hotline on 122. This service is available in Kurdish and Arabic 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. More information can be found on the government's website.



Workers wearing face masks sweep the cobblestones at Erbil's central bazaar. Photo: Bilind T. Abdullah/Rudaw



May 3, 2020

## Two Turkish soldiers killed in clashes with PKK - Interior Ministry

Two Turkish soldiers were killed and four injured on Saturday in clashes between the military and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the southeastern province of Bitlis, Interior Ministry said.

The soldiers were killed during a military operation in the Sehi neighbourhood of Bitlis against the PKK, which has led an insurgency against Turkey in the country's mainly Kurdish southeast

since 1984., the ministry said.

Then prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2012 announced the start of formal negotiations to end a PKK insurgency that has killed 40,000 people since 1984. PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan announced a ceasefire in 2013.

Violence in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast has surged after the ceasefire



collapsed in 2015, leaving the three-year peace process in tatters and reviving the conflict. Heavy fighting between Turkish forces and

groups affiliated with the PKK left urban centres in Turkey's southeast in ruins, with civilians trapped in their homes under strict curfews.



# Iranian Border Guards Kill Kurdish Porter a Week after His Wedding

**E**RBIL — Iranian border guards on Saturday killed a Kurdish porter in Baneh while only a week had passed since his wedding.

Hengaw Organization for Human Rights said “Mahmoud Moradi” was shot dead while carrying goods over the border of Hangazhalla near Baneh, Kurdistan Province.

His body was taken to Salahaddin Hospital in Baneh, the

monitoring group said.

Elsewhere near Sardasht district of Western Azarbaijan province, Iranian border guards opened fire at another group of Kurdish porters, killing at least one.

Hengaw identified the 37-year-old Kurdish man as “Mohammed Ebrahimzadeh”. He is survived by three children, the organization confirmed.



The  
New York  
Times

May 4, 2020  
By Farnaz Fassihi

# With Inflation Ravaging Currency, Iran Is Changing Names and Numbers

**T**he rial unit of currency, which has lost much of its value against the dollar, will be replaced by the toman, which the government says will be worth 10,000 rials. For many years, Iran’s government debated changing the national currency, the rial, by basically slashing four zeros off its face value — an acknowledgment of how American sanctions and economic mismanagement have contributed to inflation in the country.

On Monday, the Iranian Parliament essentially took that step, authorizing the replacement of the rial with another basic unit of currency called the toman. Each toman will be worth 10,000 rials under the new system.

The coronavirus pandemic, which turned Iran into a regional epicenter of the disease, appears to have played a decisive role, contributing to a further devaluation of the rial since February.

Since 2018 when the Trump administration repudiated the nuclear agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran, the value of Iran’s currency has fallen by roughly 60 percent.

“Eliminating the four zeros is a necessary action to simplify financial transactions,” an Iran government spokesman, Ali Rabiei, said in a Twitter posting.

The Guardian Council, a body of conservative clerics that supervises the Parliament, is ex-



Iran’s currency, the rial, will be replaced by a currency called the toman. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

pected to ratify the law, and then the Central Bank will have two years to implement the change — removing rials from circulation and issuing tomans instead.

The change is the outcome of a draft bill presented in early 2019 by the governor of Iran’s central bank, Abdolnasser Hemati. He noted that the currency has been devalued 3,500 times since 1971 and

that Iran had no choice but to "save the face" of its national currency, according to Iranian official media reports. Earlier attempts by President Hassan Rouhani's government to change the currency as far back as 2016 had remained in limbo.

Supporters of the change said slashing the extra zeros would vastly simplify financial calculations in Iran by eliminating the need for Iranian shoppers to carry loads of rials to make

purchases, which they must do now because of inflation. On Monday the rial's exchange rate was 156,000 to the dollar.

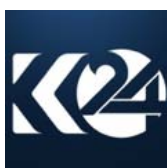
But opponents argued that the plan was an added expense at a time when the government was already facing a budget deficit of between 30 to 50 percent for this coming fiscal year. The effect of the currency change, the critics said, amounted to just cosmetic window dressing.

Fereydoun Khavand, an Iranian economist in Paris, said governments typically arrived at changing the national currency as the last stage of an economic overhaul like European countries had done after World War II or Turkey in recent years.

Iran has done the opposite, Mr. Khavand said, partly because of the crippling effect of American sanctions, which have severely limited the country's ability to sell oil or to conduct

international financial transactions. Under those circumstances, he said other basic economic changes the Iranian government may want to undertake are difficult.

"You typically fix the economy first and then change the currency," said Mr. Khavand. "The government is in a financial bind with no prospect of financial aid coming from outside or from inside so they are trying this."



May 4, 2020  
By Wladimir Van Wilgenburg

## ISIS detainees attempt second jailbreak at SDF-held prison in northeast Syria

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Suspected Islamic State detainees at a prison in the northeast Syrian city of Hasakah staged a second major jailbreak attempt on Saturday evening. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which provides security for the region, announced a day later that the situation was under control.

The incident occurred "inside one of the largest prisons in which ISIS terrorists are held in al-Hasakah Governorate," SDF spokesperson Kino Gabriel said Sunday. Members of the extremist group staged "large-scale disobedience" inside the facility, managing to fully control its interior "after they removed the dormitory and corridors doors."

The authorities deployed counter-terrorist and special forces to contain the situation, Gabriel said. He noted further that the day-long affair ended after negotiations between SDF representatives and the detainees

who were causing the disturbance and held on terrorism-related charges.

The US-led anti-Islamic State Coalition provided air cover as the event unfolded.

Speaking to Kurdistan 24, Coalition spokesperson Col. Myles B. Caggins III said, "Coalition helicopters orbited the detention facility, keeping watch in case any detainees escaped."

According to the Syria-based Rojava Information Centre, the attempted prison break took place in an Islamic State detention facility in Hasakah's Sinahi manufacturing district and not Geweran Prison, where detainees attempted a major jailbreak on March 29.

In both cases, no prisoners escaped without ultimately being recaptured, according to local authorities.

Thomas McClure, a Syria-based researcher at the Ro-



Islamic State prisoners detained together at Geweran Prison, located in the northeastern Syrian city of Hasakah and under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), March 25, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24/Hisham Arafat)

java Information Center, told Kurdistan 24 that "the situation in these facilities was already critical, with disease rampant and the facilities in North and East Syria ill-equipped to house thousands of ISIS' most hardened members."

"While there is no evidence this uprising was directly linked to coronavirus, fear of the disease is widespread in detention facilities and camps housing ISIS-linked individuals. This prison is also in the

area from which Turkey has regularly been severing the water-flow, leaving at least 650,000 people without access to enough water to carry out basic hygiene measures."

"Local health authorities forecast a 10% death rate in the prisons," he said.

As the highly-contagious coronavirus disease has spread worldwide, there has been great concern about its effect on countries with weak public



health infrastructure. Risks have been compounded in conflict zones such as Syria, where healthcare facilities are lacking, and refugees and displaced persons are living in crowded camps.

The SDF spokesperson said the Coalition and international community "have a responsibility to find a solution to the issue of detained ISIS members, provide more support for

greater security measures, and improve the conditions of detainees inside prisons in North and East Syria."

On March 27, the Coalition provided some \$1.2 million worth of supplies to combat the new coronavirus, including riot gear for guards in prison facilities.

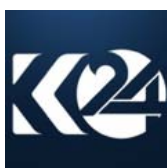
SDF holds over 14,000 captured suspected Islamic State

fighters, including 2,000 foreign nationals. So far, most European countries have refused to take back their foreign nationals.

The US-backed forces have proposed holding trials for the members who are foreign nationals in northeast Syria. However, Washington has rejected the idea.

"The burden of dealing with

ISIS uprisings and caring for these prisoners along with millions of vulnerable civilians falls on the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. The situation in these facilities is critical in part due to coronavirus, but primarily due to the failure of international powers to take responsibility for dealing with this international problem," McClure stated.



4 may, 2020  
By Wladimir Van Wilgenburg

## Renowned Kurdish singer Said Gabari passes aged 64

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Famous Kurdish folk musician and composer Said Gabari passed away on Monday at a hospital in Erbil after a struggle with lung cancer.

Gabari, 64, arrived in the Kurdistan Region in mid-March from Germany, after which he was quarantined for two weeks as required by the regional government's anti-coronavirus measures.

However, days after leaving quarantine, his health deteriorated and he was hospitalized in an intensive care unit due to cancer.

The initial plan was to send Gabari on an emergency plane to Germany for treatment on an order by Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, but this was not possible.

He passed away on Monday following a battle with lung cancer for several days.

Ibrahim Gabari, the cousin of Said Gabari, thanked the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Prime Minister Barzani for their support.

Ibrahim said the funeral would be organized on Monday in Mala Omar, a village near Erbil, "because this is his final will to be



Distinguished Kurdish singer Said Gabari gives a live musical performance. (Photo: Archive)

buried in Kurdistan."

"Said was an intellectual and spoke multiple languages. He has been considered as the Nightingale of Kurdistan," Ibrahim told Kurdistan 24.

"After he arrived from Germany, he insisted on being quarantined. After spending 14 days in quarantine, there was no sign of infection, and he left," the cousin added.

"After that, he was exposed to this disease [cancer] and we brought him here [to the hospital], where he faced his destiny."

Furthermore, Ibrahim said it would be difficult to organize memorial services due to COVID-19 measures by the KRG that prevents mass-gatherings.

"We have to discuss with the [Erbil] governor, but I don't think it would be feasible. It will have to be the decision by the government."

Gabari was born in the village of Xirbê Kejê in the northeastern Syrian province of Hasakah on April 13, 1956.

The artist wore glasses since losing his sight a few years after his birth.

He is known for his patriotic songs and his participation in an untold number of Kurdish concerts and events.

In 1970, the Syrian government arrested and tortured him for singing revolutionary songs.

In a 2015 interview with the artist, The Christian Science Monitor called him a "Peshmerga bard" and reported that he had spent years behind bars in infamous jails, such as one in Diyarbakir, Turkey, Iraq's Abu Ghraib, Iran's Evin, and others in Syria.



Middle  
East  
Institute

May 4, 2020  
By Guney Yildiz

## The US pushes for Kurdish unity in Syria with Turkish hostility and future Syria talks in mind

Washington has increased its efforts to push for unity among Kurdish factions in northeast Syria. A U.S. State Department delegation led by William Roebuck, deputy special envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, reportedly met with rival political umbrella groups: the left-wing coalition of the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), which is the key party in the governing coalition of the Kurdish-led administrations in Syria, and the Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC), which is officially part of the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition.

This is not the first time these two rival groups had talks under mediation aimed at unification. The previous efforts by the U.S., French, and the UK governments at different phases of the war failed.

The uncertain political circumstances this time around make these efforts worth watching. There are also reports that the groups have started direct talks as well.

Both umbrella groups have im-

portant weaknesses that could persuade them to compromise. In the early days of the Syrian uprising, the KNC wasn't keen to coordinate with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main Kurdish political party in Syria. The KNC then had better prospects as a group given its involvement in international platforms on Syria from which the PYD was excluded. Later in the conflict, the PYD came to dominate the political scene in the northeast as its members set up the powerful People's Protection Units (YPG) that eventually defeated ISIS as the backbone of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious military coalition. The party then became less interested in comprising with the KNC as tensions between the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition and the PYD increased. Under Turkish pressure and faced with a diminishing U.S. influence in northeast Syria, the PYD has every reason to expand its allies in Syria. Steering the KNC away from Turkish domination is a compelling urge for the group as well.

The efforts are likely to have dual objectives. The first is to



Photo by JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP via Getty Images

unify the Kurds to play a substantial role in political platforms that debate the future of Syria.

The main Kurdish parties have been excluded both from the UN-led Geneva processes and the Astana process led by Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The absence of the main Kurdish forces in future negotiations on Syria is primarily due to the Turkish veto against them. It has also been the result of the policies of the Western powers, including the U.S., which engaged in a military partnership with the Kurds while refusing to extend political recognition as legitimate partners. If the U.S. changes its approach to engagement with the Kurdish parties, then the Kurds will be

more likely to become part of future negotiations.

The second aim is to alleviate Turkey's hostility toward northeast Syria by including the KNC. That is harder to achieve since Turkey's antagonism toward the Kurds in Syria is not limited to the groups that Ankara says are linked to Kurdish militants in Turkey. So far, when Turkish troops capture Kurdish-majority areas in Syria, they not only target the Kurds linked to the PYD, but also remove public signs in Kurdish and frequently replace them with ones in Turkish, suggesting Turkey's unease even with expressions of Kurdish ethnicity.

FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM  
**Morning Star**

May 4, 2020

## Turkish opposition party calls for truth commission into 1937 Dersim massacre

TURKEY'S Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has demanded an official apology for the 1937 Dersim massacre and the establishment of a truth commission to

heal the wounds of one of the bloodiest stains on the country's history.

HDP MP Alican Onlu tabled a series of parliamentary ques-

tions today calling on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to restore the rights of the people of Dersim, in the largely Kurdish south-east.

He called for a truth & acknowledgement commission to open the archives and court records to the public and for the perpetrators of the massacre to be tried in absentia. Mr Onlu



asked for May 4 to be officially recognised as Dersim massacre memorial day.

Measures must be taken to end to the forced assimilation policies that crushed the Kurdish language, beliefs and culture of the people of Dersim, which is known by the official Turkish state name of Tunceli, he said.

A decree signed in the Turkish parliament on May 4 1937 led to an onslaught by the army and the massacre of up to 70,000 people.

The massacre followed a rebellion led by Kurdish Alevi chieftain Seyid Riza against the Turkification policies of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic. Riza was hanged by the state in November 1937 and buried in an unknown location.

Witness statements describe the brutality inflicted on the people of Dersim, including chemical weapons dropped by the Turkish air force. Among the pilots was Ataturk's adopted daughter Sabiha Gokcen, celebrated as the country's first female flyer.

Thousands of residents were forced from their land and banished. Thousands of children, especially girls, were taken from their families and placed in orphanages or given to foster families across Turkey as part of an ethnic-cleansing operation.

The people of Dersim named the massacre Tertele, meaning



Lost girls of Dersim, 1938

big flood, destruction and extinction.

It is the greatest massacre committed in Turkey after the Armenian genocide. But there have been no lessons learned from the suffering and the incident remains one of Turkey's darkest days.

Mr Erdogan offered an apology in 2011, but this was seen as

an opportunist attempt to embarrass the People's Republican Party, which was in power at the time.

The HDP demanded that the region be officially renamed Dersim from Tunceli, the name associated with the massacre, and the mass graves be uncovered, especially Riza's resting place.



4 mai 2020

## En Syrie, les partis kurdes tentent de s'unifier

Dans le nord-est de la Syrie, les différents partis kurdes tentent de s'unir. Pris en étau entre les armées syrienne et turque, les différentes composantes sont poussées par les forces occidentales à trouver une solution pour mettre fin à des années de conflits intra-kurdes.

La lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique officiellement terminée, les partis kurdes doivent aujourd'hui trouver une nouvelle stratégie pour rester indispensables sur la scène internationale. Mais leur division interne complique la tâche, d'autant que chacun a son allié.

Le PYD au pouvoir dans la zone est proche du régime de Bachar el-Assad, il est de plus vu par le voisin turc comme une branche du PKK, en d'autres termes une organisation terroriste.

Le Conseil National Kurde, lui, est justement basé et soutenu par Ankara. Il a été forcé à l'exil par le PYD il y a plusieurs années.

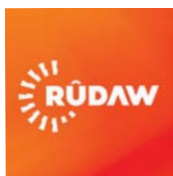
Malgré tout, des négociations ont commencé il y a 6 mois, encouragées par les Etats-Unis. Ces derniers jours, plusieurs membres des différents partis ont affirmé que des rencontres avaient également eu lieu avec une délégation française.



Des combattantes kurdes syriennes célèbrent la prise de Tel Abiad, dans la province de Rakka, le 15 juin 2015. REUTERS/Rodi Said/File Photo

Pour les Occidentaux, le but est de pouvoir conserver un allié de choix sans se mettre à dos certains acteurs du conflit, la Turquie par exemple. Pour les Kurdes, l'objectif est notamment de pouvoir être invi-

tés aux négociations de Genève pour la résolution du conflit syrien. Le PYD contrôle 20% de la Syrie mais leur présence à Genève est rejetée par la Turquie.



May 4, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## France launches new round of unity talks with Syria Kurds: source

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – A French delegation is holding a fresh round of closed door talks with Kurdish parties in northeast Syria (Rojava) as part of an international effort to bring rival Kurdish factions together, according to a local source.

The French delegation first met with the Kurdish National Alliance (HNKS) – a group of parties close to the ruling Democratic Union Party (PYD) – on Sunday. It is due to hold direct talks with the PYD leadership on Monday, a source within the ranks of HNKS told Rudaw on condition of anonymity.

Although the purpose of the visit is to promote unity, the opposition Kurdish National Council (ENKS) told Rudaw English they had not been informed ahead of the French delegation's arrival.

"We are not aware of such a delegation," Ibrahim Biro, head of ENKS foreign relations, told Rudaw English. Sulaimani Oso, an ENKS official in Rojava, also denied any knowledge of the delegation.

However, according to a source within the ENKS, who spoke on condition of anonymity, ENKS officials also met with a French delegation in Rojava two weeks ago.

The secrecy of the talks means it is unclear what was discussed and what is expected to come next.

### International efforts

This is not the first meeting between Syrian Kurdish parties and foreign mediators. Several

dialogues have taken place openly and behind closed doors involving the French, the Americans, and the Russians.

France and Russia have even received delegations of Syrian Kurdish parties in their own capitals, each time focusing on the unity of Kurds in Syria.

William Roebuck, the top US diplomat in northern Syria, met with a number of Kurdish party representatives in northeast Syria on April 26 and told them he is happy with recent progress towards unity, a HNKS source told Rudaw, on condition of anonymity.

HNKS officials confirmed the meetings with Roebuck took place, but did not divulge their substance.

Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's deputy foreign minister and special presidential representative on the Middle East, told Kurdish media in Erbil during a January meeting with ENKS officials that Moscow also endorses Kurdish unity.

"We always say that the Kurdish position has to be cohesive, united, constructive, and realistic to form the basis for dialogue with the other parties in a serious, responsible manner," said Bogdanov.

### Beginning of unity efforts

Mediated by Masoud Barzani, then-president of the Kurdistan Region, power-sharing talks began between the ENKS and the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), the umbrella group for the ruling PYD and its allies, in 2014.

Barzani is the leader of the Kurdistan Region's ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which



A Syrian Kurdish woman waves the flag of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Ras al-Ain, northern Syria, October 6, 2019. File photo: Delil Souleiman / AFP

has supported the ENKS since its foundation in the first year of Syrian crisis in 2011.

Despite several rounds of talks, which led an initial deal, the rivalry between the groups has continued, with both sides accusing one another of treason.

In late October 2019, just days after the Turkish army and its Syrian proxies seized control of two towns on the Syria-Turkey border from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Mazloum Abdi, commander of the SDF, announced an initiative to bring the ENKS, TEV-DEM, and other parties together.

Since then, several meetings have taken place, leading to the reopening of some ENKS offices in the region and the formation of a committee to investigate the alleged imprisonment of ENKS members.

### Outcome

These efforts led to the release of a jailed ENKS official in late December 2019. He was also permitted to recover his confiscated property.

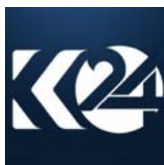
A source from within the SDF told Rudaw last week that Abdulkarim Bashar, a member of the opposition Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria (PDK-S) and deputy leader of the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition coalition, had been allowed to take back his home.

This is a gesture of goodwill from the PYD to aid the progression of their talks with the ENKS, the source claimed.

Amjad Othman, spokesperson for the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the SDF's political wing, told Al-Monitor last week that Kurdish parties in Rojava only have one option – signing an agreement.

"The motives behind the agreement are much stronger than reasons preventing its conclusion," said Othman.

"The parties to the dialogue have the single option of coming to an agreement despite the considerable challenges and difficulties which will only be resolved if the parties are serious."



May 5, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## UNICEF: Kurdistan Region introduces educational satellite TV channel for 1.5 million students

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced on Tuesday that the Kurdistan Region’s Ministry of Education, with its backing, has launched a satellite channel to support the educational requirements of children and young adults while schools remain closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a UNICEF statement, approximately 1.5 million students from first to 12th grade in the Kurdistan Region will be taught the Kurdish curriculum while they are at home, including refugee and displaced children.

“The closure of schools is having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable children—those living in poverty and in camps are being left behind because they may not

have access to online learning opportunities,” Hamida Las-seko, UNICEF Representative in Iraq, said in the statement.

“We know from experience that the longer vulnerable children stay away from school, the less likely they are to return,” she added. “We must all work together to provide different ways for students to continue learning from home and maintain a routine.”

The satellite channel is called “Kanali Parwarda.” It will initially be broadcast daily for three months and will be available in Kurdish (Sorani), Arabic, and Syriac languages.

“In addition to the educational content, the channel will also disseminate awareness raising messages about COVID-19, including social distancing and handwashing practices,” the UNICEF statement said.



An estimated 1.5 million students from first to 12th grade will be taught the Kurdish curriculum while they are at home, UNICEF says. (Photo: Archive)

Nearly 10 million children and youth throughout Iraq have been directly affected by the closure of schools due to the coronavirus.

In late April, the KRG’s Minister of Education announced in a televised speech that an e-school program for grades one through 12 was being imple-

mented to help students keep up their studies during the anti-coronavirus curfew that has closed learning centers throughout the autonomous region. The satellite TV channel, though, is intended for students who have limited access to the internet.

**Le Monde**

Par Benjamin Barthe  
06/06/2020

## Assad-Makhlouf, duel familial au sommet en Syrie

Le conflit entre le président Bachar Al-Assad et son cousin, l’oligarque Rami Makhlouf, s’expose de façon inhabituelle sur les réseaux sociaux.

**E**n cinquante années de règne en Syrie, jamais la famille Assad ne s’était déchirée en public. La règle imposait de mettre en sourdine les conflits internes au clan au pouvoir.

En 1984, même si le bras de fer entre Hafez Al-Assad, le fondateur du ré-

gime, et son frère Refaat n’avait pas été loin de déborder dans la rue, la presse officielle n’en avait pas dit mot. Rien ne devait entamer l’illusion d’un système parfaitement pyramidal, uni dans son obéissance au maître de Damas.

Ce tabou a été brisé ces derniers jours par la diffu-

sion sur Facebook de deux vidéos dans lesquelles l’homme d’affaires Rami Makhlouf, considéré comme la plus grosse fortune de Syrie, interpelle son cousin germain, le président Bachar Al-Assad, issu comme lui de la minorité alaouite. Dans le premier film, mis en ligne jeudi 30 avril, le magnat des télé-

coms, honni des opposants, qui voit en lui le symbole de la corruption du régime, implore le chef de l’Etat de rééchelonner les arriérés d’impôts réclamés à son groupe. Une somme qui s’élève selon lui à 178 millions de dollars (162 millions d’euros).

Dans le second film, diffusé



dimanche 3 mai, le quin-quagénaire, qui a largement financé la répression du soulèvement anti-Assad de 2011, dénonce les pressions exercées sur sa société, Syriatel, leader du marché de la téléphonie mobile, notamment les arrestations de ses employés. « Quelqu'un peut-il imaginer que les services de sécurité s'en prennent aux entreprises de Rami Makhoul, qui a été le plus grand soutien et parrain de ces services pendant la guerre ?, s'interroge-t-il. Si nous continuons sur cette voie, la situation dans le pays deviendra très difficile », ajoute-t-il, dans une menace voilée à l'endroit du président.

### Jérémiades cocasses

De la part d'un oligarque comme Rami Makhoul, qui a mis en coupe réglée la moitié de l'économie du pays, ces jérémiades sont pour le moins cocasses. Le procès que lui fait le gouvernement prête tout autant à sourire. N'est-ce pas lui qui, en 2014, a rabaisé la part des bénéfices de Syriatel devant être versés dans les coffres de l'Etat de 60 % à 20 % ?

La discorde entre les deux anciens partenaires témoigne de la recomposition de la scène économique syrienne après neuf années de guerre civile qui ont vu le produit intérieur brut (PIB) du pays chuter de 60 milliards de dollars (en 2010) à 17 milliards aujourd'hui.

« Les rentes dérivées de l'Etat ont diminué de manière massive, décrypte le politologue syro-suisse Jo-

seph Daher, chercheur à l'Institut universitaire européen de Florence. Bachar Al-Assad, son épouse, Asma, et son frère Maher s'efforcent de concentrer le peu de richesse qui reste entre leurs mains et celles des hommes d'affaires qui leur sont affiliés. La famille Assad nucléaire ne veut plus dépendre de Rami Makhoul, qui, avant 2011, était le banquier du régime. L'objectif est de diminuer son autonomie et de l'assujettir au palais présidentiel. »

Les premiers indices de la disgrâce du cousin sont apparus en août 2019. C'est à ce moment que les rumeurs faisant état de sa mise en résidence surveillée et de la saisie d'une partie de ses biens ont commencé à enfler. Les photos postées sur les réseaux sociaux par ses deux fils, documentant leur périple entre Monte-Carlo et Mykonos au volant de Ferrari rutilantes, avaient choqué. Le bénéficiaire numéro un des privatisations décidées par Bachar Al-Assad à son arrivée au pouvoir, en 2000, s'est retrouvé accusé de fraude fiscale.

Si son assignation à domicile n'a jamais été prouvée, le ministère des finances a officialisé en décembre 2019 le gel de ses avoirs. D'autres oligarques, comme Ayman Jaber, spécialisé dans les hydrocarbures, Tarif Al-Akhras, champion de l'agroalimentaire, et Samer Al-Dibs, le président de la chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Damas, ont été visés par la même mesure. La compagnie MTN, le second réseau de téléphonie mobile,

a été placée sous la tutelle d'une proche d'Asma Al-Assad. Un sort très similaire – une nationalisation ou un transfert de capital – pourrait attendre Syriatel.

« Bachar Al-Assad veut récupérer son argent, explique un homme d'affaires alaouite, qui fait la navette entre Damas et Beyrouth. Il s'inspire de la purge du Ritz-Carlton », ajoute-t-il en référence à l'opération qui a permis au prince héritier saoudien Mohammed Ben Salman de mettre la main, à l'hiver 2018, sur les avoirs de plusieurs centaines de dignitaires du royaume.

### Calculs personnels

Comme en Arabie saoudite, où le dauphin en a profité pour neutraliser des rivaux, la manœuvre résulte autant d'impératifs économiques que de calculs personnels. « Les files d'attente devant les boulangeries s'étirent, le pouvoir a besoin d'argent pour acheter du blé aux Russes, fait valoir Ayman Abdel Nour, le directeur d'un site d'information pro-opposition. Mais Asma Al-Assad veut aussi assurer l'avenir de ses enfants. Elle veut se constituer un portefeuille d'actifs. Bachar n'a rien hérité de son père. »

La campagne de renflouement a été menée de façon sélective. Plusieurs profiteurs de guerre notoires, perçus comme aussi corrompus que les entrepreneurs dans le collimateur des autorités, ont échappé à ces sanctions. C'est le cas de Samer Foz, le propriétaire du Four Seasons, l'hôtel le plus prestigieux de Damas, qui est considéré

comme le nouvel homme de paille du couple présidentiel.

Rami Makhoul, inversement, a fait l'objet en mars d'un nouveau gel de ses avoirs, en lien avec des taxes impayées par une société de négoce pétrolier libanaise dans laquelle il est impliqué. De tous les affairistes mis en cause par le pouvoir, il est le seul à avoir osé se défendre publiquement. Un privilège qu'il doit à son rang familial, son statut de neveu d'Anissa Makhoul, la veuve de Hafez Al-Assad, décédée en 2016. « N'importe qui d'autre aurait été liquidé dans l'heure », estime Ayman Abdel Nour. En s'épanchant sur Facebook, l'ex-ami d'enfance de Bachar Al-Assad s'efforce de capitaliser sur le soutien dont il dispose parmi les alaouites de la côte, principaux bénéficiaires de l'aide distribuée par Al-Bustan, son organisation de charité.

« Contrairement à Refaat Al-Assad en 1984, Rami Makhoul n'a pas de tanks, dit Joseph Daher. Il n'a ni les moyens ni l'intention de renverser Bachar Al-Assad. Mais il a de l'influence, des contacts dans certains services de sécurité et des miliciens à sa solde, qu'il pourrait utiliser pour créer de l'instabilité. » Ce risque pourrait inciter le président à trouver un terrain d'accommodement avec son ancien favori. Des figures de la communauté alaouite, qui redoutent que la minorité ne pâtisse de cette crise, auraient déjà amorcé une médiation.

## Despite Rising Tensions, Iran and U.S. Are Negotiating a Prisoner Release

**T**he talks come even as the Trump administration intensifies its 'maximum pressure' strategy of sanctions against Iran and threatens to shoot Iranian gunboats in the Persian Gulf.

Iran and the United States are negotiating a deal that would release a United States Navy veteran held by the Iranian authorities in exchange for an Iranian-American doctor detained by the Americans, according to a senior Iranian official and a spokesman for the veteran's family.

The negotiations are extraordinary in that they are happening at all, given the rising tensions, bombast and threats of military force that have punctuated the relationship between the Iranian government and the Trump administration.

The senior Iranian official, Abolfaz Mehrabadi, deputy director of the Iranian interests section at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, said the negotiations aim to exchange the veteran, Michael R. White, 48, who has been held in Iran for nearly two years, with the Iranian-American doctor, whom he would not identify. Mr. Mehrabadi said "the talks have not reached a conclusion yet."

The spokesman for Mr. White's family, Jonathan Franks, said he also had been told negotiations were underway between the two sides, although he had no further details.

"If the Iranians have a symmetrical deal on the table we would love for the administration to take it and bring Michael home," Mr. Franks said.

Prisoners have been an especially emotional issue in the long-estranged relationship be-

tween Iran and the United States, beginning with the seizure of Americans at the United States Embassy after Iran's Islamic revolutionaries seized power more than four decades ago.

Iran holds at least four Americans, including at least three of Iranian descent. Iran says about two dozen Iranians are held by the United States.

The advent of the coronavirus pandemic may have played a role in the prisoner negotiations. Mr. White, infected with the coronavirus while in prison, was temporarily released in late March as part of a prisoner furlough to help control the contagion. He has been in the custody of the Switzerland Embassy in Tehran, which represents United States interests there.

Mr. Franks said Mr. White had recovered from the infection.

Despite the prisoner negotiations, all other dimensions of the United States-Iran relationship have been worsening.

The Trump administration has escalated sanctions on Iran since repudiating the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated by the administration of President Barack Obama, contributing to a sharp weakening of Iran's economy. White House officials have rejected calls by Iran and others for a humanitarian easing of those penalties because of the coronavirus crisis. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has pressed to renew a United Nations Security Council arms embargo against Iran that expires in October.

Iran in return has steadily taken a more defensive and provocative posture, increasing enrichment of uranium above the limits set in the nuclear deal, launching a military satellite and engaging with



Michael R. White in Mashhad, Iran, in mid-March. Negotiations aim to exchange Mr. White, who has been held in Iran for nearly two years, with an Iranian-American doctor. White family, via Associated Press

its proxy militias across the Middle East.

President Trump tweeted last month that he had ordered the United States Navy to "shoot down" Iranian boats if they harassed American vessels in the Persian Gulf. Iranian military commanders responded that Iran would retaliate.

The State Department spokeswoman, Morgan Ortagus, said bringing home detained Americans was a priority for Mr. Trump. "We work with the Swiss every day on the health, safety, and release of U.S. citizens wrongfully held in Iran," Ms. Ortagus said.

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

Details about the physician Iran wants to swap for Mr. White are not clear. Mr. Mehrabadi, the Iranian diplomat in Washington, said the doctor was out on bail and had dual citizenship in Iran and the United States. He added that dual-citizen prisoners currently held in Iran were not part of this round of negotiations.

The Iranian-American prisoners in Iran are all held on murky espionage charges that they have denied: Siamak Namazi, a businessman; his father Baquer Namazi, a retired United Nations official, and Morad Tahbaz, an environmentalist and businessman.

Iran is also seeking the release of an Iranian-American scientist in the United States, Sirous Asgari, 59, who tested positive for the coronavirus last week while in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as he awaits deportation.

Mr. Asgari was acquitted last November in federal court on charges of stealing trade secrets in violation of sanctions while on a sabbatical visit at an American university in Ohio. ICE agents detained him for deportation after his case had been dismissed.

While it appears Mr. Asgari is not part of this prisoner negotiation, his fate is not entirely detached from it. Mr. Mehrabadi said he had relayed to his American contacts that speedy release of Mr. Asgari would expedite Mr. White's return home.

# L'EI multiplie les attaques en Irak et en Syrie

## En Irak et en Syrie, le groupe Etat islamique bénéficie de la confusion et du désengagement occidental

L'EI a mené un assaut, vendredi, contre des barrages militaires à 100 km au nord de Bagdad. Dimanche, une nouvelle mutinerie a éclaté dans une prison d'Hassaké, tenue par les Forces démocratiques syriennes.

Par son ampleur, l'attaque est sans précédent depuis de longs mois. Vendredi 1er mai, l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) a mené un assaut coordonné contre plusieurs barrages des unités de la Mobilisation populaire (MP) irakienne, une force gouvernementale dominée par les milices chiites, près de Samarra, à 100 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad. Les combats, qui ont duré plusieurs heures et nécessité l'envoi de renforts, ont fait dix morts au sein de la MP.

Ces attaques en Irak interviennent alors qu'une nouvelle mutinerie a éclaté, dimanche 3 mai, dans une prison d'Hassaké, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, où sont détenus des membres étrangers de l'EI, tombés entre les mains des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), à dominante kurde. Dans les deux pays, la survivance du groupe dans des replis de son ancien territoire lui a permis de maintenir une partie de son influence en attendant que les données de l'équation régionale évoluent en sa faveur. La montée des tensions entre l'Irak et les Etats-Unis en Irak, ainsi que les conséquences de l'épidémie de Covid-19, pourraient déjà lui avoir offert un environnement un peu moins hostile.

Depuis le début du mois du ramadan, l'Irak est ainsi confronté à une vague d'attaques rarement observée depuis la chute, en 2017, du « califat » autoproclamé dans le pays. Après la perte de ses territoires, le groupe djihadiste avait reconstitué des cellules dans les zones libérées. Quelque 2 500 à 3 000 hommes,

selon les estimations, étendent leur ancrage local. Des combattants revenus de Syrie, infiltrés par la frontière poreuse qui court sur plus de 600 kilomètres à travers le désert, sont venus gonfler leurs rangs.

Depuis la fin mars, un regain notable d'activité de ces cellules est observé dans les zones où elles sont les plus ancrées : dans la province de l'Anbar, le long de la frontière avec la Jordanie et la Syrie, et surtout dans le nord-est du pays, dans un corridor qui s'étend de la province de Ninive jusqu'à celle de Diyala, en passant par Kirkouk. Selon le porte-parole de la coalition internationale de lutte anti-EI, le colonel Myles Caggins, si le nombre d'attaques est en progression depuis le début de l'année, il restait en avril encore inférieur au nombre des attaques observées sur la même période en 2019.

« Des attaques plus directes et agressives »

« Il y a un changement qualitatif dans les actions que le groupe mène, avec des attaques plus directes et agressives, certaines étant même menées de jour », analyse Sam Heller, consultant sur les groupes armés pour l'International Crisis Group (ICG). Les attaques, désormais quotidiennes, visent principalement des positions des forces de sécurité dans des zones rurales, parfois des notables locaux, au moyen de pièges explosifs et de tireurs embusqués. En parallèle, l'EI a multiplié les opérations de sabotage contre les infrastructures électriques.

Le groupe a toutefois démontré au cours des derniers jours sa détermination à engager des combats directs, dans un périmètre d'action qui dépasse ses zones de repli traditionnelles. Après l'attaque du 1er mai, la MP



Un combattant irakien des Forces de mobilisation populaire après l'attaque de l'organisation Etat islamique, à Mukaishefah (Irak), le 3 mai. AHMAD AL-RUBAYE / AFP

a annoncé avoir essuyé d'autres assauts dans les provinces de Diyala, Salahaddin et même à Jurf Al-Sakhr, à 60 kilomètres au sud de Bagdad, qui avait été reprise à l'EI dès 2014.

L'EI exploite les failles du dispositif sécuritaire, qui se sont accentuées avec la paralysie au sommet de l'Etat depuis l'automne 2019 et les tensions entre Washington et Téhéran. L'appui de la coalition anti-EI aux forces irakiennes a été réduit après l'assassinat, à Bagdad, du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, dans une frappe de drone américaine, le 3 janvier, sous l'effet des pressions des milices et des partis chiites proches de l'Iran.

La pandémie de Covid-19 a entraîné le départ temporaire de milliers de formateurs de la coalition. Les mesures prises contre la propagation du virus, notamment l'imposition du couvre-feu, ont aussi eu pour effet de détourner une partie importante des forces de sécurité irakiennes.

Dans les territoires disputés entre l'Etat fédéral et le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan irakien, le groupe tire profit de la brèche sé-

curitaire causée par le manque de coordination entre Bagdad et Erbil, et par le faible ancrage local des milices chiites qui contrôlent la zone.

« Reconstruire »

Si la perspective d'un basculement de territoires aux mains du groupe est exclue par les experts, l'organisation Etat islamique renforce son ancrage. « L'EI ne cherche pas forcément à recruter, il n'en a pas besoin pour le moment. Il ne cherche pas non plus à être très actif, tant que la coalition est toujours présente, mais plutôt à reconstruire ses réseaux économiques et ses voies logistiques », estime Arthur Quesnay, post-doctorant en sciences politiques à la Sorbonne.

Côté syrien, dans les étendues désolées de la Badiya, entre Homs et Deir ez-Zor, les djihadistes continuent de sillonner le désert et de tendre des embuscades aux unités loyales à Bachar Al-Assad. Le régime y a perdu des centaines d'hommes depuis son retour, fin 2017. « Dans la Badiya, l'Etat islamique paraît avoir les capacités militaires de ravir une petite ville, au moins temporairement, ce qui se-



rait d'une grande importance symbolique », relève un analyste basé en Syrie.

A une centaine de kilomètres à l'est, le cours de l'Euphrate sépare les territoires revenus sous le contrôle précaire de Damas de ceux pris à l'EI par les Forces démocratiques syriennes. « Des deux côtés du fleuve, la sécurité s'est effondrée. Une patrouille qui tombe dans une embuscade, c'est une scène devenue banale. Petit à petit, l'EI s'enracine de nouveau au milieu des trafics qui font survivre la région », s'inquiète le membre d'une association humanitaire.

A dominante kurde, les FDS ont chassé les djihadistes de leurs derniers bastions au printemps 2019. Un chapelet de localités disséminées le long de l'Euphrate en aval de la ville de Deir ez-Zor restent pourtant rétives à leur autorité. Cette zone, très conservatrice, travaillée par les mouvements djihadistes depuis le début des années 2000 et rongée par les conflits tribaux, a joué un rôle majeur dans l'expansion de l'EI en Syrie au début de la guerre civile.

Dans cette région aux allégeances mouvantes – certains membres des forces de sécurité des FDS sont eux-mêmes d'anciens de l'EI –, les djihadistes traquent aujourd'hui leurs anciens compagnons, adressant un message général : changer de camp se paie cher.

« Ils vivent au sein de la population, gardent leur influence en attendant des jours meilleurs », indique un consultant originaire de la région. Il remarque une évolution dans la nature des attaques : plus spectaculaires, orchestrées en plein jour. Le 17 mars, une cellule a assassiné en public, dans un stade, une personne accusée de collaborer avec les forces kurdes. Le cadavre de la victime a ensuite été brûlé sur le terrain, ses bourreaux menaçant de mort quiconque tenterait de le déplacer après leur départ. « Seule la menace de frappes aériennes américaines empêche Daech de reprendre le contrôle de cette zone où il dispose déjà de ressources, d'une base de recrutement et d'un environnement favorable », estime le consultant.

### Poudrières

« Les revenus pétroliers captés par les FDS ne bénéficient pas équitablement aux différents groupes tribaux, relève aussi une source liée aux programmes de stabilisation du Nord-Est syrien. Il faut que les tribus aient un degré plus important d'autonomie, mais les FDS voient toujours une partie de la population comme un risque sécuritaire, et les marginalisent. » Les raids en hélicoptère menés avec les forces spéciales américaines dans les villages, parfois planifiés sur la base de renseignements lacunaires, pourraient contribuer au climat de défiance générale. « La doctrine employée ressemble à un aveu de faiblesse. Ces opérations ponctuelles et aéroportées font comprendre aux populations que le terrain n'est pas réellement sous contrôle de la coalition », insiste cette source, basée en Europe.

L'influence des cellules de l'EI ne se limite pas à la vallée de l'Euphrate. Plus au nord du territoire contrôlé par les FDS, des porosités existent entre leurs réseaux

et l'intérieur des camps où sont retenues des femmes étrangères de combattants djihadistes, dont nombre de ressortissantes européennes. Des évasions ont pu être tentées, des réseaux de militantes adhérant toujours aux ambitions de l'organisation maintiennent une pression sur celles qui s'en sont éloignées. Les conditions de vie dégradées, l'éloignement de toute perspective de rapatriement contribuent à faire de ces camps de véritables poudrières.

Il en va de même pour les hommes détenus dans les prisons. Dimanche 3 mai, un mouvement de protestation a de nouveau secoué celle d'Hasaké. Regroupant 5 000 prisonniers majoritairement étrangers, ce centre de détention avait déjà été le théâtre d'une mutinerie le 29 mars. Un avion de chasse de la coalition avait même été dépêché en urgence pour intimider les mutins. Un vol en rase-mottes avait précédé la reprise en main du site, rappelant encore la fragilité de l'ordre issu de la guerre victorieuse contre l'EI.

The New York Times

May 6, 2020

By Alissa J. Rubin

## Iraq Chooses New Prime Minister, an Ex-Intelligence Chief Backed by U.S.

**W**ith the selection of Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq has its first real government in more than five months. He will confront an array of daunting problems.

BAGHDAD — Iraq's Parliament chose an American-backed former intelligence chief as the new prime minister early Thursday morning, giving the country its first real government in more than five months as it confronts an array of potentially crippling crises.

The prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, 53, who has a reputation for pragmatism, was also seen as an acceptable

choice to Iran, the other major foreign power competing for influence in Iraq.

Mr. al-Kadhimi is Iraq's first real prime minister since the last one resigned in November in the face of persistent antigovernment protests.

He has already promised to take a new approach to the social unrest, meeting protesters and consulting with them rather than backing the previous government's sporadic efforts to crush or ignore the turmoil.

But the protest movement that arose over government corrup-

tion and persistent joblessness last fall is no longer the government's most pressing crisis. The coronavirus has frozen the economy. Oil and gas revenues, the government's main source of income, are historically low.

And simmering tensions between the United States and Iran have played out in skirmishes on Iraqi soil that could turn into a wider war.

Plummeting energy prices have nearly halved Iraq's operating revenue, making it likely Mr. al-Kadhimi will have to either cut salaries for government workers or drastically re-

duce their numbers in the next few weeks.

Either way, with the government as the country's largest employer, the decision would have dramatic consequences.

It will also fall to Mr. al-Kadhimi and his advisers to determine when and how to reopen the economy and lift the curfews that have silenced the country's cities in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

The virus appears to have had relatively little impact on Iraq. The country has registered about 2,500 cases, among the lowest in the region, but pol-

iticians and health officials are unsure whether those numbers would explode if they lift restrictions.

Although Mr. al-Kadhimi faces a litany of problems, his presence on the political stage signals a degree of flexibility in a political system that seemed deadlocked. The grip of Shiite political parties with religious ties may also be loosening.

Since 2005, and the first elected government after Saddam Hussein's removal, the country's prime ministers have been from the Shiite Dawa Party, which has religious origins and close ties to Iran.

Mr. al-Kadhimi, whose political engagement was more secular, is thought to be more open to the anti-government protesters, many of whom have espoused anti-Iranian posi-

Realistically, however, Mr. al-Kadhimi will face strong resistance if he tries to directly confront the militias or take on the Shiite parties backed by Iran and their economic interests.

The Parliament remains the same as the one who supported the former prime minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi. And Mr. al-Kadhimi won approval for his government with the votes of the Fateh Coalition, the second largest in the Parliament, and which is made up of Shiite political parties that have close ties to Iran.

"We have an opportunity now to shake the system, we are not going to change the system, but we can shake it," acknowledged Mr. Jubori, referring to Mr. al-Kadhimi's willingness to consult with the protesters.



Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, of Iraq, delivering his first televised address after his nomination in April. Credit... Reuters TV

Knights said. "A candidate that the U.S. views with respect can get more for Iraq."

And that could end up being important for Iran, which has been uneasy about the United States military presence just across the Iraqi border.

"If Kadhimi says to Mike Pompeo that he needs something, he needs it, the U.S. is open to making deals with him," Mr. Knights said, referring to the American secretary of state.

Adding to the nation's uncertainty about the near-term future is the coronavirus.

Mr. al-Kadhimi ultimately will have to decide when to fully open the government, for instance, and when to allow foreign airlines to resume flights to Iraq, a move that is important for business, but could also be hazardous.

Mr. al-Kadhimi has little experience in politics, and in his job as intelligence chief worked principally behind the scenes. That may work to his advantage, since he does not have much of a public profile for people to object to. But it is hard to know exactly how he will balance the pushes and pulls from the Iranian and United States governments.

He is close to many people in both the United States and Europe. He spent much of his life, after fleeing Iraq in 1985, in England or the United States,

and was director of the Iraq Memory Foundation for seven years, which documented the atrocities of Saddam Hussein.

