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ROJAVA: CAN THE SECURITY ZONE PREVENT A TURKISH INVASION?

On 1st August, the 13th conference on the Syrian conflict was held in Nur-Sultan (new name of Astana, capital of Kazakhstan), bringing together Russia, Iran and Turkey, as well as delegations from the Damascus regime and the Syrian opposition supported by Turkey. The Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria, dominated by the Kurds of the PYD (Party of Democratic Unity) and military partner of the Washington-led anti-

ISIS coalition, had not been invited. The discussion focused on the Idleb region, the country's last rebel stronghold, now totally overcrowded, which has been under siege by the Russian-backed Damascus army for months with intense bombardments. Ankara, for its part, wishes to avoid a massive offensive, which would precipitate millions of refugees on its territory, which already hosts more than three million: with the economic crisis, their presence has become a real domestic political problem.

Turkey has obtained a ceasefire from Damascus, on condition that the rebels move back 20 km from the de-escalation line and withdraw their heavy and medium weapons. Fragile truce: the regime has often previously broken its commitments, and Turkey, which had promised to disarm the “moderate” rebels, has not succeeded....

The summit largely failed. The participants were unable to reach an agreement on how the Committee tasked with drafting the future

Syrian constitution should operate, as its setting-up had to be delayed. Nor did the negotiators succeed in bringing lasting peace to the situation on the ground: as early as the 3rd, the “moderate” rebels they hoped to separate from the jihadists refused to leave the region.

The only “achievement” of Nur-Sultan is a final declaration which, reaffirming the will of the three participating countries to defend Syria’s “unity and territorial integrity”, explicitly condemns the Autonomous Administration: the signatories “reject any attempt to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism, including initiatives of illegitimate autonomous powers”, and “oppose separatist agendas aimed at undermining Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and threatening the national security of neighbouring countries”, a transparent allusion to Turkey. The Turkish President, obsessively opposed to the Autonomous Administration, certainly played a role there, and Damascus, which wants to recover its territories in Northern Syria, could only approve. It was also a question of denouncing the American presence in the North of the country. But the denunciation of the Autonomous Administration is indeed the only point on which the summit participants were able to agree, and the consensus hardly goes beyond that, given the divergent interests on the ground. On the 5th, Damascus, accusing Ankara of not having respected its commitments, resumed the offensive on Idleb, not without having taken advantage of the temporary cessation of hostilities to reinforce its front line... On the 8th, the Syrian army began to advance on the ground. On the 19th, it bombed the vanguard of a Turkish convoy of 28 vehicles that arrived near the village of Khan Shaykhun, south of Idleb (Hama province). Damascus accused Ankara of trying to provide

weapons and ammunition to the rebels. Tension quickly increased, with the Turkish Foreign Minister warning Syria on 20 July “not to play with fire”. But on the 23rd, once the rebels had withdrawn from Khan Shaykhun, the Syrian army surrounded the main Turkish observation post in Morek, about ten kilometres to the south... Other Turkish posts were fired upon in the following days. Turkey’s position in Syria was becoming increasingly delicate, and on the 27th, as the Syrian army continued its advance northward, Mr. Erdoğan made a “surprise” visit to Moscow to try to save the day...

Meanwhile, in Afrin, where Turkish occupation and depredation continue, Kurdish fighters continue to regularly harass the Turkish military and their Jihadist auxiliaries. On the 6th, Kurdish sources reported that during the previous week, Turkish military and jihadists had set fire to thousands of olive trees, recalling that since the 2018 invasion, they had burned more than 14,000 hectares of agricultural land... On the 9th, the Turkish Ministry of Defence announced that an anti-tank missile attack on one of its bases from the Tell Rifaat area had injured two soldiers, and that Turkey had “retaliated”. For their part, the Afrin Liberation Forces (ALF) claimed to have wounded or killed several Turkish soldiers on the evening of the 8th at a base in the Shera or Sherawa district, in response to Turkish fire that killed one of their own (*Rûdaw*, *NRT*). Following these clashes, the Turkish army pounded the area with heavy weapons, wounding five members of the same family, including a child (*RojInfo*). On the 10th, the ALF announced having killed eight jihadists from *Jabhat al-Shamiya* in Al-Bab in a night attack. On 19 July, the Turkish Ministry of Defence reported that it had once again responded to fire in the Tell Rifaat area.

The indiscriminate firing by the Turkish army, which has been taking place for months or even years in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, forcing the evacuation of many villages, is also targeting Kurdistan in Syria. On 13 August, *RojInfo* reported on the situation in the small village of Tirbê Spî, very close to the border, not far from Derbasiya (Qamishlo canton). Some farmers have not been able to cultivate their fields for four years, Turkish soldiers sometimes even shooting at children... Others accuse the Turkish army of burning their fields. The co-president of the Tirbê Spî Farmers’ Council, Kamiran Umer, estimates that 2,500 hectares have ceased to be exploited because of this situation...

In addition to the Turkish threat, according to a recent Pentagon report, the Syrian North-East is experiencing a more than worrying resurgence of ISIS. On the 6th, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a car bomb attack in al-Qahtaniya (Hasakah) claimed by the jihadist organization injured a police officer and killed five people, including three children (*AFP*). On August 11th, ISIS promised to intensify its attacks in a video showing scenes of decapitation and close-range shooting at prisoners portrayed as kidnapped Kurdish fighters... On August 13th, the YPG announced the loss on August 5 of a female fighter near Shadadi (Hasakah), Vejîn Zagros, also reporting having killed three jihadists in a special operation near Hasakah. On the 18th, a car bomb attack killed a Kurdish police officer (*Asayish*) in Qamishlo and injured two people, one seriously. On the evening of the 26th, another car bomb exploded near a church in Tabqa, just outside Raqqa, killing one civilian and injuring nine others. The *Asayish* were able to prevent the explosion of another vehicle. At the same time, the SDF announced the capture of one

jihadist and the death of another in an operation on a village in Deir Ezzor.

It should be noted that on 3rd August, the SDF General Command sent an order to all commanders of its military units to stop all recruitment of personnel under the age of 18. This is the application of the agreement signed in Geneva on 29th June between the SDF, the Autonomous Administration and the United Nations to stop the incorporation of children.

The month was also dominated by long-running discussions between Turkey and the United States, accompanied by a true “war of communiqués”: if discussions with the Americans failed, the Turks would themselves create the “security zone”, with the help of Syrian rebels ready to participate in the offensive... The Americans retorted that they were ready to protect their SDF partners from any attack, while taking into account Ankara’s concerns, as the American Special Representative for Syria, James Jeffrey, said on the first of the month.

At the same time, diplomats from both countries continued their discussions on the possible creation of a “security zone” separating the Turkish army from Kurdish fighters. According to the Turkish press, Turkey demanded full control of a 30 km deep area on the Syrian side, from which the SDF should withdraw. The Americans refused such an important depth. At the same time, the Turkish army massed tens of thousands of men along the border... On the 6th, the new Head of Pentagon, Mark Esper, described any Turkish offensive against Kurdish fighters as “unacceptable” and warned that Washington would prevent any “unilateral incursion”. On the same day, Aldar Khalil, a member of the

Autonomous Administration, stated that the Administration was ready to accept a five-kilometre deep security zone, while refusing a Turkish presence and requesting surveillance by international observers. According to Khalil, these two points were rejected by Ankara, as was the direct participation of the Kurds in the discussions.

On 7th August, Turks and Americans announced in two separate communiqués that they had decided to rapidly establish a “joint operations centre”, located in Turkey, which would coordinate the establishment of the “security zone” to eventually receive Syrians currently refugees in Turkey. On the 8th, Khalil welcomed the US-Turkish agreement, while Damascus rejected it “categorically” as a “flagrant aggression” against its sovereignty. On the 12th, an American delegation arrived in Ankara to continue discussions, and an agreement was quickly announced to create a “security zone” in North-eastern Syria. On the 14th, the Pentagon indicated that the agreement would be implemented in stages. It should be noted that the former boss of the American forces in Syria and former head of the *CentCom*, General Joseph Votel, now retired, published in *The National Interest* an article opposing Ankara’s control of the “security zone”. In this text, co-authored with a Turkish expert at George Washington University, Gönül Tol, Votel recalls that “Security zones [...] are usually designed to be neutral, demilitarized and focused on humanitarian objectives”... (*AFP*)

On 16 August, SDF Commander-in-Chief Mazloum Abdi said in an interview with the *Hawar* agency that discussions on the “security zone” had in fact begun as soon as President Trump announced the US withdrawal in December 2018.

Abdi said that the SDF had asked their American partners to act as mediators between them and the Turkish state “to solve the problem through dialogue and not war”, and then participated indirectly in the discussions from the beginning. When asked whether the SDF would accept Turkish aviation reconnaissance flights over their area, Abdi replied that “they had not accepted it and would not accept it because such flights would also endanger the other areas held by the SDF”. The Turkish Ministry of Defence had announced on the 14th drone flights over the “security zone”. Regarding the return of Syrian refugees, Abdi said that former residents of these territories were welcome to return (*Bianet*).

On the same day, Russia, reiterating its support to Damascus for the recovery of all territories lost during the civil war, said that “attempts to isolate North-eastern Syria are a source of concern” and called for dialogue between Damascus and the Autonomous Administration. On 27 July, the latter announced the withdrawal of YPG units from several positions near the Turkish border, the dismantling of various small fortifications and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. These operations, which began on 24th in Ras al-Ayn / Serê Kaniyê, continued on the 26th in Girê Spî (Tell Abyad). The US military command in the Middle East (*CentCom*) confirmed on Twitter the withdrawals and destruction of fortifications, with photos in support, adding that this demonstrated “the commitment of the SDF to support the application of the security mechanism” (*AFP*). At the same time, opposition to a possible Turkish invasion remains strong; the Council of Girê Spî (Tell Abyad) has indicated its rejection of Turkish threats, and demonstrations have taken place in several cities in Rojava.

TURKEY: ECONOMY IN CRISIS AND GROWING OPPOSITION TO ERDOĞAN; NEW ATTACKS ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Recent figures from the Turkish economy give little cause for optimism. According to the *TurkStat* Institute of Statistics, inflation in July was 1.36% compared to the previous month, 16.65% for the year. But some sectoral figures are worse: transport cost inflation reaches 4.46% in one month; and annually 18.21% for food. As for unemployment, in May it was 12.8% for those over fifteen years old, or more than four million, an increase of more than one million in one year. It reaches 23.3% among young people aged 15 to 24. In addition, industrial production in June fell by 3.9% compared to June 2018 and by 3.7% compared to the previous month. Among the three sectoral indices, manufacturing production contracted the most, with 4.6%. The political consequences could be very negative for Mr. Erdoğan...

As an indication of growing opposition to the increasingly authoritarian regime instituted by the Turkish President, 43 Turkish bar associations indicated that they would not attend the opening ceremony of the legal year on 2nd September. On the 21st of August, twenty members of the Supreme Court of Appeal out of 380 did the same. Since the attempted coup d'état in July 2016, the ceremony has been held at the Ankara presidential complex – due to Mr. Erdoğan's fears for his own safety. One of the members of the Supreme Court anonymously told *Bianet* that he did not wish to attend a ceremony “under the supervision of the president of a political party”.

On the 5th August, the government again allowed visits to the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

His lawyers, who met with him on the 7th, issued his statements expressing his concern about the persistence of a militaristic policy from the Authorities, and his proposal to contribute to a political solution for the “Kurdish question”. After his lawyers, his brother Mehmet Öcalan was also able to visit him. Through these authorizations, the government, faced with political difficulties, seeks to give an impression of flexibility, but this is illusory as soon as we look at the whole picture: throughout the month, violent operations, arrests, dismissals of HDP elected officials and even extra-judicial killings at the border went on...

On 1st August, nine Kurdish activists were arrested in a police raid in Izmir. On the 2nd, several medical staff members of the Cizre hospital, including a doctor, were arrested for treating wounded people who arrived on the premises while they were on duty in 2015, including a 10-year-old child: they are now accused of having assisted the PKK... The Turkish Medical Association TTB and the Human Rights Foundation TİHV both condemned these arrests (*Bianet*).

On the 6th, the left-wing website *Duvar* announced the launch of the “Initiative to Free Demirtaş”, with the hashtag *#FreeDemirtas*. The HDP leader has now been in prison for three years. Participants in this initiative include journalist Can Dundar, human rights lawyer Eren Keskin, German parliamentarian Cem Özdemir, co-chair of the German party *Die Linke* Katja Kipping, and Dutch MEP Kati Piri. Another hashtag used by participants is *#FreeThemAll*, referring to former HDP Co-Chair Figen Yüksekdağ and the thousands of HDP members awaiting their trial in

prison. The next hearing of the Demirtaş trial will be held on September 18.

As for the mathematician Tuna Altınel, placed on bail on 30th July after 81 days in prison, he has not finished yet with Turkish justice: still being prosecuted for having served as a translator in February 2019 at a meeting of the “Lyons Kurdish Friendship Association” (*Amitiés kurdes de Lyon*), his passport having been confiscated, he must wait in Turkey for his next hearing on the 19th November. He is also still prosecuted as a signatory to the petition of the “Academics for Peace”, a case whose hearing will be held on 26 December (*Le Monde*). Although the Constitutional Court has ruled that the signatories' convictions violated their rights, many universities still refuse to reinstate them. A petition challenging the Constitutional Court's decision, entitled “The Constitutional Court cannot legitimize terrorism”, was even launched with (as if by chance) 1.071 signatures: this number amounts to a clear signature by the ultra-nationalists, as it refers to the battle of Mantzikert (Malazgirt) which by the defeat of the Byzantines opened Anatolia to Seljuq Turks... On the 12th, Dr. Anıl Özgüç announced her resignation from the University Aydın in Istanbul, her name having been added to the petition without her consent (*Bianet*). Among the 1071 signatories, other academics also indicated that their signature was false: Şerif Eskin, Ercan Eyüboğlu, Mehmet Gürlek, Ahmet Yıldız and Alev Erarslan (*Evrensel*)... On the 8th, nineteen students from the METU Technical University were charged with “participation in illegal assemblies and marches” and “refusal to disperse” for hav-

ing participated in the ninth LGBT March of their university. The first hearing will take place on November 12. On the day of the parade, police attacked the parade, using rubber bullets and pepper spray, before arresting 21 students and a teacher. Since 2011, the university presidency has tried every year to prevent the parade by cutting off electricity in the buildings concerned or by calling the police, and then launched investigations against the organisers (*Bianet*).

On the 9th, police raided the HDP office at Muş, detaining several of its members, including the two local co-chairs Ferhat Çakı and Muhlise Karagüzel. On the same day, further arrests were made in Bitlis, Tatvan and the Bağlar district of Diyarbakir. In Gaziantep, ten people were detained following their messages on social networks. Two of them were charged with “pro-PKK propaganda”. Condemning the arrests, the HDP reported that they concerned a total of 21 individuals, city councillors, district co-chairs and members of youth assemblies.

On 19th August, the Minister of the Interior reported that 418 people had been detained in an operation in 29 provinces, a few hours after the dismissal of the metropolitan mayors HDP of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van....

On the 29th, the Constitutional Court rejected the request of the family of the murdered Armenian journalist Hrant Dink to interrogate some state officials of the time. After the 2007 assassination of the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Agos*, the Court dismissed 24 people, including some accused in the trial of the ultra-nationalist *Ergenekon* network, such as former Istanbul Deputy Governor Ergün Güngör and the head of the MIT Özel Yılmaz: precisely those people whose interrogation the

Court still refuses to allow...

On the information front, the authorities have continued their censorship efforts, including a massive attack on news websites. On the 2nd, the *Bianet* site reported that a court in Ankara had blocked access to 136 sites - including *Bianet!* - following a request from the gendarmerie dated 16 July. *Bianet* had already been blocked, but they only concerned certain items. There, the whole site was blocked, i.e. 200,000 articles and reports. The Turkish Journalists' Union (TGS), TİHV and the Human Rights Association İHD have issued press releases denouncing a further violation of press freedom and human rights. The Presidents of Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Diyarbakir also denounced this blocking order, as did the International Federation and the European Federation of Journalists (<https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/08/06/turkish-court-imposes-access-block-on-news-portals/>), which brought the case to the Council of Europe platform for the protection of journalism. An online petition has been l a u n c h e d (<https://www.change.org/p/ankara-3-ceza-sulh-mahkemesi-bianet-kapat%C4%B1mas%C4%B1nhaber-almam%C3%B6zg%C3%BCrl%C3%BC%C4%9F%C3%BC-k%C4%B1s%C4%B1lanamaz>). Harlem Désir, media representative of the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), denounced the blockade, as did *Reporters Without Borders* (<https://rsf.org/en/news/censorship-catching-bianet-rsf-partner-turkey>), *Amnesty International* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/turkey-mass-blocking-of-social-media-and-news-sites-is-full-frontal-assault-on-freedom-of-expression/>) and the *International Press Institute*

(<https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/turkey-violates-right-to-information-again-2/>). However, on the same day, the court indicated that the blocking order for the *Bianet* site had been cancelled, adding that it had been placed on the list of sites blocked “by mistake” (*Le Figaro*).

On 9 August, the lawyers of the *Media and Law Studies Association* referred the matter to the Council of State to request the suspension of the new “Regulation on radio, television and voluntary Internet broadcasting”, which came into force on 1st August 2019. The latter entrusts the Supreme Radio and Television Council (RTÜK) with the authority to supervise Internet content. For the association, “having to ask for permission and pay fees to announce news is a violation of Turkey's constitution”. The fear is also that the “imprecise language” in which the text is written may allow it to be “used for censorship purposes and with bad intentions”. The Ankara Bar Association also challenged the same text on the 6th.

On the 16th, the reporter Ergin Çağlar, from the *Mezopotamya* news agency, was imprisoned in Mersin on charges of “belonging to a terrorist organization”. On the 19th, his colleague Ziyar Karahan was imprisoned in Diyarbakir. According to her lawyer, she was told that she was detained “because of [her] journalistic activities” (*Bianet*). On the 20th, the writer and peace activist Ayşegül Tözeren, an editorialist for the left-wing daily *Evrensel*, was also jailed in Istanbul after a police raid on her home. Placed on parole on the 23rd, she has been prohibited from leaving the country. On the 30th, four former leaders of the left-wing daily *BirGün* were prosecuted for “assistance to a terrorist organisation as non-members”. In 2016,

they had reported on *Tweeter* messages broadcast under the pseudonym “Fuat Avni” that made public sensitive information about the authorities’ censorship policy.

However, the criminal complaint filed on July 8 by the *Media and Law Studies Association* against the SETA foundation was dismissed. After SETA published a report targeting journalists working for foreign media, the association called for the foundation’s conviction for “inciting the public to enmity and hatred”, “recording personal data” and “encouraging to commit crimes”. But the report was judged “within the limits of freedom of expression”, which provoked the irony of the association’s co-director: this same prosecutor, who keeps charging journalists who are only doing their job, defends the freedom of expression of pro-government institutions and media...

On 29th August, in front of the members of the Association of Broadcast Journalists, the Turkish President said: “We want a more pluralist Turkey with a freer press”... Explaining his statement, he attacked the media coverage of the protests in Gezi Park, which, he said, were “manufactured news”, and the international media, which were guilty of “anti-Turkish propaganda”. As anyone may understand, for Mr Erdoğan, “free press” means a press free to be favourable to him...

Overly critical cultural actors have learned the hard way about the cost of talking – or singing – too loud: on 27th August, Şahinkaya wrote to *Bianet* from Van prison that the musicians of *Grup Yorum* imprisoned there were reaching their 102nd day of hunger strike. Of the 18 members of the music group, 11 are in jail. Among them, Bahar Kurt has been fasting for 77 days, Helin

Bölek for 70 days, İbrahim Gökçek for 71 days and Barış Yüksel for 72 days... Since her women’s prison in Izmir, Sultan Gökçek reported she had been brutalized for requesting her books, and filed a criminal complaint against her guards after a beginning of strangulation. She could not testify to this attack at the hearing, which she was attending from a distance, because the sound of the video system had been turned off.

Another conflict is the one around the Ilisu dam, whose gates were closed on July 18, thus starting the filling process. Protests in defence of the medieval city of Hasankeyf, which will be drowned with many Kurdish villages, continued despite police attacks on demonstrators, such as on the 6th August, and on the 13th, when several HDP protesters were arrested. On the 26th, the Governor of Batman announced a ban on access to the city as of 8th October. The “Hasankeyf Coordination” described this decision as a “cordonning of destruction”, before deciding to organise a series of actions on 14th September. These will by no means be violent, but will consist in playing music or carrying out an activity to signal one’s solidarity with the threatened city (*Bianet*).

Regarding military operations, after launching the “Claws” operation against the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan on the 27th May, the Turkish army launched the second phase, “Claws-2”, on 13th July. The clashes continued throughout August, marked as usual by exchanges of claims between the two sides on the losses inflicted on the opponent...

On the 2nd, on the Turkish side of the Iraqi-Turkish border, in the Hakkari region, soldiers opened

fire on three young shepherds who had crossed the border to retrieve animals gone to the Iraqi side. The youngest, 14 years old, died quickly, as the soldiers did nothing to assist him or seek help. According to another report, the youth were bringing contraband goods when they were targeted by helicopter fire. Already in 2011, a Turkish air strike on the Iraqi border had killed 34 civilians near the border village of Roboski (Şırnak). These genuine extrajudicial executions are never prosecuted by the Turkish courts... On the same day, the Turkish Ministry of Defence indicated without specifying a date that it had “neutralized” five Kurdish fighters in the province of Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to numerous local testimonies, these strikes have resulted in many civilian casualties with no connection to the PKK.

On 3rd August, the PKK announced that on 1st August it had killed 14 Turkish soldiers in a surprise attack on their positions near Uludere (Şırnak), and six others the following day. Six Kurdish fighters were killed in these clashes (*eKurd*). Turkey has not confirmed its own losses. On the 5th, *RojInfo* announced clashes between PKK and Turkish soldiers in Khwakurk, Iraqi Kurdistan, during which more than ten soldiers were reportedly killed. On the morning of the 6th, the Turkish Ministry of Defence again announced it had “neutralized” 14 Kurdish fighters in an air strike in Khwakurk, before announcing on the 8th the neutralization of two PKK leaders in Iraq and, in a separate attack, of three other members of the organisation in Hakkari, on the Turkish side.

Also on 8th August, *Al-Monitor* analysed in a paper the assassination of Turkish vice-consul

Osman Kose. Kose had been shot dead on July 17 in a restaurant in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, by a killer with a pistol and silencer. This is the first assassination since 1994 of a Turkish diplomat in office, and it is the first such attack in Iraqi Kurdistan. It may well be a response to the death on 27th June of Diyar Gharib Muhammad, one of the seven members of the PKK Central Committee, a native of Sulemani, killed in his vehicle near Qandil by a Turkish airstrike. According to Bahoz Erdal, the Head of special missions at the PKK, Kose, although officially a diplomat, coordinated intelligence operations against the PKK in Qandil within the MIT (Turkish Secret Service). He had therefore played a decisive role in preparing for the strike that led to Gharib Muhammad's death. Although the PKK denied being involved in the attack against Kose, statements by its author, Mazlum Dağ, arrested on 21st July, point to the existence of "sleeping" PKK members in Iraqi Kurdistan. *Al-Monitor* wonders whether the PKK-Turkey military confrontation is not entering a new phase, characterized by a

greater importance of intelligence warfare, in a context where the Turkish army now has tools with more precise striking capabilities such as armed drones and long-range missiles...

On the morning of the 16th, according to local sources, a new Turkish airstrike targeting the Qandil Mountains caused fires around several villages below (*Kurdistan 24*). In particular, *Rûdaw* reported the destruction of several orchards and farms near the village of Sangasar (between Ranya and Qele Dize, not far from Lake Dokan). The Turkish Ministry of Defence confirmed strikes on PKK shelters and weapons caches. The PKK has denied the neutralisation of hundreds of its fighters since late May. On the 19th, several houses were destroyed and three civilians were wounded in a new strike on Sangasar. Turkish television reported that five PKK members had been neutralized. The next day, an airstrike destroyed a PKK vehicle near the village of Babire (Dohuk), already partially evacuated by its inhabitants following the Turkish bombardments. On the Turkish side, the

governorate of Sirnak announced on the 21st that one soldier had been killed and three wounded in clashes with the PKK (*AFP*). Then three Turkish soldiers were killed on the 22nd near Silopi, not far from Syrian and Iraqi borders.

On 24th August, the Turkish Ministry of Defence announced the launch of Phase 3 of Operation "Claws" in the Sinat-Haftanin (or Batifa) region of northern Dohuk province in Iraqi Kurdistan. The next day, he announced almost simultaneously strikes on Zirebar (Aqrê district in Iraqi Kurdistan), a village already partially evacuated by its inhabitants, and the death of three soldiers in clashes whose location was unspecified. Seven other soldiers were wounded in the same clashes. Also on the 25th, the "neutralisation" of nine other Kurdish militants in the Batifa sector was announced. On the 30th, five areas of Hakkari province, on the Turkish side, were declared "special security zones". These are the centre of Hakkari, plus Çukurca, Şemdinli, Yüksekova and Derecik. Entry to these areas has been banned for 15 days.

TURKEY:

NUMEROUS PROTESTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AFTER THE DISMISSAL OF NEW HDP MAYORS

The Turkish government continues its hateful prosecution against the HDP mayors who won the 31st March elections in Kurdistan of Turkey. On August 13, Medeni Özer, co-mayor of Edremit district, and Faruk Demir, co-mayor of Çaldıran (Van Province), were both dismissed for "links with the PKK" and replaced by a pro-AKP administrator (*Turkey Purge*). Then on the morning of the 19th, the mayors of Diyarbakir, Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, Mardin, Ahmet Türk, and Van, Bedia Özgökçe Ertan,

suffered the same fate, each time replaced by the provincial governor, appointed by Ankara. Despite the particularly unfair conditions of the election campaign, where public television stations gave 53 hours of airtime to the AKP-MHP tandem, 14 hours to the CHP, and nothing to the HDP, Mr. Mizrakli had been elected with 63% of the votes, Mr. Türk got 56%, and Ms. Ertan 54%. Thousands of Kurds have taken to the streets all over Turkey to protest. In Diyarbakir, hundreds of people, gathered outside the town hall, were dispersed by water cannons, and two were

slightly injured (*AFP*). In Van, police violently attacked hundreds of protesters gathered outside the town hall. HDP deputies gathered to protest in Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakir. In Istanbul, the rally was prevented from accessing Taksim Square, and seven HDP officials were detained (*Bianet*). In simultaneous sweep operations throughout the country, 418 people, mostly HDP members or supporters, were detained.

The MHP, the ultra-nationalist ally of the AKP, expressed its satisfaction, but the CHP (Kemalist opposi-

tion) condemned the decision, its Vice-President Veli Agbaba describing it as “fascist”, while the Mayor of the CHP of Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoğlu, elected thanks to the Kurdish vote, declared it “unacceptable”. Former Turkish President Abdullah Gül and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, despite being members of the AKP, have also expressed their opposition to a decision “contrary to the spirit of democracy” (*Reuters*). In general, condemnation was massive. 28 bar associations throughout the country issued a joint statement: “The fact that three elected mayors, whose appointment had been approved by the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK), were dismissed from office by an ‘administrative decision’ five months later and on the basis of investigations [...] not yet completed, once again demonstrates the executive’s supervision over the judiciary”. The Association of Contemporary Lawyers (ÇHD), the Union of Turkish Chambers of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), Lawyers for Democracy, the Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TİHV) have issued statements on the dismissals. Referring in their joint statement to article 38 of the Constitution that no one can be considered guilty until convicted by a court, İHD and TİHV described the decision as an “absolute violation of the Constitution”. Following an emergency meeting of the HDP, its co-chair Sezai Temelli told journalists that the decision was a “civil coup d’état”, a “new 12 September” (date of the 1980 coup d’état) (*Bianet*).

The protests lasted until the end of the month, despite numerous police attacks in Ankara, Istanbul, Dersim, Diyarbakir, Van, Erzurum and Bitlis (*WKL*). Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly defended his decision: “Those who claim that being elected brings impunity for terrorist crimes are wrong”... In Diyarbakir, police blocked all

streets leading to the metropolitan city hall and prevented a public statement by Sezai Temelli. In Mardin, five journalists from different media covering the protests were detained and released only after several days, after being subjected to strip searches and physical violence. On the 21st, police dispersed new rallies. In Diyarbakir, where at least two hundred people had gathered, seven were arrested. Speaking to the foreign press, Minister Soyly accused the HDP of being responsible for the situation: “The main problem is the HDP’s attitude, which has challenged the State by appointing as mayors people who are already being prosecuted”...

The administrator appointed in Van, Governor Mehmet Emin Bilmez, informed the members of the municipal council of the dissolution of the council and the abolition of the next meetings planned... by a texto! On the 22nd, twenty-six lawyers protesting against the dismissals were attacked and beaten by police, who also insulted journalists covering the event, and MP HDP Erol Katırcıoğlu was separated from the group and taken away by force. Izmir bar president, Özkan Yücel, and a group from the association, who arrived after the incident, were prevented from approaching. On the same day, the Ministry of Interior dismissed eight HDP municipal councillors from Edremit, Çaldıran and Tuşba districts, and the Governor of Batman dismissed the *mukhtars* or village chiefs of Çay, Korik, Bağlar and Kösetarla, under the pretext of ongoing prosecutions or investigations against them, replacing them with administrators. In two days, more than 500 HDP members and supporters who were protesting were arrested, a source from the HDP told AFP.

A video showing police violence against protesters sheltering in a café in Van caused such a scandal

that even an AKP MP from Istanbul, Mustafa Yeneroğlu, was moved, describing these images as “horrible”. Another video widely distributed on the Internet shows an Istanbul police officer shooting rubber bullets at close range in the head of an unarmed demonstrator. In Ankara, police officers held a 12-year-old child on the ground and handcuffed him behind his back before taking him away. The president of the Association of Contemporary Lawyers ÇHD recalled the illegality of this practice for a child (*Bianet*).

On the 23rd, the Turkish President defended the dismissals by accusing the dismissed mayors of having put themselves “in the service of terrorism” (*AFP*).

On the 24th, two CHP MPs, İlhan Cihaner and Ali Seker, travelled to Diyarbakir to visit Mizrakli, then to Mardin the next day to meet Ahmet Türk. On the 26th, a delegation from the HDP visited the CHP premises to meet with its President Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and discuss the dismissals, the constitution and judicial reform. The HDP then issued a statement indicating the agreement of both parties to consider the acts of the government as a “political coup” and to defend democratic principles together.

In addition, after questions expressed on television by Ahmet Türk, the dismissed mayor of Mardin, about the debts left to the municipality by director and governor Mustafa Yaman, a scandal involving the undue expenses of some of the AKP directors between 2016 and 2019 began to emerge, particularly following an investigation by journalist Tunca Öğreten of *Deutsche Welle*. On the 26th in Van, more than 80 protesters were arrested, 38 of whom were then brought to court. On the 27th, 189 people,

academics, journalists, politicians and lawyers, signed a declaration opposing the destitutions (http://bianet.org/english/politics/212298-189-people-sign-declaration-against-trustees?bia_source=mailchimp+28RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN+Bianet+English+Daily%29). In Diyarbakir, the presidents of several professional organizations or trade unions, DİSK, KESK, TTB and TMMOB, as well as the mayor of Dersim Fatih Mehmet Maçoğlu, participated in a protest sit-in.

The protests continued until the 28th, when the police special operations department arrested former HDP MP Selim Sadak in Diyarbakir.