A native of Baghdad, he worked while in exile as a journalist, and has a law degree from a university in Baghdad.

In recent years he has been close to Barham Salih, who holds the job of Iraqi president, which has fewer powers than that of prime minister but which Mr. Salih has used to play a powerful, behind-the-scenes role. It was Mr. Salih, who has deep and longstanding ties to the United States, who nominated Mr. al-Kadhimi on April 9, after two other nominees failed.

Iran had objected to a previous pick, Adnan Zurfi, but sees Mr. al-Kadhimi as "the solution for now," said Sheikh Salih al-Obeidi, a longtime spokesman and confidante of Moqtada al-Sadr, the nationalist, anti-American Shiite cleric who is also wary of Iran.

"With Kadhimi, there is no history," Mr. al-Obeidi said. "He is the kind of person who has tried not to be against anyone."

The United States seems genuinely committed to Mr. al-Kadhimi and quietly helped rally support for him by intimating to the Iraqi political factions that the United States would take several steps to help shore up the country, if the Parliament voted for Mr. al-Kadhimi's government.



Health workers carried the coffin of a person who died from Covid-19, outside Najaf. Credit...Anmar Khalil/Associated Press

tions. He is also thought to be willing to protect them against the Iranian-backed militias that have previously attacked and killed them.

"With this prime minister, Iraq is breaking the cycle of having a prime minister who comes from political Islam. He is kind of a liberal, secular person," said Rahman Jubori, a senior fellow at the American University of Iraq in Sulimaniya.

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

Mr. al-Kadhimi's first real balancing act will be starting negotiations to reset the United States military mission in Iraq, as well as to figure out its commitment to working with Iraqis in other sectors, including health care and education.

In negotiating with the Americans, Mr. al-Kadhimi may have an advantage over a more pro-Iranian politician, said Michael Knights, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Middle East Studies.

"He can be tough with the U.S. in a way what no Iranian-backed candidate can be," Mr.

## IRGC soldiers killed in Kurdish area of Iran

Three Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members died in a gunfight in a Kurdish-majority part of western Iran yesterday, according to multiple reports.

Unidentified gunmen killed a colonel and two other members of the elite military unit in Divandarreh, in Kurdistan province about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of Iraq, The Associated Press reported. It cited Iran's Tasnim news agency.

Iran's state-run Press TV said the incident occurred during an IRGC operation against "terrorists" in Kurdistan province.

The colonel, Shakiba Salima, fought in the IRGC for several years in Kurdistan, according to Press TV. The outlet reported the three IRGC deaths

and also said a number of opposing fighters were killed.

There are several armed Kurdish groups in Iran's Kurdish majority areas on its western border. These groups have attacked the IRGC in the area for years. Kurds there are also subject to violence from the state. Kurdish smugglers known as "kolbars" are frequently shot at by border guards as they cross into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Kurdish political prisoners are regularly executed in Iran, which has one of the highest rates of death penalty use in the world.

Press TV and The Associated Press did not say who killed the IRGC fighters. Hengaw, which reports on Kurdish rights in Iran, tweeted that the fight was with a "Kurdish party," but did not specify which one.



Representatives of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran and Komala — two of the Kurdish parties in Iran with armed factions — did not immediately respond to Al-Monitor's request for comment. The Kurdistan Free Life Party, an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, also operates in Iran.

Some Iranian Kurdish groups base themselves across the border in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where they can operate more freely in small towns in the mountains. Iran sometimes bombs them across the border, mostly notably destroying Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party headquarters in Koya in late 2018.

## Islamic State prison riot underscores fragile security in northeast Syria

As battle-hardened Islamic State prisoners grow increasingly restless in northeast Syria's detention centers, Kurdish authorities are warning of their potential to exploit gaps in security while the international community's attention is focused elsewhere.

IS fighters took control of a large prison in the northeastern Syrian city of Hasakah on Saturday, according to the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that run the facility. The riot ended a day later when the SDF and members of the American-led coalition fighting IS negotiated

with the militants.

SDF spokesperson Kino Gabriel told Al-Monitor the talks with the detainees included their demands for improved living conditions and greater access to information about their fates.

"There is no timeline. We are working to make their living situation better, but it's not something easy that we can do," said Gabriel. "It's our demand to the international community to reach a solution on this."

The Hasakah prison incident was the second such riot in a little over a month. In late

March, several IS militants managed to escape the same facility, but were apprehended the next day. The prison unrest comes as remnants of the terrorist group are stepping up attacks and assassinations in Syria's eastern desert region, as well as in neighboring Iraq.

"[IS] will continue to seek to overwhelm SDF defenses of the prisons, both from prison riots inside and attacks from outside," said Nicholas Heras, a Middle East expert at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

"Most of the SDF-run prisons are small facilities where IS pri-

soners are crowded tens or hundreds to a room," Heras said. "These prisons require guards, administration, food, medical care that the SDF can barely provide."

When Turkey invaded northeast Syria in October, IS suspects welcomed the distraction. US officials said more than 100 detainees escaped as the Turkish shelling against Kurdish forces intensified and those guarding the facilities were redeployed to assist in the fighting.

The long-term security of the prisons and the potential for detainees to escape remains a



concern for Pentagon officials.

“The longer IS prisoners are held in SDF prisons, the greater the potential for them to organize breakouts,” said a Defense Department Inspector General report from January.

In an audio recording released in September, then-IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi called on his adherents to free detainees and their families from “prisons of humiliation.” Baghdadi was killed in October. More recently, the extremist group’s weekly newsletter encouraged jihadis to free IS prisoners as the coronavirus diverts the attention of the governments that hold them.

Although just one COVID-19 death has been reported in the northeast, experts say a mass infection among detainees is a real possibility given the region’s war-battered health infrastructure and the severe overcrowding at its prisons.

Feeding and guarding the prisoners is already overwhelming the Kurdish authorities, said Dareen Khalifa, senior Syria analyst at the Brussels-based International Crisis Group.

“The administration’s re-

sources are woefully lacking and their capacity is waning,” Khalifa said. “Should this virus hit these densely populated detention facilities, or much of northeast Syria, we risk being in a position to witness a major outbreak.”

Informal SDF-run detention centers across northeast Syria hold more than 12,000 IS fighters, according to Gabriel, most of them from Syria and Iraq. An estimated 3,000 are foreigners who traveled from Europe or elsewhere to join the group.

The SDF has repeatedly called on foreign governments to repatriate their nationals, but most European countries have dragged their feet or flat-out refused to bring them home for prosecution. Some have gone as far as to strip the citizenship of their citizens, leaving the under-resourced SDF to deal with them.

The families of those fighters have ended up in the same legal limbo. Rights groups have sounded the alarm on squalid conditions inside camps hosting tens of thousands of IS wives and children. In the al-Hol camp in Hasakah province, hundreds of children are thought to have died from



malnutrition, diarrhea and pneumonia.

But even in the cases of innocent and orphaned children born to foreign parents, many countries have refused to get involved.

“I think there’s zero interest to repatriate right now,” said Anne Speckhard, director of the Washington-based International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

“These people were already looked at as not worthy to come home, that they’re carrying a virulent ideology and they’ll infect others,” she said. “Well, now maybe they’re carrying COVID too.”

In the absence of repatriations, the SDF has asked that the in-

ternational community at the very least provide more aid to the northeast, where an estimated 1.6 million people rely on humanitarian assistance and medical equipment is in short supply.

In late March, the US-led coalition came through with \$1.2 million worth of supplies, which included masks, shields and batons for detention camp guards. But much more is needed, said Gabriel, who warned a major coronavirus outbreak would derail efforts by the SDF to rout the militants from the region. He said, “It would be hard to focus on our operations against ISIS sleeper cells or defend the area against any threats. It is hard now, and if any spread happens, it would be much, much harder.”



May 06, 2020

## France delegation secretly meets Syrian Kurdish militias, encourages unity

**A** French delegation has been holding talks with Syrian Kurdish factions in north-eastern Syria over the past week, in its latest attempts to create a united Kurdish front in the conflict.

According to the Iraq-based news site Rudaw, which cited local sources, the delegation first met with the group of

parties that form the Kurdish National Alliance (HNKS) on Sunday. It was then reportedly set to hold talks with the more powerful Democratic Union Party (PYD) the following day.

Although the meetings were meant to be focused on uniting the various factions, there are some who have claimed that they were not informed of the

delegation’s visit and have not been invited for talks, including the opposition Kurdish National Council (ENKS)

The head of the ENKS’s foreign relations Ibrahim Biro told the paper: “We are not aware of such a delegation.” This was countered, however, by another anonymous source within the Council who stated

that some of its officials have met with another French delegation in north-east Syria more than two weeks ago.

This round of meetings, which has caused speculation over its true purpose due to the secrecy surrounding it, is not the first that has taken place between Syrian Kurds and foreign delegations. Throughout the

ongoing Syrian civil war, both overt and covert talks and negotiations have been held by the French, Americans and Russians with Kurdish parties and militias seeking to influence them as an effective force in the conflict.

A HNKS source informed Rudaw that on 26 April, the senior US Deputy Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS William Roebuck met with Kurdish representatives in the country's north-east, telling them that he was pleased with recent efforts towards unity between the factions.

France's courting of the Syrian

Kurds is expected to anger Turkey, which sees Kurdish militias such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the PYD as affiliates of the internationally-recognised terror group the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that carries out attacks within Turkey

It would also not be the first time that France has opposed Turkey's interests in the region; it condemned the Turkish military's "Operation Peace Spring" in October last year. The manoeuvre was an effort by Turkey to deter a national security threat by clearing the area near its border with Syria of Kurdish militias Syria and



implementing a safe zone in north-east Syria for around two million displaced Syrians.

In 2018, Syrian Kurdish militias

urged France to play a more active role in the conflict, with French military forces having arrived in Kurdish-controlled areas months earlier.

# L'OBS

6 mai 2020

## Après l'EI, le coronavirus empêche une ex-captive yazidie de retrouver sa famille

**P**rès de Hassaké (Syrie) (AFP) - Kidnappée à l'âge de 11 ans par le groupe Etat islamique (EI), Layla Eido a pu renouer contact avec sa famille irakienne après une longue séparation. Mais coronavirus oblige, la jeune Yazidie est bloquée en Syrie depuis la fermeture des frontières et les retrouvailles tardent.

"Je compte les jours qui me séparent du moment où je vais revoir ma famille", confie l'adolescente de 17 ans, qui vit temporairement dans le nord-est syrien.

Elle a retrouvé sa liberté depuis un peu plus d'un an, après avoir été captive des jihadistes jusqu'aux dernières heures du "califat", mis en déroute par des forces kurdes en mars 2019, dans le village syrien de Baghouz.

Alors qu'elle allait enfin revoir ses proches pour la première fois en sept ans, les autorités en Irak et en Syrie à fermer

leur frontière commune pour lutter contre la propagation de l'épidémie de Covid-19.

"Maintenant c'est le coronavirus qui m'empêche de les revoir", soupire la jeune fille aux longs cheveux noirs attachés.

"Quand on a commencé à se parler sur WhatsApp, ils m'ont dit de rentrer", ajoute-t-elle. "Mais il y a eu le coronavirus, je suis restée ici. Je n'ai pas de chance."

En 2014, au moment de la montée en puissance de l'EI, Layla est enlevée à sa famille par les jihadistes, partis à l'assaut du foyer historique des Yazidis sur les monts Sinjar, dans le nord irakien.

Comme elle, des milliers de femmes et de filles, issues de la communauté kurdophone pluricentenaire, ont été arrachées à leurs foyers pour devenir des esclaves sexuelles ou être mariées de force à des combattants.



- "Mes souvenirs m'accompagnaient" -

Layla aussi a été obligée d'épouser un combattant irakien de 21 ans.

"Les deux premières années (de ma captivité), mes souvenirs m'accompagnaient, mais après je me suis habituée à la situation", confie l'adolescente, vêtue d'un jean et d'un pull rose à sequins.

Au début, "je me demandais si mes parents étaient en vie, je

pensais à mes amies avec qui je jouais, à notre enlèvement, et je pleurais", raconte-t-elle.

Amenée d'Irak en Syrie, elle fuit avec les jihadistes d'un village à l'autre, au gré des défaites successives de l'EI. Avant de finalement échouer à Baghouz, dans l'extrême-est syrien, où son époux sera tué dans une frappe aérienne.

Quand les forces kurdes, soutenues par une coalition internationale emmenée par Washington, proclament leur

victoire à Baghouz en mars 2019, Layla fait partie des dizaines de milliers de femmes et enfants évacués de l'ultime bastion jihadiste pour le camp de déplacés d'Al-Hol.

En début d'année, elle parvient à reprendre contact avec sa famille, grâce à une amie yazidie rencontrée au camp d'Al-Hol et depuis rentrée en Irak.

Cette amie a retrouvé les parents de Layla, eux-mêmes déplacés dans la province de Dohuk dans le Kurdistan irakien.

"J'ai pleuré la première fois que j'ai entendu la voix de mon père", se souvient Layla. "Je leur parle tous les jours, on échange des photos."

- "Une vie meilleure" -

En attendant son retour en Irak, elle est logée par un responsable yazidi syrien, chargé de coordonner les retours d'expatriés de sa communauté.

Dans sa maison, des représentations accrochées aux murs représentent Melek Taous, "l'Ange-Paon" vénéré dans la religion ésotérique mo-

nothéiste des Yazidis.

Assise avec l'une des filles du responsable, Layla fait défiler sur un téléphone les photos d'autres Yazidies au parcours similaire et qui l'ont précédée dans cette maison.

Une fois que la frontière sera rouverte, Layla pourra revenir chez elle mais se posera alors le défi de sa réinsertion.

Après des années à parler arabe avec les jihadistes, Layla craint que son kurde ne soit un peu hésitant. Et elle s'était habituée à porter le niqab, le voile

intégral imposé par l'EI, qu'elle a abandonné il y a un mois à peine. Convertie à l'islam durant ses années de captivité, elle a aujourd'hui renoué avec le yazidisme.

"J'ai peur que ce soit difficile de me réadapter à ma famille, j'étais petite quand je suis partie, j'ai vécu des traditions différentes", reconnaît-elle.

Mais au final, son choix est bien celui du retour. "Je veux une vie meilleure, sans avions, sans bombardements, sans la guerre", soupire-t-elle.

**L'Humanité**

7 mai 2020

## Ibrahim Gökçek est mort après 323 jours de grève de la faim

**A**près 323 jours de grève de la faim, Ibrahim Gökçek est mort à l'hôpital où il avait été transporté la veille. Le musicien de Grup Yorum avait cessé, mardi, son mouvement car les partis turcs d'opposition (CHP, HDP et TIP) ainsi que les principales associations de défense des droits humains l'avaient assuré qu'ils allaient se mobiliser pour que les demandes de concerts déposés par le groupe pour l'été prochain par les avocats de Grup Yorum soient suivies d'effets. Son état était tel - il pesait tout juste 40 kilos - que 3 litres de sang ont du lui être transfusés. Les médecins avaient annoncé qu'ils le maintiendraient en soins intensifs pendant au moins un mois. Mais son corps, trop affaibli, n'a pas résisté. Le 3 avril dernier, la chanteuse du groupe, Helin Bölek, avait rendu son dernier souffle, après 288 jours de grève de la faim. Quelques jours plus tard, un autre musicien turc, Mustafa Koçak, s'éteignait dans une prison turque après 297 jours de jeûne.

Dans une lettre adressée à l'Humanité, Ibrahim Gökçek termi-

nait son message par ces mots : « La bataille qui se livre dans mon corps se soldera-t-elle par la mort ? Ou alors par la victoire de la vie ? Ce que je sais avec le plus de force dans ce combat, c'est que, jusqu'à la satisfaction de nos revendications, je m'accrocherai à la vie dans cette marche vers la mort. »

Il s'est éteint parce qu'il défendait son droit à chanter la démocratie, la liberté et la justice, dans un pays qui a fait de la répression l'arme essentielle contre tous ceux qui s'opposent peu ou prou au pouvoir central et aux volontés de Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Grup Yorum déclinait ses chansons en turc mais aussi dans les langues des minorités comme les Kurdes ou les Arméniens

Depuis 2000, Grup Yorum n'avait plus l'autorisation de se produire en concert, les autorités turques accusant ses membres d'être affiliés au Parti-Front révolutionnaire de libération du peuple (DHKP-C). Créé par des étudiants en 1985, cinq ans après le coup d'Etat militaire, et qui se voulait « au service de tous les peuples opprimés, de



Turquie et d'ailleurs», le groupe revendique un engagement politique qui l'amenait à chanter en turc mais aussi dans les langues des minorités comme les Kurdes et les Arméniens. Les textes des chansons reprennent des épisodes de la vie sociale et politique de la Turquie. Comme, par exemple, la catastrophe des mines de Soma, en mai 2014, où 300 mineurs avaient perdu la vie dans un incendie parce que les mesures de sécurité n'avaient pas été mises en place.

En Turquie, la répression s'est aggravée après l'échec du coup d'État contre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, en 2016. Puis 6 de musiciens se sont retrouvés sur une « liste de terroristes », dont Ibrahim Gökçek. Pratiquement tous les membres du groupe ont ensuite été emprisonnés. Arrêté en

février 2019 lors d'une descente dans leur centre culturel, Gökçek a entamé sa grève de la faim au mois de mai l'année dernière « pour « la levée de l'interdiction de nos concerts, l'arrêt des assauts contre notre centre culturel, pour la libération de tous les membres emprisonnés de notre groupe et l'annulation des procès entamés contre eux, ainsi que pour que nos noms soient effacés de la liste des terroristes », comme il l'explique dans la lettre adressée à notre journal.

Ibrahim Gökçek est inhumé aujourd'hui dans le cimetière de Kayseri à Istanbul. Un rassemblement a été organisé dans le quartier de Gazi, connu pour son opposition déterminée au pouvoir. Son épouse, Sultan, emprisonnée, ne pourra pas assister à ses obsèques.



Kurdistan au féminin 7 mai 2020

## Le cadavre d'un jeune Kurde trouvé près d'un poste de police à Amed

**T**URQUIE / BAKUR – Le cadavre torturé de Devran Dinç, un jeune Kurde de 21 ans, a été découvert à deux pas d'un poste de police turque, dans le quartier historique d'Amed, une zone interdite au public et surveillée par des caméras de surveillance des forces de sécurité turques.

Le corps sans vie de Devran Dinç, qui se rendait une fois par semaine à Sur, le quartier historique de Diyarbakır (Amed), qui n'avait pas de cer-



cle d'amis, qui ne faisait que jouer de la tembur et lisait des livres, a été retrouvé à l'intérieur des remparts de Sur, 4

jours après avoir quitté la maison. Le père İsmet Dinç a déclaré que le corps de son fils portait des traces de torture.

Devran Dinç, qui a quitté son domicile dans le district de Bağlar à Diyarbakır le 30 avril, n'est pas rentré chez lui ce jour-là. Les recherches de la famille ayant échoué, le corps de Devran a été retrouvé le 4 mai, derrière la porte verrouillée de Kirikkapi des remparts de Sur, près d'un poste de police.

La famille dénonce les irrégularités dans le traitement du dossier de leur enfant par la police turque qu'ils avaient contactée dès les premiers jours de la disparition de Devran.



7 mai 2020

## Turkey, for sixth time, cuts water supply to 460,000 civilians in north Syria

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) - For the sixth time since October, Turkish-backed armed groups on Wednesday cut the flow from the Alouk reservoir that supplies water to areas in northeastern Syria's Hasakah province that are controlled by the Kurdish-led local government, depriving some 460,000 civilians in the region of the essential resource.

The local Hawar News Agency reported that workers had not entered the Alouk water station for ten days and the reason for the action was not immediately clear.

Speaking to the Syria-based Rojava Information Centre (RIC), an official from the local administration's Directorate of Water, confirmed the news.



"The waterflow from Alouk was cut off for over a month after Turkey bombed the station on the first day of its offensive," Thomas McClure, a Syria-based researcher at RIC, told Kurdistan 24.

"It was then restored, only to be cut off three times in February and March as a means of applying political pressure on the AANES (Autonomous

Administration of North and East of Syria), and cut off again by Turkish shelling of the waterpipe at the end of March."

"Today's severance, confirmed by the Hasaka Water Bureau to RIC, therefore marks the sixth time Turkey has cut off water flow from Alouk to Hasaka," he added.

The Alouk water station is near the border town of Ras al-Ain

(Serekaniye), which Turkey and its militant proxies took over in October during Turkey's so-called Peace Spring Operation.

Under Russian mediation, though, Kurdish-led authorities in northeastern Syria have been providing electricity to the Turkish-occupied areas in exchange for water flow, but Turkish-backed groups have continued to repeatedly cut off water, demanding higher levels of power.

Furthermore, the Energy Directorate of the Autonomous administration in Hasakah on Monday accused Turkey of reducing water flow from Turkish dams, which limited the number of hours of electricity in northeastern Syria coming from dams under administration control.

The Water Directorate announced on March 24, that it was beginning to install a new water pumping station as an alternative to Alouk in al-Himme area, located to the west of Haskah. It warned, however, that such a project would not be capable of providing anywhere near to replace Alouk and was being forced to look for additional water sources.

On March 23, UNICEF Repre-

sentative 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."

Her sentiment echoed those of some vocal German officials and groups like Human Rights Watch (HRW), which warned in late March that "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."

On March 27, 49 Syrian civil society and human rights organizations also condemned the water interruption in a jointly signed statement.

"This intentional denial of water

that the residents of these areas are suffering is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and is a war crime," the statement read.

The organizations called on UN agencies, as well as the United States and the European Union, to "prpressure the Turkish Government to allow the provision of water to deprived areas."

**R**  **J** **INFO**

7 mai 2020

## La Cour de cassation confirme la peine de prison pour Selma Irmak

**S**elma Irmak a été accusée d'« appartenance à une organisation illégale » par un tribunal pour ses discours et les manifestations auxquelles elle a assisté lorsqu'elle était coprésidente du Congrès pour une Société Démocratique (DTK) en 2015-2016, et a été condamnée à 7 ans et 6 mois de prison.

La 16eme chambre de la Cour de cassation a confirmé cette peine ainsi qu'une peine de 18 mois prononcée par la 5eme

Haute Cour pénale de Diyarbakir pour « propagande en faveur d'une organisation illégale ». La décision de la Cour de cassation a fait valoir que le Congrès pour une Société Démocratique (DTK) était identique à l'Union des Communautés du Kurdistan (KCK).

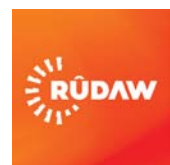
Les avocats feront appel de la décision devant la Cour constitutionnelle.

Si la Cour constitutionnelle ne



constate pas de violation dans la requête individuelle présentée par les avocats, le DTK

sera également accepté par décision judiciaire comme une entité illégale.



7 mai 2020

## For first time in its history, Kurdish parliament strips opposition MP of immunity

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region — For the first time since its establishment in 1992, the Kurdistan Region Parliament on Thursday stripped an opposition lawmaker of parliamentary immunity.

Soran Omar, a Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal) MP, will now have to face a lawsuit lodged against him by the Kurdistan Re-

gional Government (KRG) Council of Ministers' legal body last month for making public claims that Prime Minister Masrour Barzani owns a company and a bank.

The contentious vote was boycotted by 53 of out 111 MPs, including members of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Change Movement (Gorran),

Komal, Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and New Generation.

Of the 58 parliament members who attended the session, 57 voted for Omar's immunity to be revoked — including all of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) 45 MP contingent.

The revocation of immunity for three other MPs who had com-

plaints lodged against them for various charges in 2019 were also put to the parliament vote — Omed Khoshnaw, head of the KDP bloc, Ali Hama Salih, head of the Gorran bloc, and Shirin Amin Abdul Aziz, another Gorran MP.

All three were able to hold on comfortably to their legal standing, with revocation of Khoshnaw's immunity receiving three votes, while



that of Salih and Aziz received four apiece.

The KDP orchestrated the inclusion of the stripping of parliamentary immunity from all four MPs on the agenda, but the decision to dust off far older complaints against other MPs could veil the targeting of Omar for the comments about PM Barzani, a senior KDP figure.

The KRG Council of Ministers' Legal Room issued its complaint against Omar's claims on April 2.

In response, Kurdistan Region public prosecution office president Judge Azad Hassan called on the Council of Ministers to inform parliament to summon MP Omar to his office's Public Rights Committee Prosecutor, where he would have to submit evidence about his claims Barzani owned "a company" and "a bank." Failure to submit evidence could have resulted in the press of further charges against Omar, the office added.

In compliance with the call, Council of Ministers chief of staff Dr. Sabah Othman forwarded the



public prosecutor's order to parliament two days later, to "start necessary works" against Omar.

The move was rejected by parliament speaker Rewaz Fayaq on April 27, according to documents shared by Omar on his Facebook account that purportedly show her signature.

But according to bylaws, any topic can be included on the discussion agenda if chosen by two of the three parliament leadership members, without the consent of the third — even that of speaker Fayaq.

Omar on Tuesday held a press

conference describing the lifting of immunity from MPs as a "dangerous development for the ruling system of the Kurdistan Region, for freedom of expression, and the freedom of parliamentary work," he said.

But members of the KDP say stripping MPs of immunity to face legal proceedings is "very legal and normal", and a question of accountability to the public.

"Why should MPs feel like they are above the law and court?" KDP MP Peshawa Hawtamani said. "Why should they think that they do not have to appear before court?"

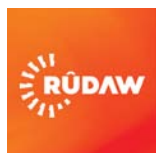
"If you have become MPs from public votes... just appear before the court and demonstrate why you should be acquitted."

The PUK, Gorran and Komal, KIU and New Generation parliamentary blocs issued a collective call for parliament not to include the lifting of MP immunity on its agenda.

"At this lawmaking session, it is better for the parliament to stay focused on resolving the financial and administrative issues of the Kurdistan Region as well as Erbil-Baghdad relations and the improvement of the livelihood of the people," the blocs jointly announced.

With Fayaq boycotting today's session, deputy parliament speaker from the KDP Hemin Hawrami and parliament secretary Muna Kahveci had to take the helm.

"I am not for the lifting of immunity from a parliamentarian because they have spoken against the state officials," Fayaq said in reference to Omar.



7 mai 2020

## Shadowing the treacherous treks of Kurdish kolbars

In the middle of the night, kolbars — grey- and black-market couriers who carry heavy loads on their back to transport goods — cross one of the world's most dangerous borders almost daily to transport foreign commodities from the Kurdistan Region to Iran's stifled markets.

The make their journey in treacherous conditions; through blizzards, and steep, twisting paths.

"We headed to the mountain at 4 am...This morning a man fell down the mountain. It is not known whether he is dead or alive. One says he is alive and another says he is dead. The way is very hard. It's icy and snowy. Everyone is miserable. Everyone becomes disabled and



paralyzed by this work," one kolbar said.

The people of Iranian Kurdistan, an area known by Kurds as Rojhelat, struggle to make a living in one of the most impoverished parts of the country. Many are university graduates, but high unemployment rates have left them poor and in desperate

search of whatever work they can get.

"There are some here who are engineers or doctors who came to work as kolbars. Some friends of mine, are medical graduates yet work here as kolbars," one kolbar said. "Can't a big county like this employ some doctors, teachers, and engineers? How

does god accept that? Help these people, please — thousands of people who are doctors, BA and MA holders, who come to work in misery as kolbars just to get 1,000 tomans. The people of Mariwan are all jobless." Not all of those who carry out this work are young graduates — some are as old as 80.

They arrive where loads containing anything from household appliances to cigarettes and ranging in weight from 25 to 75 kilograms await them. They earn 13,000 tomans per kilogram — equal to just one dollar. One by one, they pick up the packs and begin the perilous journey back to Rojhelat, where they risk being shot at by Iranian soldiers.

## En pleine crise économique, l'Irak se dote d'un nouveau gouvernement

Le spectacle des arrangements politiques menés jusqu'à la dernière minute dans l'enceinte du Parlement tranche avec l'urgence de la crise provoquée par la chute des cours du pétrole et la pandémie de Covid-19, qui a fait près de 100 morts dans le pays.

Après six mois de crise politique, l'Irak s'est doté d'un gouvernement. L'ancien chef des renseignements, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, 53 ans, a obtenu, dans la nuit du mercredi 6 au jeudi 7 mai, la confiance du Parlement.

Les partis chiites, sunnites et kurdes ne lui ont toutefois laissé aucune marge de manœuvre pour composer le « cabinet de solutions » qu'il appelait de ses vœux face à la conjonction des crises. S'accrochant bec et ongles au système de répartition confessionnelle et ethnique des postes, qui favorise depuis 2003 la corruption et le clientélisme, chaque camp et parti a défendu sa quote-part de portefeuilles ministériels et ses candidats.

Seuls quinze ministres sur vingt-deux ont été avalisés. Aucun nom n'a été proposé au pétrole et aux affaires étrangères, toujours disputés. Hormis des personnalités de premier plan à l'intérieur et aux finances, « la plupart ont des profils de directeurs d'administration : ni politiciens ni technocrates de haut vol », commente un observateur.

Le spectacle des arrangements politiques menés jusqu'à la dernière minute dans l'enceinte du Parlement tranche avec l'urgence de la crise provoquée par la chute des cours du pétrole et la pandémie de Covid-19, qui a fait près de 100 morts dans le pays. Les revenus tirés des exportations pétrolières pour avril confirment de sombres prédictions. Deuxième pays producteur de l'OPEP – le cartel des pays exportateurs de pétrole –, l'Irak, qui tire 95 % de ses recettes de l'or noir, a vu ces revenus chuter à 1,4 milliard de dollars (1,3 milliard d'euros) en avril, contre 2,9 milliards de dollars en mars.

A moyen terme, avec la stagnation des cours du pétrole, la réduction des quotas de production et l'impact économique de la crise sanitaire, les perspectives sont mauvaises. Dans son rapport trimestriel, publié début mai, la Banque mondiale anticipe une contraction du produit intérieur brut (PIB) de 9,7 % en 2020, et un déficit budgétaire de plus de 29 % du PIB, soit « la pire performance annuelle du pays depuis 2003 ».

### Les crises s'accroissent pour Bagdad

Avec la montée des tensions entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran sur son sol, et le regain notable d'attaques de l'organisation Etat islamique, les crises s'accroissent pour Bagdad.

Le vote de la loi budgétaire 2020 est l'un des chantiers prioritaires pour le premier ministre, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi. Le projet sur lequel travaillait son prédécesseur, Adel Abdel Mahdi, poussé à la démission en novembre 2019 par une vaste mobilisation, doit être revu. Il tablait sur un prix du baril de brut à 56 dollars – il était de 30 dollars, le 6 mai – et se voulait plus ambitieux encore que le budget 2019, quasi à l'équilibre avec 90 milliards de dollars de recettes et 93 milliards de dépenses.

Dans les meilleures prévisions, estime Ahmed Tabaqchali, directeur des investissements Irak chez Asia Frontier Capital, l'Irak peut espérer un prix du baril entre 30 dollars et 40 dollars et table sur des recettes pétrolières entre 28 milliards et 39 milliards de dollars.

Cela est loin de couvrir les dépenses courantes, évaluées à 67 milliards de dollars par la Banque mondiale. La question du paiement des salaires des 4 millions d'employés de la fonction publique se pose d'ores et déjà. Utilisés par les différents groupes confessionnels et ethniques pour tisser leurs réseaux clientélistes, ces emplois sont le premier poste de dépenses du pays. Avec ceux créés à l'automne 2019 pour cal-



mer la gronde sociale, la facture a grimpé de 44 milliards à 50 milliards de dollars en 2020.

Des coupes sont envisagées. Le gouvernement Abdel Mahdi avait commencé à rogner sur les dépenses d'infrastructures, notamment dans les secteurs prioritaires de l'électricité et du pétrole, et à reporter les paiements aux compagnies étrangères. L'idée qu'« il va falloir se serrer la ceinture » revient en leitmotiv dans les déclarations des conseillers économiques. Des coupes dans les salaires et les retraites de la fonction publique sont envisagées, notamment sur les primes et les compensations faramineuses qui les accompagnent.

Une ponction des salaires des petits fonctionnaires pourrait en revanche aggraver la détresse sociale qui a nourri le mouvement de contestation né en octobre 2019. Alors que les problèmes d'emploi, de corruption et d'accès aux services restent entiers, les mesures de confinement imposées face au Covid-19 ont frappé de plein fouet les foyers les plus pauvres, dont les quatre millions de travailleurs informels.

Faire fonctionner la planche à billets semble exclu à ce stade. Désindustrialisé par des décennies de guerre et de sanctions, et fortement dépendant des importations, l'Irak serait alors confronté à une forte inflation. L'autre option évoquée est d'aller puiser dans les réserves en devises étrangères qui s'élèvent à 63 milliards de dollars. « Selon

les coupes envisagées, cela pourrait leur permettre de tenir de six à neuf mois », estime Ahmed Tabaqchali. Toutefois, note de son côté un observateur, « cette option, qui risquerait d'affaiblir le dinar irakien face au dollar, ne semble pas être envisagée à court terme ». Des discussions ont été entamées avec la Banque mondiale et le Fonds monétaire international pour des prêts. Echaudés par le manque de réformes substantielles mises en œuvre dans le cadre des prêts accordés de 2016 à 2019, ils affichent leur prudence.

« Le diagnostic est posé mais, pour la mise en œuvre, il y aura toujours cette crainte de la contestation qui pousse la classe politique à différer les mesures douloureuses, quitte à être au bord du gouffre, en espérant une remontée des prix du baril de pétrole », conclut l'observateur. Ahmed Tabaqchali estime qu'une refonte totale s'impose, avec la suppression des subventions à l'énergie et à l'alimentation, remplacées par des aides sociales ciblées, et une libéralisation de l'économie pour développer le secteur privé et absorber la main-d'œuvre dans un pays où 60 % des 38 millions d'habitants ont moins de 24 ans. « Ce sera douloureux et pourrait précipiter une nouvelle crise sociale, admet le directeur des investissements d'Asia Frontier Capital. Cela va surtout contre le maintien des réseaux clientélistes. Or, dans un gouvernement comme celui-ci, chacun poursuit son intérêt et rien ne change. »



8 May 2020

## Kurds welcome Nashville Mayor's Kurdish face mask gesture

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) - The mayor of Nashville, John Cooper, wore a Kurdistan flag face mask as he opened his daily televised press briefing about the coronavirus on Tuesday, earning praise from the Kurdish community in the United States.

"Mayor Cooper made many of the citizens of Nashville happy with this gesture, especially the Kurdish Americans who live there. I'd like to thank him, the city of Nashville, and State of Tennessee for embracing their Kurdish-American citizens," Bayan Sami Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Representative to the United States, told Kurdistan 24 on Wednesday.

"It's also a testament to the growth and advancement of the Kurdish community there that not just the mayor, but many institutions and political figures including members of congress, appreciate their role as law-abiding, caring, and conscientious citizens."

Nashville has been home to North America's largest Kurdish constituency since the mid-1970s, having immigrated there after the collapse of the 1974 Kurdish uprising against the former Iraqi regime.

It now boasts an estimated 18,000 Kurdish residents, a fact that has earned it the nickname "Little Kurdistan."

The government website of Nashville has recently provided information on its COVID-19 response in the Kurdish language. Another page of the site read, "Nashville is the proud home of the nation's largest Kurdish population, as well as growing enclaves of immigrants from Somalia, Burma, and all over the world."



On October 14, the city of Nashville lit the Korean War Veterans Memorial Bridge in the colors of the Kurdish flag. (Photo: Northman Creative / Ryan Camp)

Tuesday was not the first time a Kurdish flag has been displayed in the city.

On October 14, both Nashville's city hall and a major downtown bridge were lit up in colors of the Kurdish flag in solidarity with ethnic Kurds in Syria when the US pulled troops from Syria amid a Turkish invasion, reported the Associated Press.

The move led to protest by Nashville's Kurdish community seeing it as a betrayal of America's Syrian Kurdish allies.

Later in October, however, President Donald Trump announced the US would keep forces in Syria and separate ceasefire deals brokered by the US and or Russia stopped further fighting, for the most part.

Rahman, the KRG representative, added that the "city's embrace of the community and the community's own response, especially the young generation who are creating their own

groups and associations, is a positive statement about America's diversity."

Dilman Yasin, a 33-year-old member of the Nashville Kurdish community, told Kurdistan 24 that many city's Kurds welcomed "this recognition of our community."

"I did not expect it, but I am also not surprised that he (Cooper) would make an effort to bring more awareness to safety measures such as wearing masks to micro communities," she added.

"When a local government is inclusive to a minority group, it shows that we are being recognized and the needs of our community are being acknowledged."

The Tennessee Department of Health on Wednesday confirmed the state has a total of 13,938 coronavirus cases, including 239 fatalities. So far, 33 in Nashville alone have died as a result of catching the highly-contagious virus.

Yasin pointed out that several Kurdish families in Nashville have been directly impacted by the coronavirus, including many Kurdish-owned small businesses and gig economy workers whose livings depend on groups of people gathering or using transportation that has been restricted for weeks as a result of curfews and other such measures.

"It is a serious threat to our community because many Kurds work in front line jobs that could potentially expose them," she said, adding, "Our local health department is currently looking for Community Health Workers to support individuals... and to stop the spread in immigrant communities."

Akhink Omer, a 31-year-old Kurdish-American nurse who is a resident of Nashville, was infected by the virus in March but recovered. She is working now in the COVID-19 only hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.





9 mai 2020

## Le musicien du groupe Yorum enterré après son enlèvement par la police turque

**L**e corps d'Ibrahim Gökçek, musicien du groupe Yorum, a été inhumé ce lundi matin, à Kayseri, sous haute surveillance policière.

Dimanche, le corps du musicien avait été enlevé par la police turque dans un lieu de culte alévi, à Istanbul, durant une cérémonie d'hommage. Il a été rapatrié aujourd'hui, dans sa ville natale, à Kayseri.

L'épouse emprisonnée de M. Gökçek, Sultan Gökçek, a pu participer à l'enterrement après avoir obtenu une dérogation spéciale du procureur de la République.

Pendant la nuit, les partisans

d'extrême droite, les Loups gris, de la ville de Kayseri se sont rassemblés pour protester contre l'enterrement du musicien de gauche, empêchant son inhumation dans le district de Basakpinar.

Malgré toutes les provocations de la police et des Loups gris, Ibrahim Gökçek a été enterré ce matin dans un autre cimetière de Kayseri.

Ibrahim Gökçek est décédé jeudi 7 mai, après une grève de la faim de 323 jours qu'il avait interrompue quelques jours plus tôt. Il protestait contre l'interdiction par les autorités turques du groupe de musique Yorum. Avant lui, la



chanteuse kurde Hêlîn Bölek, membre du même groupe, a perdu la vie le 3 avril 2020,

après une grève de la faim de 288 jours.

LE FIGARO

11 mai 2020

## Golfe d'Oman : plusieurs marins iraniens tués lors d'un exercice militaire

**D**imanche après-midi, un navire de soutien logistique iranien a été touché par un tir de missile, qui a fait 19 morts et 15 blessés.

L'incident est un nouveau coup dur pour les forces armées iraniennes. La marine de la République islamique a visé par erreur, dimanche 10 mai, un de ses propres vaisseaux lors d'un exercice militaire. Les détails du déroulement ne sont pas encore connus mais lundi, une déclaration officielle faisait état de 19 morts et de 15 blessés à bord du Konarak, un bâtiment de soutien logistique. Vraisemblablement provoqué par une erreur de tir à bord de la frégate Jamaran, dont l'équipage s'exerçait au lancement de missiles dans le golfe d'Oman, le Konarak aurait été touché en lieu et place d'une cible d'entraînement dont il était trop proche.

Le ciblage accidentel du Konarak par un autre bâtiment de la marine iranienne survient alors que Téhéran a mis en avant au cours de ces derniers mois l'accroissement de ses capacités de production d'équipements militaires. L'Iran a enregistré d'authentiques réussites, comme le lancement, à la fin d'avril, d'un satellite militaire, démontrant ainsi sa maîtrise de certaines technologies nécessaires et la production de missiles balistiques intercontinentaux.

L'incident de dimanche représente toutefois un échec cuisant. Il implique en effet le Jamaran, un navire symbolisant les efforts déployés par la République islamique pour renforcer ses capacités militaires maritimes de manière autonome, sans dépendre de technologies étrangères, aux-



Fabriquée aux Pays-Bas, le « Konarak » a été acheté par l'Iran avant la révolution islamique de 1979. - / AFP

quelles le régime de sanctions dont elle fait l'objet lui interdit l'accès. Equipé de missiles antinavires Noor, le Jamaran avait été inauguré par le Guide de la révolution islamique, Ali Khamenei, en personne, en 2010.

Crédibilité des autorités atteinte

« Les Iraniens entretiennent

l'idée qu'ils peuvent construire leurs infrastructures de défense seuls et le Jamaran est à cet égard leur chef-d'œuvre dans le domaine maritime », explique Fabian Hinz, spécialiste des forces armées iraniennes au Centre James-Martin pour les études sur la non-prolifération. Il estime que l'équipage du navire pouvait être occupé à tester un nouveau missile antinavire



d'une portée supérieure aux systèmes utilisés actuellement par la marine iranienne, une innovation récemment évoquée par des responsables militaires iraniens.

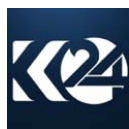
Le nouvel incident meurtrier arrive quatre mois après la destruction par la défense antiaérienne iranienne d'un avion de ligne d'Ukraine International Airlines au-dessus de Téhéran, qui avait provoqué la mort des 176 passagers. L'appareil civil avait été pris par un opérateur pour un missile de croisière adverse approchant

de la capitale de la République islamique. La catastrophe s'était produite quelques heures après un tir de missiles balistiques iraniens contre les forces américaines stationnées sur la base d'Aïn Al-Assad, en Irak. Cette frappe, dont le degré de sophistication avait marqué les esprits des observateurs, survenait en représailles à l'assassinat du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani dans un tir de drone américain, le 3 janvier, à Bagdad.

Si la mort de l'officier, qui était

devenu la figure de proue et le symbole de l'action extérieure de l'Iran dans la région, avait provoqué un bref moment de communion nationale, l'attitude des autorités à la suite de la destruction du Boeing ukrainien, dont les passagers étaient majoritairement iraniens ou d'origine iranienne, avait alors durement atteint la crédibilité des autorités. Après avoir masqué la vérité, les gardiens de la révolution, armée idéologique du régime et auteurs du tir meurtrier, avaient été forcés de reconnaître leurs responsabilités.

Quelques semaines plus tard, l'ampleur de l'épidémie de Covid-19 dans le pays était à son tour cachée à la population, le pays devenant bientôt le principal foyer régional du virus. Précipité de crises en crises, l'Iran est toujours visé par la politique de « pression maximale » décidée par l'administration Trump, dont les sanctions unilatérales corsètent l'économie du pays, entravent l'action de ses autorités et pèsent sur le quotidien des Iraniens ordinaires.



11 mai 2020

## Two abducted Kurdish Kakai farmers found killed in Khanaqin

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Two Kurdish farmers were found dead on early Monday in the Mekhas village in Khanaqin, Diyala province after they were allegedly abducted by the so-called Islamic State while they were harvesting their crops.

The incident comes as the Islamic State's recent attacks signal the terror group's resurgence in the central provinces of Diyala and Salahuddin. Besides its hit-and-run attacks, the group's long-practiced tactic is burning crops during harvest season.

Initially, "they were four Kurdish farmers harvesting when a number of suspected Islamic State militants attacked them," a source told Kurdistan 24, the farmers were even harvesting their crops at night continuously in fear of the terrorist group's arson acts. Later, the militants arrested two of the farmers, one of whom was the village head, the source said—the other two escaped. Following an intensive search



The two farmers who were found killed are from the religious minority Kakai group in Khanaqin. (Photo: Reuters/Azad Lashkari)

mission by Khanaqin's district police on Monday morning, "the two farmers were found killed," the source told Kurdistan 24.

Mekhas is a village inhabited by Kakai Kurds, a religious minority group, in Khanaqin district in Diyala province.

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the murder. However, a source in Khanaqin's police

directorates told Kurdistan 24 that the self-proclaimed Islamic State is suspected because they were involved in arson attacks on Kurdish farmers' crop fields in villages across Khanaqin.

Top Kurdistan Region officials and Peshmerga commanders have issued repeated warnings to both the Iraqi government and the international community

that the Islamic State remains active and capable of reasserting itself and re-emerging in the disputed territories to continue its campaign of violence.

A "security vacuum," as Kurdish officials have described it, has made the disputed areas in Diyala, Salahuddin, and Kirkuk more vulnerable to Islamic State attacks.

Editing by Karzan Sulavany



12 mai 2020  
By Nurcan Baysal

## No tests, no doctors, no civil society, no precautions in Kurdish cities

**T**he streets of Diyarbakır, Turkey's largest Kurdish-majority city, are crowded despite the COVID-19 outbreak. Half the shops are closed, yet the other half remain open. The city is managed by a state-appointed official, like most of the other Kurdish-majority cities in Turkey. Selçuk Mızraklı, the elected mayor of Diyarbakır, and most of the other Kurdish mayors have been imprisoned over allegedly "supporting terrorist groups".

During the state of emergency that followed the 2016 coup attempt, 20,000 Turkish health workers, including 3,315 doctors, were removed from their jobs due to accusations of terror links. Many of those who lost their livelihoods were Kurdish doctors, nurses and health workers.

A few weeks ago, I spoke with Mehmet Şerif Demir, the chairman of Diyarbakır's Chamber of Medicine, who has also faced numerous court cases on terror charges. He told me that there were many suspected COVID-19 patients in Diyarbakır, but the hospitals are not equipped to test for coronavirus infections. Tests are sent to Ankara for processing, but this can take days.