On 28th August, the Turkish President, speaking to journalists on board the plane bringing him back from Moscow, once again justified the dismissals by accusing the dismissed mayors of having “sent taxes to Qandil”, “turning them into bullets”. In the evening, the three dismissed mayors, speaking on the private television channel *Halk*, close to the CHP, indicated their intention to go to court to contest their dismissal. Van Mayor Bedia Özgökçe Ertan said, in response to the Turkish President: “ ‘Sending money to Qandil’ is not one of the charges against me. It does not appear in the summary of the

proceedings communicated by the public prosecutor's office”... (*Bianet*)

On the 31st, Istanbul's CHP Mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, also visited Diyarbakir, where he met with the city's dismissed Mayor, Adnan Selcuk Mizrakli, and Mardin's Mayor, Ahmet Türk. Reiterating his criticism of the deportations, he described Ankara's decision as “reckless”, telling journalists: “There can be no democracy or rule of law when elected officials leave their posts without having been disowned by the ballot box”. İmamoğlu also visited the grave of Tahir Elci, the Diyarbakir president of the Bar and Kurdish activist, shot dead in the street in 2015 under extremely suspicious conditions while he was supposedly protected by the police.

On the same day, the programmes of the “Peace Rallies” scheduled for 1st September in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Ankara and Izmir were published. The governors of three provinces banned several slogans or signs containing the word “administrator” or “coup d'état”...

Reactions have also been negative abroad. The human rights organization *Human Rights Watch* denounced the detentions on its website as early as August 20, (<https://www.hrw.org/news/20>

[19/08/20/turkey-3-kurdish-mayors-removed-office](https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/20/turkey-3-kurdish-mayors-removed-office)), stating that they violated voters' rights. The Council of Europe also reacted, through Anders Knappe, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, who expressed his concern on the institution's website, recalling that the Congress had already expressed its concern in the past about “the excessive use of judicial proceedings against local elected representatives in Turkey”. The European Union Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Maja Kocijanic, called for the cancellation of the renditions, and Ms. Kati Piri, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, said that the AKP, having been unable to win the elections, was now getting what it wanted “through undemocratic and totally illegal means”... Several European parliamentary groups or national political parties have condemned the destitutions, including the socialist and communist parties in France.

On the 21st, the US State Department described the decision to dismiss the three HDP mayors as “obviously worrying”. In Geneva, Kurds gathered in front of the “Palais des Nations” with banners bearing the words “No to the coup against Kurdish municipalities” and chanted: “Dictator Erdogan, take your hands off our town halls”.

IRAQ: PERSISTENT DISAGREEMENTS OVER THE BUDGET; INTENSIFICATION OF JIHADIST ATTACKS

The Iraqi Prime Minister is facing difficulties in enforcing his decisions regarding Iran-supported Shia *Hashd al-Shaabi* militias, whose integration into the army and withdrawal from certain territories he has ordered. On 5th August, members of these militias

and their supporters demonstrated in Nineveh province, blocking the Mosul-Erbil road and throwing stones at the Iraqi army convoy arriving to replace them (*ISHM*). On 6th June, Falih Fayadh, National Security Advisor, but also Head of the *Hashd al-Shaabi* Council, announced that

Nineveh's security would be jointly provided by the *Hashd*, the Iraqi army and the local police, and on 10th September, requested a two-month deadline deferment for the integration of the *Hashd into the army*. As to the Sunni inhabitants of Mosul, they are in favour of the withdrawal.

Concerning relations with the Kurds, recent history, and particularly the genocidal attempt of the *Anfal*, regularly reappears in the news with the discovery of new mass graves. On 1st August, the Iraqi Martyrs Foundation announced the beginning of the exhumation of one of them in the Samawa desert. It contains up to 130 bodies of Kurds assassinated during the Ba'athist regime, mostly women and children. Two other mass graves discovered nearby will be excavated soon.

Other points of contention between Baghdad and Erbil, the disputed territories and budgetary issues. On 3rd March, a delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) came to Baghdad to discuss the normalisation of the situation in Kirkuk. The Kurds are calling for a return to civilian administration before the provincial elections in April 2020. On the 4th, the UN Secretary General's Representative for Iraq asked Erbil and Baghdad to cooperate in restoring security in Sinjar, echoing the same request by Nobel Prize winner Nadia Mourad. Regarding the 2020 budget and the KRG's oil deliveries to Baghdad planned in the 2019 budget, despite several high-level meetings initiated as soon as the new KRG was installed, the agreement has yet to be reached... The Iraqi Prime Minister has hands partly tied by some of his coalition parties, which refuse to compromise on this question – as well as on the return of the peshmergas to Kirkuk. The KRG argues that the Maliki government's decision to stop sending the federal budget to the Region in 2014 forced it to export its oil without coordination with Baghdad (*Al-Monitor*). On the 19th, Jutyar Adil, spokesman for the KRG, recalled that Baghdad was still cutting the region's budget by more than the value of the 250,000 daily barrels that the KRG should deliver to

Baghdad (only 5440 billion dinars out of an official budget of 12,840 billion). On the 22nd, a member of the Iraqi Parliament's Finance Committee, Abdulhadi Sadawi, nevertheless blamed the KRG for part of the country's budget deficit, projected at 72,000 billion dinars for 2020. On 24th July, Jabar Yawar, Secretary General of the Ministry of Peshmergas, noted that the funds sent by Baghdad still did not cover the peshmergas salaries (*NRT*).

In other areas, the relationship is less confrontational. Thus, for higher education, the Iraqi Ministry announced on 2nd February the impending official recognition of nine Kurdish universities in Iraq. According to Mohammed Shakir, member of the Iraqi Parliament's Committee on Education, the current lack of recognition is not due to any problem in quality of teaching, but to a lack of coordination at the time of their opening. This situation, which puts at a disadvantage graduates wishing to pursue studies or obtain scholarships abroad, will hence soon be resolved (*Kurdistan-24*).

Regarding the internal policy of the Kurdistan Region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) announced that it had chosen Jafar Mustafa Ali (Sheikh Jafar) to hold the position of Second Vice-President of the Region, attributed to this party, while *Goran* (Movement for Change) has appointed Mustafa Said Qaidi as Vice-President. President Nechirvan Barzani will issue the decree formalizing their functions (*WKI*).

Regarding security, ISIS's attacks were worryingly widespread throughout the month, particularly in the disputed areas left by the Peshmergas in 2017, where Iraqi forces have been unable to provide security. On 1st August,

the *Rûdaw* channel announced that jihadists had killed four *Asayish* (Kurdish security) the previous night, including an officer, and seriously wounded two civilians, in an attack on a checkpoint near Kifri, in the Garmiyān region south of Kirkuk. The attack began with mortar fire on the village, then snipers targeted the checkpoint. Finally, an anti-terrorist unit vehicle sent to the scene was hit by a mine laid by the jihadists, and two of its passengers were killed. On the 5th, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his report to the Security Council indicated that ISIS still had \$300 million in financial resources (*ISHM*). On the same day, Iraqi security forces announced the launch of the third phase of Operation "Will to Win" in Diyala and Nineveh (Ninawa). In the Kifri region, where the Iraqi Prime Minister arrived early Monday to supervise the operation himself, the Iraqi peshmergas and security forces launched a simultaneous operation (*Rûdaw*). In the Makhmur area, south of Erbil, an anti-ISIS coalition airstrike killed six jihadists, whose bodies were later found by the ground troops. On the 6th, Iraqi police announced that they had arrested five jihadists from ISIS in Mosul (*Kurdistan-24*), but on the same day ten improvised explosive devices targeted soldiers and civilians in Rumaila (an oil field near Basra), Diyala, Anbar and as far as Baghdad... (*ISHM*). On the 7th, four jihadists were killed in Diyala, and the *Hashd* reported having secured 147 villages. However, on the 8th, a new mortar attack in the province left two civilians dead and two wounded (*ISHM*). On the 9th, Iraqi Military Security announced that it had killed four infiltrated jihadists in their hiding place in Diyala. Other coalition air strikes killed an unspeci-

fied number of jihadists in the Kanus area (Nineveh), then two in the subsequent ground operation, in which it appears that an American advisor was killed (*Kurdistan-24*).

On 11th and 14th August, improvised explosive devices exploded in Kirkuk and Diyala, while jihadists and Iraqi soldiers were killed in action. On the 12th, an Iraqi counter-terrorist unit operating in coordination with the coalition aviation killed ten jihadists in Anbar, two of whom were wearing explosive vests. On the same day, an Iraqi checkpoint south of Daquq (Kirkuk) was attacked, two federal police officers killed and two others wounded. The Minister of Pechmergas indicated in a press conference that the increase in attacks showed that ISIS had reorganized (*WKI*). On the 14th, another improvised explosive device wounded two police officers in their vehicle west of Daquq, and jihadists attacked a checkpoint between Hawija and Dibis, west of Kirkuk. On the same day, Iraqi planes killed four jihadists, including an explosives expert.

Besides, a delegation of Daquq residents terrified by the jihadist threat went to Baghdad to seek government protection. Accompanied by MP Dilan Ghafur, the group visited the Ministry of Interior and met with the Iraqi President. ISIS seems to be particularly targeting the fifteen Kaka'i villages in this area. Ghafur said that the Iraqi President had created a committee to visit these villages and report back to him (*Rûdaw*). Many Kurdish inhabitants of this region have recently left their villages.

On the evening of the 15th, the pechmergas repelled an attack from the Hamrin Mountains,

south of Khanaqin district (Diyala), on Kani Masi (*Kurdistan-24*). On the evening of the 17th, mortar fire struck a village north of Khanaqin, killing no one. On the 18th, an airstrike destroyed a car bomb in Anbar. On the 20th, two improvised explosive devices wounded four Iraqi soldiers in northeast Baqubah (Diyala), and a new airstrike killed six jihadists in Nineveh. On the 22nd, Diyala again suffered a mortar attack, and six jihadists, including four suicide bombers, were killed. On 24th September, the Iraqi Security Forces announced the launch of phase five of the anti-ISIS operation "Will to Victory". The previous phase included the destruction of 31 jihadist installations, including tunnels, and the seizure or detonation of 72 bombs (*ISHM*). On the same day, a new attack killed five *Hashd* militiamen in Daquq, where jihadists, after firing at civilians in a football stadium, attacked the militiamen with rockets (another report reports six deaths, including one policeman). The civilian victims are mainly Shia Turkmen. ISIS claimed afterwards several attacks in this province without mentioning this one in particular.

On the 25th, Iraqi security forces announced that they had killed four jihadists and arrested two others in Anbar. On the 27th, Iraqi anti-terrorism announced that one of ISIS's leaders, known as Abu Muslim, was killed in Anbar with two other leaders in an airstrike around the 13th of the month. In Diyala, on 26th August, ISIS attacked an Iraqi checkpoint near Khanaqin, killing two soldiers, and west of Baqubah, a bomb killed one police officer and wounded another; on 27th August, a bomb seriously wounded a civilian near a farm, and mortar fire targeted a village in the Muqdadayah subdistrict, again targeted the next day by a victimless bomb. Finally, on the

29th, ISIS wounded three police officers in Jalawla (Diyala) and bombed an Iraqi patrol in Nineveh, two of whose members were wounded (*ISHM*).

Regarding the disputed territories, on 8th August the Kurdish parties rejected the decision of the Baghdad parliament to hold provincial elections there on 1st April 2020. Especially in Kirkuk, they fear this will deprive displaced Kurds of their electoral rights and embed the ongoing Arabization policy in the demographic landscape. Indeed, since the law provides for the establishment of voters' lists on the basis of ration cards, the Kurds for whom these cards have been transferred to other provinces will not be able to vote. Conversely, according to official figures from the Iraqi Ministry of Commerce, over the past seven months, ration cards of more than 37,000 Arab Iraqis from other provinces have been transferred to Kirkuk, which would allow them to vote, contrary to the decree prohibiting any movement aimed at changing the demographic balance of a province. On 25th July, the Kurdish channel *Kurdistan 24* announced that it had had access to documents showing that 600 Arab families from the provinces of Salahaddin, Al-Anbar, Maysan and Baghdad had obtained residency in Kirkuk during the past six months...

The Kurdish parties are therefore calling either for an electorate based on the 1957 census, which was conducted before Saddam Hussein's Arabisation policy, or for the application of Article 4 of the Electoral Law, which allows the Council of Ministers to exclude a province from the elections. For his part, the leader of the Turkmen Front, Arshad Salehi, accused the Kurdish parties of having installed in Kirkuk

up to 600,000 Kurds from Erbil, Suleimaniyeh, or even neighbouring countries! While it is true that dozens of Kurds who were deported under Saddam Hussein have returned home since 2003, the figure given by the Turkmen leader supported by Ankara is grossly exaggerated. For the Kurds, the definitive solution, in accordance with the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, would be the application of Article 140. The province has not had an election since 2005 (*Rûdaw*)...

On the 13th, the Kurdish parties in Kirkuk decided to legally challenge the law establishing the provincial elections, the same day that the Deputy Director of the Iraqi Electoral Commission

expressed concern that many displaced persons could not vote there because they could not go to the polling stations in their home towns with up-to-date electoral cards (*ISHM*).

Throughout Kurdistan, Turkish strikes continued throughout the month, regularly causing civilian casualties. In 25 villages in Dohuk, there are abandoned houses, and about ten Christian villages in the Kani Masi district have even been completely evacuated. According to the district head, Turkish air force strikes almost daily (*Rûdaw*). On a larger scale, hundreds of villages have been abandoned by their inhabitants since May. On 12th December, KDP President

Massoud Barzani reported that the KRG was trying through diplomatic channels to stop the continuous strikes by Turkey and Iran on its territory against the PKK and the PDKI. Without specifying the content of the ongoing discussions, he insisted that they would not lead to fighting between “Kurdish brothers”, suggesting that the KRG would not use force to expel the Kurds targeted by these strikes in exchange for their end (*ISHM*). On the 20th, a few hours after Turkish strikes wounded three villagers near the Qandil Mountains, the KRG spokesman again called on Turkey and the PKK to avoid any harm to the inhabitants of Iraqi Kurdistan.

YEZIDI GENOCIDE:

3 AUGUST DESIGNATED AS A “DAY OF REMEMBRANCE” BY THE KURDISTAN PARLIAMENT

The Kurdish Parliament announced on 1st August that it was debating the designation of 3rd August as “Day of Remembrance of the Genocide of the Yezidis” perpetrated by ISIS. The law should pass during the session scheduled for the following Saturday, precisely on the 3rd (*Kurdistan-24*). On the same day, the Yezidi *Yazda* rights organization organized a commemoration of the event, which brought together Iraqi and foreign officials. Council of Ministers Secretary General Mahdi al-Alaq reported that, of the sixty-seven mass graves in Yezidis discovered after the withdrawal from ISIS, seventeen have now been opened, mainly by UNITAD, the United Nations organization investigating ISIS's crimes. Alaq also announced that the Iraqi

Ministry of Higher Education had authorized the opening of the first university in Sinjar (Shingal), as well as a museum and especially a hospital that will specialize in the treatment of women and children victims of kidnapping and torture (*Rûdaw*).

According to the head of the KRG's Yezidi Women's Safeguarding Bureau, Hussein Koro, who was speaking at a separate press conference, of the 6,417 Yezidi women abducted by ISIS, only 3,509 have been saved. Koro reported having reliable information that a number of these women and children were in Al-Hol camp in Rojava. A team sent to the area was unable to ascertain their presence, let alone bring them back... On the 3rd, former ISIS captive and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad called on them from Stuttgart, where

she was at the invitation of the German Yezidi Council, to return to Sinjar: “Today, more than 90,000 have returned [...]. More have to come back to defeat ISIS's plan to chase them away”. She also criticized the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities for failing to take action to help the survivors, and requested compensation for them. It should be noted that the resolution adopted on the same day by the Kurdish Parliament also calls for the federal government to provide reparations to the families of the victims “according to the Iraqi constitution”. Nadia Murad thanked the Kurdistan Parliament for this resolution.

On August 30th, local police discovered in Sinjar a new mass grave of Yezidis killed by ISIS, containing at least six victims (*ISHM*).

JIHADISTS IMPRISONED IN ROJAVA: WESTERN COUNTRIES FLEE THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Autonomous Administration of the Syrian North-East continues to call on Western countries to assume their responsibilities towards their jihadist nationals. The camps located on its territory hold more than 70,000 prisoners, including 10,000 foreigners, divided into 2,000 women and 8,000 children, with 370 French people, including 250 children. The newspaper *Le Monde* counted 800 Western men, 700 women, and nearly 1,500 children. These camps are now so overcrowded that living conditions have become totally unworthy. How can radicalization be stopped in such a situation? As guards have been attacked or stabbed, more and more observers believe that these camps have become real ticking time bombs. Yet countries of origin are still as reluctant to recover their nationals who have become jihadists, nor do they want their relatives, women or children. Nor does the international community provide the Kurdish administration with the financial means to set up better equipped camps.

On 12th August, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, sent a six-page letter to the French government accusing it of double talk: while the country claims to oppose the death penalty, it agreed to transfer thirteen French ISIS members to Iraq where they were promptly sentenced to death. Callamard argued that such a transfer con-

stituted a violation of international law. France defended its decision by arguing that jihadists should be tried as close as possible to the places where they had committed crimes (*ISHM*), and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave a very critical response to this letter by referring to “unsubstantiated allegations” and “pure speculation”: “The allegations made by Agnès Callamard are not based on any prior exchange with the French authorities, as provided for by the Human Rights Council’s special procedures. They are in no way substantiated, are pure speculation and are solely of her responsibility”.

The French Centre for the Analysis of Terrorism (CAT), which dispatched one of its analysts in Syria this summer to learn about the potential presence there of sponsors of attacks carried out in France, called for their repatriation so that they will be present at the trials planned for these attacks. But more generally, the CAT mission also testified to the difficulties encountered by the Kurds in “organising the detention and trial of foreign combatants. They lack just about everything, evidence about them, financial resources; they do not have the funds at this stage to create prisons for women. They also lack legal expertise. Recently, they have been supporting the project of an international tribunal on the spot, but this is not possible as it stands” (*L’Express*). If an on-site judgment is to be made, then the Autonomous Administration should be assisted in doing so.

As pointed out by the *Huffington Post*, an international tribunal is created by a special resolution of the UN Security Council, as was done in the cases of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In 2014, Resolution 2170, which created the Coalition Against ISIS, “urges all States to cooperate [...] in efforts to find and bring to justice” ISIS fighters and other terrorist organizations. The Member States of the coalition therefore have the legal basis to set up a specific international tribunal, other options being to extend the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in The Hague or to create a mixed court on the model of Cambodia after the genocide of the *Khmer Rouge*, composed of local and international lawyers...

On the 19th, in any case, the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria handed over on the spot four orphans of jihadist fighters to a delegation of the German government (*AFP*). According to a local source, the *Rojava Information Centre*, Germany could take back on its territory more than a hundred children born in Syria to German parents suspected of having come to the country to support ISIS. Even more men and women would then be repatriated. Last July, a German court ordered the repatriation of a woman with three children, whom the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intended to repatriate without their mother. The mother’s family had then filed a complaint (*Rûdaw*).

IRAN: CHILLING THREATS BY THE REGIME TO OPPONENTS, NUMEROUS CONVIC- TIONS OF KURDISH ACTIVISTS

The beginning of August was marked by the scandal caused by the chilling statements uttered by Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi at the end of July. The current adviser to the Head of the Iranian judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, and former Minister of the Interior and Justice, defended on 24th July in an interview with *Mosalas* magazine the extrajudicial executions of 1988, during which 30,000 political prisoners were sent to the gallows outside any legal framework. Non content with approving this crime against humanity, which he described as a legitimate act of war, Pour-Mohammadi went further by declaring that he was ready to continue the executions. Beyond the organization of the *Mujahedin-e Khalq*, mentioned by name, all protesters are targeted. Pour-Mohammadi was at the time of the killings sitting alongside Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran's "Death Commission", established by a *fatwa* of Ayatollah Khomeiny, who had ordered the executions. The interview, posted online by the magazine and subtitled in English by activists, is available on the Internet (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAo6w1QOFqw>). In their stiffening under US sanctions, the Iranian authorities have sent a truly horrifying message showing how far they are prepared to go in their repression of any protest. On 5th August, the Centre for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) condemned these statements and called on Raisi to disavow them. CHRI also calls on the Head of the judiciary to commit not to resume these practices in order to silence political oppo-

nents, and calls on the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, as well as on all governments, to publicly condemn Pour-Mohammadi's statements.

Besides, new arson attacks occurred in the Kurdish regions of Iran between late July and early August. According to KMMK, in the Kermanshah region of Dalahu, the fire burned for four days without the authorities making any attempt to fight it. The response came from local volunteers and environment activists. On the 3rd, a major fire struck Javanrud, while 50 ha were devastated near Sardasht (WKI).

The *Kolbars*, these cross-border Kurdish carriers, continue to pay with their lives for their attempts to survive economically. According to the KMMK, since the beginning of the year, nearly 50 people have been killed and nearly 100 injured. *Hengaw* reported in early August that during the month of July seven *kolbars* had been killed and twenty injured. Two were wounded on 31st July on the Iraqi side, not far from the Haji Omran border crossing, opposite Piranshahr (KMMK). On the same day, another one injured himself in a fall in Hawraman, and yet another in a border guard ambush near Kileh Shin (between Saqqez and Baneh). In Nowdeshah (opposite Halabja), a *kolbar* was wounded by border guard fire, and on the 7th, two were wounded near Sardasht and one killed in Piranshahr. On the 10th, the *Pasdaran* opened fire on a group of *kolbars* near the Khoy border

crossing, killing one of them and injuring another. On the 11th, a man was killed near Oshnavieh when the *Pasdaran* opened fire on his vehicle. Another *kolbar*, captured, was tortured. On the 21st, security forces wounded a *kolbar* in an ambush on a group near Sardasht. Another one received a bullet in his leg on the same day in Urumieh. On the 25th, another was killed near Baneh and one was seriously shot near Khoy. Finally, on the 27th, border guards attacked a group near Oshnavieh and killed a 32-year-old Kurd named Mohamadi Hamizadeh (WKI).

In addition, a wave of arrests has targeted Kurdish activists; according to the *Kurdistan Human Rights Association* (KMMK), 270 of them have been arrested since the beginning of the year, and at the same time many convictions have been handed down. Six people were arrested earlier this month: three in Marivan, one in Piranshahr and two in Oshnavieh (Shino). In Marivan, women's rights defender Parwin Adawai was arrested, then on the 2nd, *Etelaat* (Intelligence Service) arrested two more people, Hamdi and Shaho Kawan. In Oshnavieh, the two Kurds arrested, Aso Garmiani and Majid Darí, were charged with "assistance to the Kurdish opposition parties" and sentenced to prison terms ranging from three months to four years. Since the beginning of the year, more than 250 Kurds have been arrested by the regime. In Urumieh, five Kurdish political prisoners went on hunger strike to protest against their conditions of detention, as did the singer Peyman Mirzadeh, after receiving a hundred lashes for

“propaganda against the Islamic Republic” (WKI).

On the 6th, *Etelaat* raided the homes of several activists in Kamyaran and arrested seven of them. On the 9th, Kurdish activist Sirun Abbasi was arrested in such a raid in Dehgolan after calling for the resignation of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. In Rabati, near Sardasht, two Kurds were detained by *Etelaat* without charge (WKI).

On the 18th, the United Nations General Assembly published a report on the human rights situation in Iran (<https://undocs.org/en/A/74/188>). Written by Special Rapporteur Javaid Rehman, this report discusses the regime's multiple violations, including its persecution of minorities. The report states that Kurds represent half of Iran's political detainees and are the first to suffer political executions. The report also addresses the prohibition of the Kurdish language in education and expresses the author's concern about the persecution of Kurdish-speaking teachers. It mentions in particular Zara Mohammadi, arrested on 23rd May 2019 for having organised private Kurdish language courses in Sanandaj (WKI).

Other Kurdish activists were arrested later in the month. In Sanandaj, Zanyar Zamran, arrested last December, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for “propaganda against the Islamic Republic”. Also in Sanandaj, a Kamyaran activist, Omed Assadi, was sentenced to one year in prison for “propaganda for an opposition Kurdish party”. In Sardasht, a Kurdish businessman, Sabir Bapiri, was wounded by security forces fire on his car (KMMK). On the 20th,

Etelaat arrested Kurdish activists Mohsen Saiedpour and Akbar Gawili during raids on their homes. He had already been imprisoned for political reasons (KMMK).

On the 28th, the Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI) reported that three Sanandaj Kurds visiting the city of Damawand were arrested simply because they were wearing traditional Kurdish clothing...

Beyond Iran's Kurdistan, repression has also affected many women, particularly those having publicly removed their veils. On the 7th, the *Human Rights Activists News Agency* (HRANA) announced that three women activists had been sentenced on July 31st in Varamin to 55 years in prison. HRANA also announced on the 14th the publication of a book written by human rights defenders that can be downloaded from its website (<https://www.hrana-news.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/What-is-Right-by-Amin-Ghazaei-HRAI.pdf>).

On the 19th, the CHRI reported that, since January 2018, 32 people have been arrested for such acts of civil disobedience against the obligation to wear the *hijab*, and at least 12 have been sentenced to prison terms of six months to thirty-three years. In addition, several studies on people's feelings about the obligation of the veil show that an increasing proportion of the population considers it a personal choice and that the *hijab* should not be made mandatory. Thus, surveys conducted by the Iranian Student Survey Association in 2006 and 2014, and published by the Rouhani administration in 2018

(<https://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=70632417sgid=971919ct=GHQ4=333585estination=htt>

[p%3A%2F%2Fwww.css.ir%2FMedia%2FPDF%2F1396%2F11%2F14%2F636532375414083535.pdf](https://www.css.ir/FMedia/FPDF/F1396/F11/F14/F636532375414083535.pdf)), show that 49.2% of the population share this opinion. A report published in March 2018 by the Parliamentary Research Centre (http://www.mizanonline.com/files/fa/news/1397/5/6/1727106_316.pdf) also concluded that there is a growing disaffection with the veil and suggests a revision of the law. But since its publication, nothing has changed. The courts equate the refusal to wear the veil with prostitution and impose sentences for, *inter alia*, “encouraging corruption and prostitution”, “publishing indecent material on social media” or “public commission of prohibited acts”.

On the 27th, Saba Kord Afshari was sentenced to a total of 24 years in prison on several charges following her participation in protests in Tehran. She faces the risk of serving the longest sentence of 15 years for publicly removing her veil, which has led her to be charged with “spreading prostitution” (HRANA). Despite the arrest of his mother, who was also present during the demonstrations, Afshari refused, according to human rights groups, to record a video confession. Three other women had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment the previous day.

On the 24th August, writer and director Kiumars Marzban, arrested during a raid on his Tehran home on 26th August 2018 and detained since then in Evin prison, was sentenced on several charges to a total of 23 years in prison. He should serve the longest sentence, *i.e.* 11 years. On the same day, journalist Marzieh Amiri was sentenced to ten years and six months in prison after being arrested in Tehran with several activists

during the 1st of May demonstration (*HRANA*).

Researchers have also been targeted by the regime's repression, particularly those linked to foreign countries. In Tehran, a Kurdish anthropologist with dual Iranian and British nationality, Kamil Ahmadi (Kameel Ahmady), author of a 2015 study

on female genital mutilation (<http://kameelahmady.com/wp-content/uploads/Kameel%20-%20EN%20Final.pdf>), updated in 2017 <https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Continent%20Research%20and%20Resources/Middle%20East/the-changing-paradigms-of-fgm-c-web.pdf>),

was according to his wife arrested and sentenced to one month in prison. His arrest follows that of another anthropologist, Farida Adelkhah, living in France and also working on Iranian women. Adelkhah, arrested in early June for "espionage" while visiting her family, is still in detention in the sinister prison of Evin, in northern Tehran...

IN MEMORIAM: DEATH OF ERAFETTIN GÜRBÜZ

Our friend and colleague Şerafettin GÜRBÜZ died on Monday 5 August 2019 in Paris at the age of 57.

Born in 1962 in Pertek, Dersim province, he was a geological engineer by training. Fleeing the mass repression in Kurdistan of Turkey in the 1980s, he came to France as a refugee. After taking French courses at the Institute, rather than returning to engineering work in France as he could have done, he preferred to join the Kurdish Institute team in 1991 and became a cornerstone of it. He was a welcoming, helpful and courteous visitor receptionist who was loved and appreciated by everyone at the Institute and by his friends passing through. In

addition, he prepared the press review of the Institute's monthly *Bulletin*, and also provided a large part of the logistics, maintenance and supplies necessary for the daily running of the offices. He also prepared Saturday cultural meetings, painting and photography exhibitions, and welcomed guests to the conferences organized by the Institute.

Suffering for a few months from violent tinnitus that made his life difficult, he decided to commit suicide. He leaves behind a daughter and a son.

In accordance with his will, his funeral was held in Kurdistan, in his native village in Dersim province, in the presence of his

family and a large crowd.

A meeting was held in his memory on Saturday from 3 to 7 pm at the Kurdish Institute for his colleagues, relatives, friends and all those who knew and appreciated him. It brought together more than 300 people, some of whom coming from other European countries. The Institute has also received many messages of sympathy from personalities and parties in Kurdistan. A discreet and courteous man, "Şeref" has chosen to leave without complaining, without bothering his friends and relatives, in an old Kurdish tradition of "knowing how to die". We cannot think of him without emotion.



LA CROIX

jeudi 1^{er} août 2019 - Quotidien n° 41470 - 2,00 €

Dans les camps de familles djihadistes

« La Croix » a pu se rendre dans les camps du Kurdistan syrien où vivent, dans des conditions difficiles, des milliers de familles. Certaines se radicalisent un peu plus

P. 2 à 5

Dans le camp d'Al-Hol, le 22 juillet. Delll.Soulciman/AFP

Depuis leur sauvetage en mer jeudi 25 juillet, 116 migrants partis de Libye étaient encore bloqués à bord du *Gregoretti*, un navire des gardes-côtes italiens. Après avoir tardé à accorder l'autorisation d'accoster dans le port militaire d'Augusta, en Sicile, Matteo Salvini, le ministre de l'intérieur italien, refusait depuis dimanche

leur débarquement tant qu'un plan de répartition n'aurait pas été convenu avec l'Union européenne.

Mercredi, la situation s'est débloquée après l'annonce que cinq États membres – la France, l'Allemagne, le Portugal, le Luxembourg et l'Irlande – et des structures de l'Église italienne acceptaient de les prendre en charge. Cette décision semble

éditorial

Dominique Greiner

Une solidarité à l'épreuve

concrétiser le « mécanisme de solidarité » de répartition des migrants sur lequel quatorze pays membres de l'Union européenne se sont mis d'accord lundi 22 juillet à Paris. Une réunion qui voulait mettre fin aux bras de fer à répétition avec Rome mais que Matteo Salvini avait qualifiée de « flop », estimant que l'Italie continuerait

« à être le camp de réfugiés de l'Europe ».

L'accord au sujet des passagers du *Gregoretti* ne suffit pas à le démentir. Le mécanisme de solidarité doit faire ses preuves face à de nouvelles arrivées. Et cela va venir très vite. Mercredi, une ONG allemande informait avoir secouru 40 personnes au large de la Libye...

ÉVÈNEMENT

Depuis la chute de Daech, des dizaines de milliers de déplacés – en majorité des familles de djihadistes – sont parqués dans des camps au Kurdistan syrien.

Violences, rationnement, manque de soins... le camp d'Al-Hol abrite les éléments les plus radicalisés.

Reportage dans cette prison à ciel ouvert, et dans le camp de Roj, alors que les Kurdes, débordés, regrettent l'absence de soutien de la communauté internationale.

Syrie, la poudrière des camps de djihadistes

— Depuis la chute du califat de Daech, le 23 mars dernier au terme de la bataille de Baghouz, dans l'Est syrien, des milliers de familles de djihadistes de différentes nationalités – notamment française – sont retenues dans des camps situés dans la région, administrée par les autorités kurdes.

— Débordés par ces dizaines de milliers d'enfants et de femmes, dont beaucoup demeurent radicalisées, les Kurdes réclament le soutien de la communauté internationale.