Because the state forbids local governments from releasing infection numbers in their jurisdictions, he did not give me the number of COVID-19 patients or further information on what is happening inside hospitals. He simply said: "I can't."

Since 23,000 people returned from pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in the early days of the pandemic, the coronavirus has spread across Turkey's Kurdish cities. The government decided to close Turkey's borders with Iran and Iraq in February, but this also came too



late, and by that time many infected people had passed from Iran, a coronavirus hotspot, to Turkey's east and beyond.

I called a friend who is a doctor at a state hospital. She said she was afraid to go to work, because the precautions taken in hospitals have been insufficient and health workers are not provided with protective equipment and gloves, leaving doctors unable to protect themselves from the virus.

Closing children's crèches without providing alternatives has caused another big problem for people who have to go to work during the pandemic, such as doctors, nurses, police and municipality workers. My doctor friend told me that finding someone who can take care of her two small children has made every day a challenge.

Later, I called another doctor from Van, a mainly Kurdish city on the border with Iran, who asked me not to use his name. He said that it has been hard to control the border with Iran and refugees keep finding a way across. The number of coronavirus patients in Van hospitals has been high, but he also said he could not give any figures.

After the collapse of the peace

process between the Turkish state and the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in July 2015, fighting broke out again in many Kurdish provinces, this time in urban centres. Many Kurdish cities were demolished during military curfews and armed clashes, leaving millions of people homeless.

State administrators were appointed to replace elected mayors in dozens of pro-Kurdish municipalities. Almost all Kurdish media outlets – even a Kurdish children's channel – have been shut down. Kurdish civil society organisations were closed by the government for allegedly supporting terrorist groups. Thousands of Kurdish teachers and doctors were fired from their jobs in the region. More than 10,000 members, parliamentarians, and even the co-presidents of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) have been imprisoned.

Women's centres, cultural centres, food banks, Kurdish art centres, Kurdish language associations and many more institutions have been closed by the government. Even some Kurdish football clubs have been closed. Today, there is no strong organisation or leader left that can address the Kurdish community at a time of crisis like the

coronavirus pandemic.

In the last five years, the state launched a war against the Kurdish language. Kurdish courses were closed, Kurdish language departments were closed, optional Kurdish lessons were cancelled. Kurdish names were removed from public parks, streets and every corner of our cities. Kurdish cultural and linguistic symbols were destroyed. All public billboards have been turned to Turkish.

After COVID-19 broke out, I launched a solidarity campaign with the poor neighbourhoods of my city. While distributing food packages in the Sur and Bağlar districts, I saw many public billboards giving information about the coronavirus measures. But they are all written in Turkish.

Nearly 70 percent of the districts' inhabitants speak Kurdish, and many do not know Turkish, so they have no idea about what these public billboards tell them about the precautions they need to take against the pandemic.

Today, there are not enough tests, not enough doctors, no civil society, no mayors, and not enough measures to tackle the coronavirus in Kurdish cities.



## Turkey targets US-backed Syrian Kurdish peace talks

**T**urkey is openly disgruntled over the US-backed effort to unite disparate Syrian Kurdish factions that kicked off last month.

Turkey has begun to openly signal its displeasure with US-backed peace talks between Syrian Kurdish rival groups, raising the specter of failure for the latest US attempt to fulfill what have so far proven irreconcilable goals: to pursue its partnership with the Kurds and to repair ties with its NATO ally, Ankara, which have been badly frayed because of it.

Turkish disgruntlement was palpable in a May 11 dispatch in Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency. It characterized the effort to unite disparate Syrian Kurdish factions as more of a conspiracy aimed at creating "international representation space" for the "terrorist organization in northern Syria."

The same day, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement blasting Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and the UAE over their ongoing standoff in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

It also accused France, the aspiring mentor of "this axis of malice" of "intentions to establish a state of terror in Syria," ostensibly over its involvement in the Syrian Kurdish peace talks.

Ominously and unusually, Turkey also fingered Nechirvan Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and a longtime ally of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Anadolu said Barzani had been "commissioned" by France and the United States to implement the plan. The talks between the Kurd-



An officer of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) stands guard near the Syrian-Iraq border Oct. 31, 2012. Photo by REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani.

istan National Congress (KNC), an umbrella group of Syrian Kurdish opposition parties linked to the Istanbul-based Syrian opposition and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is part of the autonomous administration in northern Syria, kicked off last month.

The State Department's envoy on the ground, William Roebuck, is mediating between the sides.

Past stabs at unifying the groups were spearheaded by Barzani's uncle Massoud, who presides over the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the most powerful faction in Iraqi Kurdistan. They failed for a variety of reasons. Turkish resistance channeled through its leverage over the KDP and the KNC was one them.

Turkey views the consolidation of Kurdish gains in northern Syria as an existential threat that encourage its own more than 14 million Kurds to break away. "Kurdish rights are like the sea level rising. When they rise in one place, they rise everywhere," said Giran Ozcan, the Washington representative of the Kurdish-friendly People's Democratic Party, the third

largest grouping in the Turkish parliament, in emailed comments to Al-Monitor.

Its therefore not surprising that the United States has been pressing the sides, albeit unsuccessfully, to refrain from commenting to the media about the talks, for fear they will be torpedoed yet again.

The latest round of dialogue was initiated in late October by Mazlum Kobane, the genial commander in chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who played a critical role in helping the US-led coalition collapse the Islamic State's so-called caliphate in Syria.

Kobane has shifted his strategic acumen from the battlefield to diplomacy, hoping that by co-opting KNC factions and smaller Kurdish parties outside it, he can bolster the autonomous administration's diplomatic legitimacy with more local buy-in as well. Kobane described the effort in a January interview with Al-Monitor as establishing a common Kurdish front to push for Kurdish rights, be it at now stalled UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva or in future negotiations with the central government in Damascus.

The timing is no coincidence. Kobane reached out to the KNC shortly after Turkey's Oct. 9 invasion of a large swath of SDF-controlled territory between the towns of Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain. The operation, rendered possible by President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from the area following a telephone call with Erdogan, came as a huge shock.

Turkey justified the assault by echoing its long running mantra that the SDF are terrorists. The claim stems from the fact that Kobane and other top cadres in the autonomous administration were for decades members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations.

The PKK has been waging an armed campaign against the Turkish state since 1984, punctuated by failed peace talks and cease-fires. The latest round collapsed in 2015 and Ankara has since escalated pressure on the SDF and the United States to sever its ties with the group.

The United States has, in turn, been pressing Kobane to purge the SDF and all other security and civilian structures of the seasoned PKK cadres who came in to build them when the Syrian army withdrew from the area in 2012.

There is talk within the State Department's Syria team led by Jim Jeffrey about replicating the "Manbij model" across northeast Syria. The term refers to the mixed Arab-Kurdish town of Manbij, the sole SDF-administered town lying west of the Euphrates River where dozens of alleged PKK-

linked administrative and military cadres were removed in line with Turkish demands though Turkey continues to insist these were never fully met.

A deal with the KNC and other Syrian Kurdish parties would weaken Turkey's argument that the autonomous administration is a "PKK terror state." Optimally it would end Turkey's objections to the US-SDF partnership, shielding the northeast from further Turkish attacks — and further US betrayals.

At the same time, it would ease Turkish pressure on the Barzanis to squeeze access via the Fish Khabur, the sole border crossing through which humanitarian aid currently flows to the northeast.

In a perfect world, Ankara would open its borders for trade as it did with the Iraqi Kurds, allowing the autonomous administration to become self-sustaining and grow into "another northern Iraq."

The regions' oil, which Trump cites as the reason for keeping US forces in the northeast, would help grease relations, as it already does with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Tensions between Washington and Ankara over the former's alliance with the SDF would subside.

From the PKK's vantage point, this scenario might compel Turkey to resume peace talks with their imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan and agree to a cease-fire, allowing the rebels a sorely needed respite from Turkey's increasingly lethal drone attacks. "We want the talks to succeed more than anyone," a veteran PKK operative based in Iraqi Kurdistan told Al-Monitor via WhatsApp. Such calculations are likely to have propelled the United States to support the negotiations. A senior KNC official speaking not for attribution insisted to Al-Monitor, "The

Americans are really serious, and Mazlum [Kobane] is very sincere."

The KNC could not in any case afford to shun Kobane's overtures. To do so would have bolstered the PYD's charges that the KNC takes its cues from Ankara amid public fury over the Turkish invasion. What's more, the Barzanis, who help bankroll the KNC as Anadolu pointedly noted, appear to be on board.

But any deal may have been doomed from the get-go.

A well-informed source who requested anonymity in order to speak freely observed, "It's good to have the Kurds getting along and not being divided by great powers." The source cautioned, however, "There are parts of the US-Syria team that see some big Kurdish front as the key to mollifying Turkey and turning the northeast against Damascus and containing Iran." But as the October assault showed, Washington continues to prioritize its relations with Ankara, often at the Kurds' expense.

The source continued, "Turkey will never lift its veto over the SDF in Geneva. The United States should insist on the SDF being in Geneva, particularly as it continues to cite Geneva as the only forum for discussions with Damascus. But it won't do that, so if the goal is a vehicle for the SDF getting to Geneva — as opposed to Kurdish unity being a positive end in itself — then it's a road to nowhere."

Omer Ocalan, the PKK leader's nephew and an HDP lawmaker, was blunter. "Wherever Turkey sees the Kurds making political gains, it's determined to crush those gains." He added in a telephone interview with Al-Monitor, "The Kurdish issue has spilled beyond Turkey's borders and can no longer be solved through Turkey's inter-

nal political dynamics. As Kurds we have to think big now and strike international alliances based on our own values and principles, of course."

Western observers speaking not for attribution contend that another, less altruistic reason the United States wants the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds to get on better is because it seeking to consolidate its troop presence in the Kurdish areas as an alternative to the rest of Iraq. Calls for US troops to leave have been growing since the assassination of Iran's Quds Force leader Qasem Soleimani.

"The Americans need the border [between Iraqi Kurdistan and northeast Syria] to be open and fluid. Their reliance on the Kurds has increased. The key thing is the process itself. It helps keep things calm," said one of the observers in a telephone interview.

Some disagree. "Why do we need that tiny sliver of northeast Syria to stay in northern Iraq?" another asked.

In a further cynical maneuver, Turkey has invited the Association of Independent Syrian Kurds to join the Istanbul-based Syrian opposition. Founded by Ankara in 2016, the obscure grouping has little if any support on the ground, according to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, co-author of the recently published "The Kurds of Northern Syria." Turkey's goal, Wilgenburg said, is "to put more pressure on the KNC while they are in talks with the PYD."

"Turkey wants to show they have alternatives to the KNC in case they reach a deal with the PYD," and the fact that Turkey extended the invitation "betrays its concern that a deal may be in the works," he added in emailed comments to Al-Monitor.

Wilgenburg believes that

chances of a deal "are limited" and not just because of Turkey. The PYD would be reluctant, for example, to fold the KNC's Roj Peshmerga force into the SDF "because it doesn't want a competing armed Kurdish force" that could plant the seeds of intra-Kurdish conflict. Likewise, the Roj Peshmerga would be unwilling to place themselves under the SDF's command.

The KNC official acknowledged that so far the talks have been more about "agreeing on basic principles" rather than moving forward on substance. He added that the KNC would not share a table with the PYD in Geneva until a comprehensive agreement that includes political, administrative and military issues is reached.

An added complication has arisen in Iraqi Kurdistan. Tensions between the PKK and the KDP have flared in Zine Werte, a strategic mountain pass in Iraqi Kurdistan that leads to the Qandil Mountains, where the PKK is based.

The KDP sent in more than 400 of its Peshmerga fighters to Zine Werte last month, saying it was to monitor traffic to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by people traveling to and from Iran. The PKK says the real reason is to help clear path for a Turkish offensive on Qandil and has called on the KDP to withdraw.

When it sent a trio of fighters to relay that message, Turkey killed them in an airstrike. The standoff plays into Ankara's hands, as it places Kobane in the awkward position of bolstering ties with Barzani while the latter's fighters confront fellow Kurds. By the same token, though, military pressure on Qandil gives Kobane more space to tell PKK hard-liners that diplomacy, not war, is the way forward. The abiding challenge for all sides is to convince Ankara, too.



## Female Iranian Political Prisoner Pens Letter About Pressure on Fellow Inmates

**A** female political prisoner has revealed that the authorities are intensifying pressure on female political prisoners by transferring them to Qarchak Prison in Varamin, the notorious women's prison that she is held in.

In a May 8 letter from her prison cell, Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee said that two female Kurdish political prisoners have been put under more pressure by the prison authorities because of this transfer. The two women in question are Zeinab Jalalian who was moved from Khoy Prison on April 28, and Sakineh Parvaneh, who has been sent to a mental hospital several times.

Iraee begins by praising Jalalian, who is one of the longest-imprisoned political prisoners in Iran and has endured "tremendous torture".

She wrote: "Jalalian has resisted against all the threats and harassments over her long prison years, not giving up to the pressures dictating confessions to her... Zeinab Jalalian

is not only a person or just a prisoner. She is the meaning of struggle... She is the teacher of the alphabet of freedom-loving. She is the meaning of Resistance."

Iraee further explained that Jalalian is being moved away from her family in the transfer to Qarchak, which will increase the psychological pressure on her.

When Jalalian was moved, her family was not told where she was going and feared that she may have been executed or to have died from coronavirus, which is spreading throughout the prisons. A source said she was taken to "the Prison of Urmia, and then to Kermanshah, and subsequently to the Evin Prison in Tehran" before being moved to the Quarantine Ward of Qarchak Prison where newly-admitted inmates are being held until they are deemed to be non-infectious.

Speaking of Parvaneh, Iraee said that the Kurdish political prisoner suffered incredible pressure in recent months and



*Iraee, who had been serving a six-year prison sentence since October 2016 primarily for writing an unpublished story about stoning in Iran*

will no doubt be under more pressure at Qarchak Prison. She noted that Parvaneh has been taken to the Aminabad Mental Hospital several times since being transferred to Qarchak, where she was "further pressured and brutalized", which indicates a violation of human rights.

Iraee wrote: "We condemn these vindictive measures by intelligence agencies and believe that remaining silent

against them is a crime, imposing a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of their claimants."

Iraee cites that it is the tenth anniversary of the execution of Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish teacher and political prisoner, who chose to be flogged and hanged rather than give in to the mullahs, and suggested that the people of Iran wouldn't commemorate him if they gave in to pressure from the mullahs.



May 12, 2020

## Turkey only NATO member singled out in U.S. religious freedom report

**T**he U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended the State Department to return Turkey on a special watch list for "engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom," according to the commission's annual report.

As analysts Tuğba Tanyeri Erdemir and Aykan Erdemir noted in a piece for Providence Magazine, the designation suggested on the USCIRF's 2020 report singles out Turkey as the only country among NATO's 30 member states with religious freedom concerns.

"Throughout 2019, members of Turkey's various religious and ethnic minority communities faced both threats of violence and actual violence, including at least two killings," the 104-page report said.

It cited the stabbings of Christian missionary and South Ko-

rean citizen Jinwook Kim on the streets of the southeastern city of Diyarbakır and an Armenian citizen at her front door in Istanbul, two months after a message arranged in the shape of a cross was posted on the wall of her home, containing profanity and referring to the residents as "infidels".

The USCIRF also highlighted the need for U.S. diplomatic staff to track religious minority communities' efforts to "open, regain, renovate, and protect places of worship and other religious sites of spiritual, cultural, or historic importance," while also working with the Turkish government to "ensure the protection of such sites."

"In several instances in 2019, Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek religious and cultural sites, including numerous cemeteries, faced severe damage or destruction – in some cases because of neglect, but also due to vandalism or state-endorsed construction projects – while Alevi holy sites in the (central) province of Sivas faced similar threats after the government issued mining permits for the surrounding area," it said.

The commission called for the U.S. government to "exert significant pressure on Turkey to



provide a timeline for its withdrawal from Syria," while ensuring that neither its military nor its Syrian allies "expand their area of control in northeast Syria."

The USCIRF also asked the Trump administration to prevent Ankara from carrying out "religious and ethnic cleansing" in that area, or "otherwise abuse the rights of vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities there."

"Religious minorities in other areas that Turkey seized earlier, such as Afrin, continued to experience persecution and

marginalization, especially displaced Yazidis and Christians," the report said.

Turkish troops, backed by Syrian armed groups, seized the Kurdish-majority town of Afrin in March 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.

Turkey and its Syrian allies have denied reports of any de-

liberate ethnic cleansing or intention to expel the Kurdish population, but say the mass displacement of Kurds following Afrin's capture was a by-product of the fighting.

Following the Turkish government's 21-month imprisonment of pastor Andrew Brunson, whose incarceration led to U.S. sanctions and the subsequent 2018 lira crisis, has prompted USCIRF to recommend the passing of a U.S. law that advocates "the release of United States citizens and locally employed diplomatic staff unlawfully detained in Turkey" and calls for the U.S. president to impose sanctions on senior Turkish officials.

Ankara targeted some of the detained U.S. persons "in connection with religion or belief", a violation that calls for "the imposition of sanctions on responsible Turkish officials", the USCIRF said.

12 mai 2020  
Hiwa Shilani

## Kurdistan celebrates 27th anniversary of Lalish Cultural Center for Yezidis

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – On Tuesday, top Kurdistan Region officials congratulated Yezidis (Ezidis) in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq on this year's anniversary of the Lalish Cultural Center, an organization created by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) after the fall of the former Iraqi regime which keeps a presence in areas populated by the religious minority.

The organization is named for the Ezidis' most holy site, the temple of Lalish in Duhok province.

"On the twenty-seventh anniversary of the foundation of Lalish Center for Culture and Societal, I congratulate its president, members and all of my Ezidi brothers and sisters. I wish them success in their work and ven-



The three towers of Lalish's main temple, the Yezidis' (Ezidis') most sacred site. (Photo: Levi Clancy)

tures," said Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani in a statement.

"The Lalish Cultural Center has a

rich history in serving the Kurdish culture, especially in preserving the societal customs and culture of the Ezidis. I thank and support the

efforts of the members of your institution, and wish you continued work and development," he added.



The night before, KDP leader Masoud Barzani conveyed similar sentiments in his own statement, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, president and members of the Lالش Center, on the twenty-seventh anniversary of the formation of the Lالش Cultural Center, we congratulate you, and our Ezidi brothers and sisters. We value your work, appreciate your accomplishments and efforts to develop the cultural and social situation of the Ezidi brothers and brothers."

Barzani also voiced his support for the Ezidi community as a whole, and especially his best wishes for their society to heal as a whole after being persecuted by the Islamic State.

The emergence of the terrorist group and its violent 2014 assault on the Ezidi-majority city of Sinjar (Shingal) led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Ezidis. Most of them fled to the Kurdistan Region,

while others resettled in neighboring countries in the region or Western states.

Others were not as lucky and remained stranded in the war zone, where they experienced atrocities and mass executions at the hands of the extremist group for years. Militants subjected women and girls to sexual slavery, kidnapped children, forced religious conversions, executed scores of men, and abused, sold, and trafficked

women across areas they controlled in Iraq and Syria, actions now widely recognized as genocide.

Before the 2014 attack, there were roughly 550,000 Ezidis in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. As the jihadist group took over large swaths of territory in Nineveh Province, 360,000 Ezidis escaped and found refuge elsewhere, according to the Ezidi Rescue Office.



13 mai 2020

## Iran: les décès dus au coronavirus dépassent les 41.000

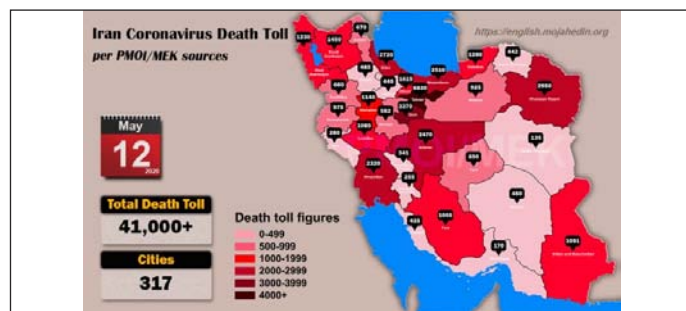
**T**endance à la hausse dans les provinces de Lorestan, Mazandaran, Khuzistan, Kerman, Markazi, Kohgilouyeh- Boyer-Ahmad, Ilam et Hamedan

Maryam Radjavi : Le limogeage soudain du ministre de l'Industrie, des Mines et du Commerce par Rohani montre une recrudescence des luttes intestines du régime sur le pillage et le vol des richesses du peuple iranien, et témoigne de la crise profonde que traverse le régime en pleine pandémie de coronavirus. Le pillage, la répression et l'exportation du terrorisme sont dans l'ADN de ce régime.

L'Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d'Iran (OMPI / MEK) a annoncé dans l'après-midi du 12 mai 2020, que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus dans 317 villes d'Iran a dépassé les 41.000. Le nombre de victimes dans les provinces de Qom est de 3370, de Mazandaran 2510, de Khuzistan 2320, de Golestan 1280, de Hamedan 1140, de Lorestan 1085, de Kurdistan 660, de Markazi 582 et de Kerman 460.

Selon les médecins, plus de 130 patients atteints du coronavirus sont morts dans les hôpitaux de Shohaday-e Gornam à Téhéran et plus de 100 dans celui de Ziayan.

Le comité d'épidémiologie du ministère de la Santé a an-



Tendance à la hausse dans les provinces de Lorestan, Mazandaran, Khuzistan, Kerman, Markazi, Kohgilouyeh- Boyer-Ahmad, Ilam et Hamedan

noncé que « la tendance à la hausse ou le début du pic est observé dans huit provinces, dont Lorestan, Mazandaran, Khuzistan, Kerman, Markazi, Kohgilouyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, Ilam, et Hamedan », a rapporté aujourd'hui l'agence de presse officielle ISNA.

Ce 12 mai, Mehrdad Sharifi, secrétaire du conseil sanitaire d'Ahwaz (sud-ouest), a déclaré au quotidien Etemad : « nous avons plus de 1 800 chiffonniers à Ahwaz qui font les poubelles sans gants ni autres équipements de protection. Ces gens courent un grand risque de contracter le coronavirus et de le transmettre à d'autres. Le Siège pour l'exécution de l'ordre de l'imam Khomeiny et la Fondation des déshérités ne pourraient-ils pas aider à les organiser et à les prendre en charge au moins pour une courte période afin de freiner la maladie ? » a-

til-il demandé.

L'agence Mehr, citant le vice-président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Kerman, a rapporté aujourd'hui une « augmentation significative du nombre de cas positifs dans la province ces derniers jours ».

Concernant la situation dans le Khorassan du nord, le député du parlement du régime, Hadi Ghavami, a déclaré ce 12 mai à radio Farhang : « le nombre de cas positifs dans le Khorassan du nord a augmenté ces derniers jours et le nombre de morts est plus élevé que la moyenne nationale. »

De plus, l'agence IRNA, qui couvre le Khorassan du nord, a écrit : « depuis la première semaine de mai, le nombre de malades a progressivement augmenté dans la ville de Farouj. La ville est dans le rouge. »

« La diminution quotidienne du

nombre de décès annoncés donne l'impression que la situation est normale », a écrit aujourd'hui le journal Jahan-e-Sanat. « Dans les villes, les personnes atteintes de COVID-19 ne sont plus amenées à l'hôpital et sont laissées sans soins adéquats (pour mourir) et les envoyer directement au cimetière. »

Saïd Namaki, le ministre de la Santé, a une fois de plus blâmé la population pour cette tendance à la hausse lors d'une interview à la télévision publique le 12 mai : « j'exhorte la population à respecter les directives. Nous sommes confrontés à d'énormes pertes dans certaines provinces où les gens ne les ont pas respectées en pensant que la situation est quelque peu normale. La plus grande erreur stratégique est de penser que le Covid-19 est terminé. Nous pouvons revenir à une mauvaise situation à tout moment. C'est vraiment un phénomène dangereux et malveillant. » Il a également déclaré que selon la « recommandation » de Khamenei, « une nouvelle révision a été effectuée afin qu'une cérémonie religieuse spéciale à l'occasion de l'anniversaire du martyr de l'imam Ali (le premier Imam chiite) ait lieu de minuit à 2 heures du matin ». Il a ensuite averti que les gens devaient être attentifs et « ne pas nous reprocher, à

mes collègues et moi-même, d'avoir augmenté le nombre de cas positifs parce que nous essayons d'ouvrir les mosquées à la population ».

Selon Radio Farhang du 12 mai, Amir Khojasteh, député du Majlis, a déclaré : « aujourd'hui, notre pays est confronté à deux types de virus, le coronavirus et une mauvaise gestion dans les domaines de l'économie et du niveau de vie (qui) combinés à une inflation débridée ont rendu la vie si difficile que les conséquences du Covid-19 sont comparativement insignifiantes. Le président dit avoir li-

mogé le ministre de l'Industrie, des Mines et du Commerce pour ne pas avoir contrôlé le marché automobile. Qui limogé pour une augmentation de 100 % du prix des logements et des appareils ménagers et une hausse de 30 à 100 % du prix de la nourriture et des vêtements alors que les salaires des ouvriers, des employés et des retraités n'ont pas été augmentés ? »

Un autre député du Majlis, Hosseini-Kia, a déclaré aujourd'hui à Radio Farhang : « l'incompétence du gouvernement vieillissant est devenue évidente pour tout le monde

pendant la pandémie de coronavirus. Le gouvernement a rejeté la responsabilité de tous les problèmes sur la population et n'a pas sérieusement mis en œuvre l'aide qu'il avait promis de fournir. »

Mme Maryam Radjavi, présidente élue du Conseil national de la Résistance iranienne (CNRI), a évoqué le nombre croissant de victimes du coronavirus et a ajouté : « toutes les promesses des mollahs au peuple iranien démuni et sinistré sont creuses et sans valeur. La seule façon de mettre fin à la pauvreté et au chômage est

de mettre fin à la dictature néfaste des mollahs et d'établir la liberté et la souveraineté populaire. »

Mme Radjavi a ajouté : Le limogage soudain par Rohani de son ministre de l'Industrie, des Mines et du Commerce montre une recrudescence des luttes intestines du régime sur le pillage et le vol des richesses du peuple iranien, et témoigne de la crise profonde que traverse le régime en pleine pandémie de coronavirus. Le pillage, la répression et l'exportation du terrorisme sont dans l'ADN de ce régime.

Kurdistan au féminin 13 mai 2020

## TURQUIE. Les villes kurdes privées de mesures de sécurité efficaces devant la pandémie du COVID -19



**B**AKUR – L'Etat turc néglige les régions kurdes en matière de protection de la santé en pleine pandémie du COVID-19. La journaliste Nurcan Baysal donne l'exemple de la ville d'Amed pour montrer combien la vie des Kurdes ne vaut rien en Turquie...

Les rues de Diyarbakir, la plus grande ville kurde du pays, sont bondées malgré l'épidémie du coronavirus (COVID-19). Seule la moitié des magasins sont fermés. La ville

est gérée par un fonctionnaire d'Etat nommé à la palace du maire élu, comme c'est le cas dans la plupart des autres villes kurde. Selçuk Mızraklı, le maire élu de Diyarbakir – et la plupart des autres maires kurdes accusés d'avoir « soutenu des groupes terroristes » – ont été emprisonnés.

Pendant l'état d'urgence qui a suivi la tentative de coup d'Etat de 2016, 20 000 Kurdes travaillant dans le secteur de la santé, dont 3 315 médecins, ont été licenciés en raison

d'accusations de liens avec le terrorisme. Parmi ceux qui ont perdu leur travail, on compte des médecins, des infirmières et des travailleurs de la santé.

Il y a quelques semaines, j'ai parlé avec Mehmet Şerif Demir, le président de la Chambre de médecine de Diyarbakir (Amed), également confronté à de nombreuses affaires judiciaires pour des accusations de terrorisme. Il m'a dit qu'il y avait de nombreux patients suspectés d'être atteints de COVID-19 à

Diyarbakir, mais que les hôpitaux n'étaient pas équipés pour tester les infections au coronavirus. Les tests sont envoyés à Ankara, mais leur traitement peut prendre plusieurs jours.

Comme l'État interdit aux gouvernements locaux de divulguer les chiffres d'infection dans leur régions, il ne m'a pas donné le nombre de patients COVID-19 ni d'autres informations sur ce qui se passe dans les hôpitaux. Il a simplement dit : « Je ne le peux pas ».



Depuis que 23 000 personnes sont revenues du pèlerinage à la Mecque dans les premiers jours de la pandémie, le coronavirus s'est répandu dans les villes kurdes de Turquie. Le gouvernement a décidé de fermer ses frontières avec l'Iran et l'Irak en février, mais cette décision est également arrivée trop tard ; de nombreuses personnes infectées étant venues d'Iran, un point chaud du coronavirus.

J'ai appelé une amie médecin dans un hôpital d'État. Elle m'a dit qu'elle avait peur d'aller travailler, parce que les précautions prises dans les hôpitaux sont insuffisantes et que le personnel soignant ne dispose pas d'équipements de protection et de gants, ce qui les rend incapables de se protéger contre le virus.

La fermeture des crèches sans proposer d'alternatives a causé un autre gros problème aux personnes qui doivent aller travailler pendant la pandémie, comme les médecins, les infirmières, la police et les employés municipaux. Mon amie médecin m'a dit que trouver quelqu'un qui puisse s'occuper de ses deux jeunes enfants est un défi quotidien.

Plus tard, j'ai appelé un autre médecin de Van, une ville à majorité kurde située à la frontière avec l'Iran, qui m'a demandé de ne pas utiliser son nom. Il m'a dit qu'il était difficile de contrôler la frontière avec l'Iran et que les réfugiés ne cessaient de trouver un moyen pour la traverser. Le nombre de patients atteints de coronavirus dans les hôpitaux de Van est élevé, mais il a également dit qu'il ne pouvait pas donner de chiffres.

Après l'effondrement du processus de paix entre l'État turc et le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), interdit en juillet 2015, les combats ont repris dans de nombreuses provinces kurdes, cette fois dans les centres urbains. De nombreuses villes kurdes ont été démolies lors des couvre-feux militaires et des affrontements armés, laissant des millions de personnes sans abri.

Des administrateurs de l'État ont été nommés pour remplacer les maires élus dans des dizaines de municipalités pro-kurdes. Presque tous les médias kurdes – même une chaîne pour enfants kurdes – ont été fermés. Les organisations de la société civile kurde

ont été fermées par le gouvernement pour avoir prétendument soutenu des groupes terroristes. Des milliers d'enseignants et de médecins kurdes ont été licenciés de leur travail dans la région. Plus de 10 000 membres, parlementaires et même les coprésidents du Parti démocratique du peuple kurde (HDP) ont été emprisonnés.

Des centres pour femmes, des centres culturels, des banques alimentaires, des centres d'art kurde, des associations de langue kurde et bien d'autres institutions ont été fermés par le gouvernement. Même certains clubs de football kurdes ont été fermés. Aujourd'hui, il n'existe plus aucune organisation ou dirigeant fort qui puisse s'adresser à la communauté kurde en temps de crise comme la pandémie de coronavirus.

Au cours des cinq dernières années, l'État a lancé une guerre contre la langue kurde. Les cours de kurde ont été fermés, les départements de langue kurde ont été fermés, les cours optionnels de kurde ont été annulés. Les noms kurdes ont été retirés des

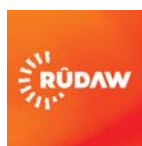
parcs publics, des rues et de tous les coins de nos villes. Les symboles culturels et linguistiques kurdes ont été détruits. Tous les panneaux d'affichage publics ont été tournés vers le turc.

Après l'éclatement de COVID-19, j'ai lancé une campagne de solidarité avec les quartiers pauvres de ma ville. En distribuant des colis alimentaires dans les quartiers de Sur et Bağlar, j'ai vu de nombreux panneaux d'affichage publics donnant des informations sur les mesures contre le coronavirus. Mais ils sont tous rédigés en turc.

Près de 70 % des habitants de ces quartiers parlent kurde et beaucoup ne connaissent pas le turc. Ils n'ont donc aucune idée de ce que ces panneaux d'affichage public leur disent sur les précautions à prendre contre la pandémie.

Aujourd'hui, il n'y a pas assez de tests, pas assez de médecins, pas de société civile.

(source Nurcan Baysal d'Ahval)



May 13, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Kurdish authorities in NE Syria 'have not received' new WHO coronavirus aid : health official

**R**egion – A senior Kurdish official from northeast Syria's administration on Wednesday said it had not yet received any coronavirus-related aid the World Health Organization (WHO) reported it had delivered to the region on May 11.

WHO tweeted on Monday that

it "managed to deliver a 30-ton medical shipment by road to #Al\_Qamishli in North-East Syria (NES) as a part of @WHO response to the emergency health needs of the most vulnerable populations," but had not specified whether the aid had been sent to facilities under the control of the Kur-

dish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria - also known by the NES acronym - or to a hospital controlled by the Syrian regime.

Jwan Mustafa, co-chair of the area's autonomous administration health board, said it had not yet received any amount of

the shipment.

"To this moment, we have not received any amount of the reported 30 tons of aid," Mustafa told Rudaw English on Wednesday. "We have not been told when and how much of it will be given to us."

However, a WHO spokesperson told Rudaw English later on Wednesday that the shipment of "exclusively medical equipment" is currently being held at warehouses in the area with its contents "under inventory."

"This equipment will be distributed to functional health facilities in NES (northeast Syria)," including the National Hospitals of Kiswa, Qamishli, Raqqa, as well as Keira in Rural Deir ez-Zor, Manbij Hospital, Haska's health department, and Qamishli's National Hospital," said the spokesperson, who did not want to be named.

"Staff availability and capacity within the hospitals were the taken into account when planning supply distribution," they added.

All the locations listed by the WHO spokesperson, with the exception of the Qamishli National Hospital, are under autonomous administration control, Mustafa told Rudaw English on Wednesday.

The administration has been told by WHO that the locations would receive their allocations of the shipment "in the coming days," Mustafa added.

The delivery was "the first road shipment in two years" to northeast Syria, Akjema Magtyamova, WHO representative to Syria, said on Monday.

The shipment "contains lifesaving medical equipment such as incubators, ventilators, ICU beds & other vital medical equipment and supplies needed to serve the population in the area," according to another tweet by the organization.

Three cases of COVID-19 have so far been confirmed by the NES authorities; it is unclear if these incidences figure



Employees of a pharmaceutical factory in Homs, central Syria check stock of hydroxychloroquine, used in the country to prevent or cure COVID-19, on April 28, 2020. Photo: Louai Behsara / AFP

into the nationwide total of 45 cases confirmed by the Syrian regime.

Another NES official said earlier this month that the administration has not been receiving enough international help to fight the novel coronavirus.

"No one is helping us... we have not received any aid from international organizations," NES Foreign Relations Department co-chair Abdulkarim Omar told Rudaw on May 5.

According to Omar, the only aid received had been from Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani, who sent four polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines needed to test samples for the virus last month.

Home to hundreds of thousands of displaced people, northeast Syria has mainly depended on the Semalka border crossing, connecting northeast Syria with the Kurdistan Region, for humanitarian aid deliveries. It was closed on March

1 to stem the spread of COVID-19, and only reopened on April 20.

The area, known to Kurds as Rojava, used to receive international aid through al-Yarubiya border crossing with Iraq, but was left out of a January 2020 UN Security Council vote to allow the passage of humanitarian provisions into Syria due to Russian opposition. The Kurdish-controlled northeast was deprived of cross-border channels for UN medical assistance after Russia blocked proposals to renew the mandate for humanitarian aid to be routed through the border with Iraq, insisting that provisions instead come through Damascus, where it can be controlled and conditioned by the Syrian government.

WHO submitted a memo to the Security Council in late April, including a call from aid groups working with the UN to grant urgent permission for aid deliveries through al-Yarubiya.

However, an updated version

of the memo no longer included the direct appeal to reopen the border crossing between Iraq and northeast Syria.

In mid-April, WHO announced that a shipment of 20 tons of "medical supplies such as incubators, ventilators, and personal protective equipment" had been sent to the northeast Syrian city of Qamishli.

A WHO communications officer said that the "majority" of that shipment would go to the self-administration controlled area - but local monitor the Rojava Information Center, citing the Kurdish Red Crescent, reported that all of the aid shipment had been sent to the city's National Hospital, controlled by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Damascus.

With two of the NES' three reported COVID-19 cases remaining active, the administration on Tuesday extended its lockdown until after Eid in late May - though its restrictions only apply at night, from 7 pm to 6 am.

## PKK attacks Turkish military base in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The attack comes amid intra-Kurdish tensions in Iraq over the PKK's and Turkey's presence in the country.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) reportedly attacked a Turkish military base in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq today.

The PKK attacked the Turkish base in Kani Masi, a mixed Assyrian-Kurdish area in Dahuk province near the Turkish border. Clashes ensued for an hour and the area lost electricity due to the fighting, the Iraqi Kurdish outlet Rudaw reported, citing a local official.

Turkey had not released a statement on the incident by the time of publication, but said the day before that its airstrikes had "neutralized" four PKK members in the Khakurk and Metina areas in Dahuk.

Turkish state media also reported a PKK attack that killed two aid workers in a vehicle in Turkey's southeastern province of Van today.



A female Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighter adjusts her scarf while another carries a picture of jailed Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan at their base in Sinjar March 11, 2015. Photo by REUTERS/Asmaa Waguih.

The PKK has fought Turkey for greater Kurdish autonomy for decades. Turkey, as well as the United States, regards the PKK as a terrorist group.

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The PKK has long based itself on the mountainous border area between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey. It also has a presence in Iraqi government-controlled areas such as Makhmour south of Erbil and

the Yazidi city of Sinjar near the Syrian border. Turkey frequently bombs apparent PKK targets in these areas, especially in the mountains close to the border, believing them to be a security threat.

Turkey has several bases in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in Erbil and Dahuk provinces. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) controls these areas and has an economic relationship with Turkey based

on Kurdish oil exports and Turkish goods imports. The KDP-led Kurdistan Regional Government has criticized both Turkey's military actions and the PKK's actions in its territory.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a party that controls Sulaimaniyah province, has historically had better relations with the PKK. However, PUK officials closed PKK-affiliated political offices last year after pressure from Turkey.

The PKK's presence has recently created greater tensions between the KDP and the PUK. Last month, KDP-affiliated peshmerga forces deployed to Zini Werte, where the PKK operates. The PUK in turn sent its own peshmerga forces to the area, which has served as a buffer zone between the KDP and the PUK. here.

There has been increased criticism of the Turkish military presence in KDP territory by Kurdish civilians and PKK affiliates recently.



May 14, 2020  
By Halgurd Sherwani

## Kirkuk's Palkana villagers face renewed phase of Arabization, arson attacks during harvest season

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The villagers of Kirkuk province's Palkana experience a new phase of Arabization on their agricultural lands as well as arson attacks

during harvest season, according to the village head.

Arson attacks on agricultural lands are mounting in disputed Kirkuk's districts and villages,

particularly during harvest season, by unknown perpetrators. However, many accuse the so-called Islamic State of being behind such intentional firing of grain fields. Palkana's village

head, though, accuses a different entity.

"In addition to their [brought-in Arabs] invasion, they try to cause us a problem," Pal-



kana's village chief said, citing last year's arson attacks "as they intentionally did last year" to force us to leave the area.

"We [Kurds of Palkana village] show some flexibility" for the sake of thwarting escalation, he added.

Regarding the issue of Arabization, the village head also mentioned "six Arab families that were brought in" and "invaded" the lands that belong to the Kurds.

"These lands belong to them [the Kurds] according to the official documents," Nasr Harki, a Kurdish lawmaker and a member of the Committee, told Kurdistan 24, while he was visiting the village along with a delegation from the Iraqi parliament to closely investigate the issue. Several Sunni Arab tribes in Kirkuk province's Hawija dis-



Kurds who have returned to their lands 15 years ago after the fall of Saddam Hussein present documents they say are deeds for the property that was taken from them during the Ba'athist regime's Arabization campaign. (Photo: Archive)

trict have asked the federal government to provide them arms with which to defend themselves against the extremist organization's increasing attacks.

"The main issue of the Kurdish landowners is with these

people [Tribal forces]," Mohammad Khurshid, head of Kirkuk's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Branch, told Kurdistan 24, explaining that it poses a threat on the Kurdish property rights.

According to a document released by the Iraqi Civil Defense Directorate, from late April to early May, around 100 hectares of agricultural lands have been burnt across Iraq, with three incidents in Kirkuk province, totaling 26 acres of agricultural lands in the province.

The former Iraqi Ba'ath regime, under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, implemented Arabization campaigns in Kirkuk province and other Kurdish-populated areas in Nineveh, Salahuddin, and Diyala.

After the fall of the former Iraqi dictator in 2003, the lands were given back to their Kurdish and Turkmen owners when the Arabs left voluntarily in exchange for a sum of money promised by the Iraqi Constitution.



May 14, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Turkish artillery strikes villages in Kurdistan Region; civilians evacuate

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Turkish military has been firing large numbers of artillery shells into areas within the neighboring Kurdistan Region for the past two days, causing distress and panic among local villagers and significant damage to their property, said the commander of border guards in Duhok province on Wednesday night.

Commander Dler Zebari told local media that Turkey near continual bombardment in recent years has ultimately "caused the evacuation of more than 400 villages within Duhok provincial borders."

He added, "In the last two days the bombing has been intensi-



A Turkish airstrike targeting alleged positions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) strikes territory inside the Kurdistan Region, Oct. 6, 2019. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

fying from the district of Zakho on the border until Amedi district, on the pretext of going after the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in those territories, causing major damage to the

resident's properties and preventing them from working and going outside out of fear for their lives." The PKK is engaged in a decades-long insurgency against

Turkey over Kurdish rights and self-rule in a conflict that has resulted in the death of over 40,000 people on both sides.

Zebari also explained that PKK fighters do sometimes enter villages along the border, attracting the Turkish fire along with them and thus putting the lives of civilians at risk.

Sarbast Akrawi, head of the Kani Massi subdistrict outside Zakho, told local media outlet Shafaq News, "The power line that supplies four villages were cut off last night due to the bombing, and that district administration, in cooperation with the Electricity Department, repaired the wires and pillars on Wednesday morning."

"The village of Kaset, in the west of the district, was severely damaged, as the extensive shelling landed too close to the homes of its residents, breaking windows and doors in some of the homes and causing a state of panic among the villagers."

Ankara, along with Washington and NATO, designates the PKK as a terrorist organization. The group is thought to have fighters near hundreds of villages inside the Kurdistan Region, mainly in the mountainous areas near the Turkish and Iranian borders. In the past decade, Turkey has regularly shelled areas inside

the Kurdistan Region, but operations this year have intensified and widened in terms of scope and territory covered. In some areas, Turkish forces have mobilized as far as 30 kilometres deep inside the autonomous region's border.

As civilians, agriculture, trade, and the local environment continue to suffer from the clashes, residents and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials have repeatedly asked the PKK and the Turkish government to take their fight elsewhere.

In April, the Iraqi foreign minister summoned the Turkish am-

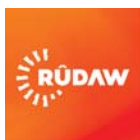
bassador in Baghdad and delivered him a memorandum of protest against airstrikes Ankara conducted earlier that week against alleged PKK positions in the Kurdistan Region and a refugee camp in the disputed city of Makhmour.

"The ministry condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the attack carried out by the Turkish side which resulted in the loss of life and property damage," said Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ahmed Sahaf.

A statement Thursday by Iraq's Joint Operations Command, which coordinated national mi-

litary and police forces, read, "We deplore the violation of Iraqi airspace by Turkish fighter jets, which took place on Wednesday morning and targeted a refugee camp near Makhmour."

It added, "This provocative behaviour is inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness in accordance with the international agreements, and is a flagrant violation of Iraqi sovereignty," stressing "the need to stop these violations in respect of and commitment to the common interests between the two countries."



May 14, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## US 'appreciates' President Barzani's efforts to unify Rojava parties: Kurdistan Region presidency

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – The top US diplomat in Erbil has expressed his "appreciation" for Kurdistan Region president Nechirvan Barzani's role in recent unity talks between Kurdish parties in northeast Syria at a meeting between the two officials on Wednesday, according to a readout from Barzani's office.

US Consul General Steven Fagin's comment on the Erbil meeting comes amid a period of detente between the ruling Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the opposition Kurdish National Council (ENKS) in northeast Syria, an area known to Kurds as Rojava - though the two parties have yet to reach any final deals in the talks supported by international community, most notably by the US, France and Russia.

During his meeting with the Kurdish leader on Wednesday,



US Consul General in Erbil Steven Fagin (left) meets with President of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani in Erbil on May 13, 2020. Photo: Kurdistan Region Presidency on TwitterW>

the US consul general "expressed his appreciation for President Nechirvan Barzani's efforts to bring the Kurdish groups together in order to maintain unity and consensus in the country."

The two also discussed Erbil-Baghdad relations, the newly-

formed Iraqi government, and efforts by Rojava Kurds for unity, according to the Barzani office readout. Fagin's office has yet to make a statement on the meeting.

US involvement in Kurdish party diplomacy includes an April 26 meeting between top

US diplomat in Syria William Roebuck and a number of Kurdish party representatives in Rojava, with Roebuck expressing satisfaction in recent progress towards unity, an anonymous source told Rudaw.

The most recent meeting between a foreign delegation and Rojava parties was in early May, when a French delegation held a fresh round of talks with the parties.

Nechirvan Barzani has also held several meetings with representatives from both sides in Erbil.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) controlling Rojava is politically ruled by the PYD and militarily ruled by its People's Protection Units (YPG) armed wing, which makes up the majority of the SDF.



The ENKS have previously criticized the PYD for its unwillingness to share power with the opposition parties, and crackdowns on their officials and offices, but recent talks have led to the release of an ENKS official, reopening of its offices, and the return of a party leader's confiscated house.

Power-sharing talks between the ENKS and the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), the umbrella group for the ruling PYD and its allies began in 2014, mediated by then-president of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani - the leader of the Kurdistan Region's ruling Kurdistan Demo-

cratic Party (KDP), which has supported the ENKS since its foundation in the first year of the Syrian conflict in 2011.

Animosity between the groups continued despite several subsequent rounds of talks leading to an initial deal, with each side accusing the other of treason.

Weeks after Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched a military operation against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria, SDF commander Mazloum Abdi initiated a new round of talks between Kurdish ruling and opposition parties in October 2019.

In a tweet in mid-December, Abdi thanked the Kurdistan Region officials for their role in facilitating talks.

"The positive position of the Southern [Iraqi] Kurdistan's administration in this regard is appreciated and we thank them," he said.

'No clear agenda'

Inayet Diko, a Germany-based Kurdish writer and journalist, told Rudaw late Wednesday that the US is acting "behind the scenes" in bringing Kurdish parties together in Syria, but questioned the benefit when "Kurds have no clear agenda."

"When Kurd[ish politicians] go to the US, Europe and other countries, they are asked about their demands. Neither the Kurds within the [Syrian Opposition] Coalition nor the Kurds who rule the Autonomous Administration [of North and East Syria] show a clear list of demands," said the writer who is originally from Rojava and an outspoken commentator on the area's politics.

Diko also commended Barzani's role in the talks process, but hoped it "becomes practical", so that negotiation outcomes materialise in real change.



15 mai 2020  
Par Annick Cojean

## Les familles de prisonniers syriens face au virus du silence

**E**nquête | Alors qu'il est impossible de connaître le bilan réel de l'épidémie de Covid-19 dans le pays, de nombreuses familles en exil s'inquiètent pour leurs proches qu'elles pensent retenus dans les prisons secrètes du régime.

Elles sont syriennes, réfugiées en Turquie, en Jordanie, au Liban, en Grèce, en Allemagne ou au Royaume-Uni. Elles ont subi la guerre et tous ses maux : la terreur et les bombes, les destructions, les déchirures, la traque, l'exil. Elles ont vu mourir des voisins, des amis, de la famille. Elles ont quitté leur maison, les lieux de leur enfance ; laissées parfois derrière elles de vieux parents qui ne pouvaient les suivre ; subi dans leur fuite humiliations, harcèlements, chantages. Leurs nuits ne sont jamais tranquilles ; depuis longtemps, les rêves ont déserté.

Ne restent que des souvenirs, de l'amertume, les traumatismes. Et pour toutes celles



AMALS HEALING AND ADVOCACY CENTER

qui ont souhaité nous parler, une obsession qui les maintient en vie et les empêche de vivre : un mari, un père, un fils, un oncle, arrêtés par la police du régime syrien et disparus dans ses geôles sans qu'on ne sache plus rien.

**Des milliers de questions sans réponse**

Pas un mot, pas une information, pas le moindre acte d'accusation ni la moindre procédure. Aucun moyen de se défendre, aucune adresse où se rendre. Des milliers de questions sans réponse. Juste la forte suspicion d'un emprisonnement dans des centres de tortures qu'Amnesty International a décrits comme « des

abattoirs humains ». Et un deuil impossible. Circulez, oubliez, il n'y a rien à voir. Silence. Les disparus semblent rayés de tous les registres officiels comme de la surface de la terre. Au moins 83 000 encore aujourd'hui, estime le Réseau syrien pour les droits humains qui documente chaque cas.



Or voilà que le coronavirus a ravivé l'angoisse de ces familles. Voilà que des histoires circulent à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la Syrie, qui les affolent et les laissent imaginer une hécatombe dans le réseau de prisons et centres de détention du régime d'Assad, l'officiel et le clandestin que personne n'a le droit de visiter. Et voilà qu'à la suite des 43 ONG qui, le 16 mars, ont exhorté le gouvernement syrien à relâcher les prisonniers politiques dans la perspective du coronavirus, suivies par l'émissaire de l'ONU réclamant des mesures urgentes pour assurer des soins de protection dans tous les lieux de détention, des épouses, mères, sœurs, nièces de disparus nous ont spontanément contactés pour dire leur panique et attirer l'attention sur le sort des détenus secrets.

« Ce sont les plus vulnérables des vulnérables ; si le Covid-19 est introduit en prison, il va les décimer », alerte ainsi Amal Al-Nasin, avocate et présidente du Centre Amals Healing and Advocacy pour les familles de réfugiés, qui nous parle depuis Antakya, en Turquie, où elle est exilée depuis 2012. Elle n'a bien sûr jamais visité les centres des services secrets dans lesquels s'entassent les prisonniers arrêtés hors système légal. Mais elle se fonde sur les rapports publiés par Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, le Réseau syrien pour les droits humains, ainsi que sur les témoignages de prisonniers enfuis, échangés ou libérés, qu'elle recueille depuis les débuts de la révolution, en mars 2011.

#### Cinquante détenus pour 24 m<sup>2</sup>

Elle peut décrire les geôles puantes et surpeuplées, dénuées de ventilation et souvent de lumière du jour, infestées par les rats. Des cellules de 4 mètres sur 6, contenant jusqu'à une cinquantaine de détenus qui ne peuvent s'asseoir et dormir qu'à tour de rôle, privés d'hygiène, de soins lorsqu'ils sont malades, régulièrement appelés pour des

séances de torture d'où ils rentrent en sang. « L'enfer », dit Me Al-Nasin. L'enfer dans lequel se sont déjà introduites des maladies comme la tuberculose et où les prisonniers décharnés, couverts de plaies, n'opposeraient aucune résistance au coronavirus. « Qu'un geôlier soit infecté, ou un nouveau détenu provenant d'une autre prison, et ils succumbent par centaines, étouffés et sans le moindre soin. Car on ne peut pas attendre des tortionnaires qu'ils s'inquiètent de la santé de leurs victimes ! »

« Il faut refuser que Bachar Al-Assad instrumentalise le coronavirus et en fasse sa nouvelle arme de guerre », Amal Al-Nasin, avocate

Ce n'est qu'une question de jours, craint-elle. Car le coronavirus circule bel et bien en Syrie, malgré les efforts du régime pour minimiser les chiffres et ses pressions sur le corps médical pour déclarer « morts par pneumonie » ou « infection des poumons » celles dues au Covid-19, les corps n'étant plus rendus aux familles, et des représentants de la police secrète (les moukhabarat) surveillant les hôpitaux afin qu'aucune information ne filtre.

Quarante-cinq cas avaient été reconnus début mai et seulement trois décès. Mais qui peut croire ces chiffres ? Qu'elles résident à l'étranger ou à l'intérieur du pays, les familles de disparus tremblent en tout cas que le virus ne se fasse l'allié du président syrien pour éradiquer des prisonniers classés comme « opposants », fussent-ils de simples étudiants arrêtés dans les premières manifestations du printemps 2011.

« Ce serait atroce, commente Me Al-Nasin, qui continue de monter des dossiers, galvaniser les proches de disparus et leur faire espérer explications, droits, justice. Alors s'il est un moment où nous avons besoin de l'aide du reste du monde, dit-elle, c'est maintenant ! Le Covid-19 a fermé les frontières, plongé les peuples de la

planète dans le confinement et l'angoisse de la mort. Ça devrait les rendre plus à même de comprendre ce que vivent les détenus syriens et leur inspirer de la solidarité. Il faut refuser que Bachar Al-Assad instrumentalise le coronavirus et en fasse sa nouvelle arme de guerre. Soit pour faire disparaître des prisonniers encombrants, soit pour amadouer l'Occident et obtenir la levée des sanctions. »

Le père et le frère de Gharam, 30 ans, installée elle aussi à Antakya, sont revenus de prison. Pas ses deux oncles, dont elle a perdu la trace depuis 2013. Toute la famille vit autour des photos des deux hommes, dans leur souvenir et leur attente. Tout est bloqué, en suspens. Les biens dont ils sont propriétaires ne peuvent être vendus, les aides dont pourraient bénéficier des enfants orphelins ne sont pas légitimes, les épouses ne peuvent se remarier. « Même l'organisation d'une fête pour mon mariage était impensable avec deux oncles séquestrés chez Bachar », dit la jeune femme.

« Ils mourraient donc ainsi ? Ils succumbent par un virus qui disculperait leur bourreau ? », l'épouse du journaliste Jihad Asaad Mohamed, arrêté en 2013

L'arrivée d'un détenu relâché provoque chaque fois l'ébullition de toute la communauté exilée, qui bombarde le rescapé de questions : « As-tu croisé untel ? As-tu entendu parler de lui ? Il est de tel village, de telle famille... A-t-il été transféré ? Torturé ? Quelle probabilité qu'il soit encore en vie ? » Le plus souvent on n'apprend rien. Et l'attente continue. Et l'espoir persiste. « Admettre la mort serait trahir les nôtres et faire le jeu de Bachar. Il nous doit des explications. Il devra rendre des comptes. » Et dans cette exigence de justice, l'hypothèse du coronavirus est encore plus insupportable.

« Ils mourraient donc ainsi ? Eux qui résistent aux tortures les plus folles, aux brûlures,

aux électrocutions, aux flagellations, à toutes ces horreurs que la famille Assad pratique depuis des décennies pour mettre son peuple à genoux ? Ils succumbent par un virus qui disculperait leur bourreau ? Non ! Non ! », crie au téléphone l'épouse du journaliste Jihad Asaad Mohamed, arrêté à Damas en 2013 et dont elle n'a aucune nouvelle.

Elle a pourtant remué ciel et terre, créé une page Facebook, milité dans plusieurs organisations, contacté Amnesty, RSF, essayé d'acheter des informations à des fonctionnaires véreux. Elle n'a rien appris, mais sa vie continue de se concentrer sur cette absence, « nourrie par l'espoir » de retrouver son mari, mais « torpillée par l'idée que le virus, telle une flamme sur une meule de foin, puisse embraser les prisons, ou donner à Bachar le prétexte d'un massacre ».

Même angoisse pour Bassima, 55 ans, originaire de la Ghouta, aux portes de Damas, qui continue d'espérer son fils unique, arrêté en 2013 à 22 ans. « Je l'ai cherché pendant un an et demi, je devenais folle. La foudre est tombée sur moi quand j'ai appris qu'il était dans l'horrible prison de Saidnaya. J'ai pu le voir quelques instants, encadré par deux gardes. Il était décharné, habillé de haillons, ne pouvait même pas tenir sa tête pour me faire face. Il m'a dit : "Ne t'inquiète pas maman, ça va". Mais bien sûr que ça n'allait pas ! » Elle sanglote à ce souvenir, elle qui est en transit dans l'île de Kos, en Grèce.

« Je lui avais apporté un pyjama, des chaussures, des chaussettes, un peu de nourriture, de l'argent. J'ai cherché un avocat et on m'a ri au nez. J'ai supplié de le revoir. Curieusement, cela m'a été accordé. Il était encore plus squelettique, hagard, dénudé. Je lui ai laissé ce que j'ai pu, et quand j'ai voulu retourner à la prison, cette fois, son nom était rayé de toutes les listes. Inconnu à cette adresse. Personne ne savait plus où il était. » Bas-

sima a hurlé qu'elle l'avait vu plus tôt, qu'elle n'avait pas rêvé. Elle s'est ruinée pour tenter de le retrouver, approcher des officiers, acheter des renseignements. Elle a même donné son alliance. D'autres ont vendu leur maison. La corruption est omniprésente, le marché du faux renseignement bat son plein.

#### Morts par « arrêt cardiaque »

Et puis il arrive qu'un acte de décès parvienne un jour aux familles. En 2018, par exemple, plusieurs centaines de documents ont été expédiés mentionnant la mort d'un disparu, datée de 2013 et presque toujours causée par « arrêt cardiaque ». Aucune preuve, aucune explication, pas de corps. La nouvelle est effroyable mais n'annihile pas l'espoir puisqu'il est arrivé,

comme nous le raconte Sara Kayyali, chercheuse à Human Rights Watch, qu'un prisonnier surgisse, un an après l'annonce de son décès, six ans après sa mort supposée. Qui croire ? « Assad joue sur les émotions des familles, rien n'est clair, l'incertitude est maîtresse. Et le coronavirus, après neuf ans de souffrances, est une nouvelle source d'anxiété pour elles. »

Ce n'est pas le nouveau décret d'amnistie publié le 22 mars par Damas qui va les reconforter. « De la poudre aux yeux ! », dit Sara Kayyali. « Une tentative lamentable de rassurer l'ONU et les ONG dans le contexte de la pandémie », renchérit Fadel Abdul Ghany, le président du Réseau syrien pour les droits humains. D'abord cette amnistie, comme

les précédentes, ne concerne que les prisonniers de droit commun, en aucune façon les détenus politiques, activistes, journalistes, militants, tous regroupés sous l'appellation de « terroristes ».

Ensuite, considérant qu'il existe environ 130 000 personnes dans les centres de détention syriens, l'ONG calcule qu'au rythme des décrets d'amnistie (dix-sept depuis 2011), il faudrait trois cent vingt-cinq ans pour vider les prisons. Sans compter que les arrestations arbitraires se poursuivent (665 depuis le décret d'amnistie du 15 septembre 2019), de même que les morts sous l'effet de la torture (116 documentées par l'ONG). Alors, le coronavirus... « Les familles ont raison d'avoir peur, affirme le docteur Muthana, un

ancien prisonnier désormais établi à Berlin. Assad est pire que les Iraniens, qui ont relâché des milliers de prisonniers sous la pression du Covid. Lui ne fera rien pour épargner les détenus. Au contraire ! Le Covid peut lui fournir l'occasion de se débarrasser de tous les dissidents. »

Un dernier rapport de l'ONG révèle l'extrême vulnérabilité du pays en matière sanitaire, le faible nombre d'hôpitaux en état de marche, et le manque cruel d'équipements et de personnel médical puisque 70 % des soignants ont fui à l'étranger. Il précise aussi que les forces du régime ont tué 669 soignants depuis mars 2011, dont 83 par l'usage de la torture, et qu'il en séquestre encore 3 327 dans ses geôles.

The New York Times

May 15, 2020

## Turkey Detains Pro-Kurdish Mayors, Removes Them From Office

**A**NKARA, Turkey — Turkish authorities on Friday detained four more elected mayors from Turkey's mainly Kurdish populated east and southeast regions, as the government pressed ahead with its crackdown on a pro-Kurdish party it accuses of links to Kurdish militants.

The mayors from the People's Democratic Party, or HDP, were detained at their homes, removed from office and replaced with government-appointed trustees, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. A fifth mayor was also fired but has not been detained.

The government accuses the party of links to the outlawed

Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The HDP denies the accusation.

The HDP denounced the crackdown on the elected mayors as a government "coup."

"This amounts to the rejection of democracy, this amounts to the non-recognition of the will of the people," said party co-chairman Mi-that Sancar.

The Kurdish people would not yield to pressure and would fight for their democratic rights, Sancar said at a news conference.

The four mayors were elected to office in local elections last year in the cities of Igdir

and Siirt as well as in Siirt's districts of Baykan and Kurtalan and the district of Altinova in Mus province.

HDP says the government has appointed caretaker mayors to 45 out of a total of 65 municipalities that the party won in local elections in March 2019. At least 21 mayors have been imprisoned on terror-related charges.

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Seven former HDP lawmakers, including former chairman Selahattin Demirtas, are also in prison.

The New York-based Human

Rights Watch has criticized Turkey's crackdown against the mayors, saying it amounts to a violation of voters' rights.

The PKK is considered a terror organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Meanwhile, authorities detained 38 people for questioning over an attack Thursday that killed two workers who were distributing aid to people in a district in eastern Turkey. The district has been placed under quarantine due to the new coronavirus outbreak.

Turkish officials have blamed the attack on the PKK.

## En Turquie, nouvelles arrestations de maires kurdes dans le Sud-Est

Les élus sont remplacés par des administrateurs désignés par Ankara.

Les autorités turques ont ordonné l'arrestation, vendredi 15 mai, de quatre maires élus sous la bannière du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, prokurde) pour leurs liens supposés avec la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Berivan Helen Isik et Peyman-dara Turhan, comaires de Siirt, une ville du sud-est du pays à majorité kurde, ont été arrêtés à leur domicile sur ordre du parquet et révoqués, tout comme les maires Baran Akgül et Ramazan Sarsilmaz, des districts de Kurtalan et de Baykan, dans la même province. Dans la ville d'Ildgir et dans la province de Mus, quatre autres maires ont été démis. Tous ont été remplacés au pied levé par des administrateurs nommés par le gouvernement.

C'est un nouveau coup dur pour le HDP, deuxième formation d'opposition de Turquie, représentée au Parlement, dont les rangs ont été dégarnis par la répression implacable menée contre ses militants, ses cadres et ses élus. Depuis l'effondrement, à l'été 2015, du processus de paix entre le PKK et Ankara, le gouvernement islamo-conservateur ne cesse de s'acharner sur le parti prokurde.

Lors des élections municipales du printemps 2019, le HDP avait remporté 65 municipalités dans l'est et le sud-est du pays. Depuis, 45 maires HDP ont été révoqués et remplacés par des administrateurs nommés, 21 sont actuellement en prison sous l'accusation de « terrorisme ». Sept députés du parti, dont sa fi-



Congrès du HDP le 23 février à Ankara. HANDOUT / AFP

gure de proue, Selahattin Demirtas, sont également en prison. C'est sous l'impulsion de cet ancien rival de Recep Tayyip Erdogan à l'élection présidentielle de 2014 que le parti a gagné sa popularité, jusqu'à faire son entrée au Parlement, quelques mois seulement après sa création, une première dans l'histoire de la république turque.

### Révocations arbitraires

Son bon score aux législatives de juin 2015 (13 % des suffrages, soit 80 députés) avait porté un coup à l'AKP, le parti du président Erdogan, lui faisant perdre sa majorité parlementaire. Lors des nouvelles législatives convoquées par le pouvoir en novembre 2015, le HDP ne fit que confirmer son rang de deuxième parti d'opposition, avec 59 députés élus. Il lui reste encore 52 députés au Parlement mais le gouvernement s'attache à l'affaiblir, l'accusant régulièrement de collusion avec la guérilla du PKK, ce que le parti nie.

Arrêter les maires prokurdes dé-

mocratiquement élus, « c'est rejeter la démocratie », a déclaré vendredi son coprésident, Mithat Sancar. « Comme toujours, ces nouvelles arrestations ne sont pas le produit d'une décision de justice mais d'une décision administrative du ministre de l'Intérieur », a souligné le HDP dans un communiqué.

Les révocations arbitraires nourrissent le ressentiment de la population kurde de l'est et du sud-est de la Turquie, mécontente de voir son droit de vote bafoué. Car, une fois révoqués, les édiles sont prestement remplacés par des gestionnaires parachutés sur décision d'Ankara sans qu'il soit question d'organiser de nouvelles élections.

Dans la foulée, les bâtiments des municipalités concernées se muent en camps retranchés, avec moult barrières de protection et forte présence policière. Le 23 mars à Batman, une ville du Sud-Est, la première décision du mandataire d'Erdogan venu remplacer le maire a été de sup-

primer le contenu en langue kurde du site Internet de la municipalité.

Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur ne laisse aucun répit aux régions kurdes, où la moindre prise de parole est sanctionnée

Cet acharnement est régulièrement dénoncé par les défenseurs des droits de l'homme. Nacho Sanchez Amor, le rapporteur du Parlement européen sur la Turquie, a appelé vendredi les autorités turques à cesser de révoquer les élus sans décision de justice. « Au moins, les conseils municipaux devraient avoir la possibilité de nommer un maire intérimaire parmi ses membres élus », a-t-il commenté sur son compte Twitter.

Affaibli politiquement par la perte de plusieurs municipalités – dont Istanbul et Ankara – passées aux mains de l'opposition kémaliste, confronté à la perspective d'une récession économique à cause de l'épidémie due au coronavirus, le gouvernement islamo-conservateur ne laisse aucun répit aux régions kurdes, où la moindre prise de parole est sanctionnée.

Pour avoir évoqué le risque d'une propagation du virus dans les prisons, la journaliste et militante kurde Nurcan Baysal a été interpellée et interrogée par un procureur le 30 mars. Le lendemain, une enquête a été ouverte contre le journaliste Rusen Takva, accusé d'avoir « créé la panique et la peur parmi la population » par ses déclarations sur le coronavirus dans la région.





May 16, 2020

## Turkey's pro-Kurdish opposition calls for elections in towns with dismissed mayors

Turkey's pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) called for local elections in over 40 towns where the government has since last year dismissed elected mayors and replaced them with state-appointed officials.

The call arrives after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan earlier on Saturday accused the HDP of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), saying his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) would crush the party in the next elections, just as it does with the outlawed group.

"We say, we dare you. We are prepared for any type of elec-



tion," the HDP said in a statement responding to Erdoğan.

"Since you have so much assuredness in yourself, then let's begin by holding elections as soon as possible in the locations in which you assigned state appointed officials, usurping the will of the people," Evrensel newspaper quoted the HDP as saying.

The Turkish government has dismissed on terrorism charges 45 out of 65 HDP mayors on in the country's Kurdish-majority southeast region, since the local elections in March last year, replacing the officials with government appointees. Six elected mayors from the party were denied their mandates from the begin-

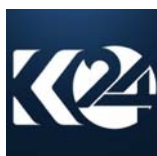
ning based on similar accusations.

"Let's begin in those places, where you have seized the will of the people," the HDP said.

The HDP became the first pro-Kurdish political party to pass Turkey's 10 percent electoral threshold in June 2015, and has held on to gain parliamentary representation in each election since.

The Turkish government accuses the HDP of harbouring sympathies and acting in the interest of the PKK and had launched a crackdown on the group since a failed military coup in July 2016.

The HDP denies any links to the militant group.



May 16, 2020  
By Khrush Najari

## Fires destroy hundreds of acres in Iraq's disputed Kirkuk; ISIS claims Diyala incidents

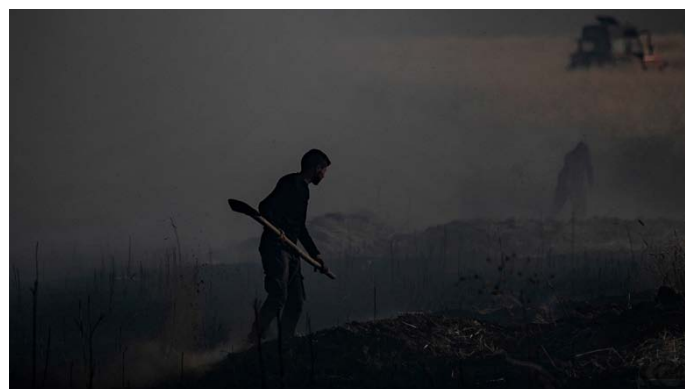
ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Major fires tore through hundreds of acres of wheat and barley crops across multiple parts of Iraq's disputed Kirkuk province on Thursday, according to an official document, adding to a series of similar incidents taking place across the country in recent weeks.

An Iraqi Civil Defense Department report listing all the known fire outbreaks between April 21 and May 14 counted 88 incidents in total. The top affected areas are as follows: 25

took place in Salahuddin province, 15 in Wasit, 14 in Diyala, and nine in Babil.

Among the causes, the report claimed, accidental sources such as electrical fires or those sparked by harvester machines or discarded cigarette butts, deliberate arson by landowners—potentially to seek government compensation—, terrorist attacks by members of the so-called Islamic State, and private or tribal disputes.

Most of them, some 29 blazes,



Farmers work to contain smouldering crop fires. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

were categorized as electrical fires. Seventeen more are still

under investigation, and one in Diyala province's disputed city

of Khanaqin that destroyed roughly seven acres of crops is confirmed to have been an "act of terror."

The provinces with the highest total area sustaining damage were Diyala and Kirkuk provinces, each losing close to 270 acres of land, or about a square kilometer, according to the government report. The high number in Kirkuk comes from only four such incidents. Comparison with previous civil defense data shows that close to 250 acres in Kirkuk burnt on Thursday.

#### Fires in disputed areas

Both Kirkuk and Diyala are either entirely or partially disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi government. These areas, as well as

other apparently vulnerable parts of the country, have witnessed a fresh uptick in terrorist attacks throughout the holy month of Ramadan.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for fires in Diyala's Khanaqin district on Thursday. In the past week, a Kurdish military commander and an Iraqi official have previously accused the terrorist organization of being behind at least some of these incidents.

A security source told Kurdistan 24 on Friday that the latest Kirkuk fires broke out in Zaqar and Ali al-Saray villages—home to the mostly-Kurdish Kakai religious minority—south of the town of Daquq.

"The fire turned the crops there to ashes," he said.

An improvised explosive device blew up at the site just as a unit of firefighters arrived to put out a fire in Qosh Qaya village, another area where Islamic State cells are still active. The security source who shared the information said that the incident resulted in no casualties.

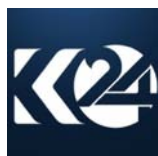
The source further noted the areas where the fires broke out are located in a region that has long been the site of Islamic State attacks, as well as renewed activity, indicating that it was likely that the terrorist organization may have been involved.

One Zaqar farmer on Friday stressed the precarity of the situation in the region when speaking to Kurdistan 24. "There is a security vacuum in our area and our lives are in

danger," he said. "When our crops burn, we cannot go tend to the fires for fear of traps and threats by Da'esh [ISIS] gunmen."

In recent months, Islamic State remnants have upped their activities across the country, most notably in disputed territories, targeting and killing dozens of civilians and members of the security forces.

Kurdish government and military officials have routinely stated that Erbil and Baghdad need to improve their coordination and cooperation in these areas to combat the terrorist organization effectively. A Kurdistan Region Peshmerga Ministry delegation will visit Baghdad for bilateral talks on security-related files, a ministry official told local media on Monday.



May 16, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Media advocacy groups condemn detention of Kurdistan 24 team in Kirkuk, call for investigation

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Two media rights watchdogs on Saturday denounced the recent detention of a Kurdistan 24 team—when they were covering recent crop fires in the disputed Kirkuk province—by Iraqi forces and called on the federal government to launch an investigation into the incident.

On Thursday, Iraqi Federal Police detained and questioned Kurdistan 24 correspondent Hemin Dalo and cameraman Nawzad Mohammed. The team was near Kirkuk's Zaqar village, where they reported on recent crop fires that destroyed hundreds of acres of farmers' lands in the area.

Dalo reports from the Garmiyan administrative unit and Kirkuk province, which is prominent among territories disputed between the federal Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Iraqi forces took control of Kirkuk during the events of late 2017.

Kurdistan 24 correspondent Dalo told the Metro Center for Defending Journalists' Rights that he and Mohammed had been treated "like terrorists" when they were questioned. "One officer told me, 'you are not allowed come to this area, you have broken the law.'"

The Iraqi forces "confiscated our smartphones and media



Hemn Dalo (Right), Kurdistan 24 reporter, with cameraman Nawzad Mohammed. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

equipment," Dalo told the press freedom group. The team then went through two rounds of interrogations, the latter of which was especially harsh and led by ranked Iraqi

officer Karim Hasib Fazel al-Shammari.

The reporter claimed that Shammari threatened he could charge the team under Article

4 of Anti-Terrorism Law since they "report ISIS' activities." Dalo also recounted Shammari as saying, "You are aiding ISIS, you burn the crops to say the area is unsafe."

The team was released only after several hours in detention and "signing a written pledge not to return and cover these

areas," Dalo told another media watchdog, the Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq, on Saturday.

The Metro Center "denounces the Iraqi federal police's treatment of the Kurdistan 24 channel team," the entity said in a statement, demanding that the security forces end their "anta-

gonistic" behavior in the disputed territories.

The Iraqi advocacy group issued a similarly condemnatory statement, saying it considers the detention of journalists without an arrest warrant, "a violation of the freedom of the press." It also expressed concerns about apparently re-

peated abuses of journalists by members of the security forces.

Both organizations called on the Iraqi government, now led by former journalist Mustafa al-Kadhimi, to launch an investigation into the incident and hold those who abuse journalists to account.



May 16, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Ankara opposes talks between Kurdish ruling and opposition parties in NE Syria : Turkish FM

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** — Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said late Friday that he warned the Kurdish National Council (ENKS) in February not to make deals with the People's Protection Units (YPG), a military wing of the ruling authorities in northeast Syria.

This is the first time Ankara has commented on ongoing unity talks between Kurdish parties in northeast Syria.

"I told them that they should not make deals with the PKK/YPG. We used to have talks with and support them [ENKS]. In February, each of them told me how the PKK/YPG had killed their relatives and jailed their close friends or family members - some are still in jail. They said they did not and would not unite with this terrorist organization," Cavusoglu told the pro-government A Haber TV on Friday.

The minister also claimed that Ankara is not against the Kurds, saying that they have previously asked Syrian President Bashar al-Assad "to grant Syrian Kurds identity cards and recognize their rights."

Ankara regards the YPG as the



An ENKS delegation poses for a photo with Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara, February 19, 2020. Photo: Social Media

Syrian arm of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) — designated a terror organization in Turkey.

The YPG presence in northeast Syria prompted Turkey, facilitated by the withdrawal of US troops, to invade the area in October 2019, citing "terror concerns."

International efforts to create a Kurdish state in northeast Syria — known to Kurds as Rojava — have "failed" as a result of Turkish military action, Cavusoglu added.

The relations between the ENKS and the Democratic

Union Party (PYD) have been thorny for years.

The ENKS - which has close ties to Ankara- accuses the PYD of being unwilling to share power, jailing its members and closing party offices.

Mediated by Masoud Barzani, then-president of the Kurdistan Region, power-sharing talks began between the ENKS and the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), the umbrella group for the ruling PYD and its allies, in 2014.

Initiated in late October by Mazloum Abdi, general commander of the YPG-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a new round of

unity talks are ongoing.

### International pressure

The unity talks have been supported by the international community, namely the US, France and Russia.

France held talks with both sides in early May.

Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's deputy foreign minister and special presidential representative on the Middle East, told Kurdish media in January that Moscow endorses Kurdish unity.

"We always say that the Kurdish position has to be cohesive, united, constructive, and realistic to form the basis for dialogue with the other parties in a serious, responsible manner," said Bogdanov.

William Roebuck, the Deputy Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and top US diplomat in northern Syria met with a number of Kurdish party representatives in northeast Syria on April 26. He told them he is happy with recent progress towards unity, a source told Rudaw on condition of anonymity.

Rudaw English has reached out to ENKS officials for comment.





May 16, 2020  
By Zhelwan Z. Wali

## At least 100 arrested in Duhok ahead of protest against government wage delays: lawmaker

### ERBIL, Kurdistan Region

— At least 100 mostly government employees, activists, and journalists in Duhok have been arrested by security forces after allegedly organizing a protest against the government's delay in paying civil servants' salaries, according to a lawmaker.

Over the last week many have taken to social media calling for an impassioned gathering in downtown Duhok at 3 pm on Saturday against the continued delay of wages from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Halz Botani, a member of the Kurdistan Region's parliament for the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), told Rudaw that of the 150 people who attempted to organize the protest, around 100 were arrested while assembling for the protest at Azadi Park.

"As I got close to the site of the planned demonstration, I noticed tens of police vehicles showing disrespect to the people who wanted to stage the protest," said Botani.

A security member told Rudaw on condition of anonymity that the gathering did not have its mandated official permit.

"Therefore, based on the law and upon a warrant from



Civil servants, activists and journalist assembling to protest the government wage delays, shortly before the gathering was dispersed by police. Photo: Rudaw.

a judge, whoever planned the gathering was detained," the source said, adding that the alleged organizers will be released on bail shortly.

Hamdi Barwari, head of the Kurdistan Human Rights' Duhok branch, claims that 48 hours before the protest, organizers applied for permission, but received no response back from local authorities.

"They went ahead to hold the gathering as planned," he said, describing their acts as "very lawful", urging security forces to release those arrested as soon as possible in comments to Rudaw English.

"They have not committed any crime as all they wanted to ask for was their liveli-

hood," Barwari added.

Over 100 teachers in Darbandikhan held a similar gathering on Saturday, demanding the government pay their salaries.

In mid-April, Iraq's former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi called on the finance ministry to halt budget transfers to the KRG and take back all transfers made since January 1, 2019.

Baghdad accuses the KRG of failing to send even a single barrel of oil in exchange for its share of the federal budget – an arrangement agreed in December.

Eager to keep public sector workers on the payroll, a KRG delegation visited

Baghdad late last month to hash things out with Baghdad following the budget cuts.

And after the delegation returned, the KRG announced that they would pay the salaries of civil servants from the "limited financial resources" available. As of May, only civil servants working for the ministries of health, interior and Peshmerga have been paid.

Now that a new government is in place under the leadership of Mustafa al-Kadhimi, another KRG delegation is expected to return to Baghdad to put an end to the budget cuts as civil servants bear the brunt of the long-standing budget and oil disagreements.

The oil-for-budget agreement between the KRG and the Iraqi federal government had been years in the making.

The KRG started exporting its oil independently of Baghdad via its own pipeline to the port of Ceyhan in 2013.

The independent oil sales infuriated the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, which cut the Kurdistan Re-

gion's share of the federal budget from 17 percent to zero in 2014.

The move coincided with the outbreak of war with the Islamic State group (ISIS), a massive displacement crisis, and the collapse of world oil prices, which coalesced to plunge the Kurdistan Region into financial crisis.

The Region has been steadily recovering since former

Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi reinstated a portion of the KRG's budget in late 2018 and Abdul-Mahdi secured a bigger lump sum under the 2019 budget.

In return for its 12.67 percent share of the 2019 federal budget, the KRG was supposed to send SOMO 250,000 bpd, but has consistently failed to do so, claiming contractual arrangements and debts owed to foreign oil companies prevented the handover.

The arithmetic behind the December deal has no doubt been shaken in recent months by the ongoing political crisis in Baghdad, the collapse of world oil prices, and the economic slowdown sparked by the pandemic.

Iraq depends on oil sales for 90 percent of its state revenues. Painful austerity measures are expected if Baghdad is to weather the financial storm.

## Kurdistan au féminin

17 mai 2020

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

# Les soldats turcs tuent un kolbar kurde à la frontière iranienne

**T**URQUIE / BAKUR – Bahram Yusefi, originaire du Kurdistan oriental, a été tué par des soldats turcs près du village de Yamanyurd, à Van / Saray.

Des coups de feu ont été entendus hier soir à 5 km de la frontière avec le Kurdistan d'Iran (Rojhilat), près du village de Yamanyurd, dans le district Saray de Van.

Des soldats turcs ont ouvert le feu à partir d'un blindé sur Bahram Yusefi, 35 ans, qui aurait pénétré le territoire turc depuis le village de Belecuk, du Kurdistan de l'Est, pour vendre des cigarettes. L'homme a perdu la vie sur les lieux.

La famille essaye de prendre le corps

Les proches de Yusefi ont



TURQUIE / BAKUR – Bahram Yusefi, originaire du Kurdistan oriental, a été tué par des soldats turcs près du village de Yamanyurd, à Van / Saray.

déclaré qu'ils essayaient de prendre le corps qui a été transporté à l'hôpital du district d'Özalp. Ils ont déclaré

que Yusefi était décédé des suites du feu ouvert depuis un véhicule blindé, ajoutant qu'ils annonceraient les dé-

tails de l'incident à un stade ultérieur.



May 17, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria declare prison amnesties

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) declared a mass prison amnesty for the advent of Eid al-Fitr, which excludes convicted terror offenders, rapists, and drug dealers.

The amnesty provides a full pardon for those charged with “violations” – although the NES provided no specifics. The term is usually used to refer to minor crimes like traffic offenses and breaches of building regulations. The amnesty will not apply to anyone convicted after Sunday.

Kanaan Barakat, the NES interior minister, told Rudaw English he did not know how many people would be released, as “details of the amnesty are not clear.” Rudaw English also contacted Berivan Khalid, co-chair of the NES, but she was not available to comment. Under the amnesty, inmates jailed for misdemeanors, which are generally less serious than felonies, will see their sentence reduced by a third, while those jailed for life will see their sentence commuted to 20 years. Those on temporary sentences (not sentenced to death or life



Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) guard inmates at a jail in Hasaka, March 31, 2019. File photo: Rudaw

in prison) will see their jail time halved.

Those with incurable or terminal diseases will also be released.

Some convicts are excluded from the amnesty, however. statement “The amnesty excludes rapists, drug dealers, terrorists, and those convicts who are wanted but are at large,” the NES said in a announcing the amnesty on Sunday afternoon.

“They [people at large] will not benefit from the amnesty if they fail to turn themselves in in the coming 60 days.”

Kurdish authorities in northeast

Syria, known to Kurds as Rojava, are holding tens of thousands of prisoners in makeshift jails, including political prisoners and those affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIS).

The opposition Kurdish National Council (ENKS) claims several of its members have been arrested by Rojava authorities – the fate of many currently unknown. Local authorities deny they are holding ENKS members.

It is not clear whether the amnesty extends to political prisoners. The interior minister told Rudaw English he does not know this either.

Rojava authorities are also administering several camps, including the now notorious Al-Hol, housing around 10,500 woman and children related or affiliated with ISIS militants from 54 different counties, Sheikhmous Ahmed, head of Rojava camps, told Rudaw English.

Most of these camp residents were arrested in March 2019 in the battle of Baghouz, where ISIS made its last stand in eastern Syria.

There are around 10,000 ISIS militants held in Rojava prisons, among them around 2,000 foreigners awaiting legal mechanisms to prosecute them. NES officials have called on the international community to repatriate their nationals or help facilitate trials in Syria. There have been several escape attempts by ISIS prisoners and their families in Rojava – the most recent on Sunday.

Seven ISIS militants escaped from a small jail in the town next to Al-Hol camp. Four of them were later recaptured but three remain at large.

The New York Times

18 May 2020  
BY FARNAZ FASSIHI

## A surge in Iran cases stirs debate on easing restrictions

**W**hen Iran began to reopen late last month, commuters packed subways and buses, young people lined up for takeout hamburgers and pizza, and traffic snarled highways. Shoppers crowded the traditional bazaars of Isfahan and

Tehran. Worshipers resumed communal prayer at mosques during evenings in the holy month of Ramadan, which began around April 23.

Three weeks later, the country has been hit by a new surge of coronavirus cases, according

to health officials in some of the eight provinces where the numbers have spiked. Health experts had predicted this would happen when the government made the call to ease restrictions in late April.

Iran, an epicenter of the out-

break in the Middle East, reopened without meeting the benchmarks recommended by health experts, such as ensuring widespread testing and contact tracing, and recording a steady drop in cases for at least several weeks.



The central government has claimed for weeks that Iran was prevailing against the pandemic. But in reopening the country, President Hassan Rouhani said the battle could not fully succeed independent of salvaging the economy, which was being pummeled by United States sanctions even before the virus hit.

So with the government's blessing, many Iranians resumed daily life.

Elham, a 34-year-old government employee in Tehran, said that when her ministry ordered its employees to return to work, she had no choice but to resume riding a crowded subway twice a day. Now, she said, she spends a big chunk of her income on masks, gloves and disinfectants.

Many other people can't afford the protective gear.

"People can't stay at home when the government says return to work, and we have no money if we don't go," Elham said in a telephone interview. "They rushed to open with no plans in place, and now they are blaming us for the surge." She did not want to give her last name for fear of repercussions.

The health minister, Saeed Namaki, on Sunday attributed the new surge in cases to people's not observing social distancing and not wearing masks.

The ministry has stopped releasing a breakdown of numbers for provinces in an effort to control a new wave of panic and pressure on the government to shut down cities.

According to government tallies, more than 7,000 people in Iran have died from the virus and nearly 122,500 have been infected. Health experts inside and outside Iran and some Iranian politicians have said the real numbers are most likely several times that large.



Masked motorcycle taxi drivers waiting for commuters near the Grand Bazaar in Tehran last week. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

The Health Ministry spokesman, Kianoush Jahangiri, said Monday that 2,294 people had tested positive in the previous 24 hours. A day earlier, that number was 1,808.

In the immediate aftermath of a strict, two-week lockdown in April, the number dropped to fewer than 1,000 a day. The official mortality rate, however, has fluctuated daily.

Last week, at least eight provinces and Tehran, the capital, were declared red zones: areas where new cases were still increasing.

The southeastern province of Khuzestan, home to the country's oil and petrochemical industries, reported a 300 percent increase in new cases since the province re-opened in late April, according to its governor. On Friday, Khuzestan locked down 16 of its cities at least until Monday. Local health officials said Sunday that 715 people had tested positive for coronavirus in the previous 24 hours.

Other provinces that are reporting alarming surges include Isfahan, Fars, East Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Lorestan, Hormozgan and Sistan Baluchestan, according to the health ministry and local governors.

"The situation is extremely dire," Alireza Bahadori, mayor of the city of Behbahan in the hard-hit Khuzestan, said in a video circulating on Iranian media.

Standing at a fire station wearing a mask and a plastic face shield, and as ambulance sirens wailed in the background, the mayor said, "Positive results for corona tests have reached an explosion."

Hossein Farshidi, the top public health official in Hormozgan, called the surge in his southern province "extremely dangerous and worrisome."

The cries of alarm from local officials were at stark odds with the central government's claim that Iran has the virus under control.

"It's a source of pride that Iran has managed to not only reopen businesses by observing protocols but also reactivate its mosques and religious centers — and also maintain a steady decline of the disease," President Rouhani said Friday, according to official media.

Since the outbreak in Iran began in mid-February, the government has come under harsh international and domestic criticism for its chaotic management of the crisis, from its

failure to cordon off the first epicenters to its less-than-transparent approach to sharing data.

Other countries have also seen their coronavirus numbers fall and rise again, but the rekindled crisis in Iran may offer an important lesson for other governments trying to get the balance right between guarding public health and restarting their economies.

"Other countries should look to Iran and not do what it did," said Dr. Kamiar Alaei, an expert on Iran's public health and president of Institute for International Health and Education in Albany, N.Y.

"They moved late to close off cities and they opened too early," Dr. Alaei said. "What we feared is coming true."

Morteza, a resident of the city of Mahshahr in Khuzestan Province, said in a telephone interview that local officials seemed to be using a trial-and-error approach to managing the coronavirus. Now, he said, residents are confused and angry at the increase in new cases — and at the city shutting down again just as business and daily life was resuming.

"One day, we are told: 'It's safe. Go live your life,'" he said. "And the next day, we hear: 'It's dangerous. Stay home.' We don't know what to believe anymore because nobody trusts what the government says."

In about one week, Muslims will mark the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan with the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, ordinarily celebrated with a large communal prayer led by the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Mr. Rouhani said Saturday that the prayers led by Mr. Khamenei were canceled, but that prayers would be held with social distancing outdoors at local mosques in some cities.



18 mai 2020

## 'Kurdophobia' at centre of Turkey's intervention in Syria's Idlib, academic says

**T**urkish nationalism and security concerns surrounding the Kurdish issue shape Ankara's Syria policy, including its intervention in the last rebel-held province of Idlib, academic Cemal Özkahraman said in an article for the Jerusalem Post.

The most important reason behind Turkish presence in Idlib and other parts of Syria is "Kurdophobia", Özkahraman said.

"Turkey could not endure any possibility of Kurdish self-determination or even basic human rights either at home or



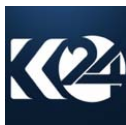
beyond Turkish borders, which is why Turkey has attacked and assaulted Kurdish areas in Syria whenever an opportunity arose," he said.

The breakdown of Turkey's

peace process with the outlawed militant groups fighting for Kurdish self-rule in July 2015, and its fears that Syrian Kurds would gain more legitimacy after they became the main U.S. partner against the Isla-

mic State, led to several major Turkish military operations with allied Syrian Islamist militias against Kurdish forces in northern Syria since 2016.

Meanwhile, Turkey significantly increased its military presence in Idlib after suffering its biggest military blow of the Syrian war in late February, when 34 of its soldiers were killed in an airstrike. Following that attack, Turkey launched an operation in conjunction with Turkish-backed Syrian militias, in which heavy drone and artillery bombardment took out scores of Syrian government forces.



May 18, 2020

By Wladimir Van Wilgenburg

## Turkish border guards reportedly kill Kurdish farmer

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Turkish border guards on Sunday allegedly killed a Kurdish farmer, Muheydin Abdullah, 50, in the Deruna Agha village near the town of Girkê Legê (Al-Muabbada in Arabic) on the Syrian-Turkish border.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a British-based war monitor, on Monday, said the "victim was killed while working on his land."

The village is the starting point for joint Turkish-Russian patrols in the area.

According to SOHR, at least 448 civilians were killed by the Turkish security forces on the border since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, including 78 children under 18.

Bassam al-Ahmad, the execu-

tive director of Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), similarly told Kurdistan 24 that the violations by the Turkish security forces have not stopped since the early stages of the Syrian crisis.

He added that not only civilians were killed that attempted to reach to, Turkey, "but also people who were going on with their normal lives."

"There was never any investigation by the Turkish Government itself to hold those people who did these crimes accountable. However, STJ, HRW, and other human rights organizations did some good work in this regard."

According to an STJ report from January, at least 12 men and women were shot dead by the Turkish border guards while attempting to access Turkey il-



Turkish border guards on Sunday allegedly killed 50-year-old Kurdish farmer, Muheydin Abdullah. (Photo: Social Media)

legally from the Idlib province between July to October 2019.

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report from July 2019 suggested that Turkey over the last year has sealed off its border with Syria, while "Turkish border guards have carried out mass summary pushbacks and killed

and injured Syrians as they try to cross."

In May 2016, Human Rights Watch sent a letter to the Turkish interior minister, urging Turkey to investigate the incidents and to order its guards not to shoot at asylum seekers, and to re-open its border to Syrians seeking safety.