— Notre reporter a pu se rendre, ces derniers jours, dans deux de ces camps, à Al-Hol, où femmes et enfants s'entassent et où la violence règne, et à Roj, sorte de camp vitrine pour les autorités kurdes.

Camps d'Al-Hol et de Roj (Kurdistan syrien)
De notre envoyé spécial

Une tempête de poussière balaye les milliers de tentes blanches du camp d'Al-Hol. Dans les allées, à perte de vue, une marée noire de niqabs piétine des ordures qui jonchent le sol. Les regards sont craintifs, les voix suppliantes, la foule oppressante. Des groupes de



femmes irakiennes et syriennes errent, désespérées, hurlant le nom d'un mari, d'un frère, d'un fils dont elles n'ont plus de nouvelles depuis la chute du califat, le 23 mars dernier. Lors de la dernière bataille contre Daech, à Baghouz, dernier bastion du califat, il y a plus de quatre mois, des milliers d'hommes se sont rendus aux Forces démocratiques syriennes – la coalition de milices dominée par les Kurdes – pour échapper aux combats et aux bombardements de l'aviation internationale.

Immédiatement incarcérés au Kurdistan syrien, région devenue de facto autonome du régime de Damas dans le chaos de la guerre civile, ces prisonniers ne peuvent pas entrer en contact avec leurs proches. « Je ne sais même pas si mon mari est encore vivant, sanglote Nawras (I), originaire de Fal-loudja, un ancien fief de Daech en

Irak. Dans la paume de sa main qu'un gant troué laisse entrevoir, elle serre un morceau de papier froissé sur lequel est griffonné un numéro de téléphone. « Je vous en supplie, appelez mon fils ! Je crois qu'il a été transféré dans une prison à Bagdad, mais je n'ai aucun moyen de le contacter ici. »

Bien que des téléphones – en principe interdits par les Kurdes qui gèrent le camp – circulent sous le manteau, la plupart de ces femmes n'ont pas les moyens de s'en procurer au marché noir. La nourriture est rationnée et l'anarchie provoquée par la surpopulation du camp, construit à l'origine pour accueillir quinze fois moins de résidents, rend les distributions insuffisantes. « L'afflux massif de déplacés en provenance de la région de Baghouz a pris de court les organisations, se rappelle Sara Al Zawqari, porte-parole du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge. Nous faisons face à une demande bien supérieure à nos moyens d'action, et le contexte politique complique l'acheminement de l'aide humanitaire. »

Pour pallier ce manque, des commerçants des villages voisins et des déplacés non affiliés à Daech ont ouvert des boutiques d'alimentation, de fruits, de légumes et de vêtements. Un souk de fortune au cœur du camp,



« Certaines femmes djihadistes font la loi. Elles nous menacent, disent que nos produits ne sont pas halal, et nous interdisent de mettre de la musique. »

dans lequel Djamilah, originaire de l'ouest de l'Irak, tient un magasin de produits cosmétiques et de maquillage avec son mari. « Lorsque nous nous sommes installés ici, il y a un an et demi, la

vie était supportable. Mais depuis l'arrivée de milliers de personnes de Baghouz, certaines femmes djihadistes font la loi. Elles nous menacent, disent que nos produits ne sont pas halal, et nous interdisent de mettre de la musique. »

À quelques dizaines de tentes de là, des enfants pataugent dans une flaque d'eau croupie ; d'autres se jettent des pierres en riant, les dents noires. Une odeur de pourriture mêlée de sueur et d'excrément se dégage des corps crasseux. L'un d'entre eux s'agrippe à nos vêtements, les yeux exorbités, le crâne à moitié chauve, le visage émacié par des mois de diarrhée. « L'eau qu'ils reçoivent est polluée, la nourriture avariée, se désole Ahmed, bénévole du Croissant-Rouge kurde. Nous faisons face à des épidémies comme le cho- ●●●

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ÉVÈNEMENT

3

Un souk de fortune au cœur du camp d'Al-Hol. Baderkhan Ahmad



repères

Daech, de la chute aux procès

10 juillet 2017. Après une offensive de neuf mois des forces fédérales soutenues par la coalition internationale emmenée par Washington, Mossoul, deuxième ville d'Irak aux mains des djihadistes depuis 2014, est libérée.

17 octobre 2017. Daech abandonne Rakka, sa « capitale » syrienne, dont il avait pris le contrôle trois ans plus tôt.

15 mars 2019. Orphelins de leur mère djihadiste, cinq enfants français sont autorisés à quitter leur camp du Kurdistan syrien pour rentrer en France.

23 mars 2019. Après la reprise de Baghouz, poche de quelques centaines de mètres carrés où les derniers djihadistes et une partie de leurs familles vivaient terrés, les Forces démocratiques syriennes proclament la mort territoriale de Daech.

Du 26 mai à début juin. Onze djihadistes français transférés depuis la Syrie, et jugés devant le tribunal antiterroriste de Bagdad (Irak), sont condamnés, au terme de procès expéditifs, à la peine capitale. Les ONG de défense des droits appellent depuis à leur rapatriement en France.

10 juin. Douze enfants de djihadistes français, après une sélection au « cas par cas », sont rapatriés de Syrie. Le lendemain, trois djihadistes et leurs neuf enfants, retenus dans un centre de rétention turc, sont remis à la justice française.

●●● *léra ou la tuberculose, et personne ne nous aide.* »

Dans la queue du centre de soins, une jeune mère de 19 ans perd son sang-froid : « Ma fille est en train de mourir et personne ne s'en occupe. Les pays étrangers ont détruit nos maisons et nous ont forcés à venir dans ce camp. J'aurais préféré rester avec Daech à Baghouz et mourir, plutôt que de venir ici. » Dans ses bras, sa petite fille de 2 ans sanglote. Elle souffre de diarrhée et de convulsions. « Si vous la laissez mourir, je vous jure que je me vengerai. Daech vous punira. »

À l'entrée du camp, trois pick-up blancs siglés du logo de la Croix-Rouge stationnent. Nous ne croiserons pratiquement aucune autre association internationale durant notre visite. « Il ne faut pas

« Allez expliquer à ceux qui vous financent que leur argent va aider des familles de djihadistes. Personne ne vous donnera un centime! »

être dupe. Pour les organisations humanitaires, aider ce type de population est extrêmement délicat, explique prudemment une responsable d'ONG qui souhaite garder l'anonymat, cela représente

un grand risque en termes de réputation et de financement. Et c'est la même chose pour nos bailleurs de fonds. » Contacté par *La Croix*, un autre travailleur humanitaire abonde : « Allez expliquer à ceux qui vous financent que leur argent va aider des familles de djihadistes. Personne ne vous donnera un centime! »

Les 73 000 personnes retenues dans le camp d'Al-Hol restent donc livrées à elles-mêmes. Parmi elles, plus des trois quarts sont originaires de Syrie ou d'Irak. Des familles souvent affiliées à Daech, auxquelles s'ajoutent des déplacés originaires des territoires occupés par le groupe djihadiste, qui ont fui les combats. Si aucune charge ne pèse sur ces derniers, ils sont eux aussi contraints de vivre dans l'enfer d'Al-Hol, faute de pouvoir

rentrer chez eux. « Mon quartier a été entièrement détruit, je n'ai nulle part où aller », soupire Khaled, l'un des seuls hommes adultes du camp.

Réfugié ici depuis un an et demi, le vieil homme est originaire de Mossoul, l'ancienne « capitale » irakienne de Daech, partiellement rasée par les bombardements de la coalition internationale entre octobre 2016 et juillet 2017. « Surtout, les milices chiïtes qui contrôlent la ville finiront par savoir que nous étions ici. Nous serons assimilés à des djihadistes et ils nous tueront », redoute-t-il.

Une peur partagée par tous les Irakiens que nous avons rencontrés. Depuis leur victoire contre Daech en Irak, ces milices proches de l'Iran, omniprésentes sur tout le territoire irakien, se rendent cou-

pables de nombreuses exactions contre les populations sunnites, la branche de l'islam dont se réclame le groupe terroriste.

D'après les dirigeants du Kurdistan syrien, le retour des familles syriennes comme irakiennes est surtout conditionné à l'accord des responsables politiques et religieux de leurs régions d'origine. « Nous devons nous assurer qu'ils seront accueillis dans des conditions de sécurité acceptables et que, s'ils doivent être jugés, ils ne seront pas passibles de la peine de mort », explique Mahmoud Ibrahim Kero, membre du comité chargé des camps de déplacés dans la province.

En réalité, la majorité des chefs tribaux s'oppose au retour de ces familles soupçonnées d'avoir été

Suite page 4 ●●●

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ÉVÉNEMENT

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●●● Suite de la page 3

allégeance à Daech. Cinq mois après la chute du califat, seulement 800 femmes et enfants syriens ont pu quitter Al-Hol et rentrer dans leurs villages. « Personne ne sait quoi faire d'eux, et aucun pays ne veut les récupérer. C'est pour ça qu'ils les laissent mourir là, glisse un humanitaire qui travaille depuis plusieurs années entre la Syrie et l'Irak. Bien sûr, la situation très instable dans la région complique le retour des familles locales. Mais pour les djihadistes occidentaux et leurs enfants, il n'y a pas d'excuse, leurs pays doivent les rapatrier. Ce serait déjà ça de moins! »

Encerclés par une tranchée profonde de quelques mètres, les onze mille étrangers du camp vivent séparés du reste des détenus. Une plaine silencieuse, presque déserte. Quelques silhouettes en abayas noires flottent, inatteignables. Des enfants turcs narguent un soldat qui monte la garde. « La nuit, soupire-t-il le visage dissimulé par un foulard noir, ces rats se glissent sous le grillage et attaquent les Syriennes et les Irakiennes de l'autre côté. »

Depuis plusieurs semaines, les autorités kurdes refusent catégoriquement l'accès à cette partie du camp aux journalistes étrangers, invoquant des raisons de sécurité. Discrètement, plusieurs responsables évoquent des directives imposées par l'État français. Un accord tacite, qui permettrait de limiter la couverture médiatique concernant les conditions de détention de ces femmes et enfants que la France ne souhaite rapatrier qu'au cas par cas.

« Bien sûr, la situation très instable dans la région complique le retour des familles locales. Mais pour les djihadistes occidentaux et leurs enfants, il n'y a pas d'excuse, leurs pays doivent les rapatrier. Ce serait déjà ça de moins! »

Faute de pouvoir les rencontrer, La Croix a pu contacter par téléphone plusieurs djihadistes étrangers détenues à Al-Hol. Toutes racontent vivre un quotidien moins rude que leurs codétenues irakiennes et syriennes. « Pour les gosses, c'est carrément le Club Med! », dit même une djihadiste française qui, grâce à l'argent que lui envoie sa famille, se passe désormais des cartons de rationnement fournis par les organisations humanitaires.

« De toute façon, ils distribuent toujours la même chose. C'est déjà ce qu'on mangeait pendant le siège de Baghouz. Les enfants, ça leur donne la diarrhée et moi l'envie de vomir. Je préfère faire les courses moi-même. » Pour gagner quelques dollars supplémentaires et tuer le temps, cette femme originaire du sud de la France a aussi ouvert un stand de sandwiches. « On a créé une petite économie à l'intérieur... on fait notre vie. »

« Certaines ont basculé dans quelque chose de bien plus extrême que Daech. Elles nous traitent de kouffar, brûlent nos tentes et attaquent celles qui ne pensent pas comme elles. »

En plus de l'aide financière de leurs proches, bon nombre de djihadistes occidentales peuvent compter sur le soutien de partisans de Daech du monde entier. Dans une récente enquête, le Rojava Information Center, un centre de recherche basé au Kurdistan syrien, révèle que de nombreuses prisonnières d'Al-Hol reçoivent régulièrement des dons de réseaux salafistes européens, via la plateforme de paiement en ligne Paypal. Une campagne de financement participatif allemande intitulée « Justice pour les sœurs » aurait même récolté plus de 3 000 € en soutien aux prisonnières d'Al-Hol.

Si cette aide extérieure améliore les conditions de vie des djihadistes étrangères, toutes décrivent un climat d'extrême violence et des relations très tendues entre les codétenues. « Certaines ont basculé dans quelque chose de bien plus extrême que Daech, explique une djihadiste belge qui assure de son côté n'avoir rien renié de la doctrine du califat. Elles nous traitent de kouffar (mécréants en arabe, NDLR), brûlent nos tentes et attaquent celles qui ne pensent pas comme elles. »

Pour ces ultras, la chute du califat serait une punition divine, un châtement infligé à des djihadistes ayant dévié de la volonté d'Allah. Dans l'annexe où sont parquées les étrangères d'Al-Hol, une idéologie plus radicale encore que celle qui avait conduit ces femmes à rejoindre la Syrie ou l'Irak serait donc en train de naître. Le lendemain de notre dernière visite à Al-Hol, une femme indonésienne aurait été tuée, selon une agence de presse kurde. Encerclée de six mois, elle aurait été torturée et battue à mort par plusieurs de ses codétenues.

À deux cents kilomètres au nord-est d'Al-Hol, toujours au



Parmi les 73 000 personnes retenues dans le camp d'Al-Hol, plus des trois quarts sont originaires de Syrie ou d'Irak et sont livrées à elles-mêmes. Photos Baderkhan Ahmad

Kurdistan syrien, le camp de Rojava accueille lui aussi des étrangers et des déplacés syriens et irakiens. Mais ici, ni séparation entre les nationalités ni surpopulation. Quelques centaines de tentes seulement, surmontées de réservoirs d'eau, posées au milieu des puits de pétrole. Au loin, des voix d'enfants et le crissement des balançoires rouillées viennent briser le calme.

Des gardes kurdes patrouillent le sourire aux lèvres, le long d'une fine barrière métallique. « Le fait que les djihadistes et les déplacés soient mélangés et moins nombreux permet aux organisations humanitaires de travailler plus facilement ici qu'à Al-Hol. Elles viennent en aide aux résidents sans faire de différence entre les origines », explique la responsable du camp, Jody Qamislo, un

foulard fleuri dans les cheveux. Tout au long de notre visite, elle s'appliquera à présenter son camp comme un modèle. Le programme est millimétré, les interlocuteurs, triés sur le volet.

Il est un peu plus de 10 heures. L'heure de l'école. Dans des préfabriqués bariolés de dessins jaunés par le soleil, des dizaines d'enfants chahutent, sous l'œil distrait de quelques bénévoles, un dessin animé en fond sonore. Une petite fille aux yeux clairs, hijab noir sur les cheveux, bavarde en russe avec une autre qui semble être sa sœur jumelle. Ici, garçons et filles de 48 nationalités suivent ensemble des cours d'arabe littéraire, mais aussi de kurde, la langue officielle de la région autonome. « Ils sont très heureux d'apprendre notre langue », assure un professeur qui accompagne une dizaine de

choristes au piano dans la pièce d'à côté.

En chœur, les enfants de Daech entonnent des chansons de propagande de la milice qui a défilé le groupe terroriste et les tient prisonniers. La scène est à l'image de la visite : une vitrine à la gloire des Kurdes. Dans les allées du camp, les mères se déplacent librement. Certaines portent toujours le niqab, obligatoire sous Daech, mais beaucoup choisissent de ne plus dissimuler leur visage.

« La situation s'est beaucoup apaisée depuis quelques mois. Les femmes se déradicalisent, car nous prenons le temps de discuter avec elles, de les accompagner, assure fièrement notre guide. Nous leur donnons des cours de couture et de sport, ça les éloigne de l'idéologie de Daech. » Sur son passage, les détenues la saluent chaleureusement. L'une d'entre ●●●

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ÉVÉNEMENT

5



Le camp de Roj est présenté comme un modèle avec une école pour les enfants, des cours de musique et un accès pour les organisations humanitaires. Photos Baderkhan Ahmad

paroles

« Daech a gardé une forte capacité de nuisance en Syrie »

Fabrice Balanche
Spécialiste de la Syrie,
maître de conférences
à l'université Lyon 2

« Les derniers djihadistes de Daech sont essentiellement retranchés aujourd'hui dans la steppe (de la Badiyah, NDLR), entre Palmyre et la frontière irakienne. Il se dit que son ancien "calife" autoproclamé,

Abou Bakr Al Baghdadi, aurait également trouvé refuge dans cette zone du sud-est syrien. Ils sont aussi encore présents dans les villages arabes de la vallée de l'Euphrate, d'où de nombreux combattants syriens sont originaires. Les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) n'osent pas trop aller les y chercher, de peur de provoquer des révoltes populaires au sein des tribus qui les protègent. En Syrie, Daech a gardé une forte capacité de nuisance, comme en témoignent les attentats qui frappent toujours régulièrement les FDS, ou les incendies qui ravagent les récoltes de blé des paysans dans la région ».
Recueilli par Malo Tresca

... elles, en foulard violet, surgit de sa tente et lance un « bonjour ! » souriant. La responsable du camp l'autorise à nous parler. Quelques minutes d'échange en français, occasion inespérée d'une discussion sans le filtre des gardiens, qui gardent une oreille sur notre conversation.