## Onze exécutions menées par l'EI en deux jours

**D**es jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie ont exécuté par balle 11 personnes en deux jours, principalement des combattants prorégime, sur une route désertique dans l'est du pays, a rapporté lundi une ONG.

Les corps de "sept combattants syriens d'une milice prorégime" ont été retrouvés lundi à l'aube dans la province orientale de Deir ez-Zor, sur une route reliant le chef-lieu de cette région, frontalière de l'Irak, à la capitale Damas, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH). La veille déjà, sur un autre tronçon de cette même route, des jihadistes de l'EI ont abattu un officier de l'armée syrienne, deux soldats et une femme, s'emparant du véhicule à bord duquel ils se trouvaient, a indiqué à l'AFP le



Le slogan de l'EI peint sur le mur d'une maison de la province d'Alep, en 2017. Photo d'illustration George Ourfalian/AFP

directeur de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane.

L'EI n'a pas revendiqué dans l'immédiat ces assassinats sur l'application de messagerie Telegram, où l'organisation publie habituellement ses communiqués.

Depuis sa défaite en Syrie en mars 2019, l'EI mène régulièrement des attaques meurtrières, notamment dans le vaste désert du centre syrien, qui s'étend de la province de Homs (centre) à celle de Deir ez-Zor. Dans ce même secteur, 11 soldats du régime ont

été tués le 7 mai dans une embuscade imputée à l'EI par l'OSDH.

Les attaques des jihadistes en Syrie ciblent aussi bien l'armée syrienne et ses alliés que les forces kurdes, longtemps soutenues par Washington dans leur lutte anti-EI.

Après avoir autoproclamé en 2014 un "califat" à cheval sur la Syrie et l'Irak, l'EI a enchaîné les défaites dans les deux pays avant d'être totalement vaincu l'an dernier.

La guerre en Syrie, déclenchée en 2011 avec la répression de manifestations prodémocratie par Damas, s'est progressivement transformée en un conflit complexe impliquant une multitude de belligérants, dont des groupes jihadistes et des puissances étrangères, faisant plus de 380.000 morts.

## En Syrie et en Irak, Daesh multiplie les agressions

**D**es petits groupes de djihadistes sèment la terreur dans des zones rurales ou semi-désertiques. Mais on reste loin du « califat » de feu Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi. Malgré l'effondrement du « califat » autoproclamé en 2014 par Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, malgré l'assassinat dudit « calife » l'an dernier, malgré la chute sinon l'anéantissement de toutes les agglomérations un jour tenues en Irak ou en Syrie par « l'Etat islamique » (ou Daesh) entre 2013 et 2019, l'organisation terroriste serait-elle en train de renaître de ses

cescres ? La capacité de nuisance des djihadistes en question n'a certes plus rien à voir avec celle dont disposait le « califat » lorsqu'il régnait sur un territoire plus vaste que le Royaume-Uni, mais depuis de longs mois les attentats et autres exactions se multiplient au Moyen-Orient, faisant resurgir des craintes qu'on croyait appartenir au passé. L'épidémie de coronavirus tombe en ce sens bien pour eux car elle a détourné l'attention et affaibli les régimes en place.



Baghouz, dernier fief de Daesh, tombait en mars 2019. Même s'il ne dispose plus de base territoriale, l'Etat islamique n'a pas perdu son pouvoir de nuisance. - afp Journaliste au service Monde



## Les Kurdes se battent contre deux virus : le covid19 et la “démocrature”

**L**e covid19 touche nos amis kurdes et nous craignons pour la vie de ceux et celles qui croupissent en prison. Un autre danger les guette : la démocratie, la dictature façon Erdoğan qui se cache sous les traits d'une démocratie de façade. Ainsi le chef de l'Etat turc avait organisé en mars 2019 les élections locales, comme l'y oblige la constitution, mais, moins d'un an après, Il détricote en toute quiétude le résultat des urnes. Le HDP avait gagné 71 municipalités. 6 élections furent immédiatement invalidées pour un motif fallacieux et, dans les mois suivants, plusieurs maires furent destitués dont ceux de Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van. Les 23 mars et 15 mai 2020, le gouvernement turc destituait à nouveau des co-maires de municipalités dirigées par le HDP (Batman, Silvan, Ergani, Lice et Eğil, Güroy-mak, Gökçebağ et Halfeli auxquelles sont venues s'ajouter Siirt, Iğdır, Kurtalan, Baykan et Aixnova), Le HDP chiffre à 45 le nombre de destitutions visant des maires démocratiquement élus et remplacés par des administrateurs nommés par le pouvoir. Depuis les élections locales du 31



La Mairie de Siirt encerclée par la police turque.

mars 2019, 26 co-maires ont été mis en état d'arrestation : 21 sont derrière les barreaux et 5 en garde à vue. Par ailleurs, des dizaines d'anciens maires HDP élus en 2014 sont toujours emprisonnés. Le HDP en appelle à l'opinion internationale :

“Une fois de plus, nous appelons la communauté internationale, le Secrétaire général du Conseil de l'Europe, le Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux et le Comité des régions de l'UE en particulier, ainsi que nos partis frères et tous les tenants de la démocratie, à élever la voix et à agir contre ces politiques racistes du gouvernement turc qui tente

d'ériger le “régime de tutelle” en norme”.

Le maire de Diyarbakir condamné à une lourde peine de prison

Dr Selcuk Mizrakli, co-maire de la ville métropolitaine de Diyarbakir, élu le 31 mars 2019, destitué le 19 août, est détenu à la prison de Kayseri / Bünyan depuis le 22 octobre 2019. L'audience finale de son procès-éclair s'est tenue le 9 mars 2020, après une instruction bâclée, devant la 9ème Haute Cour pénale de Diyarbakir qui l'a condamné à 9 ans, 4 mois et 15 jours de prison pour “appartenance à une organisation terroriste”. L'acte d'accusation a

retenu la confession d'une “repentante” qui a obtenu, en échange de son témoignage, une libération immédiate et l'abandon des charges retenues contre elle. On a également reproché au Dr Mizrakli diverses activités sociales et politiques organisées par le HDP, dont il était membre, ou par “Sarmaşık”, une association pour la lutte contre la pauvreté et le développement durable dont il était président, association qui fut interdite et fermée après que l'Etat d'urgence fut déclaré. Pour Human Rights Watch, les éléments de preuve contenus dans l'acte d'accusation n'étaient en rien l'accusation selon laquelle il serait impliqué dans des crimes ou dans des faits de terrorisme.

Zülal Erdoğan, l'un des avocats du co-maire destitué de la ville métropolitaine de Diyarbakir a déclaré : “Toutes les allégations présentées comme éléments de preuve dans le dossier sont illégales. Nous irons en appel, nous irons devant la Cour suprême, nous irons devant la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme. Ce n'est pas fini, la procédure judiciaire va se poursuivre”.

## Inquiétudes après la condamnation à cinq ans de prison en Iran de la chercheuse franco-iranienne Fariba Adelkhah

**L**a chercheuse a été arrêtée en Iran en juin 2019. Son compagnon, le chercheur français Roland Marchal, arrêté en même temps qu'elle, avait été libéré en mars. Après presque un an de détention « provisoire » dans la prison d'Evin à Téhéran, la chercheuse franco-iranienne Fariba Adelkhah, 61 ans, a été

condamnée à cinq ans de prison, a annoncé samedi 16 avril son avocat, Saeid Dehghan. La justice iranienne a retenu contre l'anthropologue les charges de « rassemblements et collusion en vue d'agir contre la sécurité nationale » et « propagande » contre la République islamique. Pour cette dernière accusation, la

franco-iranienne a été condamnée à un an d'emprisonnement mais, si la sentence est confirmée en appel, elle purgera la peine la plus longue.

La France a condamné cette décision de justice, réclamant la libération immédiate de la chercheuse. Samedi, dans un

communiqué, le ministre des affaires étrangères, Jean-Yves Le Drian, a dénoncé une condamnation « politique », qui n'était « fondée sur aucun élément sérieux ou fait établi ». Téhéran ne reconnaît pas la double nationalité de ses citoyens. De ce fait, cette spécialiste du chiisme et chercheuse au Centre de re-

cherches internationales de Sciences Po Paris n'a pas pu, pour l'instant, bénéficier de l'assistance consulaire de l'ambassade de France à Téhéran.

### « Cette condamnation est illégale »

Son avocat, Saeid Dehghan, espérait une libération conditionnelle. Pour lui, la condamnation de Fariba Adelkhah est « une déception ». Me Dehghan, qui compte faire appel, avait réussi à prouver l'innocence de sa cliente concernant deux autres accusations, « espionnage » et « trouble à l'opinion publique ». « Pour nous, cette condamnation est illégale, explique-t-il. Dans le texte du verdict, il n'y a même pas une ligne de mon plaidoyer. »

Fariba Adelkhah a été arrêtée en Iran en juin 2019 alors qu'elle menait des études sur le clergé dans la ville religieuse de Qom. Son compagnon, le chercheur français Roland Marchal, spécialiste de



La chercheuse Fariba Adelkhah, en 2012. THOMAS ARRIVE / AFP

l'Afrique de l'Est, avait été interpellé au même moment qu'elle, à l'aéroport de Téhéran-Imam Khomeini, alors qu'il s'apprêtait à passer des vacances en Iran avec Mme Adelkhah. Accusé de vouloir « porter atteinte à la sécurité nationale » et de « collusion avec un Etat étranger », Roland Marchal a été finalement libéré en mars, sans qu'aucun verdict ne soit prononcé à son encontre.

Dans les cercles d'analystes

des affaires iraniennes, l'hypothèse la plus répandue est que l'Iran cherche à utiliser Fariba Adelkhah pour faire libérer un de ses diplomates, Assadollah Assadi, incarcéré en Belgique. L'homme est accusé d'avoir été impliqué dans l'attentat déjoué contre un rassemblement en juin 2018 à Villepinte de l'organisation des Moudjahidin du peuple, ennemis jurés de Téhéran.

L'Iran a, par le passé, utilisé les détenus iraniens ayant une

autre nationalité comme monnaie d'échange dans ses négociations avec l'Occident. Cela a été notamment le cas du journaliste irano-américain Jason Rezaian. Accusé et arrêté pour « espionnage », il a été relâché après un an et demi de détention, en janvier 2016, au moment où une partie des sanctions internationales avaient été levées dans le cadre de l'accord sur le dossier nucléaire de Téhéran.

De fait, la libération de Roland Marchal a été concomitante avec celle, en France, d'un ingénieur iranien, Jalal Rohollahnejad. Arrêté en février à Nice, ce dernier risquait une extradition vers les Etats-Unis, qui l'accusent d'avoir cherché à exporter du matériel technologique malgré l'embargo américain contre Téhéran. En décembre 2019, le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, a proposé aux Etats-Unis que les deux pays se livrent à un échange de prisonniers.

The New York Times

19 mai 2020

By Alissa J. Rubin and Farnaz Fassihi

## Iran Quietly Lowers the Temperature with U.S.

Despite the heated rhetoric on both sides, Iran has toned down its approach to the West on several fronts, and the U.S. has reciprocated.

**BAGHDAD** — After years of increasing tensions that nearly led to war, Iran has moderated its approach to the West, shifting from a policy of provocation to one of limited cooperation. The change reflects an effort to avoid direct confrontation with the United States that the Iranians say could benefit President Trump in the November election.

Nowhere is the shift more evident than in Iraq, where Iran has backed a pro-American prime minister and ordered its proxy militias to cease



The Grand Bazaar in Tehran, Iran, last week. After months of attacks on American forces in Iraq, Iran has called off its proxy militias, one of several de-escalation steps. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

their rocket attacks on American forces.

The Americans, while publicly dismissive of any change in Iranian posture, have quietly reciprocated in modest and indirect ways.

Taken together, the openings represent an incipient détente that, even if it does not last or lead to the end of hostilities between Iran and the United States, has already lowered the temperature of the relationship, reducing the risk of open conflict.

“A war is less likely to happen,



but there is still the risk of a confrontation,” said Randa Slim, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute. “But it’s less likely because the intent of the primary actors has shifted. Both Iran and the U.S. definitely do not want a war six months before the U.S. elections.”

Iran’s shift, which has not been announced or explained publicly, appears to be tactical, analysts said, noting that the country still vehemently opposes the Trump administration’s demand that it renegotiate its nuclear agreement with the West and that it has not backed off its goal of ousting the United States military from the Middle East. Publicly, both countries remain engaged in verbal warfare.

But the recent signs of de-escalation have been significant:

- After months of hit-and-run attacks on American forces in Iraq that pushed the United States and Iran to the brink of war in January, Iran has called off its proxy militias and the attacks have largely ceased.
- When Iraq’s Parliament chose an American-backed prime minister this month, Iran, which has been instrumental in choosing previous Iraqi governments, ultimately acceded to the choice and helped put him in office.
- In April, Iran reached out to the United States to open negotiations for a prisoner swap, offering to release a United States Navy veteran held by Iran in exchange for an Iranian-American doctor detained by the Americans.
- Attacks on merchant ships and tankers in the Persian Gulf that threatened one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes for much of last year have been ratcheted



Anti-war activists marching in Washington in January. The détente has made open conflict less likely. Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

down, although not entirely ended.

Diplomats, Iraqi and Iranian officials and analysts cite a combination of reasons for the change, including a fear of war with the United States. They also note that Iran is overextended — fighting a coronavirus epidemic, a tank-

could ill afford.

“Iran is redefining its regional policies after Gen. Suleimani’s assassination,” Mohammad Hossein Malaek, a seasoned Iranian diplomat and former ambassador to China, wrote in Iranian Diplomacy magazine in April. “It’s reshuffling its cards, it’s reassessing its capabilities,



Iraqi security forces clashing with protesters in Baghdad last November. Ivor Prickett for The New York Times

ing economy and public unrest at home — and needs to retrench.

Tehran was caught by surprise when the Americans retaliated for the killing of an American contractor in Iraq in December by killing the leader of Iran’s elite Quds Force, Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani. The United States threatened a disproportionate response if another American was killed, something Iran

and it has entered the arena with a new perspective and plan.”

Iran has also concluded that escalating tensions with the United States could provoke armed conflict which, aside from being painful for Iran, could benefit Mr. Trump politically, improving his re-election chances, according to people familiar with the policy. Since taking office, Mr.

Trump has withdrawn from the nuclear agreement with Iran and imposed crippling economic sanctions that have devastated Iran’s economy.

An adviser to Iran’s foreign ministry said that even the powerful Quds Force — the branch of the Revolutionary Guards that runs proxy militias from Iraq to Lebanon — had been ordered to “act conservatively” and remain in “a holding pattern” until November.

In addition to the American election, Iran has its eyes on a United Nations Security Council decision in October that will determine whether an international arms embargo against it is extended. Until then, Iran wants to avoid alienating members of the Security Council, analysts said.

The Trump administration credits its “maximum pressure campaign” against Iran, including sanctions and military threats, for forcing the country to rethink its strategy.

“Pressure works,” Brian Hook, the State Department’s special representative for Iran policy, said Tuesday. “For over three years we have contained and countered Iran through deterrence and diplomacy. The regime is also broke because of our sanctions. Iran’s leaders today face a choice: either negotiate with President Trump or manage economic collapse.”

The attacks in the Persian Gulf dropped off, the Americans point out, after Mr. Trump ordered the Navy to sink any Iranian vessels harassing American ships. On Tuesday, the Navy warned boats not to come within 100 meters of an American naval vessel in international waters.



At the same time, despite the all-or-nothing statements, the United States has engaged with Iran indirectly.

After Iran accepted the American-backed nominee for Iraq's prime minister, Mustapha al-Kadhimi, the United States granted Iraq a four-month waiver from American sanctions on Iran so that Baghdad could buy gas from Tehran. The waiver — longer than the usual 30- to 45-day waiver — gives Iran access to much needed cash.

Another outreach between the two foes has involved discussions about a possible prisoner swap involving an American Navy veteran, Michael White, and an Iranian doctor in U.S. custody. The talks seem to have stalled in the past few days but neither side appears to have given up on them.

In another possible gesture, Iran's Central Bank governor, Abdolnaser Hemmati, said in March that the United States had allowed some frozen Iranian funds in third countries to be released to Iran. The payments were widely understood to be for oil purchases.

United States officials deny that they allowed any frozen funds to be paid to Iran.

Western analysts characterize Iran's shifts as adapting to changing situations.

What we've been seeing coming out of Iran over the past couple of months is more easily explained as a tactical shift in each theater that makes sense in that theater, rather than a strategic



Mourners in Tehran after the death of Lt. Gen. Qassim Suleimani in January. His sway had extended throughout the region. Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

change," said Jarrett Blanc, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

prime minister also condemned Iran's influence and the virtually unchecked power of its proxy militias.



Prime Minister Mustapha al-Kadhimi of Iraq, who is backed by the United States. Iran acceded to his selection and helped put him in office. Iraqi Prime Minister Media Office, via Reuters

In Iraq, where the back and forth with the United States was most transparent, Iran was ultimately more concerned with stabilizing Iraq than installing its preferred candidate, Iranian officials said.

Anti-government protests in Iraq last fall that led to the resignation of the previous

By March, with Parliament still unable to agree on a new prime minister, Iraq was facing a host of other problems as well: Plummeting oil prices had deprived the government of its main source of revenue, and restrictions imposed to fight the coronavirus pandemic had shut down the economy.

In April, Gen. Ismail Qaani,

who replaced General Suleimani as the Quds Force commander, came to Baghdad with a clear message. He told senior Iraqi political leaders that Tehran was troubled by Iraq's economic disarray: "Things are not good in Iraq and they can't go on like this because Iraq will become a burden on Iran," he said, according to a senior Iraqi political leader who met with General Qaani.

With Iraq on the verge of falling apart and the Americans threatening to end the sanctions waivers for Iraq and refusing to aid its struggling economy, Iran blinked.

"Iran overplayed its hand and they were overstretched — in Lebanon, in Syria and then the protests in the fall — and the fact that Shiites protested against Iran, that shook them," said a senior Iraqi politician who asked not to be identified in order to discuss delicate diplomatic issues.

Iraq not only accepted Mr. al-Kadhimi, the American choice, but also lobbied its allied parties in Iraq to support him.

Western officials took that as a victory.

"The narrative since 2003 is that the West has allowed Iraqi politics to shift toward Iran," said a senior Western diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. "But actually here, this time, the Americans and the British supported Kadhimi from the beginning and Iran did not, and it was Iran who moved a little."

## Iranian Revolutionary Guards kill two Kurdish fighters near Iraqi border

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards have killed two Kurdish militants and injured four others in a battle near Iran's border with Iraqi Kurdistan, state media has said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards killed two "counter-revolutionary terrorists" in a clash in the western province of Kurdistan, state television's website reported on Wednesday.

At midday on Tuesday, the Guards "in a joint operation with Kurdistan province's intelligence organisation fought an eight-man counter-revolutionary



Kurdish fighters often clash with Iranian troops near the Iraqi border [Getty]

group and killed two of them," state television quoted a Guards' statement as saying.

Four other members of the group were wounded and the rest fled into the mountains, it added.

They were still being pursued.

The clash occurred near the town of Marivan, the statement said, without naming the group.

For much of the past 40 years, Iran has been battling Kurdish fighters who use bases in neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan to mount attacks against the Guards and state institutions inside the country.

Earlier this month three Revolutionary Guards were killed fighting Kurdish militants near the border with Iraqi Kurdistan.



20 Mai 2020  
Chris Den Hond

## Entre les crises, la Turquie navigue à vue

Affaiblissement de la livre, baisse des réserves monétaires, crainte d'une sévère récession en 2020 : Ahmet Insel, économiste, politologue et professeur émérite à l'université de Galatasaray à Istanbul, répond à nos questions sur l'impact économique du coronavirus en Turquie. Mais aussi sur les engagements armés menés par Recep Tayyip Erdoğan en Syrie et en Libye.

Chris Den Hond. — Comment la Turquie gère-t-elle la crise du coronavirus ?

Ahmet Insel. — L'épidémie de Covid-19 évolue modérément en Turquie. Le nombre de décès est officiellement de 4 000 personnes le 14 mai, mais comme dans la quasi-totalité des pays (excepté la Bel-

gique), ce chiffre officiel est sous-estimé pour diverses raisons. À Istanbul, la comparaison du nombre total des décès en mars-avril 2020 avec celui des cinq dernières années donne une estimation de la surmortalité due directement et indirectement à l'épidémie. Si on projette cette estimation sur l'ensemble de la Turquie, la surmortalité due au Covid-19 serait 50 à 60 % supérieure aux données fournies par le ministère de la santé, soit environ 6 000 décès. Pour un pays de 83 millions d'habitants, ce résultat corrigé n'est pas si catastrophique, pour le moment. Il est comparable à celui de l'Allemagne. Un avantage de la Turquie est sa population bien plus jeune que les pays européens.

D'autre part, après avoir pris à

la légère l'épidémie, le gouvernement a mis en place des mesures de confinement très strictes pour les personnes âgées et interdit les circulations interurbaines, fermé les écoles, les magasins et les restaurants. Il n'y a pas eu de saturation pour les capacités d'accueil des hôpitaux. Du point de vue de la gestion de l'épidémie, le gouvernement a réagi, certes avec un peu de retard, mais l'épidémie aussi est arrivée avec un mois de retard. Ce qui a permis au système hospitalier de se préparer au choc.

Une mesure très discriminatoire révèle bien la nature revancharde de l'autocratie erdoganiste. Le Parlement a voté une loi de remise partielle des peines pour alléger la population carcérale d'un tiers.

Du coup, 90 000 prisonniers ont été libérés, mais pas les condamnés politiques, élus, journalistes, avocats, militants associatifs... En libérant des prisonniers de droit commun, notamment un chef éminent de la pègre, idole des milieux d'extrême droite et homme des basses œuvres des services secrets, mais en maintenant les prisonniers dont le seul crime est de s'opposer sans aucune violence à l'autocratie d'Erdoğan, le régime révèle clairement sa nature. Mais les mesures d'aide financière aux familles en difficulté, la relative réussite de la gestion de la pandémie par le gouvernement semblent avoir un peu rehaussé le soutien à Erdoğan dans les enquêtes d'opinion alors que ce soutien avait beaucoup baissé avant la pandémie.

C. D. H. — Combien de temps la banque centrale peut-elle tenir au rythme où filent les devises ?

A. I. — Fin avril les réserves brutes de devises de la banque centrale étaient tombées à 51 milliards de dollars (46,73 milliards d'euros), ce qui représente un peu moins de trois mois d'importation. Ce montant était d'environ 75 milliards de dollars (68,72 milliards d'euros) fin 2019 contre 106 milliards de dollars (97,12 milliards d'euros) fin 2016. Il s'agit de réserves brutes hors les réserves d'or. En termes nets, les réserves de devises sont de 28 milliards de dollars (25,65 milliards d'euros) fin avril. Depuis février 2020, la banque centrale a massivement engagé ses réserves pour empêcher la dépréciation de la livre. Les banques publiques aussi ont vendu beaucoup de devises. Malgré ces interventions, la livre s'est dépréciée de 15 % depuis le début de l'année 2020 vis-à-vis du dollar.

Il y a une forte pression à la dépréciation de la livre. Les investisseurs étrangers désinvestissent et rapatrient leurs capitaux. Il y a aussi une fuite devant la livre chez les ménages et les entreprises. Erdoğan impose une politique de diminution des taux d'intérêt qui affaiblit encore plus la monnaie. Les dépôts en devises des ménages augmentent, mais surtout de plus en plus de ménages préfèrent garder leur épargne en devises hors du système bancaire, ce qui affaiblit encore plus les moyens de réponse du système bancaire. La banque centrale et les banques publiques ont à peu près épuisé leurs ressources d'intervention sur le marché des changes. Et le gouvernement refuse, par une posture nationaliste, d'utiliser les facilités de trésorerie du FMI. Une suspension par le gouvernement de la convertibilité de la livre, une limitation du mouvement des capitaux, etc. ne sont pas au programme du gouvernement pour le moment, mais



Ahmet Insel, avril 2017. G. Garitan/Wikimedia Commons

tout le monde craint leur annonce un vendredi soir après la fermeture des marchés. Début mai, les autorités monétaires turques cherchent désespérément à passer des accords de troc de monnaies (swap) avec les banques centrales du Japon et de l'Angleterre. Mais la Réserve fédérale des États-Unis (Federal Reserve System, FED) refuse pour le moment d'inscrire la Turquie dans sa liste de pays susceptibles de bénéficier d'un tel accord.

C. D. H. — L'exportation de voitures et d'électroménager vers l'Union européenne (UE), deux points forts de la Turquie, a fortement chuté. Comment le commerce vers l'UE est-il affecté ?

A. I. — Environ 60 % des exportations de la Turquie vont vers l'UE, avec laquelle existe un accord d'union douanière qui exclut les produits agricoles primaires et certains services. En effet, l'automobile et l'électroménager sont des postes très importants dans les exportations vers l'UE et pendant la période post-confinement sur les marchés européens, notamment d'automobiles, on écoulait d'abord les stocks qui ont gonflé. Et nous ignorons les effets sur l'emploi et le pouvoir d'achat du choc post-confinement. Il faut ajouter à cela la probable perte substantielle des recettes du tourisme. On s'attend à une récession pour 2020 supérieure à 5 % du PIB en Turquie, notamment en raison de l'effondrement des exportations et des services

(hôtellerie, restauration, transport).

C. D. H. — Les entreprises auront-elles les devises pour acheter les produits dont elles ont besoin ?

A. I. — Il y a deux choses qui allègeront un peu la contrainte de devises : la chute spectaculaire des cours de pétrole (l'énergie représente 30 % des importations) et la récession, parce que l'industrie importe des biens intermédiaires pour exporter. Le déficit des comptes extérieurs augmente surtout avec la croissance. La question principale dans un mois ou deux sera plutôt l'ampleur du choc de la demande, notamment par l'alourdissement de la facture des importations.

C. D. H. — Erdoğan ne va-t-il pas être obligé de se rapprocher des États-Unis pour survivre ?

A. I. — Il est très difficile de prévoir la politique étrangère d'Erdoğan qui est désormais plus proche d'une navigation à vue. Il cherche actuellement à renouer le dialogue avec les États-Unis et l'UE. Des contacts bilatéraux sont accablés avec les bailleurs de fonds, mais la Turquie ne donne plus les garanties de prévisibilité d'antan ni la sécurité juridique nécessaire pour les acteurs économiques, et n'inspire plus la confiance chez ses alliés institutionnels. Erdoğan utilise un jour des propos quasi injurieux vis-à-vis de certains dirigeants européens,

défie l'UE et lui envoie le lendemain une lettre de félicitations à l'occasion de la journée européenne du 9 mai ! La chute brutale des prix du pétrole a réduit aussi les marges financières des soutiens au régime d'Erdoğan, comme l'Azerbaïdjan, le Qatar, voire la Russie. Il reste la transformation de l'économie en une zone internationale de blanchiment d'argent. Là aussi, le défaut de prévisibilité en matière de stabilité n'attire pas tant que ça ces capitaux. En revanche, depuis quelques années la Turquie figure de fait, mais pas encore officiellement, dans la liste noire des organisations internationales en matière de blanchiment d'argent.

C. D. H. — Combien coûte la guerre en Libye et en Syrie ?

A. I. — La Turquie a 20 000 soldats en Syrie qui sont en situation de guerre. Tous sont des professionnels. Il y a des interventions régulières contre des positions du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en Irak. Cela doit coûter cher. En Libye il n'y a pas beaucoup de soldats turcs, mais la Turquie — avec probablement le Qatar — financent environ 5 000 mercenaires transportés de Syrie vers la Libye, en soutien au gouvernement de Fayez El-Sarraj, le gouvernement reconnu par la communauté internationale, et le matériel militaire est pour l'essentiel livré sur place. Comme la production du pétrole est en grande partie arrêtée en Libye depuis janvier 2020, le gouvernement de Fayez El-Sarraj n'a plus les moyens de payer ne serait-ce qu'une partie de ces dépenses.

C. D. H. — Quelles sont la force et la faiblesse des oppositions politiques à Erdoğan ?

A. I. — La faiblesse principale de l'opposition à Erdoğan est son hétérogénéité. Elle est composée des ultranationalistes laïcs, des kémalistes, des Kurdes, des alévites, des démocrates, des socialistes, des conservateurs, des fémi-



nistes. Ils représentent un peu plus de la moitié de l'électorat. Pour dire non à Erdoğan, ils arrivent tant bien que mal à composer ensemble, mais ils ne représentent pas une force de rechange unie. Comment mettre sur une même plateforme politique les nationalistes laïcs comme les électeurs du Bon Parti (İYİ

Parti), voire l'aile nationaliste du Parti républicain des peuples (CHP) et les Kurdes du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP) ?

La force d'Erdoğan consiste à attiser les dissensions culturelles, religieuses et nationalistes quand il se sent menacé, et à rassembler autour de lui suffisamment de personnes

sur la base du nationalisme religieux. Il utilise l'activisme international de l'État comme un moyen de mobilisation, avec des arguments de sécurité nationale, de mise en péril de l'État unitaire et de la nostalgie des grandeurs perdues d'antan. Ce dernier thème revient souvent sous la forme du « retour aux terres qui nous appar-

tenaient il y a cent ans » (sous l'empire ottoman), comme au sujet de l'intervention en Libye ou en Syrie, mais tout en rappelant que la Turquie respecte l'indépendance et l'intégrité territoriale de ces États. Il y a une sorte de schizophrénie dans pas mal de discours de justification de la politique extérieure actuelle de la Turquie.

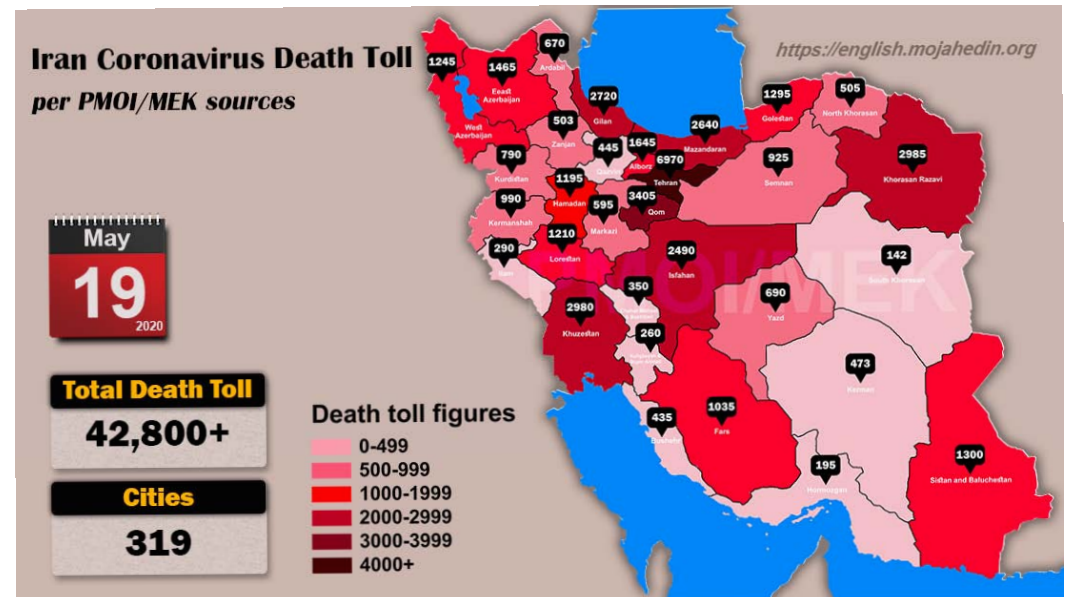
20 Mai 2020

## Iran: les décès dû au Covid-19 dans 319 villes dépassent les 42.800

Les mensonges sans fin de Rohani contredisent les rapports des experts et des responsables du régime

L'Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d'Iran (OMPI / MEK) a annoncé le 19 mai 2020 que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus dans 319 villes iraniennes avait dépassé les 42.800. Le nombre de victimes dans les provinces de Khouzistan est de 2980, de Mazandaran 2640, d'Alborz 1645, de Lorestan 1210, de Fars 1035, du Kurdistan 790, de Khorassan du Nord 505, de Zanjan 503 et de Kohgilouyeh-Boyer-Ahmad 260. Le porte-parole du ministère de la Santé du régime a reconnu aujourd'hui dans son rapport technique que 2111 personnes avaient contracté le virus ces dernières 24 heures, que 62 étaient décédées et que 2698 patients étaient sous soins intensifs.

Aujourd'hui, Hassan Rohani a déclaré : « dans la lutte contre le coronavirus, les actions du gouvernement dans le domaine de la santé, du traitement et de la mise en œuvre du plan de développement de la santé, nous ont mis dans une position où nous ne manquons pas de lits d'hôpitaux spéciaux, ni d'installations ni d'équipements médicaux. »



Poursuivant ses mensonges flagrants, il a ajouté : « non seulement la production de kits de test, de respirateurs et de masques N95 répond aux besoins intérieurs du pays, mais nous avons également le pouvoir d'exporter ces produits maintenant. » Rohani a ajouté : « Les actions du 11ème gouvernement (le sien) dans le développement du cyberspace et des communications nous ont permis de répondre aux besoins de la population en utilisant le cyberspace en cette période. » En outre, il a affirmé que « la force coercitive n'a été utilisée en aucune façon pour lutter contre le coronavirus ».

Le 9 mai 2020, le général Hossein Ashtari, chef des Forces de sécurité de l'Etat (FSE), dont les propos ont été publiés dans le quotidien Entekhab, déclarait : « la police du FATA (cyberpolice) a sévi avec fermeté contre ceux qui répandaient des rumeurs dans le cyberspace, a identifié plus de 1 300 sites internet et arrêté 320 personnes. »

Poursuivant les mensonges proférés par Rohani, son porte-parole Ali Rabi'i a déclaré hier à l'IRNA : « nous sommes au troisième rang mondial après la Chine et la Suisse pour le rétablissement et le traitement de la maladie du co-

ronavirus. Nous avons passé la phase de gestion et de contrôle du virus. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes entrés dans la phase de maîtrise du virus. »

Alireza Zali, le chef du centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus (CNLC) à Téhéran, a mis en garde contre la répétition dans d'autres villes de ce qui s'est passé au Khouzistan. Il a déclaré aujourd'hui à l'agence Mehr : « nous ne devons pas penser que le coronavirus est terminé à Téhéran. Il est toujours là. »

Mohammad-Reza Qadir, président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Qom, a déclaré

aujourd'hui à l'agence ISNA : « la situation n'est pas encore revenue à la normale. La plus grande erreur consiste à présenter la situation comme normale. »

Simultanément, le directeur général du bureau des relations publiques de l'Organisation médicale de l'État a parlé de 107 décès dans le personnel médical dus au coronavirus et a souligné que ce n'était pas l'ensemble des décès. Dans des propos publiés aujourd'hui par l'agence Fars, il a également déclaré : «

nous recueillons les chiffres exacts à travers le pays pour voir précisément combien de membres du personnel médical ont été infectés ou ont perdu la vie en service. »

Le directeur général de la société Imen a été cité par le site Shafaghna affirmant aujourd'hui : « les chiffres des décès dus au coronavirus ne correspondent pas à l'augmentation du nombre de cas positifs. Nous devons parler aux gens de manière honnête et transparente (...) Comment le

nombre de décès diminue-t-il dans ces conditions ? Annoncer des zones blanches était une erreur au départ. »

Le Dr Mohammad-Reza Mahboubfar, membre du CNLC, a déclaré aujourd'hui à Setareh Sobh : « Cet été et cet automne, nous assisterons à la troisième et à la quatrième vague du virus dans le pays, avec des conséquences et des décès plus importants. Il n'existe pas de zone blanche. Si l'on ne fournit pas les chiffres réels, les gens ne pren-

dront pas le virus au sérieux dans une grande partie de la société (...) Nous avons prédit que la deuxième vague commencerait, et c'est ce qui s'est passé. La deuxième vague n'a eu lieu qu'en raison de l'assouplissement des restrictions (...) Les responsables étaient plus préoccupés par les troubles sociaux et les conséquences économiques du virus (...) Dans notre pays, un nombre important de personnel médical a perdu la vie et nous avons été classés les premiers dans ce domaine. »



20 Mai, 2020

By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

## Syrian Kurdish parties form political umbrella to unite Kurds

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Twenty-five Kurdish political parties and movements in northern Syria on Monday formed a political umbrella in Qamishlo intending to unite the Syrian Kurds under the name “Kurdish National Unity Parties.”

In a statement released on Tuesday, the 25 parties, which includes the Democratic Union Party (PYD), said the umbrella organization was formed to unite Kurdish ranks in Syria.

The parties include those who are a part of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), and those outside of the administration, it added.

The umbrella organization plans to hold joint activities and meetings under the new party name to support the Kurdish unity initiative and to exchange views on the latest developments on the ground, the statement read.

The PYD and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), the two major factions among Syrian

Kurdish parties, have continued negotiations that began in early November to discuss the need for unity after Turkey's cross-border offensive in northern Syria in October.

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

The dominant Syrian Kurdish factions – the PYD and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-backed KNC – have not successfully cooperated as had been hoped, in part because agreements they reached in Duhok and Erbil between 2012 and 2014 were never effectively implemented.

The United States has publicly supported the SDF's initiative to unite the Kurdish parties. Furthermore, the Kurdistan Region has also supported the efforts to bring the Syrian Kurds together.



The logo for the “Kurdish National Unity Parties” group. (Photo: Kurdish National Unity Parties)

In a meeting with Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani on May 13, US Consul General in Erbil, Steven Fagin, praised Barzani's efforts to unify various Kurdish-led political factions in Syria.

In early May, William Roebuck, Deputy Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State, met with several Kurdish parties to discuss the unification initiative.

Guney Yildiz, a non-resident scholar at the Washington-based Middle East Institute, published a piece on May 4

where he said the initiative aims to “unify the Kurds to play a substantial role in political platforms that debate the future of Syria.”

Yildiz added that a second goal of the talks is “to alleviate Turkey's hostility toward northeast Syria by including the KNC.”

So far, the PYD have been excluded from peace talks due to Turkish opposition, while the KNC joined the talks as a member of the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition.

On Tuesday, UN Syria Envoy

Geir Pedersen said new constitutional talks might be held in Geneva again in the future.

Turkey has publically opposed the Kurdish unity talks.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told A Haber on Friday that the KNC should not make deals with the People's Protection Units (YPG), which

Turkey alleges has close ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a claim the YPG denies.

The PKK is a Kurdish rebel force currently engaged in a decades-long war with Ankara for broader Kurdish rights in Turkey.

Salih Muslim, the co-spokesperson of the PYD, recently told Kurdistan 24 that no agreement has been reached

between the two sides so far.

During an online meeting on May 12, the KNC leadership and the majority of its members discussed the initiative.

A day after the meeting, the KNC released a statement where it underlined the "necessity and importance of achieving [unity] in a way that serves the cause of the Kurdish

people in Syria and the consolidation of their legitimate rights in the context of a federal, democratic, multi-national, and multi-religious Syria."

The KNC also expressed support for the efforts of the US and the leadership of the Kurdistan Region "to achieve the unity of the Kurds within the framework of the national opposition."



May 20, 2020

## A Kurdish Border Porter Killed and Another Wounded

**A** Kurdish Border Porter—known as Kolbar—was killed and another one wounded in a shootout after being targeted by the Turkish troops in the border region of Qotur on the border between Khoy County, West Azerbaijan Province and Turkey.

A reliable source in Qotur has informed the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) that "At 10 pm, May 17, Turkish army forces fired directly at a group of Kolbars near the vil-

lage of Amanort at the zero border region, as a result of which a Kolbar named Bahram Yousefi was killed and another kolbar known as Shams al-Din Omarpour was wounded". According to the source, Bahram Yousefi's body was taken to Van and has not yet been handed over to his family. Shams al-Din Omarpour has been transferred to a medical centre in Van and his condition is reported to be critical. Bahram Yousefi, 35 from the village of Beljuk Qutoor, was the



father of three children. At least two Kurdish Kolbars have been killed by Turkish

troops in the Kurdish town over the past year.

20 May, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## US-led Coalition airstrikes destroy ISIS tunnels southwest of Erbil: Source

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The US-led coalition against the Islamic State, in coordination with Kurdish Peshmerga forces, carried out airstrikes on Wednesday against the terrorist group's fighters in the area known as Qarachukh Mountain, located outside the disputed district of Makhmour, a security source told Kurdistan 24.

According to the source, the strikes targeted tunnels used by militants as a launching pad to burn down nearby crops fields of the citizens living in the area.

Casualties among the Islamic State extremists remain unknown as small sleeper cells are spread throughout hideouts in Mount Qarachukh.

"The Islamic State took full advantage of the security void in disputed Makhmour to regroup and exploit the weak security in remote territories and villages under Iraqi security forces' jurisdiction to launch nighttime insurgent attacks against Kurdish civilians living there," the security source added.

Peshmerga commanders sta-

tioned at the Gwer frontline outside Makhmour have continuously warned the federal government of a mounting Islamic State presence in the area and of the threat it posed to residents.

Last week with the beginning of harvest season, Islamic State burned down hundreds of acres of crop fields in the



disputed Makhmour district. The group also claimed responsibility for fires in Diyala's Khanaqin district on Thursday. In the past week, a Kurdish military commander as well as an Iraqi official have previously accused the terrorist organization of being behind at least some of these incidents.

Makhmour is one of the territories disputed by the federal Iraqi government the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). It is located on the outskirts of Erbil province, some 60 kilometres southwest of the Kurdistan Region's capital city.

After the fall of the previous Iraqi regime in 2003, the town was jointly administered by the two governments since the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003.

Following the emergence of the Islamic State in 2014 throughout many of Iraq's disputed territories, Peshmerga forces held their frontline and prevented militants from entering their territory despite the terrorist organization controlling adjacent land. Security in those areas, however, significantly deteriorated after Iraqi forces backed by Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) militias overran disputed territories in response to the Kurdistan Region's September 2017 independence referendum, driving Kurdish forces out.

Since then, Iraqi forces have been in charge of protecting the area of Makhmour. Like in several other disputed territories, the extremist group has taken advantage of the secu-



Smoke rises after a Coalition airstrike in Iraq's disputed district of Makhmour, May 20, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

rity vacuum in such areas. In Makhmour, they have staged multiple attacks against security forces or civilians, as well as extorting local villagers and farmers to pay "taxes" or give them livestock under threat of violence and death.

Over the past few years, the Peshmerga forces and Iraqi troops, backed by US-led Coalition airpower, have launched several military operations to eliminate sleeper cells hiding in areas surrounding Mount Qarachokh.

## Kurdistan au féminin 20 Mai 2020

# Hommage au leader kurde Ihsan Nuri, l'« aigle d'Ararat »

Le 21 mai 1892 naissait Ihsan Nuri, politicien et officier kurde qui a co-dirigé la rébellion d'Ararat.

« Repose en paix, ô l'aigle d'Ararat ! Parce que Dieu a créé l'humanité de la terre et les Kurdes du feu, et nous savons que le feu est éternel et puissant, » l'historien kurde, Sedat Ulugana.

Ihsan Nuri, également connu sous le nom d'Ihsan Nuri Pacha était un militaire et un politicien kurde, ancien officier de l'armée ottomane, et l'un des généraux des forces kurdes lors de la rébellion d'Ararat entre 1927 et 1930.

Ihsan Nuri est né à Bitlis. Il appartenait à une branche de la tribu Jalali. En 1910, il a obtenu son diplôme de lieutenant et a rejoint l'armée ottomane. Il a participé aux opérations de contre-insurrection en Albanie.

Puis il a été envoyé au Yémen où il a servi pendant 33 mois. A son retour du Yémen, il est nommé aide de camp du 93e régiment d'infanterie ottoman et est envoyé à Beyzon. Au début de la Première Guerre mondiale, il est blessé à Nerman et est renvoyé dans la zone arrière pour y être soigné. Sur le chemin d'Erzincan, il souffre de gelures près de Karaburun. Après avoir été soigné à Erzincan, il est affecté à la neuvième armée ottomane, puis nommé membre du comité d'administration d'Ozurgeti en Géorgie, brièvement occupée par les troupes turques pendant la campagne du Caucase de 1918 et sert comme commandant de la gendarmerie mobile de la ville. Après la Première Guerre mondiale, il prend contact avec la Société pour la Révolution du Kurdistan. Il écrit un article sur les Quatorze Points de Woodrow Wilson, qui sera pu-

blié le 30 mars 1919 dans la revue kurde Jîn [vie]. A son arrivée à Trabzon, Rushdi Bey, qui était le commandant de la 9e division caucasienne, l'envoie à Bakou pour rencontrer les autorités de l'Armée rouge, puis il soutient la rébellion de Sheikh Said en 1925 et plus tard celle d'Ararat.

### République d'Ararat

Les nationalistes kurdes se sont réunis en octobre 1927 et ont non seulement proclamé l'indépendance du Kurdistan, mais ont également formé le Xoybûn\* ou Khoybûn (Indépendance ou être soi-même), un organe national suprême avec des pouvoirs nationaux et internationaux complets et exclusifs. De nombreux Arméniens ont également rejoint le mouvement Xoybûn.

Conscient de la nécessité d'une structure militaire appropriée, Xoybûn a promu Ihsan Nuri au rang de général

(pacha) et l'a nommé commandant en chef de l'armée nationale kurde. Ihsan Nuri, en plus d'être un ancien membre kurde des Jeunes Turcs, a montré son allégeance à la cause kurde lorsqu'il a dirigé la mutinerie au sein de l'armée turque avant la rébellion de Sheikh Said.

En octobre 1927, Ihsan Nuri a réuni un petit groupe de soldats armés d'armes modernes et formés aux tactiques de l'infanterie. Cette force a initié la révolte de Xoybûn, marchant vers le Mont Ararat. Ihsan Nuri et ses hommes réussirent non seulement à atteindre le Mont Ararat, mais ils réussirent à sécuriser les villes de Bitlis, les provinces de Van, et la plupart des campagnes autour du lac de Van, établissant ainsi une zone notable de résistance kurde.

Le 28 octobre 1927, la Répu-

bligue indépendante kurde de l'Ararat est proclamée par un gouvernement provisoire, présidé par Ibrahim Pasha Heski Tello, un ancien officier qui a déjà participé à la révolte du Cheikh Saïd, puis à un premier soulèvement de l'Ararat en 1926. La plupart des tribus kurdes de la région, dont la puissante et nombreuse tribu des Djelali, à laquelle appartient Ibrahim Pasha Heski Tello, s'y rallient. La République de l'Ararat n'obtient pas de reconnaissance étatique, mais obtient immédiatement le soutien du mouvement patriotique arménien du Tashnaq. De plus, le gouvernement provisoire kurde obtient du gou-

vernement d'Ankara le retour dans leur foyer des chefs Kurdes exilés. Certains d'entre eux rejoignent la révolte, tandis que d'autres préfèrent se réfugier en Syrie

À la fin de l'été 1930, les forces aériennes turques bombardent les positions kurdes autour du mont Ararat de toutes les directions. Selon le général Ihsan Nuri, la supériorité militaire des forces aériennes turques a démoralisé les Kurdes et a conduit à leur capitulation.

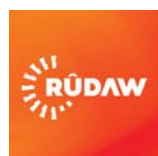
#### Mort en exil à Téhéran

En 1930, Ihsan Nuri est arrivé



comme réfugié à Téhéran. Le gouvernement iranien a restreint ses déplacements pendant ses années à Téhéran. Durant l'été 1976, il a été blessé, heurté par une moto devant sa maison un matin. Il a été transporté à l'hôpital où il

est mort de ses blessures dans la journée. Le coupable conduisant la moto qui l'a heurté n'a jamais été identifié ni appréhendé.



21 May, 2021  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## HDP speakers detained outside their Ankara office: party statement

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – Officials and members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) publicly addressing state dismissal of its mayors were detained by police in the Turkish capital city of Ankara on Wednesday, the party has announced.

Turkey's interior ministry removed from office and detained HDP mayors in the municipalities of Igdir, Siirt, Baykan, Kurtalan, and Altinova on Friday for alleged links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in yet another wave of a government crackdown on party officials.

The party said on Wednesday that their Ankara province co-chairs and other party members took to the front of their office to read out a statement responding to Friday's raids but were blocked from doing so by police, who then detained some of those involved. "Central Executive Member,

Ankara provincial co-chair & party members have been detained while they were making a press statement about the latest trustee appointment to our municipalities," read an English-language tweet from the HDP, which added that the government "cannot intimidate us with such attacks. We will continue to defend people's will."

The HDP did not give a definite total for those arrested, but called for the immediate release of four officials it announced were being held.

The party's Sanliurfa deputy Omer Ocalan published a video, apparently filmed from above from inside the office, purportedly showing a party member being bundled into a van by police officers.

The HDP is a frequent target of state crackdown, and is accused by Ankara of being the political wing of the PKK, which has been involved in a decades-long conflict with the



A video published by HDP Sanliurfa deputy Omer Ocalan purportedly showing a party member being bundled into a van by police officers in Ankara on May 20, 2020. Photo: Twitter

Turkish state in pursuit of cultural and political rights for Kurds in the country.

The HDP has denied organic links to the Kurdish rebels - but unlike the state or other Turkish political parties, it does not view the PKK as a terrorist organization and has expressed its respect for the ideology of jailed party leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The party won 65 of over a thousand municipalities in the March 2019 local elections, but six mayor-elects were banned from taking up office on the grounds that they had been previously dismissed by the government.

According to official party data sent to Rudaw English, only 14 of the HDP mayors remain in office.

## EU backlash

The European Union has released two statements condemning the removal of the mayors this week.

Anders Knappe, president of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, said on Tuesday that Ankara continues dismissing Kurdish mayors "[e]ven during the current COVID-19 pandemic."

"[T]he excessive use of legal proceedings against local elected representatives and their replacement by state appointed officials is not only an af-

front to those who stand up for free and fair elections, it is also a serious and permanent threat to the proper functioning of local democracy in Turkey," he added.

The European External Action Service (EEAS), which manages the EU's diplomatic relations with other states, said Monday that the recent dismissal of five mayors belonging to the HDP in southeast Turkey "appear to be politically motivated."

"Decisions and actions taken by the Turkish authorities against municipalities with

mayors from opposition parties remain of deep concern, in particular when they appear to be politically motivated," it added.

Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, HDP deputy and a member of Turkish parliament's Human Rights Committee told Rudaw English on Tuesday that the EU has failed to show "strong reactions" against human rights violations in Turkey, for fear Ankara could set a new wave of refugees upon Europe.

"The European Union does not show strong reactions with some concerns. There have

been crises about refugees. Following these crises, after Erdogan has used the refugees as a political card, the European Union spends the day with prudent condemnation," said Gergerlioglu.

He called on the EU to replace its "prudent" condemnations of Ankara with "stricter language."

"The European Union should use a stricter language and apply stricter sanctions because the appointment of trustees clearly means disregarding the will of the people. It is an incredible massacre of democracy."



May 21, 2020

# ICRC warns of dire humanitarian crisis in northeast Syria

The International Committee of the Red Cross warned Thursday of a worsening crisis in northeast Syria, where water cuts, food shortages and depleted health services are proving as dangerous as coronavirus.

Home to sprawling displacement camps hosting tens of thousands of people, including families of Islamic State group members, the Kurdish-held northeast has been hard hit by nine years of war.

A COVID-19 outbreak, which the United Nations says has infected six people and killed one in the region, has only added to a litany of challenges in the area, the ICRC said.

"For millions of people in northeast Syria, consequences of fighting, shortages of water, food and medicine, a lack of electricity, the economic downturn with job losses and price hikes are as much of a worry as coronavirus," said Karim



A Syrian girl waits for customers bringing chickpeas to grind for a fee at a camp for the internally displaced in Hasakeh province on May 10, 2020 DELIL SOULEIMAN AFP/File

Mahmoud, ICRC office head in the city of Hasakeh.

Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC's regional director, said "there's a risk that profound crises will worsen, hidden in plain sight, while the world's attention is on" the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under pressure from Russia, the UN Security Council in January reduced the number of border crossings authorised to deliver humanitarian aid to nor-

thern Syria from four to two, both on the Turkish frontier.

The Yarubiya entry point on the Iraqi border, used mainly to deliver UN-funded medical aid to the northeast, was one of those scrapped, causing an aid shortage.

Only one out of 16 hospitals is fully functioning, while eight are partially operational and seven are out of commission, the ICRC said.

Over 50 percent of the local population in northeast Syria is believed to be food insecure, which means they consume less than 2,100 calories a day, the World Food Programme says.

That high proportion was "due to the heavy fighting that took place in this part of Syria over the past few years," said WFP spokeswoman Jessica Lawson.

Kurdish-led fighters for years battled IS, before Turkey and its Syrian proxies seized Kurdish areas on the Syrian side of the border last year.

"Many households were displaced a number of times and frequently most of their belongings have been destroyed or looted, heavily affecting livelihoods in the area," Lawson said.





May, 21, 2020  
By Lawk Ghafuri

## KRG denies role in Sulaimani-Kirkuk prisoner transfer deal

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) interior ministry has denied a senior Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) official's claims that a KRG-Baghdad deal had been struck to hand over Sulaimani province detainees to Kirkuk authorities.

A KRG interior ministry statement denied any knowledge of the deal to transfer more than 170 prisoners arrested during the fight against ISIS, which the PUK announced it had reached with Kirkuk provincial authorities on Tuesday.

"We want to inform the public that KRG has no information or knowledge regarding the handover of 176 detainees in Sulaimani province to Kirkuk province," reads Thursday's statement.

"Such a deal should follow specific KRG and federal government mechanisms before it is implemented, but the recent handover of prisoners did not follow the KRG mechanisms and instructions."

The statement's publication followed claims made by the head of the PUK's Kirkuk office that the party acted as "mediator" of a prisoner handover deal between the KRG and federal government in Baghdad - not as the sole responsible Kurdish agent of the deal.

"We as PUK office in Kirkuk only mediated between federal government and KRG in handing over the prisoners, and the deal was officially agreed by both KRG and federal government," Mohammed Osman told Rudaw anchor Sangar Abdulrahman on Thursday.



File photo: Bilind T. Abdullah / Rudaw

"The prisoners that been handed over the federal government is according to law, which specifies that every detainee should be returned to the area that he committed the crime in order to face justice."

Osman's comments to Rudaw appear to be a backtrack from statements he made at a press conference on Tuesday that said the handover was conducted "upon the order" of the leadership of the PUK, which controls Sulaimani.

"Upon the order of the co-presidents and politburo of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, we were advised to take an initiative to hand over all those who were captured during the fight against Daesh (ISIS) by the PUK or the Kurdistan Regional Government and held in Sulaimani province to the Iraqi government," Osman told press.

The detainees - all from Kirkuk province - have been held in Sulaimani detention facilities since before the events of October 16, 2017, which saw Kurdish authorities and the Peshmerga forced out of the province by the Iraqi government days after the Kurdistan

Region held an independence referendum.

The referendum included Kirkuk, which is constitutionally recognised as territory disputed between Baghdad and Erbil.

According to the handover agreement, all the detainees will be handed over to the Kirkuk's Joint Operations Command on an unspecified date.

"The Kirkuk Joint Operations Command, in consultation with the governor, has set up a committee to receive all the detainees from Sulaimani province. The committee is tasked with auditing the cases and then referring them to the court," Saad Harbiya, head of Kirkuk's Joint Operations Command announced in the same press conference on Tuesday.

None of the detainees being handed over have been formally tried, but many are suspected of having participated in ISIS activities.

Prisoners to be transferred to Kirkuk include those "detained on terrorism charges, and

other crimes of murder and assassination," Osman told Rudaw. "Some of the prisoners are wanted by the Iraqi intelligence agency, while some others are wanted by the Iraqi counter-terrorism forces."

From mid-2014 until October 2017, Kurdish security and Peshmerga forces defended Kirkuk from ISIS advances on the oil-rich city.

Non-Kurdish parties and groups in Kirkuk have previously issued multiple calls for the KRG and Sulaimani province authorities to hand over the detainees.

Kirkuk Governor Jabouri praised the PUK initiative and said on Monday that prisoners acquitted by a court will be released.

Release of prisoners handed over by Sulaimani authorities and acquitted by Kirkuk authorities has precedent, Iraqi presidential advisor and prominent local Arab figure Ismael Hadidi told Rudaw on Monday, with 200 detainees previously released after their handover by Sulaimani authorities.

Though it denies involvement in this latest transfer, the KRG has previously engaged in prisoner handovers.

Dindar Zebari, KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy, announced in December 2018, that the KRG handed over more than 1,400 ISIS prisoners to Baghdad to face justice.

More than 420 prisoners were handed over by the KRG to federal government in August 2012, a contemporary report by KirkukNow said.



21 Mai 2020

# Iran: les décès dûs au Covid-19 dans 319 villes dépassent les 43.100

Le nombre de nouveaux patients a doublé par jour

- Rouhani : Nous avons progressé pas à pas au cours des trois derniers mois sans aucun recul
- Maryam Rasjavi: nul ne prend au sérieux les allégations ridicules du président du régime, il a ouvert le parti du mensonge

L'Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d'Iran (OMPI) a annoncé dans l'après-midi du 20 mai 2020, que le nombre de victimes du Covid-19 dans 319 villes d'Iran a dépassé les 43.100 personnes. Le nombre de victimes dans les provinces de Téhéran a atteint 7025, de Khouzistan 3055, de Khorrasan-Razavi 3045, de Sistan-Baloutchistan 1315, de Hamedan 1245, de Lorestan 1235 et du Kurdistan 805.

Un porte-parole du ministère de la Santé du régime a déclaré aujourd'hui que 2346 personnes avaient contracté le coronavirus ces dernières 24 heures. Par rapport à il y a deux semaines, ce nombre a presque doublé. Cependant, Rohani a déclaré aujourd'hui : « nous avons progressé pas à pas au cours de ces trois mois, sans aucun recul. Dans l'ensemble, nous avons bien progressé dans la lutte contre ce dangereux virus et nous avons presque réussi à contenir la maladie. »

Un porte-parole de la faculté des sciences médicales d'Ispahan, s'adressant à l'agence Mehr, a annoncé une « augmentation de 50 % des patients ambulatoires atteints de coronavirus à Ispahan par rapport à la semaine dernière » et a déclaré : « il serait alarmant que la sensibilité des gens à cette maladie diminue, car nous serons confrontés à une épidémie dans toute la province d'Ispahan. » Il a



ajouté : « 409 patients atteints du coronavirus ont été hospitalisés dans deux hôpitaux désignés à Ispahan, dont 113 dans un état critique. »

Hier, le président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Tabriz a déclaré à l'agence IRNA que « les infections au coronavirus sont en augmentation dans l'Azerbaïdjan de l'est ».

Le gouverneur de Mehdi-Shahr (province de Semnan) a déclaré hier à l'agence Fars, affiliée aux pasdarans que « la tendance à l'augmentation du nombre de cas positifs est extrêmement préoccupante ».

Aujourd'hui, le vice-chancelier de la faculté des sciences médicales de Zahedan a déclaré au quotidien Roozeno : « le mois de mai a été le point culminant de la maladie du coronavirus au Sistan-Baloutchistan. 40% des décès ont eu lieu en mai ... Il est certain que

le nombre d'infections dans la région de Najafabad-Khash va augmenter de manière significative dans les prochains jours. »

« 172 nouveaux patients ont été admis dans les unités ordinaires et 61 dans les unités de soins intensifs ces dernières 24 heures (...) Les chiffres montrent une légère augmentation par rapport aux jours précédents, et la courbe descendante s'est arrêtée aujourd'hui », a déclaré Alireza Zali, chef centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus (CNLC) à Téhéran, à la télévision publique aujourd'hui, ajoutant : « nous avons eu une augmentation soudaine dans de nombreuses villes qui étaient dans une situation à faible risque (...) La situation au Khouzistan pourrait se répéter comme un scénario amer dans chaque ville. »

Parallèlement, le quotidien

Eghtesad Saramad a écrit aujourd'hui : « la classe des pauvres est le principal vecteur de transmission du virus. En tant que porteurs mobiles, ils sont présents partout car s'ils ne travaillent pas chaque jour, ils mourront de faim. Pour eux, l'isolement et la quarantaine n'ont aucun sens ; peu importe qu'ils meurent du coronavirus ou de la faim. »

Un autre quotidien officiel, Hamdeli, a également écrit aujourd'hui : « selon de récentes évaluations, le seuil de pauvreté pour une famille de quatre personnes a atteint 9 millions de tomans. Si l'on considère que le salaire minimum pour une grande partie des familles iraniennes, qu'elles soient employées ou ouvrières, est de 2,8 millions de tomans, il existe un écart de six millions de tomans entre ce que reçoivent les détenteurs d'emploi et le seuil de pauvreté dans tout le pays. »

Mme Maraym Radjavi, présidente élue du Conseil national de la Résistance iranienne (CNRI), a déclaré : « Alors que les travailleurs et les citoyens démunis ploient sous le poids de la pauvreté et du coronavirus, Rohani affirme que le pays a progressé pas à pas ces trois derniers mois et qu'il n'y a eu de recul nulle part. Personne ne prend au sérieux les allégations ridicules du président du régime. Il a ouvert le parti du mensonge. »



## Turquie : tensions au sein de l'armée

Le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a poussé à la démission le chef d'état-major de la marine, Cihat Yayci, apprécié des nationalistes.

La rétrogradation, puis la démission du contre-amiral Cihat Yayci, connu pour avoir été l'architecte de l'engagement militaire d'Ankara en Libye, ont créé une onde de choc en Turquie, où les rapports entre l'armée et le pouvoir civil ont connu de nombreux revirements ces dernières années. Populaire au sein des cercles nationalistes, Cihat Yayci, 54 ans, occupait depuis 2017 le poste de chef d'état-major de la marine turque. Jusqu'ici, sa carrière semblait en pleine ascension. Le décret présidentiel signé vendredi 15 mai à 3 heures du matin, juste après la prière de la nuit, a mis fin à ses espoirs de carrière. D'un trait de plume, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan l'a démis de sa fonction de chef d'état-major de la marine pour le verser à l'état-major général, sans plus de précisions sur les fonctions qu'il était censé y exercer.

S'estimant injustement sanctionné, M. Yayci a démissionné trois jours plus tard. Dans sa lettre de démission, rendue publique le 18 mai, il explique qu'il lui est impossible d'accepter sa nouvelle nomination, évoque « des mensonges et des calomnies » et conclut à « un complot » ourdi contre sa personne.

Cette allusion au « complot » est d'autant plus troublante que le contre-amiral était de ceux qui se sont rangés aux côtés du président Erdogan lors du coup d'Etat manqué de juillet 2016, dont la paternité a été attribuée au prédicateur Fethullah Gülen, un ancien allié du numéro un turc, devenu depuis sa bête noire. Fervent partisan de M. Erdogan,

ennemi juré de Gülen, M. Yayci avait d'ailleurs développé une technique particulière pour identifier les prétendus adeptes de l'imam dans l'armée. Grâce à ce système appelé « FETÖmètre » (le terme FETÖ désignant les « gülenistes terroristes »), des dizaines de milliers de militaires ont été limogés et jetés en prison en raison de leur implication présumée dans le putsch raté de 2016.

Avant tout, le contre-amiral s'est illustré en tant qu'architecte du pacte de démarcation maritime que le président turc a signé le 27 novembre 2019 avec Faïez Sarraj, le chef du gouvernement libyen reconnu par l'ONU. Controversé, le pacte assure à la Turquie l'accès à des zones économiques revendiquées par la Grèce et par Chypre dans l'est de la Méditerranée.

### Vives critiques

La nouvelle de sa démission a fait l'effet d'une bombe, suscitant de vives critiques y compris dans la presse pro-gouvernementale. Sur les réseaux sociaux, des fans du gouvernement islamo-conservateur sont allés jusqu'à appeler le numéro un turc à revenir sur sa décision. La sanction est d'autant plus surprenante qu'elle survient à un moment où l'engagement militaire d'Ankara en Libye semble porter ses fruits, les drones turcs ayant infligé récemment de sérieux revers au maréchal dissident Haftar, le protégé de Moscou dans le conflit libyen.

L'homme est un éminent représentant du courant eurasien, influent au sein de l'armée. Farouchement anti-occidental, favorable au rapprochement avec la Russie, il est l'auteur d'un livre intitulé Les Exigences de la Grèce : questions et réponses aux problèmes de la mer Egée. Il y valorise l'esprit conquérant de l'époque ot-



La garde d'honneur de l'armée turque lors d'une cérémonie au mausolée de Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, à Ankara le 19 mai. Burhan Ozbilici / AP

tomane, insistant sur la nécessité de revendiquer la souveraineté turque sur certaines îles et îlots de la mer Egée. Sa théorie, appelée « La Patrie bleue », rappelle que la Turquie, doit défendre avec véhémence ses frontières maritimes en mer Noire, en mer Egée et en Méditerranée orientale.

Fait significatif, sa rétrogradation a eu lieu en dehors du traditionnel Conseil militaire suprême (YAS), qui se déroule chaque année au mois d'août pour décider des démissions et des promotions au sein de l'armée. Pressé de mettre M. Yayci au placard, le président ne pouvait visiblement attendre quelques mois de plus.

### Divisions internes

Selon les analystes militaires, l'éviction du contre-amiral révèle les divisions internes et les luttes de pouvoir à l'œuvre au sein de l'armée turque mais pas seulement. Il faut y voir avant tout un signal envoyé par M. Erdogan aux haut gradés du camp eurasien, ceux-là mêmes qui l'ont aidé à vaincre les putschistes lors du coup d'Etat manqué de 2016. « Avec la déchéance de Yayci, Erdogan a voulu leur ordonner de rester à leur place », explique Yavuz Baydar, écrivain et rédacteur en chef du site d'actualité en ligne Ahval.

Encouragé par les succès de l'opération turque en Libye, ainsi que par le positionnement

turc dans l'est de la Méditerranée, où de nouvelles explorations gazières sont prévues en juillet, le clan des Eurasiens se serait senti pousser des ailes. Au point de risquer de faire de l'ombre au puissant ministre de la défense, Hulusi Akar, auquel le président Erdogan a accordé une large autonomie pour maintenir les généraux sous contrôle.

Ces événements surviennent aussi à un moment où la Turquie, affaiblie par la récession économique qui se profile après l'épidémie de coronavirus, cherche à recoller les morceaux de ses relations avec ses alliés traditionnels. Dans une lettre adressée récemment au président américain, Donald Trump, M. Erdogan évoque « l'importance de préserver avec force la coopération turco-américaine ». « Nous sommes tous dans le même bateau », a-t-il rappelé dans une autre missive, envoyée à l'Union européenne le 9 mai.

Le président turc sait que le soutien financier dont il a tant besoin ne viendra pas de la Russie, un partenaire avec lequel les relations sont compliquées, notamment sur les théâtres d'opérations militaires de Libye et de Syrie. Un signe ne trompe pas. Ankara ne parle plus ces jours-ci d'activer les systèmes de défense antimissiles russes S-400 livrés par Moscou en juillet 2019 et qui, depuis, sont restés dans leurs boîtes.



## Ankara mise tout sur le tourisme

La croissance de la Turquie devrait se contracter de 5 % en 2020, et le chômage grimper à 17,2 %

**C**hute de la production industrielle, montée du chômage, dépréciation de la monnaie, les répercussions du Covid-19 risquent d'entraîner la Turquie sur la pente d'une douloureuse récession en 2020. L'objectif de croissance du gouvernement, 5 %, est d'ores et déjà hors d'atteinte. Les assurances du ministre de l'économie, Berat Albayrak, qui est aussi le gendre du président, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, certain que « l'économie turque surmontera les difficultés avec un minimum de dommages et en peu de temps », peinent à convaincre. Pour 2020, le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) prévoit une contraction de 5 % du produit intérieur brut (PIB) et un taux de chômage à 17,2 % (contre 14,7 % en février).

Estimant que la pandémie est « sous contrôle », le gouvernement veut relancer l'activité au plus vite. L'ouverture se fera par étapes, à partir de la fin du mois de mai, juste après le ramadan. Avant tout, il faut sauver le secteur touristique, lourdement affecté. Haut lieu du commerce et du tourisme à Istanbul, le Grand Bazar, fermé depuis le 23 mars, devrait rouvrir ses portes le 1er juin.

Sur la côte, les hôteliers broient du noir. « La saison est perdue », dit Omer Alkan, propriétaire de deux hôtels à Fethiye, une ville touristique sur les bords de la Méditerranée. « Toutes nos réserva-

tions ont été annulées ou repoussées à l'automne. Si les liaisons aériennes ne sont pas rétablies, l'impact sera rude. Pour l'essentiel, ma clientèle est britannique, le tourisme local ne suffira pas à compenser mes pertes », ajoute l'hôtelier, joint par téléphone.

Pour attirer les vacanciers, le ministère de la culture et du tourisme a mis en place un programme de certification, censé garantir le respect des règles d'hygiène et des mesures barrières sur les lieux de villégiature. Dans les hôtels, le nombre de clients sera restreint. « Sur cent lits disponibles, je serai autorisé à en louer seulement soixante », explique M. Alkan.

Non seulement les recettes du tourisme ne seront pas au rendez-vous cette année, mais les emplois qu'il procure – 600 000 déclarés, le double en comptant les non-déclarés – sont menacés. Officiellement, 4,39 millions de personnes sont sans emploi en Turquie. Selon des données publiées, en mars, par l'institut national de statistique, ce chiffre omet 2,5 millions de personnes qui ne recherchent pas activement un emploi, mais seraient « prêtes à travailler » si l'occasion se présentait.

### Dette de 168 milliards de dollars

L'industrie manufacturière, autre gros pourvoyeur d'em-

ploi, est affectée. Le secteur du textile est à la peine. Setrak Tas, propriétaire d'une PME de textile à Istanbul, s'attend au pire : « Toute notre production est stoppée. La collection printemps-été 2020 nous est restée sur les bras. Les impayés s'accumulent. »

Volant au secours des entreprises, le gouvernement a annoncé un plan de relance d'un montant total de 26,5 milliards d'euros. En revanche, la perte des revenus des ménages n'a pas été anticipée. Le filet social se révèle insuffisant.

Le chômage partiel laisse de côté le secteur informel – 35 % du PIB –, les travailleurs saisonniers et les indépendants. « Les ouvriers craignent bien plus le chômage que le virus », résume Ali Ihsan Akiskalioglu, un industriel de Eskisehir, une province du centre.

Le pays n'est donc pas à l'abri d'une crise sociale. Or, la capacité financière des autorités à y remédier apparaît limitée. D'autant qu'une crise monétaire se profile.

Depuis le début de l'année, les investisseurs étrangers ont retiré plus de 8 milliards de dollars (7,3 milliards d'euros) des marchés obligataires et boursiers en monnaie locale, les sorties se sont accélérées avec la pandémie de Covid-19.

En 2020, la devise turque a

perdu 17 % de sa valeur par rapport au dollar. Pour soutenir la monnaie, la banque centrale a largement puisé dans ses réserves en devises, suscitant l'inquiétude des marchés sur sa capacité à rebondir si la crise venait à empirer.

Sous la pression du président Erdogan, engagé dans une guerre sans merci contre les taux d'intérêt élevés, qui, selon lui, ne feraient qu'aggraver l'inflation, (10,9 % au mois d'avril) l'institution monétaire a considérablement réduit la voilure. Le principal taux directeur est passé de 24 % à 8,75 %.

Dans les douze mois à venir, le pays va devoir faire face au remboursement d'une dette de 168 milliards de dollars. « L'endettement du secteur des entreprises est élevé. En grande partie, il est libellé en devises. Or, la dépréciation de la livre turque est due aux mesures restrictives prises par Ankara, ce qui contribue à faire monter l'anxiété sur les marchés des changes », assure l'économiste Ugur Gürses.

Confrontés à la perspective d'une crise monétaire, le président et son gendre se sont mis à blâmer les « spéculateurs étrangers ». Mais, s'il veut sauver la monnaie, le gouvernement turc a le choix entre relever les taux ou solliciter l'aide du FMI, deux options que le président Erdogan a déjà rejetées.



May 22, 2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Turkish authorities detain 18 tied to HDP, including women's rights group members

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – Turkish police detained at least 18 people belonging or tied to the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) on Friday as part of an anti-terror operation, according to state media, in the third wave of HDP-related arrests in a week.

The 18 detained in the south-eastern province of Diyarbakir include officials from the HDP and other groups affiliated to the party, the state-owned TRT news outlet reported, and police are continuing their search for three other people.

HDP spokesperson Ebru Guney confirmed in a press conference that some current and former HDP officials have been detained, calling for their release.

Though raids on the HDP and affiliated groups are frequent, it is rare that so many women, who worked for two HDP-tied women's rights associations, were among the detained.

Rosa Women's Association, unofficially linked to the HDP, said that four of its officials and members were detained at 5 am in police raids on their homes in Diyarbakir, including association head Adalet Kaya.

"Search continues at our association's office," a tweet from the association read at 10 am on Friday.

"We have worked and fought ceaselessly [for our rights] in an environment where women are subjected to violence since the foundation of our associa-

tion. We will never accept today's unlawful act against our association," the group added, calling for the "immediate" release of the detainees.

The independent Bianet news outlet reported that two activists from the Free Women's Movement (TJA), another group with unofficial links with the HDP, were also detained. The remaining officials belonged to the HDP itself and its sister Democratic Regions Party (DBP).

Gunay called for the release of all today's detainees, especially those from both women associations.

"Rosa Women's Association is the only association that fights violence against women in the region but it was raided this morning," she said, claiming that the government wants to protect perpetrators of gender-based violence by targeting women's groups.

The HDP is accused by Ankara of being the political wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - an armed group involved in a decades-long conflict with the Turkish state in



Members of the Rosa Women's Association, one of the HDP-tied groups targeted by Friday's raid. Photo via Twitter

pursuit of cultural and political rights for Kurds in the country.

The party has denied organic links to the Kurdish rebels - but unlike the state or other Turkish political parties, it does not view the PKK as a terrorist organization and has expressed its respect for the ideology of jailed party leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Turkey's interior ministry removed from office and detained HDP mayors in the municipalities of Igdir, Siirt, Baykan, Kurtalan, and Altinova last Friday for alleged links with the PKK in yet another wave of a government crackdown on party officials.

The HDP said on Wednesday that their Ankara province co-

chairs and other party members were blocked from taking to the front of their office to read out a statement responding to Friday's raids by police, who then detained some of those involved.

The party won 65 of over a thousand municipalities in the March 2019 local elections. Only 14 of the HDP mayors remain in office, according to official party data sent to Rudaw English earlier this month.

Proceedings to strip 19 HDP lawmakers of parliamentary immunity for trial for alleged links to the PKK are underway, pro-HDP news outlet ANF reported on Friday.



May 24, 2020  
By Nurcan Baysal

## Bones sent in the post: Kurdish remains are not considered human

Like so many Kurdish families, Aksoy's family had been mourning the loss of their loved one without their body. It wasn't until this year that Agit İpek's bones were finally given to his family, some three years after his death.

What is different about this family's experience is that Turkish officials sent İpek's remains in a small package via the state postal service – cash on delivery.

İpek, a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was killed during fighting with Turkish soldiers on May 23, 2017, in Dersim (Turkish name Tunceli) province, eastern Anatolia.

His family searched for his corpse for two years. Initially, officials told the family that there was no corpse. However, in May 2019 they called the family and told them that "the body was found."

The family gave a blood sample for DNA testing in order to confirm that the corpse belonged to İpek. The forensic medicine institution delivered the body to the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office via cargo service, and then last month the family was summoned to the Diyarbakır courthouse where they received their son's body in a cargo package.

Halime Aksoy is one of the many Kurdish mothers who have been looking for the bones of their children. In Kurdish towns and cities like Nusaybin, Cizre, Silopi,



"I saw the parcel with my Agit was there. So, I took the bones and went home," Halime Aksoy, mother to the late Agit İpek, said to the Mezopotamya News Agency recently.

Diyarbakır, and Yüksekova, hundreds of families are looking for pieces of their children.

They would be happy if they could only find a few bones of their children so they can have a gravestone, a small stone that they can visit and cry at. On many gravestones in these Kurdish towns, there are only numbers - as many bodies were buried without being identified.

The Arslan family lost three of their children during the war. Hacer and Sait were killed in basements in Cizre in 2016. Muhammed was killed fighting in the mountains. Since 2016, they have been looking for the remains of their daughter Hacer. During my last visit to the family, their mother told me: "Months and years are passing; I still haven't received a strand of Hacer's hair. I am looking for just a strand, only one strand of hair."

In the 1990s, thousands of Kurdish people were put into mass graves. Thirty years have

passed, and we still don't know the exact number of people who were killed and who lie in the mass graves. Their children grew up, and today are now looking for the bones of their parents.

One of them is a friend of mine, Yeşim İncedursun. She has been looking for her father's bones for over 20 years. Five years ago, she returned from Germany to search for the bones of her father. She spoke with local villagers and tried to find the exact place to dig. With her sister, they began to dig an area on their own.

"There is no end to this soil that you are digging", I said to Yeşim. She responded: "It is hard to live this way. For the past twenty years, not a day has gone by that we haven't thought of our father. If we find his bones and lay him to rest in a nice place, he will rest in peace and we will rest easy. Can you imagine the happiness that we receive from the bones of our deceased? We

will find so much happiness if we can find his bones."

In a 2014 report by the Truth Justice Memory Centre human rights organisation, another Kurdish woman whose husband was a victim of the forced disappearances in Turkey in the 1990s said:

"Being able to hold their dead body, to hug them, is something else. It must be a special feeling, to hug their lifeless body, to send them on their last journey. (...) I think that having a grave must provide some closure, the sense of knowing they are resting here. Sharing your problems with them, letting it all out and crying at their grave for hours, these are all things we haven't been able to experience. (...) In debates about the forced disappearances, sometimes people argue that they do not care what happens to them after they die, that it does not matter where they are laid to rest. But it does matter: it matters that their loved ones have a grave



to visit. Those of us who lack that are left without closure.”

After Halime Aksoy received her son’s bones in that cargo package, parliamentarians from the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) pro-

tested this treatment and called it inhumane and a crime against humanity.

Cahit Özkan, vice-president of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), responded by saying: “There is

nothing inhumane. Inside the cargo package, there was not a corpse - it was only a few pieces of bone.”

This is the reality for Kurds in Turkey. Our bones are not considered human.

People often ask me: “What do Kurdish people really want?”

Sometimes we only want the bones of our children. Only the bones.



24 mai 2020

## Iran : les décès dûs au Covid-19 dépassent les 43.800 dans 320 villes

L’Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d’Iran (OMPI) a annoncé dans l’après-midi du 23 mai 2020 que le nombre de victimes du coronavirus dans 320 villes d’Iran a dépassé les 43.800. Le nombre de victimes dans les provinces de Khouzistan est d’au moins 3270, de Khorasan-Razavi 3085, de Lorestan 1315, de Fars 1050, du Kurdistan 826, de Kerman 538 et de Qazvine 505.

Alors que même le ministère de la Santé du régime affirme qu’il n’y a pas de provinces exemptes de virus et que la plupart des centres provinciaux sont au rouge, aujourd’hui, Rohani, s’adressant au centre national de lutte contre le corona virus (CNLC), a annoncé : « à partir du 31 mai, tous les employés de bureau devront retourner au travail et la restriction précédente sera levée. Les lieux saints et les lieux de culte (...) seront ouverts dès le lendemain de l’Aïd al-Fitr en respectant les instructions du ministère de la Santé. ». Irrité par les révélations sur la vérité de la tragédie du coronavirus en Iran, Rohani a déclaré : « certains essaient d’effrayer les gens dans le pays sur la maladie du coronavirus, nous n’allons

pas le tolérer. »

Mais le ministre de la Santé du régime, s’adressant au quotidien public Hamshahri, a expliqué aujourd’hui : « nous assistons à une nouvelle épidémie de la maladie

dans les provinces chaudes (...) Au Khouzistan, les choses ne vont pas dans la bonne direction. Nous avons parlé aux responsables des provinces voisines du Khouzistan, à savoir Chahar Mahal-Bakhtiari et Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, et nous leur avons donné les avertissements nécessaires sur la nouvelle épidémie. Nous avons vu des cas au Sistan-Baloutchistan dans le village de Najafabad-Khash qui nous ont donné l’alerte. »

S’adressant au média officiel Modj, un porte-parole du ministère de la Santé, a déclaré aujourd’hui : « la situation dans la province du Khouzistan



est toujours au rouge. » Il a admis implicitement que les statistiques étaient truquées, en disant que « le nombre de patients est beaucoup plus élevé que 1 % de la population (...) il faut faire plus d’expériences scientifiques. Il n’y a pas encore eu de telles études en Iran. Cependant, il semble que, comme l’a dit le ministre, le nombre de patients n’a pas atteint les 10 % de la population. »

Ainsi, selon le ministère de la Santé, le nombre réel de personnes infectées est « beaucoup plus élevé » que 850 000, mais il n’a pas atteint 8,5 millions et se situe quelque part entre ces deux chiffres. Entre-temps, aujourd’hui, le même porte-parole a an-

noncé que le nombre de contaminés était de 133.521. En d’autres termes, les statistiques truquées publiées sont 6,5 à 65 fois inférieures aux chiffres réels. Le régime est très secret et veut garder tout le monde dans la confusion.

Le gouverneur du Lorestan, Seyed Moussa Khademi, a déclaré aujourd’hui à l’agence Mehr: « chaque jour, nous avons une augmentation du nombre de personnes infectées dans certaines des villes (...) Actuellement nous n’avons pas reçu de bons rapports de Boroujerd et de Delfan. Le nombre de personnes infectées dans ces villes est relativement plus élevé. »

Le président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Jiroft, dans la province de Kerman, a déclaré aujourd'hui à la télévision publique : « avec l'augmentation du nombre de personnes infectées dans la partie sud de la province de Kerman, cette région se rapproche du statut de zone rouge. »

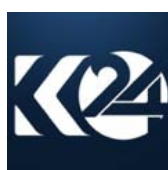
Le président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Bouchehr a déclaré à l'IRNA aujourd'hui : « lorsque le

nombre de personnes testées positives augmente, le nombre d'hospitalisations augmente probablement aussi. Ce n'est pas un bon message. Au cours des trois derniers mois, depuis la propagation du virus dans cette province, 7 000 personnes ont été hospitalisées en raison de maladies respiratoires aiguës. » Le vice-président de cette faculté a également déclaré : « contrairement au passé, où seuls quatre à cinq pour cent des résultats des

tests étaient positifs, aujourd'hui, plus de 50 % des tests sont positifs. Cela montre la tendance à la hausse de la maladie à Bouchehr. »

L'IRNA a écrit : « à la fin du mois de Farvardin (19 avril), le nombre de patients testés positifs n'atteignait pas la centaine. Mais avec le plan de distanciation sociale intelligente et la levée des restrictions (...) entre 20 et 79 personnes sont testées positives chaque jour. »

Les médias officiels s'inquiètent de la demande de changement de la population. L'un d'entre eux, le quotidien Arman, a écrit aujourd'hui : « nous aurons très certainement à endurer des changements sociaux, politiques et économiques pendant cette phase et après la fin de la dangereuse épidémie de coronavirus (...) nos chances sont minimes. »



May 24, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Iraq reports 197 new COVID-19 cases; 20 in Kurdistan

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – On the first day of the Eid al-Fitr holidays, the Iraqi health ministry reported 197 new coronavirus infections over the previous 24 hours, with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announcing twenty new cases over the same period.

Iraqi health authorities said that the total number of confirmed COVID-19 infections recorded throughout Iraq reached 4,469 on Sunday, including 160 deaths, and a total of 2,738 recoveries.

Meanwhile, KRG's total cases have increased to 496, including five deaths, and 402 recoveries, the regional health ministry said in a Sunday statement. There are also now 88 active cases.

Iraqi health workers conducted over 6,500 coronavirus tests over the previous 24 hours, the federal ministry said. In the Kurdistan Region, the authorities carried out close to 1,300 examinations over the same period. Iraq



A coronavirus testing facility in the Kurdistan Region. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

has stepped up the testing of suspected coronavirus carriers while KRG efforts in that regard have remained relatively similar throughout the pandemic.

Last week, the Iraqi Council of Ministers imposed a countrywide curfew during the normally bustling and revelous Ramadan Eid holiday after a sustained uptick in new coronavirus cases. The KRG took similar measures by imposing

a region-wide lockdown for 72 hours, aimed at minimizing gatherings during the holidays.

Hassan Khalati, a member of the Iraqi parliamentary crisis committee, suggested on Sunday that the cause of the high rate of new recorded coronavirus infections in Iraq over the past few days is the increased rate of testing.

Speaking to local media,

Khalati called for expanded testing and monitoring efforts to detect the virus and limit its spread. He also stressed the need to "impose curfew" on areas "that record a large number of infections."

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Sunday instructed the security forces to tighten the curfew regulation to curb the spread of the virus.



May 24, 2020  
By Hardi Mohammed

## Kurdish policeman found beheaded in Kirkuk

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region — A Kurdish policeman in Kirkuk was found beheaded on Sunday morning in what his family believe to be a “terror-related incident.”

The body of Bahjat Anwar, a father-of-five and member of Kirkuk's police force was discovered in his vehicle in the city's Askari neighbourhood. Anwar's son Hussein Bahjat said he was unable to reach his father on three of his mobile phones after he left to repair his car on Saturday afternoon.

A number of knife wounds was found on his body, his brother Awad Anwar told Rudaw, adding that he had money and phones on his person at the time.

“He appears to have defended himself because there are



Mourners at the funeral of Bahjat Anwar in Kirkuk on May 25, 2020. Photo: Rudaw

knife cuts on his hand. He defended himself. They broke his fingers,” his brother recounted.

While no one has claimed responsibility for the killing, Anwar believes that is “terror-related.”

Local authorities have now

launched an investigation into the incident.

Kirkuk falls within the territories disputed by Erbil and Baghdad. Remnants of the Islamic State terror group (ISIS) have recently increased their attacks

in the area amid a growing security vacuum.

Islamic State militants stormed the headquarters of the Iraqi counter-terrorism and intelligence directorate in late April, the fourth attack in the space of a month.

Just days before, the US-led coalition to defeat ISIS launched an attack on a number of ISIS hideouts south of Kirkuk.

Although declared territorially defeated in Iraq in December 2017, ISIS militants have continued to launch attacks in both Iraq and Syria, which have increased in recent months.

Members of both Iraqi and Kurdish security forces are especially vulnerable to attack, including kidnap and extortion.



May 25, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Senior officials of the Kurdistan Region honor 44th anniversary of the great Kurdish “Gulan” revolution

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) — On Monday, the top leader of the Kurdistan Region recalled the forty-fourth anniversary of the Gulan upheaval, congratulating the Kurdish nation, as he affirmed that the sacrifices of the uprising were not made in vain.

“The size of the sacrifice that characterized the Peshmerga of the Gulan revolution is a

source of pride for the people of Kurdistan,” Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and long-time President of the Kurdistan Region, said in a statement.

“This event was an important phase in the Great Gulan (May) Revolution,” he added. “It proved that the people of Kurdistan, even if they suffer

a setback, they rise up again and do not give up their rights and do not retreat from achieving their goals.”

The spark of the Gulan (May) revolt, which was led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), was lit on May 26, 1976, against the former Baathist regime in Baghdad. It was initially concentrated in the border areas between

Turkey and the Kurdistan Region.

Masrour Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), marked the 44th anniversary of the Gulan uprising and congratulated the people of Kurdistan and all those who participated in it.

“I salute with great respect,



and commemorate the brave Peshmerga who continued the struggle tirelessly for the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people,” the Prime Minister said.

He also explained that the Gulan uprising was, in reality, an extension of the September 11, 1961, Kurdish revolt, under Abd al-Karim Qasim, who had become president of Iraq, after leading a military coup against the British-installed Hashemite monarchy.

“The uprising occurred with the aid and participation of all the components in the Kurdistan Region,” the Prime Minis-



Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) with his fellow Peshmerga during Gulan uprising, 1976. (Photo: Archive)

ter stated, “resulting in the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the parliament in 1991.”

Barzani also stressed that the Gulan uprising demonstrated that the will and demands of a nation are more powerful than almost anything else, as he added, “With the unity and efforts of the people of the Kurdistan Region, we can overcome any crisis, and in the current crisis facing us, we need to serve our nation as a single unit, as Peshmerga, and this way we will overcome every difficult situation and obstacle facing us.”

**Morning Star**

May 25, 2020

## Syrian Kurds face continued Turkish aggression despite ceasefire agreement, new report finds

**T**URKEY continues to breach an international ceasefire in northern Syria, launching frequent air strikes against civilians and infrastructure, according to a new report.

The Rojava Information Centre has published a 52-page dossier documenting the current situation in the largely Kurdish area that was invaded by Turkish forces in Operation Peace Spring in October 2019.

Many of the atrocities are well documented, including the judicial execution of Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalef by jihadist forces working with the Turkish armed forces.

Turkey was accused of using chemical weapons, notably white phosphorus during its bombing of civilians in the



Yezidi YBS Fighters Photo: Kurdish Struggle / Creative Commons

town of Sere Kaniye, where ground troops met with fierce resistance.

More than 300,000 people have been internally displaced and 258 civilians killed, 69 of those between November 2019 and April 2020 despite a ceasefire agreement.

Washington’s reputation in northern Syria has been damaged after the US was perceived to have abandoned Kurds by withdrawing troops, giving the green light to the Turkish invasion. It leaves the Kurdish semi-autonomous region facing the prospect of striking a deal with Damascus, while acknowledging the

importance of relations with the US as leverage in discussions.

One resident of Qamishlo said: “If we are to be exterminated, we would not just make agreements with the regime, but with the devil.”

Head of the Syrian Democratic Forces Mazloum Abadi

conceded that the US policy has been a disaster and detrimental to the whole region. “It played against Kurds, Arabs and Christians,” he said. “But the Syrian crisis is an international crisis and the solution can only be international, with the involvement of those international powers.”

## Women's organisations criminalised in Turkey after scores of arrests

**W**OMEN'S groups, their slogans and their right to organise have been criminalised by the Turkish authorities with the arrest of scores of Kurdish women last week.

Police swooped to detain prominent activists from the Tevgera Jinen Azad (TJA) and Rosa Women's Association in a large-scale operation on Friday in which security services smashed down doors in a series of night-time raids.

Offices were ransacked and key documents taken, despite lawyers not being present, from the Rosa Women's Association building in the city of Diyarbakir in Turkey's largely Kurdish south-east.

The association was established in 2016 after all women's organisations in Diyarbakir were shut down by presidential decree. It is the only women's

group engaging in support work and active struggle combating violence against women.

A 24-hour confidentiality clause was imposed on the case file, meaning that details of the reason for the detentions and the charges being brought were initially unknown.

But lawyers confirmed that the authorities have banned prominent slogans used by the women's movement including "Jin jiyan azadi" ("women, life, freedom" in Kurdish) along with "Women want peace" and a slogan demanding the whereabouts of disappeared Kurdish student Gulistan Doku.

A banner proclaiming that femicides are a political issue has been outlawed and activists are being charged for calling the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) co-chair system —

which allows for equal representation on the basis of sex in the party's structure — "a red line." The party's policy has been banned and branded an act of terrorism by the government.