Déçue par Daech, Claire raconte s'être rendue aux forces kurdes il y a un an et demi, et vivre, depuis, ici avec son fils de 3 ans. Son mari fait partie des onze Français transférés en Irak et condamnés à mort par le tribunal de Bagdad. « C'est un petit Guantanamo, en mieux quand même », concède Claire. « Nous sommes très surveillées, ajoute-t-elle, la nuit il y a parfois des descentes dans nos tentes. Et puis, j'ai peur pour mon fils car beaucoup de maladies circulent dans le camp. Plusieurs enfants sont morts cet hiver. » La jeune femme n'a plus qu'une chose en tête : être rapatriée avec son fils. « Ils ne peuvent pas nous laisser croupir là éternellement, si ? », demande-t-elle, sans attendre vraiment de réponse.

Claire le sait, le sort des djihadistes étrangers est loin d'être scellé. D'abord, parce que plusieurs pays occidentaux refusent catégoriquement de les rapatrier. Ensuite parce que les Kurdes syriens, conscients de ces réticences, comptent utiliser ces détenus comme levier de négociation. « La vraie guerre contre l'idéologie de Daech commence maintenant. La coalition internationale doit comprendre qu'elle ne peut pas partir », prévient le responsable kurde, Mahmoud Ibrahim Kero.

Car la survie de la région autonome, cernée par les forces turques au nord et l'armée de Bachar Al Assad à l'ouest, semble largement conditionnée à la présence des Occidentaux sur le terrain. « Si la coalition s'en va et

qu'un nouveau front s'ouvre avec la Turquie, nous ne serons plus en mesure d'assurer la détention des djihadistes », menace en off un cadre militaire.

« La vraie guerre contre l'idéologie de Daech commence maintenant. La coalition internationale doit comprendre qu'elle ne peut pas partir ! »

Autre objet de négociation : l'établissement d'un tribunal international sur le sol kurde. Alors que les autorités locales réclamaient jusqu'à récemment le rapatriement des combattants étrangers, elles proposent désormais d'établir chez elles une cour spéciale pour juger les crimes de Daech, sur le modèle des tribunaux mis en place au Rwanda et en ex-Yougoslavie.

« Le fait que l'administration autonome du nord-est de la Syrie aspire à un statut politique n'est plus un secret pour personne, analyse Chloé Troadec, chercheuse au Rojava Information Center. Et compte tenu du refus ou de la lenteur de certains pays à rapatrier leurs ressortissants, la mise en place d'une juridiction internationale sur place est désormais présentée par les responsables locaux comme la seule solution réaliste. » D'autant qu'une telle décision du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies serait, pour les Kurdes, une avancée historique vers la reconnaissance de leur souveraineté sur le nord-est de la Syrie.
Noé Pignède

(1) Certains prénoms ont été changés.

Chez les Syriens d'Istanbul, la peur de l'expulsion

La cité du Bosphore est celle qui accueille la plus grosse part des 3,6 millions de rescapés de la guerre civile syrienne établis sur le sol turc. Mais pour Ankara, la ville a atteint le maximum de sa capacité.

Depuis quelques jours, Fatih a changé de visage. Le flot de réfugiés syriens, habitués à déambuler dans les ruelles de ce quartier de la rive européenne d'Istanbul, à qui ils donnaient l'allure d'une « petite Damas », s'est réduit.

« Beaucoup de gens se cachent chez eux ou limitent leurs déplacements au trajet entre la maison et le travail, raconte à voix basse Mahmoud, un jeune Alépin, qui travaille comme serveur dans un restaurant syrien de ce secteur. La pression des autorités est très forte. Les illégaux ont la trouille de se faire renvoyer en Syrie. »

Ce climat de peur est le résultat de la campagne d'arrestation et d'expulsion que la préfecture d'Istanbul a lancée à la mi-juillet à l'encontre des dizaines de milliers de Syriens qui résident dans la cité du Bosphore clandestinement. Une catégorie qui recouvre à la fois ceux dont le titre de séjour mentionne une ville de résidence autre qu'Istanbul et ceux qui sont démunis de tous papiers.

Cette population, évaluée par l'Office international des migrations entre 100 000 et 300 000 personnes, s'ajoute aux 550 000 Syriens qui vivent légalement dans la mégalopole de 16 millions d'habitants. Poumon économique de la Turquie, riche en petits boulots, Istanbul est la ville qui accueille la plus grosse part des 3,6 millions de rescapés de la guerre civile syrienne établis sur le sol turc.

La chasse aux clandestins prend la forme de contrôles d'identité inopinés dans les stations de métro et les gares et de descentes de police dans les commerces tenus ou fréquentés par des Syriens. Sur les quatre mille indésirables arrêtés ces derniers jours, la plupart ont été renvoyés dans leur région d'enregistrement. Mais plusieurs centaines d'entre eux ont aussi été déportés dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, en violation du droit humanitaire international, cette zone étant fréquemment bombardée par l'armée syrienne et son allié russe ; selon les Nations unies (ONU), au moins 450 civils ont été tués depuis le début de l'offensive en avril, dont une centaine ces dix derniers jours.

Contraint de signer un papier

Les autorités turques prétendent que ces rapatriements ont tous été volontaires, mais plusieurs cas attestent du contraire. Amjad Tablieh, un réfugié syrien de 18 ans, a, par exemple, été interpellé le 20 juillet, non loin de Fatih, alors qu'il faisait des courses. Incapable de produire son titre de séjour qu'il avait laissé à son domicile, le jeune homme a été renvoyé en Syrie après avoir été contraint de signer un papier attestant du caractère « volontaire » de son expulsion.



Des réfugiés syriens réintègrent leur pays après avoir été expulsés de Turquie, à Bab al-Hawa, le 24 juillet. AAREF WATAD / AFP

Dans une vidéo sur Internet, Mohamed Mustawi, 15 ans, affirme avoir eu droit au même traitement, alors qu'il disposerait d'une résidence à Sanliurfa, dans le sud-est de l'Anatolie. Amr Dabboul, un réfugié de 27 ans, candidat à la migration en Europe, que *Le Monde* a pu contacter par WhatsApp, s'est lui aussi retrouvé obligé de renoncer à son titre de séjour.

« J'ai été mis en prison mi-juillet, après avoir été capturé par les gardes-côtes turcs, au large d'Izmir, alors que j'étais dans un bateau qui se dirigeait vers la Grèce, raconte le Syrien. Ils m'ont expliqué que je resterais derrière les barreaux aussi longtemps que je refuserais de signer l'ordre d'expulsion. Alors je me suis exécuté et ils m'ont renvoyé en Syrie. »

La Turquie justifie ce durcissement par le fait qu'elle aurait atteint le maximum de sa capacité d'accueil. C'est le pays qui abrite le plus de Syriens au monde, près de quatre fois plus que l'ensemble des Etats de l'Union européenne (UE). Selon un sondage réalisé début juillet par l'université privée Kadir Has d'Istanbul, la proportion de Turcs opposés à la présence syrienne est passée de 54,5 % en 2018 à 67,7 % en 2019.

Cibles de propos xénophobes

Touchés de plein fouet par l'inflation et la baisse de leur pouvoir d'achat, les ménages turcs approuvent de moins en moins la politique d'accueil des « frères » syriens, imposée à partir de 2012 par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Au sein de l'AKP, le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir, l'idée s'est même imposée que la perte de la mairie d'Istanbul aux municipales du 23 juin serait due à cette politique. M. Erdogan, qui avait loué il y a trois ans le rôle supposé des Syriens dans la mise en échec du coup d'Etat qui le visait, s'aligne de plus en plus sur les positions

du CHP, le parti kémaliste, dont le chef de file, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, répète à l'envi qu'il faut « renvoyer tous les Syriens chez eux ».

« Ce genre de discours ne correspond pas vraiment à la réalité du terrain », juge Sinan Hatahet, un analyste syrien, qui réside à Istanbul.

« C'est vrai que les classes populaires turques pâtissent de la concurrence économique des Syriens. Mais les classes moyennes ont beaucoup profité de cette population qui a de l'argent et qui consomme. »

A l'occasion des municipales, les réfugiés ont néanmoins été la cible de propos xénophobes et de campagne de harcèlement sur Internet, avec le mot dièse #Dehors_les_Syriens. Et deux jours après sa victoire, Ekrem Imamoglu, le nouveau maire d'Istanbul, membre du CHP, a déploré l'abondance d'enseignes rédigées en arabe dans certains quartiers. « Il n'est pas possible de changer le visage d'Istanbul », s'est écrié le nouvel édile.

« La Turquie était censée être le pays sûr pour les Syriens et cet espace est en train de se refermer. » Nadim Houry, directeur d'Arab Reform Initiative

Quelques jours plus tard, le 29 juin, une foule de Turcs en colère a attaqué à coups de pierres les commerces syriens du quartier périphérique de Küçükçekmece à Istanbul. Une rumeur, infondée, selon laquelle un jeune Syrien du quartier avait agressé sexuellement une fillette, a suffi à mettre le feu aux poudres.

« Aucune issue de secours »

Rapportés à la masse de la population syrienne, ces incidents restent mineurs. Mais pour les observateurs, l'accroissement du sentiment antisyrrien et son instrumentalisation par la classe politique turque augurent un avenir difficile.

« La Turquie était censée être le pays sûr pour les Syriens et cet espace est en train de se refermer », observe Nadim Houry, directeur du cercle de réflexion Arab Reform Initiative, à Paris.

« Malheureusement cette intolérance progresse beaucoup plus vite que les négociations censées mettre un terme au conflit. La pression augmente sur les épaules des Syriens alors qu'ils n'ont toujours aucune issue de secours. »

Il y a quelques jours, réalisant leur erreur, les autorités turques ont autorisé Amjad Tablieh à revenir à Istanbul. Amr Dabboul lui aussi a remis le pied en Turquie, mais en franchissant la frontière de façon clandestine.

Un adolescent kurde tué par des tirs d'hélicoptère à Hakkari

Un hélicoptère de l'armée turque a ouvert le feu jeudi sur des villageois, dans la province de Hakkari, au Nord-Kurdistan (Turquie).

Le groupe visé par l'attaque était constitué d'habitants du village de Çemekurk, dans le district de Derecik, qui revenaient du sud-Kurdistan (Irak), portant des produits de contrebande.

Un adolescent âgé de 14 ans a été tué sur le coup tandis qu'un autre villageois a été grièvement blessé.

L'attaque meurtrière a eu lieu vers 15 heures, heure locale. Le corps de l'adolescent a été découvert par les villageois qui ont accouru sur les lieux après l'attaque.

Les forces de sécurité turques commettent régulièrement des crimes le long de la frontière, contre les villageois kurdes qui vivent



du commerce transfrontalier. Jusqu'à présent, les auteurs de ces crimes n'ont jamais été poursuivis par la justice turque. Le 28 décembre 2011, 34 civils, dont 19 mi-

neurs, ont été tués par des bombardements de l'aviation turque, dans le village frontalier de Roboski, à Uludere, district de la province de Şırnak.

Turquie: neuf militants kurdes arrêtés à Izmir

Neuf militants kurdes ont été arrêtés tôt ce matin, dans le cadre d'un raid de la police dans plusieurs districts d'Izmir, en Turquie.

De nombreuses perquisitions ont par ailleurs été menées par la police qui a saisi des livres et des documents numériques.

Accusées d'appartenance à une organisation illégale, les personnes arrêtées ont été conduites à la direction de la sécurité provinciale.



Le Monde Par Marie Jégo | 01/08/2019

Turquie : en liberté provisoire, le mathématicien Tuna Altinel est toujours poursuivi par la justice

L'homme de 53 ans, maître de conférences à l'université Claude-Bernard Lyon-I, est accusé d'appartenir à un groupe terroriste pour avoir participé, en France, à une conférence sur les Kurdes. Il a été emprisonné durant 81 jours.

Libéré mardi 30 juillet par un tribunal de Balıkesir (nord-ouest de la Turquie) après 81 jours d'incarcération, le mathématicien Tuna Altinel, maître de conférences à l'université Claude-Bernard Lyon-I, n'en a toutefois pas encore fini avec la justice turque. La pro-

chaine audience de son procès a été fixée au 19 novembre.

A sa sortie de prison, l'enseignant a notamment raconté comment il a initié ses codétenus au français à l'aide d'un vieux

Bescherelle, soulignant avoir « beaucoup appris d'eux ». Placé en liberté provisoire sans contrôle judiciaire, le mathématicien de 53 ans n'a pas été exempté des charges qui le visent, son affaire n'ayant pas encore été jugée sur le fond.

Accusé d'appartenir à une organisation terroriste, à savoir le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en guérilla contre l'Etat turc depuis 1984, il risque plusieurs années de prison pour avoir participé, en février 2019 à Lyon, à la réunion d'une association kurde enregistrée en France. Son arrestation a déclenché un vaste mouvement de solidarité dans le milieu universitaire français. Comme il l'a souligné mardi lors de l'audience, l'unique charge qui pèse contre lui est « d'avoir aidé à organiser la réunion légale d'une association légale », au cours de laquelle il a traduit les propos de certains des intervenants.

Dispensé de contrôle judiciaire, Tuna Altinel est libre mais ne peut quitter le territoire turc faute de passeport, le sien lui ayant été confisqué par les autorités. Son sort est emblématique de la répression qui s'est abattue sur des milliers d'universitaires et d'intellectuels, victimes des purges massives qui ont suivi le coup d'Etat manqué du 15 juillet 2016.

Depuis, plus de 20 000 universitaires ont perdu leurs postes. Certains ont été radiés et privés de passeport, d'autres ont été condamnés, parfois emprisonnés par une institution judiciaire épurée elle aussi avec le limogeage de près de 4 000 juges et procureurs.

« Propagande en faveur du PKK »

Installé en France depuis 1996, le mathématicien diplômé du lycée francophone Galatasaray à Istanbul n'a jamais renoncé à son engagement politique dans son pays d'origine. A ce titre, il a signé en 2016, avec près de 2 000 autres universitaires turcs, une pétition réclamant l'arrêt des opérations me-



Tuna Altinel à sa sortie de prison, à Balikesir (Turquie), le 30 juillet. YASIN AKGUL / AFP

nées alors par les forces de sécurité dans les régions kurdes du sud-est de la Turquie. « Nous ne serons pas les complices de ce crime », clamaient les signataires. Pour Ankara, la pétition est un acte de « propagande en faveur du PKK » et les personnes qui l'ont signée sont des suppôts du terrorisme. Tuna Altinel risque trois ans de prison. La prochaine audience de ce procès-ci a été fixée, elle, au 26 décembre.

Un espoir de voir les signataires de cette pétition lavés de tout soupçon est apparu vendredi 26 juillet, lorsque la Cour constitutionnelle a qualifié leurs condamnations de « violation de la liberté d'expression ». A une très courte majorité (neuf voix contre huit), les juges ont estimé qu'avoir signé la pétition n'était pas un crime. Ils ont indiqué que les requérants, neuf universitaires condamnés qui s'étaient adressés à la Cour, avaient le droit de réclamer une

compensation d'un montant de 9 000 livres turques (environ 1 500 euros).

Cette décision a suscité un tollé parmi les médias progouvernementaux, qui l'ont qualifiée de « scandaleuse ». De fait, la Cour constitutionnelle est l'une des rares instances judiciaires qui échappent au contrôle du président Erdogan, puisque plusieurs des juges qui en font partie doivent leurs nominations à l'ancien président Abdullah Gül, aujourd'hui éloigné du chef de l'Etat.

Attaquée de toutes parts, la Cour a dû se justifier. Dans un communiqué de presse diffusé mercredi, l'instance explique que sa décision ne vaut pas approbation de la pétition. « La Cour est consciente de ce que la pétition en question a été préparée dans un but déterminé et qu'elle contenait des commentaires exagérés, blessants et agressifs à l'endroit des forces de sécurité. »

LE FIGARO Par Stanislas Poyet | le 01/08/2019

Le bras de fer entre la Russie et la Turquie aux pourparlers de paix sur la Syrie

Un treizième round de négociations s'ouvre ce jeudi 1^{er} août à Nur-Sultan au Kazakhstan, pour trouver une voie de sortie au conflit syrien. La Russie, l'Iran et la Turquie se retrouvent autour de la table, rejoints par une délégation du gouvernement syrien et des rebelles, mais sans les membres de la coalition emmenée par les États-Unis.

Ces négociations - dites d'Astana, du nom de l'ancienne capitale kazakh - se tiennent

depuis 2017. En deux années, elles ont totalement éclipsé les pourparlers de Genève entamés par les forces de la coalition. Les Nations unies ainsi que des représentants des pays voisins qui abritent des millions de réfugiés syriens seront présents en tant qu'observateur: la Jordanie, mais aussi et pour la première fois le Liban et l'Irak.

La reconquête d'Idlib au cœur des négociations

Bien que les représentants du régime et de

l'opposition soient conviés à la même table, l'objet de ce sommet concerne bien plus le rapport de force entre pays étrangers impliqués dans le conflit. L'enjeu principal du sommet est la question du gouvernorat d'Idlib, bastion surpeuplé du nord-ouest de la Syrie. Ce territoire est contrôlé à ce jour par Hayat Tahrir al-Sham - HTS, issu de la fusion de plusieurs groupes rebelles dont certains affiliés à Al-Qaïda - et le Front National de Libération (FNL), une force rebelle dite modérée. Depuis quatre mois, l'armée

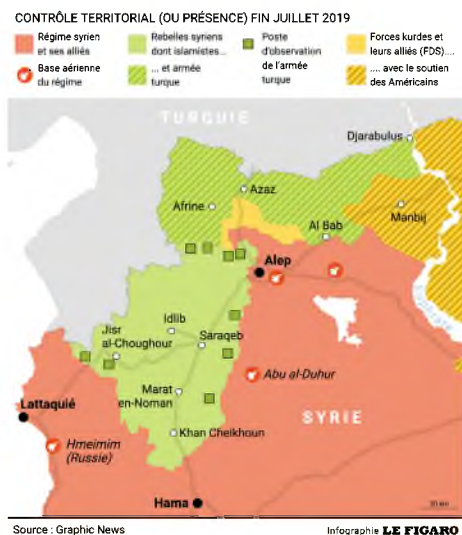
syrienne mène une offensive contre ce territoire abritant près de 50.000 combattants, appuyée par les frappes de l'aviation russe.

«La Russie alterne entre coups de pressions militaires et diplomatiques»

Frédéric Pichon

Dans le gouvernorat d'Idlib, la Russie et la Turquie sont dans des camps opposés. Si la Russie appuie militairement le régime de Bachar el-Assad depuis 2015, la Turquie - qui a longtemps réclamé la tête du président syrien, avant de se raviser face à l'impossibilité de renverser le régime - soutient les rebelles du FNL, directement visés par l'offensive conjointe de Damas et Moscou. Pourtant, ces deux pays ne cessent de se rapprocher depuis quelques années, comme en témoigne la récente livraison de missiles sol-air russes S-400 à la Turquie, pourtant membre de l'OTAN.

Le nord-ouest de la Syrie



Vladimir Poutine et Recep Tayyip Erdogan lors d'une conférence de presse sur le conflit syrien, à Ankara en septembre 2018. ADEM ALTAN / AFP

Pour le chercheur Frédéric Pichon, «la Russie alterne entre coups de pressions militaires et diplomatiques». Selon lui, «l'objectif de la Russie n'est pas la conquête de la province - son offensive depuis plusieurs mois est plutôt mesurée - mais bien de peser de tout son poids dans les négociations avec la Turquie». Pour cause, Moscou souhaite qu'Ankara abandonne les rebelles du FNL, afin d'amorcer une reconquête progressive du territoire. Moscou et Ankara envisagent une guerre d'usure pour affaiblir les groupes rebelles, sans risquer une offensive massive trop coûteuse.

La Turquie prête à des concessions en échange de mesures contre les Kurdes

Depuis son engagement dans le Nord-Ouest syrien, la Turquie cherche à éviter un déferlement migratoire sur son sol. Le pays abrite déjà 4 millions de réfugiés syriens - c'est le pays comptant le plus de réfugiés au monde

- ce qui n'est pas sans provoquer son lot de problèmes internes. Ankara souhaite donc éviter à tout prix une offensive massive dans le gouvernorat d'Idlib surpeuplé. Seulement, Recep Tayyip Erdogan serait prêt à abandonner son soutien à l'opposition syrienne en échange de concession sur un autre dossier qui lui est cher: les Kurdes.

Pour Frédéric Pichon, Erdogan «pourrait abandonner les rebelles en échange d'un engagement contre les Kurdes. Ankara souhaite que le Rojava [nom de la région indépendante kurde syrienne, NDLR] ne soit jamais une réalité». Recep Tayyip Erdogan craint que la constitution d'une région autonome kurde en Syrie ne renforce les velléités séparatistes des Kurdes de Turquie. «La question kurde est la seule boussole de la politique étrangère d'Erdogan», conclut Frédéric Pichon.



01/08/2019 | Zhelwan Z. Wali

Four Kurdish security members, including commander, killed in ISIS attack south of Kirkuk

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Islamic State (ISIS) militants killed four Kurdish security members and wounded eight others in an assault on a checkpoint near Kifri south of Kirkuk Wednesday night

A group of ISIS fighters attacked the checkpoint manned by Kurdish security forces known as Asayesh in Kolajo in the Garmiyan region at 11:00 pm. Commander of Garmiyan operations Aso Jalal, as well

as an Asayesh member named Haidar Fuad, were among those killed, according to Khalil Khudada, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) office in Jalawla.

"ISIS launched the attack in the beginning with mortar shells, firing some mortars on the center of Kolajo town," Khudada said. "They later attacked the Gulala Asayesh base with snipers."





Kurdish security forces after the ISIS attack Wednesday night in Kolajo. Photo: Rudaw

Khudada added that after ISIS attacked the Asayesh base, Kurdish Counter-Terror Group (CTG) forces rushed to repel them. Then, a landmine which the militants had

laid targeted a vehicle of the counter terror forces and killed two of its members.

Among the wounded are two civilians, four CTG members and two Asayesh members, according to Khudada.

"Two of the wounded are in critical condition,"

and were rushed to Sulaimani for treatment, he said.

Kifri is in the Diyala province and is 188 kilometers southeast of Erbil between

Kalar and Tuz Khurmatu. Diyala is disputed between both the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi federal governments.

ISIS remnants have maintained a presence in the Hamrin mountains in the area, despite Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces' operations.

The militant group was declared defeated in Iraq in December 2017, but sleeper cells and small groups of the jihadists are still active, especially in areas disputed between Baghdad and Erbil in the security gaps between the Peshmerga and Iraqi forces.



02/08/2019 | Karwan Faidhi Dri

Kurd, 14, shot dead by Turkish border guards in Hakkari



A Turkish military helicopter files over Hakkari's mountainous border area with the Kurdistan Region. File photo: AFP

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Turkish border guards shot dead a 14-year-old boy in the Turkish province of Hakkari on Thursday. Officials said the victim was part of a group of people crossing Turkey's shared border with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region illegally.

The death of the boy, named by local media as Vedat Ekinci, has caused outrage on social media, with several users comparing the incident to a 2011 Turkish bombing which killed 34 smugglers in neighboring Simak province.

News of the shooting was first published by [pro-Kurdish media outlets](#) in Turkey, which claimed Ekinci was shot from a Turkish helicopter.

Hakkari governor's office confirmed the

death of "a citizen" in the Derecik district in a [statement](#) on Friday.

It said the incident took place in an area used by a "terror organization" against Turkish state – referring to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"A number of people were trying to enter northern Iraq [Kurdistan Region] illegally on August 1, 2019 but they were given Stop Warning by our border units," it said.

"[They] did not follow the Stop Warning and [instead] headed to northern Iraq but [Turkish forces] fired warning bullets as per engagement rules."

One person was taken to Dericik Sahra Hospital but later succumbed to their injuries, the state-

ment added, without disclosing the victim's identity.

The mountainous area sees regular clashes between the PKK and the Turkish Army, but has also become a popular smuggling route. Cigarettes, drugs, and other contraband cross the border in this fashion.

The PKK-affiliated [ANF news agency](#) said the "villagers" were returning to Turkey from the Kurdistan Region when they were targeted by Turkish helicopters at around 3 p.m. local time on Thursday.

Kurdish social media users compared Ekinci's death to the December 2011 killing of 34 Kurds in neighboring Simak – known as [Roboski Massacre](#) – when Turkish jets mistook a group of smugglers for PKK fighters.

One of these people was the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) lawmaker Garo Paylan, who [tweeted](#): "Roboski continues."

The HDP also condemned the killing of Ekinci, calling on authorities to provide answers.

"The killing of 14-year-old Vedat Ekinci is the second Roboski massacre. We call on the authorities to immediately issue a statement. The murderers of children will not go unpunished," it said in a tweet on Friday.

The government and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) are yet to comment on the incident.

Turkey starts filling huge Tigris river dam, activists say

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey has started filling a huge hydroelectric dam on the Tigris river, a lawmaker and activists said, despite protests that it will displace thousands of people and risks creating water shortages downstream in Iraq.

Citing satellite images, they said that water was starting to build up behind the Ilisu dam, a project that has been decades in the making and which aims to generate 1,200 megawatts of electricity for southeast Turkey.

Turkish officials have not commented on work at the dam. Turkey's State Hydraulic Works (DSI), which oversees dam projects, referred questions to the Presidency, and the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry was not available to comment.

However, President Tayyip Erdogan said earlier this year that Turkey would start filling the Ilisu dam in June, a year after it briefly held back water before backing down following complaints from Iraq about reduced water flows in mid-summer.

The dam, which first gained Turkish government approval in 1997, is a key part of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project, designed to improve its poorest and least developed region.

Iraq says the dam will create water shortages by reducing flows in one of two rivers which the country depends on for much of its supplies. Around 70% of Iraq's water supplies flow from neighboring countries, especially via the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which run through Turkey.

Satellite images from the past two weeks show the dam has started holding water, said Necdet Ipekyuz, a lawmaker from Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). He said a road in the area has already been submerged.

"They are taking steps slowly to decrease the reactions to water being held. That is why they are not informing the public," he said, adding that several HDP lawmakers tried to visit the dam in July but were prevented by police.

Environmental campaigners have unsuccessfully challenged the dam project at the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds it would damage the country's cultural heritage.



A general view of the ancient town of Hasankeyf by the Tigris river, which will be significantly submerged by the Ilisu dam being constructed, in southeastern Turkey, June 1, 2019. REUTERS/Umit Bektaş

SUBMERGED TOWN

The rising waters of the dam are also expected to eventually submerge the 12,000-year-old town of Hasankeyf. Residents are being moved from the ancient town to a "New Hasankeyf" nearby, while historic artefacts have also been transported out of the area.

A group of NGOs, lawmakers and labor unions shared satellite images of the dam showing the increase in water levels between July 19-29.

"The current situation is strengthening the idea that the valves have been closed permanently," the group, known as Hasankeyf Coordination, said in a statement.

"Because the dam lake is growing every day, the people who live in these areas are worried. They cannot know when the water will reach their residential or agricultural areas."

The Iraqi government said in a statement that Turkish and Iraqi officials had discussed the water resources of the two rivers in Baghdad on Wednesday to see how they could "serve the interests of both countries".

Turkey proposed setting up a joint research center in Baghdad for water management and to work together on some agriculture plantations in Iraq, as well as projects for development of drinking water infrastructure.



The Tigris river flows through the ancient town of Hasankeyf, which will be significantly submerged by the Ilisu dam being constructed, in southeastern Turkey, August 26, 2018. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

The European Court of Human Rights in February dismissed the case brought by environmental campaigners to block the dam project, saying heritage protection is the responsibility of Turkish authorities and it had no jurisdiction.

The government needs to make an announcement, even if the dam were being filled for a trial run, said HDP's Ipekyuz. "They are trying to tie a belt around the Tigris river's neck and suffocate it," he said.

Additional reporting by John Davison and Ahmed Aboulenein in Baghdad; Editing by Dominic Evans and Susan Fenton



02/08/2019

Turkey starts filling dam that Iraq says will cause major water shortages

Along with the resulting lower levels of the Tigris River in Iraq, rising waters at the site of Ilisu Dam would submerge the 12,000-year-old town of Hasankeyf. (Photo: National Geographic/Julia Harte)

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Turkey has started filling a controversial dam with water as part of a massive hydroelectric project that has been protested for years because it would submerge local residential and archaeological areas and substantially decrease Iraq’s water supply.

“They are taking steps slowly to decrease the reactions to water being held. That is why they are not informing the public,” Necdet Ipekyuz, a lawmaker from Turkey’s pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) told Reuters.

According to Ipekyuz and activists, satellite images from the past two weeks show that Ilisu Dam has begun to fill, rising above the level of at least one road. He added that a number of HDP lawmakers have recently attempted to visit the site, but were prevented by police.

When Reuters asked Ankara to confirm the claims, Turkey’s State Hydraulic Works (DSI), which oversees dam projects, referred questions to the Presidency. The Agriculture and Forestry Ministry said it was not available to comment.

In early 2019, President Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey would start filling the dam in June, a year after it briefly held back water before backing down following complaints from Iraq about reduced water flows in mid-summer.

The effects of Turkish dams have long caused significant reduction of water levels in the Tigris River downstream in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, Mosul, and in the marshlands of southern Iraq, raising fears of drought which would affect the country’s livestock and agriculture.

Iraq says the dam will create water shortages by reducing flows in one of two rivers which the country depends on. Roughly 70 percent of Iraq’s water supply flow from



Along with the resulting lower levels of the Tigris River in Iraq, rising waters at the site of Ilisu Dam would submerge the 12,000-year-old town of Hasankeyf. (Photo: National Geographic/Julia Harte)

neighboring countries, namely Turkey and Iran.

Activists have been attempting to halt the project since, saying it would damage the country’s cultural heritage, since rising

waters at the site of the dam are expected to submerge the 12,000-year-old town of Hasankeyf.

Local residents are being moved from the ancient town to a “New Hasankeyf” nearby and many historic artifacts have also been transported elsewhere.

On Wednesday, officials from Turkey,

Iraq, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) took the first steps toward the construction of [three dams](#) to be built just south of the Turkish border in the Kurdistan Region’s province of Erbil.



The dam, which was designed to generate 1,200 megawatts of electricity for southeast Turkey, was first approved by Ankara in 1997.

Kurdistan syrien : situation explosive dans les camps pour djihadistes

Mutineries violentes, tentatives d'évasion, propagande... Les centres de détention pour les membres de Daech, dont quelques centaines de Français, sont des poudrières.