The women detained were quizzed about their organisations' support for each other and why they planned activities for International Women's Day on March 8.

Others were grilled over their support for the Peace Mothers and involvement in actions in solidarity with the Kurdish hunger strikes, led by HDP MP Leyla Guven, that demanded an end to the isolation of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan, which ended in May 2019.

TJA warned: "Women's right and freedom to independent organisation is being criminalised. All uses of the right to

freedom of expression in favour of women's freedom are being treated as incriminating evidence."

"Being a woman, being Kurdish, living in Kurdish areas results in a threefold increase in oppression," the group said, adding: "TJA is facing attack because it opposes the ... draft law to allow child marriages and to pardon rapists who agree to marry the child."

The group said that it organised the March 8 rally to stand against femicide, rape, racism, sexism and against the removal of elected HDP officials, along with opposition to war, exploitation and patriarchy.

"If this is a crime, then we are all committing this crime. We hereby invite all to stand up for TJA."

## ISIS Prisoners Threaten U.S. Mission in Northeastern Syria

**WASHINGTON** — A year after American-backed forces seized the last remnant of territory under Islamic State rule in Syria, some 10,000 captured ISIS fighters in Kurdish-run wartime prisons pose "a significant risk" to the United States mission in the country's northeast, military commanders say.

Hardened ISIS fighters protesting the dire conditions in their makeshift confines, including the potential spread of Covid-19, have rioted at the largest

prison in Hasaka twice in the last two months. The uprisings were quelled, but they underscore the "high-impact risk of a mass breakout," American commanders told investigators from the Pentagon inspector general's office.

These findings, contained in the inspector general's latest quarterly report on the U.S. military missions in Iraq and Syria, issued earlier this month, represent new and alarming warnings for an Ame-

rican counterterrorism mission that already faces renewed attacks from resurgent ISIS guerrillas, pressure from Russian troops supporting the army of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, and concerns that the coronavirus could infect their own ranks.

These concerns have limited operations of the 500 remaining U.S. troops in northeastern Syria.

Only a handful of Covid-19

deaths have been reported in the country's northeast, and none so far in the prisons. But humanitarian assistance workers express fear that a rapid outbreak is a real possibility given the region's war-battered health infrastructure and the severe overcrowding at its prisons.

"The humanitarian situation in places of detention and in camps in Syria's northeast was dire even before the threat of Covid-19 appeared," said Fa-



brizio Carboni, the Near and Middle East director for the International Committee of the Red Cross. “We’re extremely worried about all detainees during this pandemic.”

Mr. Carboni added: “Their living conditions make them extremely vulnerable should the virus enter and spread. We know that overcrowded, unhygienic and poorly ventilated cells create the perfect conditions for that to happen.”

The Syrian Democratic Forces, whose fighters are the Pentagon’s partner on the ground in the yearslong campaign against the Islamic State, operate a constellation of about two dozen ad hoc detention sites for captive ISIS fighters, including converted schoolhouses and a former Syrian government prison at Hasaka, the site of the recent riots.

The prisons hold about 10,000 men, of whom about 8,000 are locals — Syrians or Iraqis — and about 2,000 are from 50 other nations whose home governments have balked at repatriating them. Scores of those men are Europeans, from countries like Belgium, Britain, France and Germany, but far more come from across the Middle East, including Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen.

Many European law enforcement officials fear that if they repatriate their extremist citizens, they would be unable to convict them or keep them locked up for a long time. Some countries have stripped suspected ISIS fighters of their citizenship. The scant repatriations that have taken place over the past several months — including by Kazakhstan, Oman and Tunisia — stopped altogether given Covid-19 restrictions, American officials said.

The Kurdish-led force that holds the ISIS fighters does not have the capacity to investigate or try them, American officials say. Western counterterrorism officials say the lon-



People suspected of being part of the Islamic State, in a prison cell in Hasaka, Syria, in January. Credit...Goran Tomasevic/Reuters

ger the foreign fighters are held, the more they become even further radicalized and the greater potential for mass breakouts.

The Kurds also operate more than a dozen camps for families displaced by the conflict that hold tens of thousands of people, many of them non-Syrian wives and children of Islamic State fighters. These include the sprawling Al Hol camp about 25 miles southeast of Hasaka, where some 70,000 people have been living in increasingly dire conditions.

Counterterrorism officials fear that these camps not only enable ISIS communications and financial networks, but are also ideological breeding grounds for the next generation of Islamic extremists.

In the months following the Islamic State’s loss last March of its last remnant in northeast Syria, the village of Baghouz, American and Kurdish officials said the Kurds could not sustain security long-term at the makeshift facilities it was using.

That became clear in October, when the Turkish military moved into northern Syria after getting a green light from President Trump. Turkey targeted the American-backed

Kurds, calling into question the Kurds’ ability to secure the ISIS fighters. About 100 fighters escaped in the turmoil, but Kurdish officials said they recaptured the majority of them.

Then came the riots at the prison in Hasaka, which holds between 4,000 and 5,000 captives. Media reports said that on March 29, ISIS militants began breaking down doors and digging holes in walls between cells. The rioting was brought under control the next morning, but violence erupted again with gunfire heard inside and ambulances called in to help the wounded.

Five weeks later, in early May, ISIS fighters briefly took control of the same prison. The riot ended a day later when Kurdish officials and members of the American-led coalition negotiated with the militants.

“ISIS prisoners significantly outnumber the S.D.F. guards, and the generally poor conditions in these jails are driving detainees to take greater risks to break out,” said Nicholas Heras, head of the Institute for the Study of War’s Middle East security program. “ISIS also has a longstanding policy to seek to break out its fighters from prison, which makes

these S.D.F. facilities a focus of ISIS efforts to replenish its ranks in Syria and Iraq.”

Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the head of the military’s Central Command, told Congress in March that the detention of foreign fighters and ongoing attempts at radicalization in the displacement camps were parts of the same problem.

American and allied forces were helping to mitigate prison security risks by training and equipping Kurdish guards and helping construct more secure structures, General McKenzie said. But he called those efforts “a tactical-level Band-Aid, not a long-term solution.”

The Pentagon has increased the amount it will spend to repair, renovate and, beginning this year, build new detention structures, up to \$20 million from \$10 million, with a \$4 million cap on any single project. The pandemic delayed site-survey teams from visiting potential locations, but Pentagon officials said initial construction of new prisons could start in the coming months.

In addition, the Defense Department is paying the Syrian Democratic Forces between \$500,000 and \$1 million in stipends for guard salaries and other costs, according to Pentagon officials. Kurdish leaders have expressed appreciation for the aid, but echo General McKenzie’s long-term assessment.

“Our allies must find a quick radical solution to this international problem,” Mazlum Abdi, the Kurdish force’s commander, said in a Twitter message after the first riot at the prison in Hasaka.





May 26, 2020

## One Kurdish Border Porter Killed and Two Others Injured

According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), on May 24, 2020, a group of Kolbars from the village of Koran in the Somay Bradust area of the Orumiyeh border region were directly shot by the border guards of Iran. As a result of the shooting, a Kolbar named Arsalan Ahmadi was killed while two brothers called Turan Ahmadi and Radwan Ahmadi were wounded.

According to statistics compiled by KHRN, three Kolbars and businessmen have been killed and six others injured in the past five days after being shot by the Iranian and Turkish border guards in the border areas of West Azerbaijan province.



One Kurdish Border Porter –known as Kolbar- was killed and two others were wounded after being shot by the Iranian border guards in the Somay Bradust border area of Orumiyeh, West Azerbaijan province.



May 27 2020  
By Ruken Isik

## Turkey cracks down on Kurdish women's rights activists despite COVID-19

The crackdown against Kurdish organisations, activists, and municipalities continues in Turkey, despite the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Kurdish women have become the latest target.

On the eve of Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, 18 people were arrested after their offices and homes were raided on May 22, including several prominent Kurdish women's rights activists.

Twelve people remain in detention, while six people were released on bail - including 71-year-old Havva Kiran who has been put under house arrest.

Co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party

(DBP) Saliha Aydeniz in an interview with VOA-Kurdish said that 12 people of the women were members of the Rosa Women's Association in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır.

This includes Rosa Women's Association President Adalet Kaya and founding member Narin Gezgör.

Other arrested activists included those from the Kurdish women's umbrella organisation Free Women's Movement (TJA), as well as from other institutions.

It was not clear what the women had been detained for. However, lawyers representing the activists stated that prosecutors had interrogated their clients by asking questions about their peaceful activism.

This included questions about activities around International Women's Day on March 8, statements to the press over the replacement of pro-Kurdish mayors by government-appointed trustees, and support for the Peace Mothers – a non-violent women's civil rights movement – in their efforts to lobby the state into accepting demands of prisoners on hunger strike.

The women were also asked questions in regards to campaigning for a missing university student Gülistan Doku. Doku's family and friends has been searching for her for more than 100 days since she went missing in the city of Der-sim (Tunceli in Turkish).

The TJA in a statement said

the arrested activists were being criminalised for women's rights activism.

"Women's right and freedom to independent organisation is being taken up as an incriminating matter. All uses of the right to freedom of expression in favour of women's freedom are being treated as incriminating evidence," the TJA said.

"Using the rights to freedom of organisation and expression which are under the guarantee of international law and states has now become a crime leading to the arrest of women."

In a recent interview with Ahval, TJA spokeswoman Ayşe Gökkan said the Rosa Women's Association has been active during the corona-

virus pandemic and reached out to women facing violence at homes during the lockdown. Since the start of the pandemic there has been a surge of violence against women worldwide and in Turkey.

HDP parliamentarian Meral Daniş Beştaş wrote on Twitter that the three-year-old son of Gönül Aslan, a member of Bağlar Municipality in Diyarbakır, had also been taken to prison with his mother when she was arrested.

Aslan's son Dilgeş has kidney disease that requires close monitoring and her husband had to leave Turkey for political reasons. A social media campaign is calling for Dilgeş and all women activists to be released immediately.

The arrests are part of a wider crackdown on pro-Kurdish activism, which has continued despite the COVID-19 outbreak.

"We are fighting against two viruses simultaneously – COVID 19 and racist authoritarianism against the Kurds and their democratic will – both being severe public health issues," pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP parliamentarians Hişyar Özsoy and Feleknas Uca said in a recent statement on Kurdish municipalities seized by the Turkish state since the local elections



Arrested Kurdish women's rights activists - including Rosa Women's Association President Adalet Kaya, founding member Narin Gezgör, and association executives Fatma Gültekin, Gülcihan Şimşek and Özlem Gündüz, Remziye Sızıcı, Gönül Aslan, and Sevim Coşkun. Diyarbakır Peace Mothers member Havva Kiran was also placed under house arrest (photo courtesy of Rosa Women's Association).

of March 31, 2019.

Since March 2019, 22 Kurdish co-mayors have been arrested and 45 HDP municipalities out of 65 have been seized by the Turkish government.

According to Amnesty International, nearly 400 NGOs

have been shut down since the state of emergency decree was announced 2016 following the failed coup attempt, including women's rights organisations providing shelter for victims of domestic violence.

The Rosa Women's Association was established after Kur-

dish women's organisations and municipality centres were shut down in Diyarbakır.

Action against Kurdish rights organisations and to remove elected pro-Kurdish mayors is often taken under spurious terrorism allegations. In a statement, the TJA rejected any accusations and charges on terrorism.

"We are organising the March 8 [protest] against femicide, rape and sexual abuse, gender inequality, child marriage, discrimination on the basis of religion, racism, sexism, against state appointed trustees which violate women's right to elect and be elected, against isolation, war, exploitation of labour and patriarchy," the statement said.

"If this is a crime, then we are all committing this crime. We hereby invite all to stand up for the TJA."

## AL-MONITOR

May 27, 2020

# Turkey conducts rare strike in Iraq's Sulaimaniyah province against PKK

Most Turkey-PKK fighting takes place in other parts of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq where Turkey has military bases.

Turkey bombed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in Iraq's Sulaimaniyah province, Turkish authorities announced today. Turkey-PKK clashes in

this area in the Kurdistan Region near the Iranian border are relatively uncommon.

Turkish armed forces and intelligence operatives either killed or captured five PKK fighters in the Asos area, Turkey's state-run Anadolu News Agency reported today. The fighters died in an aerial attack, the Turkish

Ministry of Defense said. Anadolu also reported today that five PKK fighters were either killed or captured in the Hakurk and Haftanin areas. Turkey often does not specify whether it has killed or captured PKK fighters, instead using the term "neutralized."

Turkey frequently bombs PKK

targets in Iraqi Kurdistan territory. The PKK also attacks Turkish forces in the region, most recently opening fire at a Turkish base near the border this month.

What makes the Asos attack significant, however, is that it took place in Sulaimaniyah province. Asos is a mountain



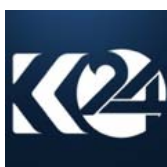
about 35 miles north of the city Sulaimaniyah, which is the second-largest in the Kurdistan Region. The area is controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which historically has had warm relations with the PKK and relatedly poor relations with Turkey. The PKK and its Iran-based affiliates have operated there in recent years, and Turkey bombed the area twice in 2017, according to the Iraqi Kurdish outlet Kurdistan 24.

Most of Turkey's airstrikes against the PKK are near the Turkish border in the Erbil and Dahuk provinces — like Haftanin and Hakurk. Turkey has several military bases in these provinces that are controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The KDP has an oil-based relationship with Turkey, but many in KDP strongholds oppose Turkey's military actions there as well as the PKK's presence. The PUK has historically been closer to Iran.

The PKK says it fights for greater political and cultural rights for the Kurds in Turkey. The group is motivated by the repression of the Kurdish language and arrests of Kurdish politicians throughout Turkish history. Turkey, on the other hand, views the PKK as a terrorist organization, and continues to blame it for attacks on civilians in the country, including a bombing that killed workers in southeast Turkey last month.

The PKK has based itself on

the mountains border between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey since 2013. A majority of Turkey-PKK fighting has occurred in Iraq — not Turkey — in 2020, according to the conflict data-focused non-governmental organization ACLED. More than 4,800 people, including civilians and fighters, have been killed during fighting between Turkey and the PKK since 2015 when peace talks broke down, according to the International Crisis Group.



May 27, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## COVID-19: 287 new cases, 6 deaths in Iraq; Kurdistan extends travel ban

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) — On Wednesday, the Iraqi Ministry of Health announced 6 deaths from the coronavirus and 287 new infections in the previous 24 hours, while its counterpart in the Kurdistan Region recorded 25 new cases, continuing an uptick for both.

Health officials pointed out that 71,414 individuals were tested for the highly-contagious disease in Iraq during the same period, while those the regional government conducted 948 tests.

The autonomous Kurdistan Region has its own health ministry and conducts tests separately. Daily testing results conducted by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) are typically announced later in the day than the federal government's figures and are then added to the next day's national tally.

According to the new nationwide data, the highest number of infections was recorded in

Baghdad with 1,426 infections, roughly one-third of the total confirmed cases in Iraq, as well as 65 deaths. Iraq enacted a near-total lockdown mid-March, before partially lifting the curfew in April. This is thought to have been the likely cause of the current spike in new infections, prompting a commission in the parliament assigned with policy decisions regarding the pandemic to demand a second tightening of restrictive measures.

On Wednesday afternoon, the Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Interior decided to extend the ban on travel between provinces of the region and with rest of Iraq until June 15.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government, since the coronavirus emerged, has taken all measures to prevent the spread of this pandemic such as closing borders, announcing a curfew, and placing citizens returning from abroad under quarantine," read a ministry statement, which claimed that the recent increase of new infections in



Municipality workers spray disinfectant along a street in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah. (Photo: AFP)

the is the result of a lack of the public's compliance with government health regulations and recommendations.

Erbil Governor Firsat Sofi warned in a press conference earlier on Wednesday, "The virus will reach epidemic proportions if people do not abide by instructions and preventive measures following the removal of the curfew and the opening of markets and mosques."

On Tuesday, the Kurdistan Region's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research

announced the end of the school year for universities and colleges in the region as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Minister Aram Mohammed said in a speech that there would be no final exams and that students' grades from months before schools were vacated to stop the spread of the disease would count for the whole year.

According to the Iraqi health figures, the total number of national infections has reached



5,135 individuals, including 175 deaths and 2,904 recoveries.

The tally in the Kurdistan Re-

gion is now 532 confirmed cases, five of them fatal and 407 where patients had recovered.

The coronavirus has infected nearly 5.7 million people worldwide and killed more than 355,000, according to government-reported data compiled

by Johns Hopkins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting.

Kurdistan au féminin

28 mai 2020

## IRAN. Décès d'une femme kurde battue lors de la destruction de sa maison par des agents de l'Etat

**I**RAN / ROJHILAT – Les agents municipaux iraniens de la ville de Kermaşan ont causé la mort d'une femme kurde en l'attaquant et en détruisant sa maison.

Le 26 mai, Assieh Panahi, une Kurde de 58 ans, est décédée après avoir été violemment battue par des agents municipaux de la ville de Kermanschah. Cette femme au foyer, mère de sept enfants, a succombé à une crise cardiaque après que les agents l'aient agressée avec un spray au poivre alors qu'elle voulait les empêcher de détruire sa mai-



son. On l'accusait de l'avoir construite sans permis de construire.

Panahi faisait partie des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes

dont les habitations ont été détruites lors du séisme de novembre 2017. Au moins 620 personnes ont perdu la vie et 8 500 autres ont été blessées lors du séisme de magnitude

7,3 survenu le 12 novembre 2017 à Kermanschah. Les rescapés du séisme sont toujours privés de logements et vivent dans des camps de fortune depuis plus de 3 ans maintenant.

Depuis plusieurs décennies, les Kurdes du Kurdistan de l'Est sous l'occupation iranienne subissent le racisme étatique et sont condamnés à la pauvreté tandis que leurs richesses naturelles sont pillées et leur nature détruite dans le cadre d'une politique d'anéantissement de l'identité kurde.



May 28, 2020

By Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Kurdish unity talks in Rojava 'for all Syrians': senior official

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region — Recent unity talks between the Kurdish ruling and opposition parties in northeast Syria are part of a “national” framework approved by all ethnic and religious groups in the region, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) co-chair Amina Omar said on Tuesday.

Initiated in 2014 and resumed in late 2019, talks between the ruling the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) and the opposition Kurdish National Council (ENKS) seek to mend thorny relations between the two groups, who have been at odds for several years.

The SDC - the political arm of the Kurdish-led, multi-ethnic Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - is composed of Kurds, Arabs, and other ethnic and religious groups in the region.

Omar insists that the council is “for all Syrians” from differing ethnic and political backgrounds, and there is wide

support for the unity talks.

“The SDC is a national, Syrian and democratic project. It is for all Syrians. It includes many political figures and individual figures from all ethnic and religious groups in Syria such as Kurds, Arabs, Syriacs, and Assyrians as well as their political parties,” she said.

“The Kurdish issue in Syria is a national one and should be resolved as per international deals. SDC members are in agreement on this point,” added Omar.

Arabs make up 50 to 70 percent of the SDF, according to a 2019 report by the US-based Wilson Center. However, there are no statistics on the demographic make-up of the SDC.

Ties between the ENKS and the TEV-DEM have been frayed for years, with the former accusing the latter of being unwilling to share power.

Mediated by Masoud Barzani, then-president of the Kurdistan Region, power-sharing talks began between the ENKS and the TEV-DEM in 2014.

SDF commander Mazloum Abdi announced a new round of unity talks in late October.



Syrian-Kurdish demonstrators wave Kurdish flags at a protest in Qamishli on June 23, 2018. File photo : AFP

### Russia's sedition plans

A Pentagon Inspector General report in March stated that the majority of Arab communities "passively support the SDF and its associated civil institutions," but are under pressure from state actors to renounce support for the group.

CENTCOM spokesperson US

Army Maj. John Rigsbee later told Al-Monitor that "the Syrian regime and Russia are the most active in attempting to influence local populations to sever ties with the SDF."

Omar confirmed to Rudaw English that Russia is seeking "sedition" in northeast Syria, known to Kurds as Rojava, by recruiting Arabs to use against

the SDF.

"There are Turks, Russians, Americans, Syrian regime and Iranians [in Syria]. Each of these forces pursue their interests and extend their power there on the account of the other. Russians have visited many tribal leaders in order to establish a force from them," she said.

"The aim of the Russians is to defend their interests and widen their influence in the region. ..they want to create sedition between the SDF and its Arab components and probably use these fighters against the SDF itself in the future."

Omar also said that Moscow is making these efforts public, having held several meetings with Arab tribesmen.

Rudaw English has reached out to the Russian foreign ministry regarding Omar's claim.

AL-MONITOR 

May 29, 2020  
By Amberin Zaman

## Turkey's assault against Syrian Kurds leaves trail of misery and spin

**W**as a burn victim hit by white phosphorus during Turkey's invasion of Ras al-Ain in October? Whatever the reason, he and many others are still suffering.

HASAKAH, Syria — Seven months after Turkish forces and their Sunni opposition allies crossed into northeastern Syria, upending a fragile balance that made the Kurdish-run territory the safest and most stable in the war-ravaged country, tens of thousands of displaced civilians are struggling to survive in the squalor of camps and classrooms they now call home. Some are trying to recover from injuries that rights groups allege in

some cases amount to war crimes. A propaganda war waged by both sides is continuing full blast.

Mohammed Hamid Mohammed is among the victims of the Turkish assault launched Oct. 9 against Syrian Kurdish forces. Ankara charges that they are "terrorists" seeking to dismember Turkey. The US-backed group known as the People's Protection Units denies it harbors hostility toward Ankara.

The 12-year-old Mohammed became the symbol of Turkish impunity when graphic images of his body covered in oozing grayish ochre burns were plas-



Mohammed Hamid Mohammed, a Syrian boy who suffered intensive burns during Turkey's October assault on northeast Syria, sits at his makeshift home in Hasakah, Syria, May 25, 2020. Photo by Ivan Hassib/Al-Monitor.

tered across global headlines. As the number of victims bearing similar burns grew, allega-

tions that Turkish forces were using white phosphorus, a chemical agent deployed in mili-



tary operations to produce smoke or provide illumination, against the civilian population began to circulate. Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, called the reports "fake news" peddled by the foreign media. Turkey denies possessing any chemical weapons.

Mohammed said he had been playing outside his house in the now Turkish-occupied town of Ras al-Ain — known as Serkaniye in Kurdish — when he suddenly heard an explosion and saw fire. "I didn't feel anything until I woke up in the hospital. My dad was next to me," Mohammed told Al-Monitor during an interview. "I was screaming because I could feel the burns on my body. Journalists were taking pictures of me. The pain was bad."

As news of his plight grew, Massoud Barzani, an influential leader of neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan, decided to act. With the help of the French government, Barzani arranged for Mohammed and his father, Hamid, to be flown in air ambulance to France, and Mohammed was treated for three months at a military hospital outside Paris.

Mohammed had to undergo seven surgeries. "I was tired of the pain of lying on the bed. One time I tried to walk a little, but after a couple of steps I fell to the ground," Mohammed recalled on a recent afternoon.

Life at the ramshackle school in the city of Hasakah where he has sheltered with his parents, sister and four brothers since returning on March 10 is hard. The family relies on charity. The flow of water and electricity is erratic. Temperatures are rising and there is no air-conditioning, nothing unusual in the life of refugees. But exposure to heat can be a life and death matter for Mohammed, and Hasakah is subjected to extreme temperatures in the summer. His burned skin is also not supposed to be exposed to direct sunlight for the next five years.

A maze of leathery scars, some thick and lumpy, others spidery, crisscross his neck and body. They stretch his skin, impeding mobility and causing pain. He has to do special exercises and wear a full body vest. "It gets hot here and pus comes out from under my armpits and my wounds itch. It's very painful," Mohammed said.

A report detailing his condition issued by the Hopital D'Instruction des Armees de Percy noted that Mohammed had been admitted for "severe extensive burns reportedly sustained due to phosphorus exposure during air bombing" on Oct. 10. But his clinical symptoms suggested that Mohammed's burns had been suffered "earlier than reported and likely related to inflammation of clothes" which "may have been caused by phosphorus or not."

That hasn't stopped some media outlets such as the Saudi TV channel Al Arabiya from continuing to claim that the boy was burned by white phosphorus. Hamid denies that his son had been injured prior to the Turkish invasion. The assertion that he had suffered burns before Oct. 10 was first made by a Turkish academic in a report by Turkey's state-run news agency, Anadolu. "It is unclear where and when the wounded child's photo was taken, but it looks like the wounds are from an old burn," said Levent Kenar, professor and chair of Department of Medical Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense at University of Health Sciences.

Hamid said he found the boy lying on the ground outside their home on the second day of the Turkish attack. Hamid acknowledged that he did not know what type of munition had struck his son.

Officials from the Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northeast Syria air frustration with the media's fixation on the child. "Mohammed's story is



Mohammed Hamid Mohammed plays with his 6-month-old cousin Roslin at a makeshift camp in Hasakah, May 25, 2020 (photo by Ivan Hassib/Al-Monitor)

undoubtedly tragic. But there are hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians and tens of thousands of children who are suffering as a result of the Turkish occupation," said Fawza Youssef, a top Kurdish official.

"Just recently in Afrin 12 children were hit by Turkish mortar attacks. Six were martyred, some lost their hands, some their legs, others their eyes and there was no attention drawn to their plight. This illustrates the hypocrisy of the world politics. Mohammed's plight is the plight of all our children. His plight is that of all Kurdistan," Youssef told Al-Monitor in a WhatsApp interview. Afrin, a mainly Kurdish enclave was occupied by Turkish forces and their Sunni opposition allies in January 2018. The

UN's Human Rights Council said in a March 2 report that "Cases of detentions, killings, beatings and abductions, in addition to widespread looting and appropriation of civilian homes, by a variety of armed groups operating under the umbrella of the Syrian National Army have been documented, in a consistent, discernible pattern previously documented in Afrin."

The United Nations also noted the summary execution of the young woman politician Hevrin Khalaf and her driver on Oct. 12 by the Turkish-backed Ahrar al-Sharqiya brigade near Tell Tamar and the deaths of 11 civilians the same day as they were travelling to Ras al-Ain. "At around 3.30 p.m., the convoy was hit by an air strike,



Mourners attend a funeral for Kurdish political leader Hevrin Khalaf and others including civilians and Kurdish fighters in the northeastern Syrian Kurdish town of Derik, known as al-Malikiyah in Arabic, on October 13, 2019 (photo by Delil Souleiman/AFP via Getty Images)



targeting the first vehicle, in the centre of Ras al-Ain, near the Great Mosque,” the report said. “The Turkish authorities have either denied involvement in or indicated that they have no record of these incidents. The Commission continues to investigate these incidents, and calls on the Turkish authorities to launch its own investigations and make the findings public.” Turkey has not revealed any findings.

While the French findings cast doubt on Mohammed’s possible exposure to white phosphorus, Dr. Abbas Mansouran, an Iranian Swedish epidemiologist, says there is no doubt that it was used on some burn patients he treated during the early days of the Turkish incursion at a hospital in Hasakah. Some 30 victims, mostly civilians, were admitted to Hasakah’s main hospital with “severe and unusual burns and smoke injuries to their faces, ears and other areas.” These bore characteristics “very different to those that I would expect to have been caused by anything other than chemical incendiary weapons like white phosphorus,” Mansouran observed in a report. “My experiences go back to the first half of the Iran-Iraq war [in the 1980s], including working in the burns unit,” he said. Both sides used chemical weapons in the eight year long war, including sarin and mustard gas.

The 69-year old, who traveled to Syria as a volunteer and is a research principal at Sweden’s PEAS institute for infectious diseases, told Al-Monitor that he had shared the report in a Jan. 21 meeting with Julie Tetard, a political affairs officer at the Geneva office of the UN special envoy for Syria. “I never heard back from the UN,” he told Al-Monitor.

It’s hardly surprising. The UN rebuffed the Kurdish Red Crescent’s appeals to investigate whether Turkish forces had used chemical agents against several Syrian Kurdish civilians and fighters who were transfer-

red to Iraqi Kurdistan for treatment. Kurdish Red Crescent leader Dr. Sherwan Bery told Al-Monitor that the UN had said the request could only come from a government, not a nongovernmental organization. Bery said they still had taken hair, blood and urine samples from some 10 victims, all of them fighters, and that they were being stored in Sulaimaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan. “We cannot confirm that white phosphorus was used,” he said. Bery added that his organization had shared its own findings with the Swedish, Italian and German governments.

A Western diplomat familiar with the UN’s deliberations said, “The UN special envoys’ offices are not involved in anything related to accountability. They won’t say the word ‘war crime’ even if it happens in front of them. It is too sensitive.”

Allegations that civilians had been exposed to white phosphorus were, however, backed in at least in one case by Wessling AG, a Lyss, Switzerland-based laboratory. In a Dec. 4 report viewed by Al-Monitor, Wessling said of the skin tissue of one of the victims “that the type of wound (chemical burns) in combination with the significantly high amount of phosphor found in the sample demonstrates that phosphorus reagents (white phosphorus munitions) have been used.”

Mansouran treated the patient whose sample was sent to Wessling. The doctor said the patient was a civilian from Ras al-Ain. The man was struck by an unmanned Turkish drone while traveling on a motorbike en route to his village on Oct. 17. “He was very strong, he survived,” said Mansouran.

Turkey’s NATO’s allies are typically reluctant to rebuke Ankara over rights abuses other than to pressure it for concessions on matters of strategic benefit to themselves.

In an Oct. 23 hearing held amid



James Jeffrey, the US Special Representative for Syria Engagement, testifies before a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on US President Donald Trump’s decision to remove US forces from Syria, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, October 23, 2019. (photo by Reuters/Yuri Gripas)

calls for an arms embargo on Turkey, the State Department’s envoy for Syria, Jim Jeffrey, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that that there was “one report” of the use of white phosphorus, and “we are looking into that.”

Jeffrey told US Rep. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican, “White phosphorus is tricky because as you indicated it has military uses. You have to almost determine not what happened but what the intent was.”

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) told Al-Monitor in an email, “When white phosphorus is used as smoke, illumination or as an incendiary weapon, its use does not fall under the purview of the Chemical Weapons Convention or the OPCW. In such instances the intended effects are due to the white phosphorus’ thermal properties, rather than its (chemical) toxic properties.”

The organization noted, however, that its use as an incendiary weapon against civilian populations is banned under a 1980 UN convention. It added that that reports in the media that the organization had investigated Turkey’s alleged use of chemical weapons during its Peace Spring offensive “are incorrect.”

Responding to Al-Monitor’s request for comment, a State Department spokesperson said, “The Turkish Government has acknowledged the cases we have brought to their attention, providing background and in some cases directing us to the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) as the responsible authority. We are aware of one individual belonging to Ahrar al-Sharqiya prosecuted to date for killing unarmed civilians during the Peace Spring Operation, but we do not have sufficient details of the trial process as it has not been made public. We have requested and expect a firm Turkish commitment to continue its efforts to comply with its obligations under the law of armed conflict and mitigate harm to civilians, and to promote accountability for violations or abuses.”

The spokesperson continued, “The Department of State continues to raise the issue of alleged human rights violations or abuses and violations of international humanitarian law with officials at high levels of the Government of Turkey, including as recently as March following the release of the most recent UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria report. We have reiterated our expectation that Turkey investigate alleged violations and abuses and promote accountability where appropriate.”

On white phosphorus, the spokesperson added, "The State Department has raised this issue at very high levels with the Turkish authorities. They maintain any use of white phosphorus would have been to mask friendly forces through a smoke screen. We have no independent information related to Turkish forces using white phosphorus as a chemical weapon."

Eight days after launching the incursion, Turkey, an OPCW

member, donated some \$33,000 to the organization for the construction of a new chemical technology center. The new facility "is required to meet the demands of OPCW States Parties for enhanced verification tools, improved detection capabilities and response measures, as well as increased capacity-building activities," the organization said in a press release.

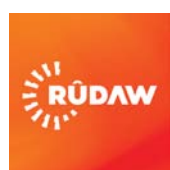
Back in Hasakah, Mohammed and his family have some good

news at last. A group of local volunteers collected enough money to put the family up in air-conditioned housing, and now the local government has agreed to provide for Mohammed's treatment and future housing costs. Berivan Khalidi, a senior Kurdish official told Al-Monitor, "We have directed our relevant institutions to provide what Mohammed needs, in terms of monitoring his health, and even securing work opportunities for his relatives."

But what Mohammed wants

above all is to go back to Ras al-Ain. "I always dream of going back to Serekaniye, of going back to school. I was the best in my class. I want to become a surgeon."

Mohammed realizes those dreams aren't likely to materialize anytime soon. "I don't think Turkey will stop its attacks. There will always be victims," he said.



May 29, 2020

## Human rights groups urge UN to protect Afrin after surge in violence

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region – Twenty human rights groups operating in northern Syria called on the United Nations on Friday to help put an end to the Turkish-backed militia presence in Afrin following a spate of deadly clashes between armed factions.

The northwest Syrian town of Afrin and its surrounding countryside have been under the control of Turkish-backed militia groups since early 2018 when Turkey launched a military offensive against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

Clashes erupted on Thursday between rival militia factions which are nominally united under the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army umbrella, reportedly killing civilians in the crossfire.

Protesters marched on the governor's residence on Friday to demand an end to the violence, according the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

ANHA, a media outlet affiliated with the YPG's political arm, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), released a statement on Friday on behalf of 20 human rights groups calling on the UN to help end the violence and alleged abuses.

The statement accuses Turkish-backed militias of "violations and crimes against defenseless civilians" in Afrin and of "extreme brutality, without the slightest consideration or respect for laws and human rights".

It also accused Turkey of pursuing a deliberate policy of forced displacement and demographic change targeting the region's ethnic Kurds.

The signatories, who include the SOHR, call on the UN to establish a committee to investigate the allegations.

"We ask the United Nations Security Council to put this area [Afrin] under international protection until Syria's situation is solved," the statement added.



Turkish-backed Syrian militiamen seize control of Afrin, northwest Syria, March 18, 2018. File photo: Bulent Kilic / AFP

Afrin residents held a mass demonstration on Friday just a day after Turkish-backed militias clashed in the town center.

"The demonstrators headed to the governor's residence where they chanted slogans calling upon the governor to intervene and stop the daily violations against the people of Afrin and displaced people from other Syrian provinces," SOHR said in a statement.

The protesters also called on

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to intervene and force Turkish-backed militias to move their headquarters out of the urban center.

According to the SOHR, the protest was called after clashes erupted on Thursday between the Hamza Division, Jaish al-Islam, and Ahrar al-Sham – all of which are supposed to be united under the Syrian National Army umbrella.

News reports citing local



sources indicate a child was among seven people killed in the crossfire. Rudaw English was unable to independently verify the reports.

Once considered an island of calm amid Syria's brutal civil war, Afrin has seen mounting violence since the Turkish offensive in 2018 and the arrival of militia factions fleeing regime offensives in the south. On April 28 this year, a massive truck bombing killed at least 42 people near the town's main bazaar.

Thousands of indigenous Kurds were forced to flee Afrin when Turkish forces and their Syrian militia proxies launched Operation Olive Branch on January 20, 2018.

By the time Ankara had seized control of Afrin city from the YPG on March 24, tens of thousands of Kurds had fled,

many of them to Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria.

Families displaced by regime offensives to the south were resettled in their place.

Afrin is now home to 298,700 Kurds and 458,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria, while Afrin city is home to 53,300 Kurds and 110,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria, according to Afrin-based organizations.

According to UN estimates, upwards of 150,000 Kurds have been displaced from Afrin, most of them to Shahba camp in Tel Rifaat, north of Aleppo.

Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch with the stated aim of pushing the YPG back from its southern border.

Ankara believes the YPG is af-

filiated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group which has fought a decades-long war with the Turkish state for greater political and cultural rights for Kurds.

The YPG, which makes up the backbone of the US-backed SDF, denies any organic ties with the PKK.

Monitors regularly accuse Turkey's Syrian militia proxies of committing abuses against Afrin civilians, especially Kurds – both during and after the offensive.

Photographs quickly emerged in March 2018 of militiamen looting Kurdish homes and businesses and pulling down a statue of Kawa the Blacksmith – a core figure in Kurdish folk legend.

Observers accused the militias of ethnic cleansing after homes

were commandeered by fighters, residents intimidated or kidnapped for ransom, and displaced families blocked from returning.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched another offensive against Kurdish forces in October 2019, this time in the northeast, after US troops withdrew from the Syria-Turkey border region.

UN observers accused these Turkish proxies of potential war crimes and allowing an Islamic State (ISIS) revival in areas liberated by the Kurdish-led SDF.

The Russian-backed Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad has demanded Turkey withdraw from Syrian territory and recently clashed with Turkish troops in the opposition holdout of Idlib.

## Reports: Children among the dead after Syrian rebels clash in Turkish-held Afrin

Clashes between Syrian rebel groups in the northern city of Afrin left at least two children dead Thursday.

Fighting among Turkey-backed Syrian rebel groups in the Turkish-controlled city of Afrin in northern Syria left several civilians dead Thursday, including two children, according to war monitors.

Fierce clashes between the Hamzat Division and the Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam factions erupted Thursday, said the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Three civilians, including two children, were killed in the gunfire, the monitoring group said.

Elizabeth Tsurkov, a fellow in the Middle East Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, wrote on Twitter that the fighting started after a group of fighters from the Hamzat Division walked into a shop run by a man displaced from Syria's southwestern Ghouta region.

"They asked to purchase something for 300 lira [\$0.16] on credit. The owner of the shop refused. In response, the Hamzat shot up the place & tossed a grenade, killing the shop owner and his son," she wrote.

Afrin has been in the hands of Syrian fighters trained and equipped by Turkey since March 2018, when the Free Syrian Army captured the city



A member of Jaish al-Islam takes a selfie with a mobile phone in the town of Soussian in Aleppo countryside, Syria, Sept. 23, 2018. There was a clash among Jaish al-Islam and two other Turkish-backed militias in Afrin on March 28, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi.

from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, which Turkey considers an offshoot of the banned Kurdis-

tan Workers Party.

Human rights groups have since documented the wide-



scale persecution of locals by Turkish proxies, including forced conversions among the Yazidi religious minority.

“The current situation for Yazidis remaining in the Afrin is dire as they are forced to hide their identity, unable to practice their faith, and remain frightened for

their safety,” the Yazidi advocacy group Yazda said in a statement today.

Yazidi activist and Nobel laureate Nadia Murad accused Turkey and its affiliated rebel groups of an ethnic cleansing campaign in Afrin.

“They are kidnapping women, killing civilians, and destroying houses and shrines,” she said on Twitter. “To date, the international community has failed to bring attention to these crimes.”

Turkey denies war crimes were committed by its proxies.

Afrin was also the site of a deadly truck bombing last month. The YPG denied responsibility after Turkey accused the militia of carrying out the attack that killed more than 50 people.

Kurdistan au féminin

29 mai 2020

La Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

## ROJAVA. Attaque terroriste visant des enfants à Shaddadi

**S**YRIE / ROJAVA – Hier, deux terroristes ont lancé une grenade contre un groupe d'enfants à Shaddadi. Quatre enfants ont été blessés, dont certains grièvement. On soupçonne les terroristes travaillant pour la Turquie d'être derrière l'attaque pour terroriser les Kurdes syriens et les pousser à l'exode.

Jeudi, trois enfants et un adolescent ont été blessés lors d'une attaque à Shaddadi, dans le nord-est de la Syrie. Deux inconnus à moto ont lancé une grenade sur le groupe d'enfants jouant dans la rue. Trois enfants âgés de trois à six ans ont été bles-

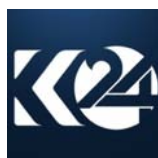


sés. Un adolescent de 15 ans a été touché par des éclats d'obus à l'estomac lorsque la grenade a explosé, et un autre éclat a été logé dans la

tête de l'adolescent. Il est en soins intensifs.

Les résidents ont immédiatement amené les enfants bles-

sés à l'hôpital Hikme d'Hasakah (Hesekê). Les Forces de sécurité intérieure ont ouvert une enquête.



May 29 ; 2020  
By Krush Najari

## Iraq and Kurdistan both announce record daily COVID-19 infections

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Iraqi health authorities on Thursday reported 322 new coronavirus cases over the previous 24 hours, breaking its previous record from just five days earlier. The

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) also broke a new milestone on the same day with its record of 34 new infections.

In recent weeks, the number of

active cases across the country has increased dramatically following the lifting of lockdown restrictions in late April amid a strained national economy.

The new cases in Iraqi pro-

vinces outside the Kurdistan Region came after health workers conducted 5,104 tests for the disease, according to the federal health ministry.

The country's testing campaign

has trended upward since over recent weeks, but the percentage of people screened—numbered at close to 0.5 percent—has remained small compared to neighboring nations. There have been over 211,000 examinations in total since the highly-contagious disease first crossed into Iraq's borders.

The autonomous Kurdistan Region has its own health ministry and conducts tests separately. Daily testing results conducted by the Kurdish officials are typically announced later in the day than the federal government's figures and are then added to the next day's national tally.

Regional health workers carried out 985 tests of their own, officials said on Thursday. The KRG's efforts dedicated to confirming infections have averaged around 1,000 per day since the

disease first broke out, totaling around 72,000 up until now.

Iraq now has reported a total of 5,457 cases, including 179 deaths and 2,971 recoveries. KRG, meanwhile, says it has recorded 566 infections, five of whom have succumbed to the disease and 409 have recovered.

Baghdad and Basra provinces top the number of active cases across the country, with the cities of Sulaimani and Erbil leading the Kurdistan Region's numbers.

Kurdistan Region Health Minister Saman Barzinji warned Thursday that "the spread of the virus has accelerated" as the autonomous region has reopened and "some citizens are not following the health safety guidelines."

On Tuesday, the Kurdistan Region's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research



Security forces stand guard to enforce the Kurdistan Region's coronavirus curfew on the streets of Sulaimani, March 14, 2020. (Photo: Reuters/Ako Rasheed)

announced the end of the school year for universities and colleges in the region as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Minister Aram Mohammed said in a speech that there would be no final exams and that students' grades from months before schools were vacated to stop the spread of the disease would count for the whole year.

The coronavirus has infected over 5.8 million people worldwide and killed more than 360,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting.

**LE FIGARO**

29 mai 2020

## Iran: trois gardes-frontières tués dans un accrochage avec des «insurgés armés»

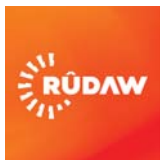
Trois gardes-frontières iraniens ont été tués vendredi 29 mai dans un accrochage avec des «insurgés armés» dans le nord-ouest du pays, près de la frontière iranienne, a rapporté l'agence de

presse Isna.

L'affrontement a eu lieu près de la localité de Sardasht dans la province iranienne d'Azerbaïdjan-Occidental, alors que «les gardes-frontières étaient en pa-

trouille», a précisé l'agence iranienne, faisant état d'«insurgés tués» et de «trois gardes-frontières tombés en martyrs». Le groupe auquel appartiendraient ces «insurgés» n'a pas été identifié par l'agence Isna.

La République islamique fait face depuis de longues années à des rebelles kurdes qui utilisent des bases dans le Kurdistan irakien voisin pour lancer des attaques sur le territoire iranien.



May 29 ; 2020

By Zhelwan Z. Wali

## Two Kurdish kolbars killed by Iran border guards: rights group

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Two Kurdish kolbars were killed Thursday night by Iranian border guards in Khoy, a city in Iran's West

Azerbaijan province, according to a human rights group.

"At 10 pm tonight [Thursday night], a group of Kolbars from

the village of Kirkush in the Khond area of Khoy were shot dead near observation posts at this border village," reads a statement by the Paris-based

Kurdistan Human Rights Network, citing what they refer to as "a well informed source."

The deceased were listed in

the report as Mohsen Darvishzadeh and Ibrahim Jordanizj.

Kolbars are semi-legal porters who transport goods on their backs over the border between Iraq and Iran. It is a job with many risks and few rewards, but for many, the only option for earning an income. Many are pushed into the profession by poverty and lack of employment alternatives, particularly in Iran's Kurdish provinces.

Over the past week, five people have been killed and six wounded by Iranian and Turkish border guards in the same province, according to the rights group.

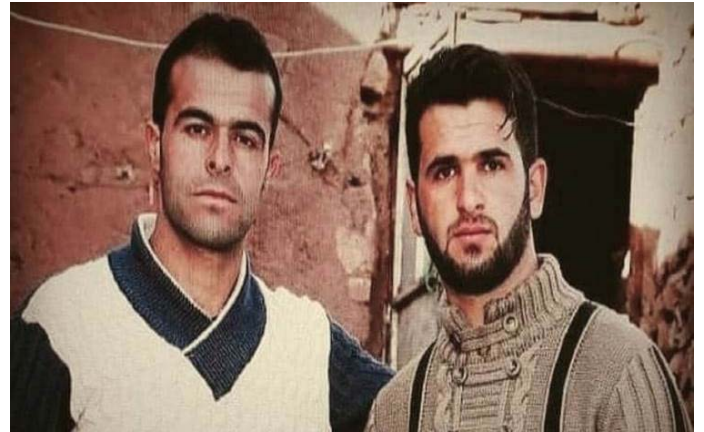
Monitors estimate around 70,000 people, mostly Iranian

Kurds, make a living as kolbars.

Rudaw English interviewed two kolbars earlier this month who discussed the dangers of their trade.

"Since corona[virus] has gotten serious in Iran, we've been out of work and our lives have been turned upside down. There is nothing else for me to do, so I do kolbary," one kolbar said before he set off through the rugged mountains.

The Paris-based monitor recorded 245 incidents that either killed or injured kolbars trekking goods over the border, in which 56 died and 153 were wounded in 2019.



Ibrahim Jordanizj (left) and Mohsen Darvishzadeh (right) were killed while working as kolbars. Photo: Kurdistan Human Rights Network facebook page

In the same period, an estimated 237 kolbars were shot by Iranian border guards, according to Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, which tracks

violations against kolbars.

Another 23 kolbars froze to death in the mountains, drowned in rivers, or fell from cliffs.

## Kurdistan au féminin

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

30 mai 2020

# SYRIE: Crimes visant les femmes à Afrin : Les Kurdes demandent une enquête internationale

**S**YRIE / ROJAVA – L'Administration autonome (AA) de la Syrie du Nord et de l'Est a condamné les crimes des mercenaires islamistes visant les femmes d'Afrin, a tenu la Turquie responsable des crimes de ces groupes et a appelé la communauté internationale à agir face à ces crimes, en y mettant fin et en les condamnant.

Dans un communiqué publié aujourd'hui, l'Administration autonome a appelé la Russie, les Etats-Unis et les Nations unies (ONU) à prendre une position claire concernant les crimes de guerre et crimes contre l'humanité commis par les mercenaires de la Division al-Hamza (Firqat al-Hamza).

**Voici le communiqué de l'Administration Autonome :**

« Après plus de deux ans d'occupation turque et de ses mercenaires de la ville d'Afrin, les milices terroristes soutenues et financées par le régime turc continuent de commettre les pires des crimes contre les civils et leurs biens qui s'y trouvent, compte tenu du silence international injuste et de la soumission au chantage du régime turc qui n'hésite pas à utiliser la carte du terrorisme et des réfugiés pour couvrir les crimes de ses mercenaires en Syrie et en Libye.

Ce que font ces groupes est une transgression claire, une violation flagrante et publique de tous les pactes et chartes internationaux ainsi que de toutes les valeurs morales, car ces pratiques constituent un véritable génocide dans tous ses sens.

**Crimes et viols visant les**



**femmes**

Des centaines d'abus et des milliers de pratiques criminelles ont lieu à Afrin (déplacements, meurtres, enlèvements, extorsions financières, démolitions de maisons, destruction de lieux saints, exécutions sommaires, incendies, pillages et vols, installation d'étrangers), et aujourd'hui, les viola-

tions se multiplient, des transgressions et des traitements contraires à l'éthique contre huit femmes détenues par le soi-disant Firqet al-Hamzat à Afrin, qui est l'une des factions terroristes affiliées au régime turc, et ces comportements expriment la nature brutale et immorale de ces gangs de mercenaires.



Ce qui se passe à Afrin en général, ainsi qu'à Serêkaniyê / Ras al-Ain et Girê Spî / Tel Abyad, et ce qui a été révélé aux femmes détenues en échange d'une demande de rançon par les mercenaires d'al-Hamzat est une violation très grave.

#### **Appel à condamner ces pratiques et à mener une enquête internationale sur les crimes des mercenaires**

Alors que nous, dans l'Administration autonome du Nord et de l'Est de la Syrie, condamnons et

dénonçons ces violations et tenons le régime turc responsable de ce qui s'est passé contre ces femmes, nous lançons un appel urgent à toutes les organisations des droits de l'homme, aux mouvements féministes du monde, à toutes les organisations des Nations unies, à la Fédération de Russie et aux États-Unis d'Amérique pour qu'ils assument leurs responsabilités urgentes devant l'opinion publique internationale, condamner immédiatement ces crimes et exprimer des positions publiques et claires sur ce que font le Firqet al-Hamzat et toutes

les factions et groupes de mercenaires soutenus par la Turquie, nous demandons également la nécessité de mener une enquête internationale et de tenir les responsables de ces violations pour y mettre fin.

#### **Institutions féminines sommées d'agir contre les crimes visant les femmes**

Ce qui se passe à Afrin est une violation des droits humains et des règles du droit international, et le monde entier doit les sacrifier

héroïques faits par les femmes à Afrin et dans le nord et l'est de la Syrie contre l'organisation terroriste DAECH et les mercenaires de la Turquie. Les défenseurs de la liberté des femmes et des droits humains doivent agir de toute urgence dans tous les pays du monde pour condamner les violations pratiquées par les mercenaires du régime turc.

Éternité et gloire pour les martyrs, liberté pour les prisonniers et les kidnappés ». (ANHA)

## Le Monde

30 mai 2020

# En Turquie, Erdogan ressasse son rêve de changer Sainte-Sophie en mosquée

**P**our la première fois depuis quatre-vingt-sept ans, un imam a récité vendredi une sourate dans la basilique, devenue un musée, un gage aux plus conservateurs.

Istanbul a célébré avec ferveur, vendredi 29 mai, le 567<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la conquête de Constantinople par le sultan Mehmet II, dit « le Conquérant ». Les festivités ont débuté le matin avec la sortie d'une flottille de bateaux voguant sur le Bosphore, dont les eaux, fréquentées par des dauphins, sont devenues bleu turquoise après plus de deux mois de navigation restreinte. En soirée, un événement inhabituel s'est produit sur la péninsule historique de l'ancienne capitale ottomane. Pour la première fois depuis quatre-vingt-sept ans, un imam a récité une sourate du Coran à l'intérieur de la basilique Sainte-Sophie.

Limitée à deux personnes, l'imam et le ministre du tourisme, Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, la prière a été suivie avec émotion par le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui assistait à

l'événement en visioconférence, un écran plat ayant été installé au cœur de l'édifice. Un peu plus tard, un spectacle de son et lumière a été projeté sur les murs extérieurs de la basilique, dont l'imposante silhouette domine le cœur historique d'Istanbul. Les cérémonies ont été retransmises par toutes les chaînes de télévision.

Une façon pour M. Erdogan de donner des gages à la frange la plus conservatrice de son électorat, laquelle réclame depuis longtemps la conversion du bâtiment en mosquée, une éventualité évoquée de plus en plus souvent par le président turc ces dernières années. Une façon aussi de polariser davantage la société et d'énervier le voisin grec avec qui les relations sont tendues.

#### **« Un monument mondial du Patrimoine culturel »**

Réciter des sourates à Sainte-Sophie n'est pas vu d'un très bon œil par l'élite laïque du pays, qui déplore une atteinte à l'héritage de Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, le fondateur de la République turque. C'est lui qui,



La basilique Sainte-Sophie, à Istanbul, le 29 mai. Emrah Gurel / AP

en 1935, avait œuvré à la transformer en musée. La Grèce non plus n'a pas apprécié. Vendredi, le porte-parole du gouvernement grec, Stelios Petsas, a cru bon de rappeler que « Sainte-Sophie est un monument mondial du Patrimoine culturel » qui ne doit pas être instrumentalisé.

A chaque crise politique, le président Erdogan ressasse l'idée de transformer la basilique du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle en mosquée, ce qu'elle a été de 1453, date de la conquête, jusqu'en 1935. En 2017, il avait évoqué

cette éventualité en réponse à la reconnaissance par le président américain, Donald Trump, de Jérusalem comme capitale de l'Etat hébreu. En 2019, alors que son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) apparaissait en mauvaise posture pour les municipales, cette vieille antienne avait resurgi.

Sa réalisation semble d'autant plus improbable que la « Grande Eglise », classée au Patrimoine mondial par l'Unesco et deuxième musée le plus visité de Turquie avec près de 4 millions d'entrées an-

nuelles, est une source de revenus considérable pour le ministère du tourisme, dont les rentrées risquent d'être réduites à la portion congrue cette année à cause de la pandémie due au coronavirus. Une fois devenue mosquée, l'entrée serait forcément libre. Il conviendrait aussi d'occulter ses mosaïques byzantines, l'islam ne tolérant pas la représentation figurative.

#### Rêve de la conquête ottomane

Au moment où l'économie turque est menacée de récession à cause de l'épidémie, les autorités cherchent à bercer la population avec le rêve de la conquête ottomane. « Nous allons conquérir les mosquées ! », a prévenu jeudi Ali Erbas, le chef de la direction des affaires religieuses, tandis qu'il annonçait la décision du gouvernement de rouvrir les mosquées aux prières collectives après une interruption de soixante-quatorze jours.

Prévue pour le 12 juin, la réouverture a finalement été avancée au 29 mai. Les milliers de fidèles qui ont convergé vers les mosquées vendredi ont été invités à prier à l'extérieur. Le port du masque était obligatoire et les tapis de prière étaient disposés à plus de 1 mètre les uns des autres. Des employés municipaux ont distribué du gel désinfectant et les haut-parleurs des minarets ont répété la nécessité de se tenir à bonne distance les uns des autres.

Le gouvernement estime que l'épidémie a été maîtrisée. Vendredi, les autorités sanitaires ont déclaré plus de 160 000 cas confirmés de Covid-19 et un total de 4 489 décès. Jeudi, le président Erdogan a annoncé la levée, prévue lundi 1er juin, des restrictions imposées jusqu'ici à la circulation entre les villes ainsi que la réouverture des restaurants, cafés, centres sportifs, plages et musées.



May 30, 2020

## Police detain pro-Kurdish HDP chairs in terror probe in southeastern Turkey

**T**urkish police detained two provincial co-chairs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) as part of a terror investigation in the southeastern province of Batman, A Haber news reported on Saturday.

Ömer Kulpu and Fatma Ablay were detained following a raid of the regional HDP headquarters as part of an investigation launched by the Batman Chief Public Prosecutor's office, it said.

Police cited banners of the jai-

led Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan, visible from outside the HDP building, as the reason for the raid, pro-Kurdish Mezopotamya news agency reported.

Police also found a large number of photographs belonging to PKK members, in addition to banners, banned publications and digital material, the Batman Governor's Office said.

The PKK is an armed group that has been at war in Turkey for Kurdish self-rule for over 30 years.



The Turkish government has long accused the HDP of sympathising and acting in the interest of the PKK. Forty mayors who were elected from the HDP in the March 2019

local election in Turkey's Kurdish-majority regions have been replaced by government-appointed officials and over a dozen arrested on terrorism-related charges.



May 30, 2020

## Turkey's Saturday Mothers mark 25 years for movement with call for justice

**S**aturday Mothers, one of the longest-running peaceful protest movements in the world to demand the whereabouts of their loved ones who disappeared after

Turkey's 1980 military coup, marked their 25th anniversary of sit-ins on Saturday.

The group, which has been gathering in Istanbul's Galatasa-

ray Square since 1995, released a statement on the silver anniversary of their protests, calling for an end to policies of impunity.

"We have been struggling for 25 years against impunity policies in the face of our initiatives to attain our people and justice," Duvar news site quoted the statement as saying.

The number of state-endorsed forced disappearances surged in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup and during armed conflict between Kurdish separatists and the Turkish government during the 1990s.

The primary objectives of Turkey's Saturday Mothers include locating the bodies of the disappeared during those periods and bringing those responsible to account.

"This culture of impunity that has been enacted by all institutions of the state in Turkey prevents access to an effective legal solu-

tion," the statement said.

The Saturday mothers urged justice for four men who disappeared while in police custody in 1995: Emin Atuş, Hizni Bilmen, Abdulkadir Demir and Şakir Demir.

The four men, who are all related, were summoned to a police station in the town of Midyat in Turkey's southeastern province of Mardin on May 14, 1995. Although the group was released the same day, eyewitnesses say they were forced into a military vehicle a kilometre from the station shortly afterwards and have been missing since, the state-



ment said.

No progress has been made on the case, with which evidence was only collected 18 years after the incident, it added.

Between 1992 and 1996, 792

state-forced disappearances and murders were reported in Turkey's Kurdish-majority east region in the conflict between Turkish security forces and Kurdish insurgents, according to Turkish Human Rights Association.

**AMIN**

May 30, 2020

## Three Iranian soldiers killed in clashes along border

**B**EIRUT, LEBANON (11:00 A.M.) – The Iranian border guards announced on Friday that three of its soldiers were killed in an armed clash in the northwestern district of Sardasht.

The social aide to the border guards in West Azerbaijan province, Colonel Muhammad Fakry, said that these three soldiers were killed by "bad guys" while they were implementing a border patrol, vowing to re-

veal the details of the incident later.

For years, Iran has faced Kurdish separatists using bases in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to launch attacks on the territory of the Islamic Republic.

These separatist factions are often associated with the PJAK, a group that is associated with the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).



May 30, 2020  
By Khrush Najari

## COVID-19: Kurdistan reports 9 new cases as Iraq, again, breaks daily record

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region Health Ministry said on Friday that it recorded nine new coronavirus cases over

the previous 24 hours, as federal Iraqi authorities reported 416 new infections, once again breaking its record set just a day earlier.

The new cases in Iraqi provinces outside the autonomous Kurdistan Region came after health workers conducted 5,246 coronavirus tests, raising

the total to over 216,000 given, as per numbers provided by the national health ministry on Friday.



Over 260 of the cases were recorded in relatively densely-populated Baghdad province, a ministry statement said. The latest addition brings the total number of infections across the country to around 5,873 infections, including 3,044 recoveries and 185 deaths, the statement added.

The ministry noted that 45 patients are currently in intensive care units.

The Kurdistan Region has its own health ministry and conducts tests separately. Daily testing results conducted by the Kurdish officials are typically announced later in the day than the federal government's figures and are then added to the next day's national tally.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) health workers conducted over 1,100 examinations for the highly-contagious disease, first reported by Chinese authorities in late 2019 and has since spread globally, infecting nearly 6 million people and killing just under 367,000 of them, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hop-

kins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting.

Specialized laboratories in the Kurdistan Region have carried out close to 74,000 coronavirus tests in total, the regional health ministry said in a statement late Friday, noting that the total number of patients has risen to 676, including five deaths and 409 recoveries.

In recent weeks, the number of active cases across the country has increased dramatically following the easing of lockdown restrictions in late April amid a strained national economy.

Kurdistan Region Health Minister Saman Barzinjy warned Thursday that "the spread of the virus has accelerated" as the region has reopened and "some citizens are not following the health safety guidelines."

Sulaimani Health Directorate spokesman, Dr. Yad Naqishbandi, stated his concerns regarding the recent spike in the number of cases when speak-



"We will follow health instructions" is seen written on the back of a medical worker's uniform at a COVID-19 treatment center in Erbil. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

king to Kurdistan 24 on Friday. He warned that should the current circumstances continue, coronavirus-dedicated hospitals would reach capacity and only receive patients whose conditions are particularly unstable.

This could potentially lead to a further spread of the virus since it would be more difficult to isolate infected individuals from their surroundings amid the loosened curfew.

Naqishbandi reiterated the calls of health officials and professionals on the public to adhere to

safety guidelines to prevent the virus from spreading.

Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani described the situation as "very serious" in a strongly worded statement on Friday that accused "some" regional entities of trying to "politicize" the current situation.

"Those who acted against health measures and discouraged people now have to take the responsibility of putting people's lives and health in danger," Barzani charged, adding, "They have got to stop gambling with the lives of people."



May 30, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## KRG ministry: Burning of Kurdish farmers' crops in Iraq 'systematic'

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources stated that there is a "systematic" burning of Kurdish farmers' crops in areas disputed between the federal government and the autonomous region and demanded that farmers and their fields be protected from the "fire of hatred."

"We regret the suffering and loss of property to our farmers in Kurdish territories outside the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a result of the fire of hatred and detestation," a ministry statement read.

The frequency of crop fires has increased in recent weeks with coming of the harvest season,

many but not all in disputed territories.

Both federal Iraqi officials and a Kurdish Peshmerga commander have blamed most of the fires on the Islamic State, but blamed others on discarded cigarettes and other accidental causes, deliberate arson by landowners—potentially to seek government

compensation, tribal disputes, or a new wave of so-called Arabization meant to displace Kurdish populations from places like Kirkuk, which the ministry appeared to have decided upon.

"We consider burning the wheat and barley crops of our farmers, starting from disputed Makhmour to Khanaqin, to be

carried out as part of a systematic process, and this process is repeated annually, which leads to the complete loss of their efforts as farmers," the statement added, referencing the disputed territories that extend from Sinjar (Shingal) near the Syrian border eastward to Khanaqin, not far from the border of Iran.

The crop fires also took place last year in several provinces, both with and without disputed territories, including Kirkuk, Nineveh, Diyala, and Basra.

"We have asked the Ministry of Peshmerga to protect residents and safeguard their lives and properties in the Kurdish areas outside the administration of the regional government (disputed territories), in accordance to their presence in

those areas."

He also called on local governments in the disputed territories to offer protection, "as a representative of our ministry at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture (in Baghdad) has also urged the need to protect crops and farmers in these territories."

The KRG statement also demanded that the federal agriculture ministry, Kirkuk's provincial government, and various administrative departments in the disputed areas "assume their responsibilities to protect the lives and property of our farmers in these areas and compensate the damage they have suffered."

Two weeks ago, the Civil Defense Directorate said that the number of crops field fires re-

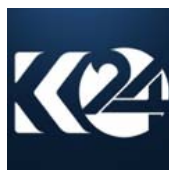


Crop fires have increased in recent weeks with coming of the harvest season. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ched 80 fires in 15 provinces, namely Baghdad, Babil, Maysan, Wasit, Diwanayah, Diyala, Muthanna, Salahuddin, Kirkuk, Karbala, Anbar, Nineveh, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Najaf.

According to the Iraqi civil defence's statistic, more than

1,300 acres have been burned, while about 13,000 acres were saved from fires throughout the country. The tally did not include the four provinces of the Kurdistan Region, as fire incidents have not yet occurred there this season.



May 30, 2020  
By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

## SDF commander announces first 'success' in Syrian Kurdish unity talks

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Mazloum Abdi, the commander-in-chief of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), on Friday announced progress in unity talks between leading rival Kurdish parties in Syria, describing a recent round of exchanges in hopeful terms.

"The first step of the intra-Kurdish dialogue process was successful," Commander Abdi said in a tweet. "We have now moved to the second phase. We hope that both political parties will take into consideration the interests, future, and expectations of the people."

"United and together, we shall triumph and write our history," he affirmed.

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), the two major factions among Syrian Kurdish parties, renewed negotiations in early November to resolve long-standing disputes after Turkey's cross-border offensive in northern Syria in October.

PYD is the leading component of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). Their armed wings are the People's Protection Units (YPG) and SDF, respectively.

On Friday, a KNC delegation returned from Erbil following meetings in the Kurdistan Region with PYD.

Mohammed Ismail, a member

of the KNC leadership, told Kurdistan 24 on Wednesday in Erbil that the PYD and KNC have taken further positive steps on an agreement during the "serious negotiations."

The meetings "are crucial" for the general political process in Syria, the party official noted, adding further that their efforts towards a settlement would continue.

"If there is an agreement with PYD, it will be a comprehensive agreement that will include all aspects: political, administrative, military, and economical," said Ismail. He noted that "these meetings are supported and supervised by the Americans."

On May 22, former PYD co-chair Salih Muslim told Kurdistan 24 that the KNC and PYD are discussing many subjects but that the most important factor is now to "build mutual trust," which, he noted, has been the basis for the recent meetings.

"We have agreed upon some topics, but we are yet to sign any agreements. Hopefully, that will be possible in the times ahead."

Ilham Ahmed, the President of the SDC Executive Council, underlined on Friday that discussions with the KNC had been limited to political affairs so far.

"We did not discuss issues

such as their participation in the self-administration system, or possible military integration [of the KNC-backed Rojava Peshmerga into the SDF],” Ahmed said during an online event organized by the UK-based Kurdistan Solidarity Campaign.

“We realized we do not have so many political differences, but there are some obstacles that can be resolved.”

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

The two have yet to successfully cooperate even after agreements they reached in the Kurdistan Region’s Duhok and Erbil between 2012 and 2014 as the stipulations of the deals were never effectively implemented.

Ahmed highlighted the US role in the latest talks, suggesting that there is a higher potential for success. “The US is mediating now; that was not the case before, but the processes resemble each other a lot.”

Furthermore, she denied rumors that PYD has demanded

the KNC leave the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition conglomerate. “But we have serious criticism regarding the opposition specifically its Islamist character.” Still, “we are willing to work with anyone in the opposition who are not far from our principles.”

She also warned that Turkey is still trying to undermine the Kurdish unity talks.

On May 24, senior KNC official Ibrahim Biro told Kurdistan 24 that “it has been almost a year that the French, from one side, and, recently, the Americans have been trying to approach Kurdish circles [in Syria] to help resolve the differences.”

“This is a positive development; the US is an influential actor in the world, and now it is monitoring a political exchange between two Kurdish sides,” said Biro, who is the former KNC head and an incumbent member of its Foreign Relations Committee.

“The meetings that have been held so far are significant, and there has been a relentless discussion about political topics,” he added.

“Yet, there has not been a solid agreement to this moment. As long as political disputes and



Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) General Mazloum Abdi. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

differences from the past several years are in place, it will be difficult to envision an agreement in the immediate future.”

But, he stressed, their side is “optimistic that those differences will be resolved in the next round of talks – with the role of the US that we expect will be able to bring the two sides close to each other.”

However, Gönül Tol, the founding director of the Middle East Institute’s Turkey program, warned against too much early optimism for the outcome of the Kurdish unity talks.

“This has been going on for a long time, these mediation efforts,” she told Kurdistan 24 on May 22, adding, “but there was a time when it was more diffi-

cult when the tensions were stronger between the KNC and the PYD.”

“It was last year when the US and France tried to mediate between the PYD and KNC and they failed. So, it’s not the first time it’s happening.”

She explained that it’s easy for the KNC and PYD to agree on the ideals of a federal and pluralistic Syria. But, Tol noted, previous agreements failed between the two sides due to a lack of implementation.

“Although KNC and PYD can reach agreement now on paper, but when it comes to the implementation there are a lot of problems,” she said. “That’s when past efforts have failed.”



May 30, 2020  
By Hiwa Shilani

## Turkish airstrike kills father and son in Kurdistan Region village

**E**RBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The most recent of a recent wave of Turkish airstrikes targeting the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in the Kurdistan Region’s Duhok province late on Saturday morning killed two civilians from the same family, a father and his

adult son, and wounded one in the village of Hetuta on the outskirts of Amedi district.

Sources told Kurdistan 24 that the two who perished in the attack are 60-year-old Jalal Nuradin and his 32-year-old son Ahmed, whose bodies were re-

trieved from the scene by other family members.

According to information gathered by Kurdistan 24, over the past four years, Turkish bombardment has killed 23 civilians in and around Amedi.

The PKK is engaged in a decades-long insurgency against Turkey over Kurdish rights and self-rule in a conflict that has resulted in the death of over 40,000 people on both sides. Turkish military operations inside the Kurdistan Region’s Qandil Mountains and other



sprawling areas near the borders of Turkey and Iran have become commonplace since the peace process between the PKK and Ankara collapsed in 2015.

A recent analysis by the US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) concluded that 77 percent of all engagements between Ankara and the armed group have “taken place in Iraq,” referring mostly to the autonomous Kurdistan Region.

Ankara, along with Washington, the EU, and NATO, designates the PKK as a terrorist organization. The group is thought to have fighters near hundreds of villages inside the Kurdistan Region, mainly in the mountainous areas near the Turkish and Iranian borders.

60-year-old Jalal Nuradin (right) and his 32-year-old son Ahmed were killed by Turkish airstrikes in the Kurdistan Region's province of Duhok, May 30, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Turkey has regularly attacked areas inside the Kurdistan Region over the past decade but operations this year have intensified and widened in terms of scope and territory covered. In some areas, Turkish forces have mobilized as far as 30 kilometres deep inside the autonomous region's border.

In April, the Iraqi foreign minister summoned the Turkish ambassador in Baghdad and delivered him a memorandum of protest against airstrikes Ankara conducted earlier that month against alleged PKK po-



60-year-old Jalal Nuradin (right) and his 32-year-old son Ahmed were killed by Turkish airstrikes in the Kurdistan Region's province of Duhok, May 30, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

sitions in the Kurdistan Region and a refugee camp in the disputed city of Makhmour.

As civilians, agriculture, trade, and the local environment continue to suffer from the

clashes, residents and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials have repeatedly asked the PKK and the Turkish government to take their fight elsewhere.

## Kurdistan au féminin

30 mai 2020

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

# Le gouverneur de Siirt a fait détruire la bibliothèque municipale portant le nom d'un écrivain kurde

**T**URQUIE / BAKUR – L'administrateur nommé à la municipalité kurde de Siirt (Sêrt) le 15 mai à la place des co-maires HDP, a fait démolir la bibliothèque municipale portant le nom de l'écrivain kurde Celadet Elî Bedîrxan.

La bibliothèque avait déjà fait parler d'elle en 2016, lorsque l'administrateur de l'époque avait fait retirer l'enseigne en kurde à l'entrée et tous les livres kurdes. Le panneau a été remis en place après la nouvelle victoire électorale du HDP aux élections de mars 2019.

On ne sait pas les motifs la dé-

molition de la bibliothèque. Le gouverneur, nommé administrateur, a fait accrocher dans son bureau des photos du président Tayyip Erdogan et du ministre de l'Intérieur Süleyman Soylyu comme premier acte officiel. Ensuite, dix employés municipaux ont été licenciés sans motif valable.

Les co-maires élus Berivan Helen Işık et Peyman-dara Turhan du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP) ont été destitués par le ministère turc de l'Intérieur et placés en résidence surveillée après



quatre jours de garde à vue.

L'intellectuel kurde Celadet Elî Bedîrxan ou Celadet Bedir Khan, également connu sous le nom de Mîr (Prince) Celadet,

était rédacteur en chef du magazine kurde Hawar, publié pour la première fois à Damas en 1932.



30 mai 2020  
Par André Metayer

## Rafle à Diyarbakir

Dans le cadre d'une opération policière menée à Diyarbakir, de nombreuses personnes ont été interpellées le 22 mai dernier, dont 18 mises en garde à vue. Il s'agit principalement de responsables de deux organisations de femmes, l'Association des femmes Rosa, qui lutte activement contre la violence envers les femmes et le Mouvement des Femmes libres (TJA). Le TJA a été créé après la fermeture administrative en 2016 du Congrès des femmes libres (KJA) qui incarnait la mobilisation féminine depuis février 2015. Le KJA était né de la transformation en congrès du Mouvement démocratique des Femmes libres (DÖKH), bien connu des AKB.

Sur les 18 personnes interpellées, 14 ont été mises en détention et 4 ont été remises en liberté sous contrôle judiciaire. Toutes sont accusées de terrorisme, sans plus de précision. Les AKB connaissent particulièrement deux d'entre elles : Ayla Akat Ata, membre fondatrice de l'Association des

femmes Rosa, qui a été remise en liberté sous contrôle judiciaire et Gülcihan Şimşek du TJA, qui connaît à nouveau la prison de Diyarbakir.

### Ayla Akat Ata

Ayla Akat Ata, avocate, fut très tôt sur tous les fronts : association turque des Droits de l'Homme, Fondation TOHAV (avocats et défenseurs des droits humains), Göç-der (aide aux populations déplacées en « exil intérieur »), Plate-forme démocratique des Femmes de Diyarbakir. Elue députée de Batman en 2007, elle est interpellée et mise en détention en 2010 puis réélue en 2011. Le 3 janvier 2013, elle est à Imrali, comme avocate d'Abdullah Öcalan dans le cadre du processus dit de « résolution » (de la question kurde). Empêchée de se présenter aux élections législatives de 2015, elle est élue porte-parole du TJA. Interpellée en compagnie notamment de Gültan Kışanak, lors de la manifestation du 26 octobre 2016, elle est jetée en prison le 31 octobre pour « appartenance

à une organisation terroriste ». Elle est libérée au bout de sept mois, en mai 2017 et reprend ses activités militantes à la direction du TJA et au sein de l'Association des femmes Rosa. Ayla Akat Ata est venue à Rennes en 2008 où elle a fait un tabac.

### Gülcihan Şimşek

Les AKB connaissent Gülcihan Şimşek depuis 2005 : « si nous n'avions pas rencontré Mme Gülcihan Şimşek, maire DEHAP de Van Bostançi, si nous ne l'avions pas écoutée ni visité avec elle Bostançi, quartier de réfugiés à la périphérie de la ville de Van, nous serions repartis avec une vision faussée et assez paradisiaque de Van » note Sylvie dans son carnet de voyage. En avril 2007, nous faisons part, dans un courrier adressé à l'ambassadeur de France à Ankara, de notre préoccupation à la suite du contact avec Gülcihan Şimşek, qui ne nous avait pas caché qu'elle recevait des menaces, les difficultés à exercer les responsabilités de

maire, les exactions et les poursuites dont elle, mais aussi ses autres collègues maires, faisaient l'objet. Après ses deux mandats de maire, elle est interpellée en mise en détention à Diyarbakir puis à Midyat. Toujours dans l'attente d'un jugement, elle est remise en liberté conditionnelle en 2014. Durant ces cinq années, les AKB ont lancé des appels, des pétitions en sa faveur et entretenu une correspondance régulière, des échanges ô combien riches d'enseignements et d'émotions. Mais la prison n'a pas brisé cette femme. Militante, avant tout contre la violence faite aux femmes et contre la pauvreté, elle participe, comme vice-présidente du DBP, à la Journée internationale des femmes le 8 mars 2017 à Van. Le 23 octobre 2018, elle accepte, comme représentante du KJA, de répondre à une interview de Kurdistan au féminin, « une des rares », selon le site, à accepter qu'on publie son nom. 22 mai 2020 : retour à la case prison.



CNRI  
Conseil national de la Résistance iranienne

31 mai 2020

## Iran : plus de 48.200 décès du Covid-19 dans 323 villes

Selon le ministère de la Santé et les responsables du régime, les provinces de Khouzistan, Ispahan, Azerbaïdjan de l'Est et de l'ouest, Lorestan, Kurdistan, Kermanschah, Hormozgan, Sis-

tan-Balouchistan, Mazandaran, Hamedan, Kerman et Ilam sont dans le rouge ou en état de vigilance et de crise.

20 des 28 villes du Khouzistan sont dans le rouge.

L'Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d'Iran (OMPI) a annoncé dans l'après-midi du 31 mai 2020, que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus dans 323 villes d'Iran dépasse les 48 200. Le nombre de victimes

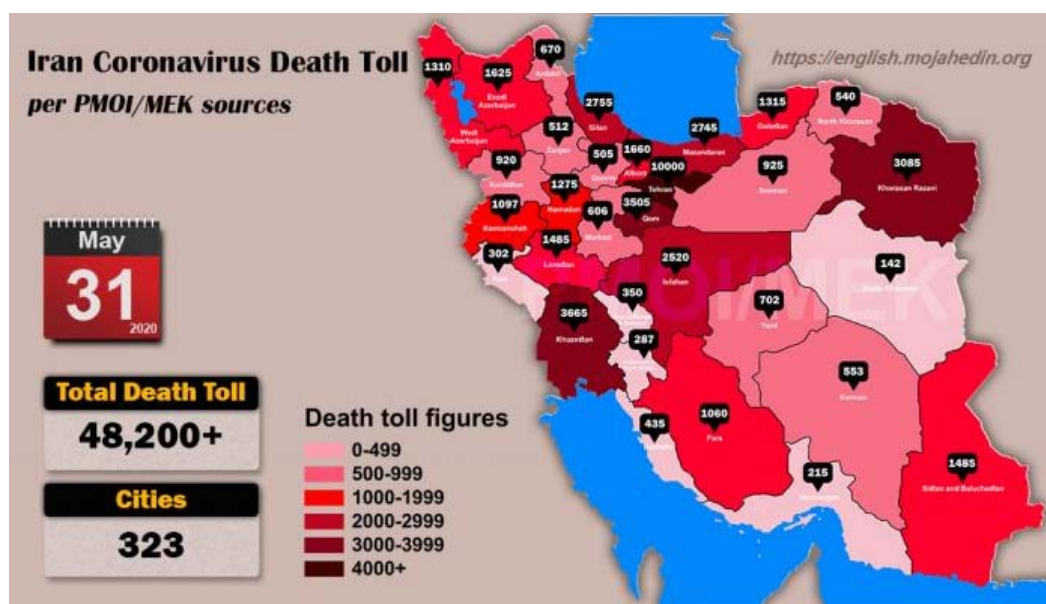
dans les provinces de Khouzistan est de 3665, de Mazandaran 2745, de Sistan-Balouchistan 1485, de Lorestan 1485, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'ouest 1310, du Kurdistan 920 et d'Ilam 302.

Un porte-parole du ministère de la Santé a annoncé dans ses chiffres truqués aujourd'hui que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus ces dernières 24 heures était de 63 et que le nombre de nouveaux cas était de 2516. Il a dit à l'agence Irna ce 31 mai que « les provinces d'Ispahan, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'ouest et de l'est, de Lorestan, de Kermanschah, de Hormozgan et de Sistan-Balouchistan sont en état d'alerte ».

À Téhéran, selon Irna du 30 mai, le vice-président de la faculté des sciences médicales a déclaré: « nous n'avons pas d'hôpital exempt de virus (...) nous ne pouvons pas déclarer un hôpital "propre", car la période d'incubation du coronavirus est longue. »

Dans la province de Khouzistan, le sous-directeur de la santé de la faculté des sciences médicales d'Ahwaz a déclaré à Irna aujourd'hui : « 20 des 28 villes du Khouzistan sont dans le rouge en terme de propagation du Covid-19. Les cas positifs dans la province sont très élevés et plus que prévus. Fin avril, avec la réduction des restrictions, la maladie est repartie à la hausse au Khouzistan. »

Le site Javan, affilié aux pasdarans, a cité Mohammad Molavi, le député d'Abadan au Majlis du régime, aujourd'hui : « le coronavirus est endémique au Khouzistan. Les gens au Khouzistan sont en train de périr. Le nombre de malades quotidiens dans cette province est le premier du pays. » A Dezfool, l'agence Tasnim, affiliée à la Force Qods, a écrit aujourd'hui que « le nombre de patients continue d'augmenter de manière exponentielle et cette tendance à la hausse a provoqué une vague d'inquiétude dans la population. Les gens attribuent cette hausse à l'incompétence des



autorités. »

L'agence Borna a publié hier les propos du président de la faculté des sciences médicales d'Ispahan disant que « jusqu'à présent, des milliers de personnes sont mortes du Covid-19 (...) Le personnel médical est toujours aux prises avec le virus ». De son côté le site Qalam a aussi publié hier ses déclarations : « 1100 malades certains et suspectés de l'être sont morts dans la province d'Ispahan, sauf dans le secteur de Kachan (...) depuis mars 2019 les salaires des médecins n'ont pas été versés et pour les infirmières c'est depuis juin de l'année passée, et pour nous la priorité c'est que ces salaires soient versés. »

Au Kurdistan, l'agence Imna a cité le 30 mai Gharib Sajadi, membre du conseil municipal de Sanandaj : « la situation est critique. Prétendre que la situation est normale, sous n'importe quel prétexte, vise à dissimuler le problème (...) Malheureusement le nombre de morts, selon l'Organisation de l'Aramestan, est plus élevé la plupart des jours que les chiffres officiels. Récemment, cinq et parfois six morts soupçonnés positifs au coronavirus sont enterrés chaque jour au ci-

metière de Behecht-e Mohammadi ». Le 30 mai, l'agence Tasnim a cité le vice-président de la faculté des sciences médicales du Kurdistan expliquant : « la tendance croissante à la propagation du Covid-19 dans les villes de Sanandaj, Saqez et Marivan est très inquiétante. »

A Hamedan, le vice-président de la faculté des sciences médicales Avicenne a déclaré à ISNA le 31 mai : « il y a eu des poussées du virus parmi les familles et les petits quartiers qui étaient en contact les uns avec les autres. » Tasnim a rapporté le 30 mai : « dans la province de Hamedan, les hôpitaux manquent de lits en soins intensifs pour les patients non atteints du coronavirus. Ces derniers jours, nous avons été témoins de la pénurie de lits en soins intensifs à l'hôpital Behecti et des malades laissés en attente. »

Le président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Tabriz, dans l'Azerbaïdjan de l'est, a été cité par le quotidien Entekhab le 30 mai : « avec la levée des restrictions, nous assistons à la hausse des cas positifs, en particulier chez les jeunes. 50% des personnes infectées ont moins de 50 ans. »

Dasn la province de Kerman, le président de la faculté des sciences médicales de Jiroft a été cité hier par Tasnim : « la propagation du virus dans les villes du sud de Kerman a atteint un stade critique. 35% des personnes infectées dans la partie sud de Kerman sont des travailleurs et des employés du secteur public. Dans ces circonstances, il faut éviter toute sorte de rassemblement. »

Selon IRNA du 31 mai, le gouverneur de Qasr-e-Chirine (province de Kermanschah) a déclaré : « la situation dans la ville est alarmante en raison de l'augmentation du nombre d'infections au coronavirus. »

Le gouverneur de la province d'Illam, cité par Tasnim le 31 mai, a déclaré : « la hausse des cas positifs à Illam est alarmante et doit être prise au sérieux. »

IRNA a rapporté aujourd'hui que la province de Mazandaran, avec 300 patients hospitalisés pour des « problèmes respiratoires aigus », fait partie des huit provinces qui « ont atteint un état alarmant ». Dans le lexique des molahs, « problème respiratoire aigu » signifie une mort imminente.



## Un charnier découvert à Mardin

**D**es ossements humains découverts à Dargeçit (Kerboran en kurde), dans la province de Mardin, ont été envoyés à Istanbul en vue d'une autopsie.

Les habitants du village d'Akyol, dans le district de Kerboran, ont découvert, dans une grotte du hameau de Gulbiş, un charnier contenant les ossements de dizaines de personnes. Les ossements appartiendraient à des civils kurdes enlevés puis exécutés par le JITEM (service de renseignement de la gendarmerie turque) dans les années 90.

Plusieurs parents de victimes de « meurtres d'auteurs inconnus » (traduction littérale du terme turc « faili meçhul » utilisé pour qualifier les exécutions extrajudiciaires) ont déposé une requête auprès du procureur de Kerboran afin que les os soient analysés. Suite à cette requête, des soldats turcs et des avocats de la branche de l'Association des droits de l'homme (IHD) de Mardin ont visité la grotte. Les ossements ont ensuite été envoyés à l'Institut de médecine légale d'Istanbul pour analyses.

Erdal Kuzu, l'un des avocats des parties civiles dans l'affaire du "JITEM de Dargeçit" a déclaré : "Les os seront examinés. Nous avons fait une demande auprès du parquet de Dargeçit pour savoir si les os portent l'ADN de personnes exécutées dans les années 90."

La guerre menée par l'Etat turc contre le mouvement de libération kurde incarné par la PKK (Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan) a été particulièrement

sanglante dans les années 1990 : des milliers de Kurdes – paysans, journalistes, universitaires, militants politiques, défenseurs des droits humains, hommes d'affaire – ont été enlevés et exécutés.

**Près de 17 000 personnes « disparues »**

On estime à près de 17 000 le nombre de victimes de disparitions forcées et d'exécutions extrajudiciaires durant cette période sombre. Leurs corps ont été enterrés dans des fosses communes, des grottes ou des usines désaffectées, sinon jetés dans des décharges, coulés dans des puits et des fosses d'acide ou, comme en Argentine, largués par des hélicoptères militaires. La plupart du temps, les victimes ont été arrêtées à leur domicile par la police ou l'armée, ou convoquées au poste de police local pour une "déclaration", ou encore arrêtées dans la rue par les militaires. C'est souvent le dernier lieu où elles ont été vues vivantes. La plupart des "meurtres d'auteurs inconnus" sont attribués au JITEM, une organisation paramilitaire non reconnue par l'Etat turc qui serait responsable d'au moins 80% des meurtres impunis.

Dans le cas des squelettes découverts à Kerboran, on suppose qu'ils appartiennent à des victimes du JITEM. Le site est situé à quelques centaines de mètres seulement du village d'Altinoluk où vit İrfan Yakut, fils d'une victime. C'est là qu'il a vu son père, Yahya Yakut, pour la dernière fois, il y a 27 ans. Yahya Yakut avait été menacé de mort à plusieurs reprises par les paramilitaires parce qu'il refusait d'être pro-



tecteur de village. En septembre 1993, il est parti pour Konya dans l'espoir d'y trouver du travail et y emmener ensuite sa famille. Mais il n'est jamais arrivé à destination. À Midyat, un district de Mardin, le minibus dans lequel il voyageait a été arrêté. Un groupe d'hommes masqués l'a traîné hors du véhicule. Depuis, on n'a plus aucune nouvelle de lui.

**Ce n'est pas le premier charnier découvert à Kerboran**

"En tant que fils d'une personne disparue, il est particulièrement important pour moi que le sort des personnes exécutées, dont les restes ont maintenant été retrouvés, soit clarifié. De nombreuses personnes dans la région connaissent l'histoire de mon père. C'est pourquoi, j'ai été informé immédiatement après la découverte du charnier", a déclaré İrfan Yakut. "J'ai rapidement visité le site et pris des photos. J'ai compté 30 crânes, il y en a probablement d'autres. De nombreuses personnes ont disparu à Kerboran dans les années 90. Ce n'est pas le premier charnier découvert ici".

En 2011, l'IHD a établi une carte montrant la localisation

de 253 sites où ont été découverts les ossements de 3 248 personnes disparues. Les charniers sont répartis dans 21 villes du Nord-Kurdistan. Beaucoup de corps appartiennent à des combattants de la guérilla du PKK tués dans les affrontements ou après leur capture par l'armée turque.

**Les fosses communes – une réalité de l'entreprise génocidaire menée contre les Kurdes en Turquie**

Les charniers se sont très tôt imposés en Turquie comme une technique de répression sans merci dans la guerre contre les Kurdes et leur mouvement de libération. En 1925, deux ans seulement après la fondation de la République turque, le leader kurde Cheikh Saïd (Şêx Seîdê Pîran) et 47 de ses compagnons ont été exécutés à Amed (Diyarbakır) et enterrés dans une fosse commune. Douze ans plus tard, Seyîd Rıza, principal chef du soulèvement de Dersim, son fils Resik Hüseyin et cinq de ses amis ont également été exécutés et enterrés dans une fosse commune dont l'emplacement reste encore un mystère de nos jours, tout comme celui de Cheikh Saïd et de ses compagnons.



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By Fazel Hawramy

## Iran's new parliamentary speaker launches scathing attack on Rouhani

In his first speech as parliament speaker, Iranian hardliner Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf launched a scathing attack on President Hassan Rouhani's "ineffective" political record, pledging to guide the government policy in the "right revolutionary direction."

In remarks made on Sunday, hardliner Ghalibaf claimed Iran's executive office is "in turmoil" and preoccupied with external affairs rather than issues affecting Iranians hard-hit by US sanctions.

The three-time presidential candidate and former mayor of Tehran called on the newly-formed parliament to adopt a "revolutionary and logical attitude" towards the government to guide it onto the right path, Fars News reported.

A former police chief and commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) air force, Ghalibaf was elected Thursday as speaker of Iran's 11th parliament, one of the most influential positions in the Islamic Republic.

The legislature is now controlled by hardliners following a stringent vetting process last year which disqualified many reformist candidates.

Ghalibaf, who failed in his bid to become the president of Iran in 2017 and withdrew from the race in favor of current judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, is expected to become a real headache for President Rouhani's government.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has tried for decades to maintain a power balance between

the hardliners and the relatively reformist camp in order to maintain stability within the establishment.

Raisi, a hardliner, has been at loggerheads with Rouhani since taking the helm of Iran's courts in March 2019, appointed as chief of justice by Khamenei.

Raisi subsequently launched an anti-corruption campaign, targeting many people close to Rouhani including his brother who was sentenced to five years in prison last October over corruption.

"Taking a few people to court over corruption will not fool the people, and they must know about the fate of the large sums of money that have been taken from the treasury," Rouhani responded to Raisi in November.

However, the new speaker seems eager to hold the government to account.

"The 11th parliament is neither confrontational ... nor is it going to compromise when it comes to people's rights and interests," he warned, adding the new parliament "will now allow to the government to be negligent."

Iran is in the middle of an economic crisis brought on by the US re-imposition of sanctions in late 2018, a drop in oil prices and decades of mismanagement and corruption that has permeated through different branches of the establishment.

Millions of people are rely on government handouts to make ends meet amid high unemployment, growing inflation and



(L-R) Khamenei, Rouhani and Ghalibaf in Tehran on February 21, 2018. Photo: khamenei.ir

a plummeting currency. Cash-strapped Iranians have questioned the wisdom of spending billions of dollars in the country's regional endeavors establishing proxy forces across the region, and have called on the IRGC and the establishment to redirect funds to their own people.

As one of the top commanders of the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980s, Ghalibaf was close to the slain IRGC Quds commander Qasem Soleimani who was the architect of Iran's support for its proxy forces across the Middle East.

Ghalibaf said in his speech that the strategy to support Iran's proxy forces remains unchanged.

"The 11th parliament feels obliged to continue the path of martyr Soleimani, in increasing the strength of the Resistance...and sees the supporting the people of Palestine, Hizbollah of Lebanon, the Resistance groups Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the oppressed people of Yemen as its national and revolutionary duty," Ghalibaf told lawmakers.

Ghalibaf said that Iran will not

abandon Iraq and continues to be engaged in the country.

"It will be by the side of people of Iraq, its government and Marjaiya [Shiite clerical leadership] and is ready to offer any assistance," he added.

Given his extensive support network within the powerful IRGC, Ghalibaf's new role will have a lasting impact on the direction Iran will take in the coming years as it tries to offset the impact of crippling US sanctions and reach a compromise with the remaining members of the 2015 nuclear deal.

President Donald Trump withdrew from the landmark deal in May 2018, accusing Iran of having a nuclear weapon program and causing mayhem across the Middle East through IRGC proxy forces in the region.

Iran has since taken steady steps in violation of the agreement in the absence of international aid to ease the sanctions.

The US on Wednesday ended cooperation waivers granted to countries still working at Iranian nuclear plants, dealing a further blow to Tehran.