Chaleur infernale, malnutrition, surpopulation, manque d'hygiène et de soins... Le tout porté à ébullition par une pression idéologique permanente. Depuis la chute, en mars dernier, des ultimes retranchements de l'État islamique aux confins sud-est de la Syrie, les camps de détention gardés par les Kurdes, au nord-est du pays, ressemblent à des poudrières cernées par les flammes. Plus de 80 000 civils -femmes et enfants de djihadistes en ultramajorité-, s'entassent dans ces véritables prisons à ciel ouvert que sont devenus les camps d'Al-Hol, de Roj et d'Ain Issa, au Rojava, le territoire tenu par les forces Kurdes en Syrie. Parmi ces détenus, se trouvent environ 10 000 étrangers - 2000 femmes et 8000 enfants dont 370 Français (250 enfants). Ces derniers se trouvent dans une situation inextricable. Alors que certains pays rapatrient leurs ressortissants, Paris a choisi de laisser les membres français de Daech sur place, afin qu'ils y soient jugés. À l'exception des mineurs, dont la situation est examinée "au cas par cas"... Dans les faits, la France n'a rapatrié que 17 orphelins, confiés depuis lors à des proches ou aux services sociaux.

Depuis des semaines la tension monte dans les camps de détention kurdes. Et les incidents, plus ou moins alarmants, s'y multiplient. Le 5 avril dernier, la prison de Derik, réputée être la plus sécurisée du Rojava, est le théâtre d'une importante mutinerie : près de 200 détenus, tous anciens membres de l'État islamique, mènent des attaques coordonnées contre leurs gardiens. La tentative d'évasion n'échoue que grâce à l'intervention de forces sécuritaires kurdes et au survol de la prison, à basse altitude, par deux avions de chasse de l'armée américaine.

Parmi les mutins, se trouvaient **une vingtaine de Français**, dont quelques cadres et propagandistes de Daech : Thomas Barnouin, Mohamed Megherbi ou Adrien Guihal... Ils ont été depuis transférés dans d'autres prisons de la région, dont celle de Qamishli, la "capitale" du Kurdistan syrien.

Enfants mourants, gardiens poignardés

Au camp d'Al-Hol, la situation est explosive. Environ 70 000 Syriens et Irakiens s'agglutinent sur le site principal. Près de 10 000 étrangers sont, eux, cantonnés dans le camp annexe délimité par un grillage. Les conditions sanitaires y sont épouvantables. Plusieurs dizaines d'enfants en bas âge sont morts ces derniers mois. A plusieurs reprises, des gardes ont été poignardés. Ils sont régulièrement caillassés par des enfants, encouragés par leurs mères, fanatiques d'Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, le "calife" autoproclamé de Daech. A la mi-juillet, une vidéo circulant sur les réseaux sociaux montrait le drapeau noir de l'Etat islamique hissé sur un lampadaire d'Al-Hol.

A Al-Roj ("Soleil couchant"), un camp de plus petite envergure où sont détenues des familles, les conditions sont tout aussi exécrables. "Pour lutter contre l'idéologie de Daech, il faudrait garantir des conditions humaines de



Dorothee Maquere, veuve du djihadiste français Jean-Michel Clain, assise en compagnie de quatre de ses cinq enfants survivants, après la chute du dernier retranchement de Daech en Syrie, le 5 mars 2019. Elle est aujourd'hui détenue dans un camp gardé par les forces kurdes au nord-est de la Syrie. AFP/Delil SOULEIMAN

traitement. Or, c'est l'inverse qui se produit", témoigne maître Nabil Boudi, qui a pu accéder au camp, début juillet, à l'occasion d'une conférence internationale sur le terrorisme organisée au Kurdistan syrien. Les familles se trouvent dans une situation d'extrême vulnérabilité. Elles manquent de tout. Certaines n'ont accès qu'à un peu de farine, de sucre et d'eau pour se nourrir". Cet avocat parisien, qui défend une quinzaine de familles -ainsi que des djihadistes français condamnés à mort à Bagdad (Irak)-, n'a pas pu parler directement à ses clients. "A l'intérieur des camps, les tensions sont permanentes entre les femmes qui cherchent à échapper à la propagande de Daech et celles qui en font la promotion."

Des Françaises déplacées à la suite de violences

Selon Nabil Boudi, plusieurs Françaises ont été récemment transférées du camp de Roj vers d'autres lieux de détention, à la suite de violences. Difficile de savoir si elles en étaient les victimes ou les coupables.

Le 14 juillet dernier, l'épouse française d'un djihadiste, enceinte de huit mois et accompagnée de son fils de trois ans, est parvenue à s'évader du camp pendant quelques heures, ainsi que **l'a révélé Libération**. La jeune femme a profité d'une visite à l'hôpital d'Al-Malikiyah, une ville des environs, pour s'échapper. Accompagnée par un garde, elle demande à aller aux toilettes. Là, elle échange son niqab noir pour une blouse d'infirmière. Puis elle habille son fils avec une robe de petite fille et un chapeau. Elle réussit ensuite à quitter l'hôpital au nez et à la barbe de son gardien. Elle est finalement retrouvée quelques heures plus tard en ville : un passeur s'appropriait à la guide jusqu'à la frontière turque voisine...

"Les forces kurdes de Syrie ne sont pas en mesure de détenir autant de personnes, tout en assurant des conditions suffisantes de sécurité et d'étanchéité dans les camps", souligne Jean-Charles Brisard, président du Centre d'analyse du terrorisme (CAT), qui s'est lui aussi rendu au Kurdistan syrien, début juillet. "Ces lieux ne sont pas conçus pour des détentions longues. Le Kurdistan syrien n'est pas un état reconnu. Ses représentants n'ont ni les moyens financiers, ni les moyens juridiques, d'organiser le procès et l'incarcération de milliers de personnes, poursuit-il. Nous sommes face à un risque important d'évasion et de dispersion des détenus djihadistes, notamment ceux de nationalité française."

La stratégie du maintien à distance des prisonniers français est assumée par Paris. "Ces terroristes, parce qu'il s'agit bien de terroristes qui nous ont attaqués [...] doivent être jugés là où ils ont commis leurs crimes", rappelait Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre des Affaires étrangères à la fin du mois de mai dernier. Le gouvernement français avait pourtant élaboré un plan de rapatriement concernant 250 personnes, hommes, femmes et enfants. Les personnes majeures, qui font toutes l'objet d'une procédure judiciaire, devaient être placées en détention provisoire avant d'être jugées. Une vingtaine de prisons s'étaient préparées à les réceptionner. Mais, face à une très forte hostilité de l'opinion publique, cette opération a finalement été annulée.

Le maintien de milliers d'adeptes de Daech dans des camps chauffés à blanc présente lui aussi des risques. Pour rappel, c'est à Camp Bucca (Irak), un centre de détention où furent regroupés jusqu'à 26 000 prisonniers, entre 2003 et 2009, que des cadres d'Al-Qaeda avaient jeté les bases du futur État islamique.

Turkey, Russia and Iran's joint statement rejects Kurds' 'separatist' agenda in Syria

Turkish, Russian, and Iranian leaders released a [joint statement](#) regarding the situation in Syria in a trilateral summit organised in the Kazakh capital of Astana on Aug. 2.

The 13th round of meetings on Syria was focused on the situation in Idlib, the last rebel-held enclave in Syria, and northern Syria controlled by U.S.-backed Kurdish forces, as well as the situation in northern Syria, where Kurdish-led autonomous areas are under threat of Turkish attack.

An agreement signed by Turkey and Russia last September prevented regime attacks on the province, which is home to an estimated 3 million people, including hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Assad regime forces backed by Russia have launched intensive bombing and ground attacks this year on Idlib after Moscow said Turkey had failed to live up to its agreement to remove "extremist" opposition groups from the agreement's de-escalation zone in southern Idlib.

The jihadist group Tahrir al-Sham, which includes fighters from al Qaeda-linked groups, has become a dominant force in the province since the agreement was signed.

The statement said the leaders at the meeting had "reviewed in detail the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area and highlighted the necessity to establish calm on the ground by fully implementing all agreements on Idlib, first and foremost the Memorandum of 17 September 2018."

But all parties will continue cooperation to elim-



inate blacklisted armed groups in Idlib while increasing efforts to ensure the protection of the civilian population, the statement continued.

The three countries also declared their opposition to the autonomous regions set up by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and predominantly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria, saying in the statement that they "rejected ... all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism."

The Kurdish groups established a large, self-governing territory in the north and east of Syria after driving the Islamic State (ISIS) out of the area.

Turkey opposes the groups for their links to Kurdish militants fighting for self-rule in Turkey, while Russia and Iran wish for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime to regain control of the entire country.

In response to a question on guaranteeing the rights of the Kurdish people in the Syrian constitution, the head of the Russian delegation, Alexander Lavrentev, [said](#) Moscow was encouraging dialogue between the autonomous administrations and the government in Damascus.

"We support the dialogue and this makes our position different from the positions of the rest of the parties," he said.

The Syrian Kurds began talks with Damascus following the U.S. President Donald Trump's abrupt Dec. 19 announcement that he was pulling U.S. troops from Syria.

Trump's announcement has since been rowed back, but the Kurdish forces are still in danger of attack from Turkey, which has declared its intention to launch a military operation to clear their presence from its border.

Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Turkey on the International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format, Nur-Sultan

The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey as guarantors of the Astana format:

1. Reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter;

2. Reaffirmed in this regard the respect for universally recognized international legal decisions, including those provisions of the relevant UN resolutions rejecting the occupation of Syrian Golan, first and foremost UN Security Council resolution 497;

3. Reviewed in detail the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area and highlighted the necessity to establish calm on the

ground by fully implementing all agreements on Idlib, first and foremost the Memorandum of 17 September 2018. They expressed serious concern with the increased presence of the terrorist organization "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" in the area and reaffirmed the determination to continue cooperation in order to ultimately eliminate DAESH/ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated

- with Al-Qaeda or DAESH/ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council. While deploring civilian casualties, they agreed to undertake concrete measures, based on the previous agreements, to ensure the protection of the civilian population in accordance with the international humanitarian law as well as the safety and security of the military personnel of the guarantors present within and outside the Idlib de-escalation area;
4. Discussed the situation in the north-east of Syria and emphasized that long-term security and stability in this region can only be achieved on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country;
 5. Rejected in this regard all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives, and expressed their determination to stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as threatening the national security of neighboring countries;
 6. Expressed their conviction that there could be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and reaffirmed their commitment to advance the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated political process in line with the UN Security Council resolution 2254 and the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi;
 7. Held detailed consultations on the trilateral basis as well as with the representatives of the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen on the conclusion of formation and launching of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, in accordance with the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. They expressed satisfaction with the progress made on finalization of the composition and the rules of procedure of the body and reiterated their readiness to facilitate the convening of the committee as soon as possible;
 8. Welcomed the fourth successful operation on mutual release of detainees/abductees held on 31 July 2019 within the framework of the respective Working Group of the Astana format. They underscored that the Working Group was a unique mechanism, that had proved to be effective and necessary for building confidence between the Syrian parties, and agreed to take measures to continue and step up its work;
 9. Emphasized the need to increase humanitarian assistance to all Syrians throughout the country without preconditions. In order to support the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria and the progress in the process of the political settlement, they called upon the international community, the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, to enhance the assistance to Syria, inter alia by developing early recovery projects, including the restoration of basic infrastructure assets - water and power supply facilities, schools and hospitals as well as the humanitarian mine action. They also discussed the idea and exchanged views on the perspectives of holding the International Conference on the Humanitarian Assistance to Syria;
 10. Highlighted the need to facilitate safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Syria, ensuring their right to return and right to be supported. In this regard they called upon the international community to provide appropriate contributions and reaffirmed their readiness to continue interaction with all relevant parties, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other specialized international agencies;
 11. Welcomed the participation of the delegations of Iraq and Lebanon as new observers of the Astana format. They expressed their conviction that the observers (Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon) would contribute to the efforts to bring peace and stability in Syria;
 12. Expressed their sincere gratitude to the Kazakh authorities for hosting in Nur-Sultan the 13th International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format;
 13. Decided to hold the next International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format in Nur-Sultan in October 2019. **Ahval, Ø**

L'Orient
LE JOUR 02/08/2019

Cinq ans après l'EI, les Yazidis fêtent l'été mais n'oublie pas les tueries

A Lalish, sanctuaire des Yazidis dans le nord de l'Irak, des centaines de personnes célèbrent la fête de l'été, assombrie cette année encore par le souvenir de l'offensive meurtrière du groupe État islamique (EI), il y a tout juste cinq ans.

Au milieu de femmes vêtues de T-shirt commémorant le "génocide" et brandissant des clichés de Yazidis suppliciés par les jihadistes, les dignitaires, longue robe blanche et keffieh sur la tête, ont défilé samedi, avec à leur tête Hazem Bek, récemment intronisé prince des Yazidis. "Nous commémorons la mémoire de toutes les personnes tuées lors du génocide il y a cinq ans", martèle-t-il.



Une Yazidie irakienne au temple de Lalish, située dans une vallée proche de la ville de Dohuk, dans le Kurdistan irakien, le 2 août 2019. Photo AFP / SAFIN HAMED

Les Yazidis sont une minorité kurdophone adepte d'une religion monothéiste ésotérique. Ils sont considérés comme hérétiques par l'EI, qui en 2014, a tué en quelques jours des centaines d'hommes de la communauté, enrôlé de force des enfants-soldats et réduit des milliers de femmes à l'esclavage sexuel.

Si Lalish, au Kurdistan irakien, est de nouveau le cœur battant de la vie religieuse des Yazidis, leur bastion historique de Sinjar, à plus de 300 km de là, est ravagé. La politique de la terre brûlée de l'EI a privé de son gagne-pain cette communauté d'agriculteurs et les services publics n'y sont toujours pas rétablis car la reconstruction tarde à débiter.



Hazim Tahsin Beg (à droite sur la photo), le nouveau chef de la communauté yazidie, en visite au temple de Lalish, le 2 août 2019. Photo AFP / SAFIN HAMED

pour que cette communauté brisée puisse rentrer chez elle et reconstruire sa vie", a-t-elle plaidé, appelant autorités irakiennes et kurdes à "trouver en urgence des solutions".

La cause des Yazidis est portée à l'étranger par Nadia Murad, prix Nobel de la Paix 2018, qui sillonne le monde avec l'avocate Amal Clooney pour que la communauté internationale reconnaisse le "génocide" dont a été victime sa communauté.

"J'espère que quelque chose sera fait pour Sinjar, car actuellement, (la région) est tellement dévastée que c'est comme si elle n'existait pas", déplore Alia Barkat, jeune femme yazidie venue à Lalish, où des fidèles se pressent pour allumer des bougies, faire brûler des huiles ou participer au rituel de purification du temple.

L'envoyée spéciale de l'ONU en Irak, Jeannine Hennis-Plasschaert, a dénoncé dans un communiqué "l'échec actuel de la stabilisation" de Sinjar. "La stabilité est vitale

Le crime de génocide est le plus grave du droit international et l'ONU enquête actuellement pour établir si l'EI a commis des crimes de guerre, des crimes contre l'humanité ou un génocide, notamment à l'encontre des Yazidis d'Irak. Ils étaient 550.000 dans le pays avant 2014 - soit un tiers des Yazidis du monde -, mais depuis, 100.000 ont pris le chemin de l'exil et 360.000 autres s'entassent toujours dans des camps de déplacés, en majorité au Kurdistan.



Des femmes yazidies brandissant des photos de victimes de l'invasion par l'EI de la région du Sinjar, le 2 août 2019. Photo AFP / SAFIN HAMED

Ekurd Daily 03/08/2019

Iraqi Kurdistan parliament designates Aug. 3 as Yazidi genocide remembrance day.

Iraq's Kurdistan region,— Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament on Saturday passed a bill declaring August 3, as the annual Day of Remembrance of the Genocide against the Yazidis.

MPs attending a Saturday parliamentary session passed a resolution to "designate August 3 as Yazidi Genocide Remembrance Day" and called for reparations to survivors and the families of victims "under the provision of the Iraqi constitution," according to the Kurdistan Parliament website.

The legislation, which recognizes the crimes against the Yazidi community as genocide and addresses issues such as reparations to be paid by the federal government, passed with all 87 members present voting in favor of the bill.

The solemn session was opened with a speech by Yazidi lawmaker Hedy Alu, followed by a moment of silence.

In August 2014, the Islamic State ISIS militants **attacked** the Sinjar district, which was home to hundreds of thousands of Yazidis, after Massoud Barzani's KDP pesh-

merga militia forces **withdrew** from the area without a fight leaving behind the Yazidi civilians to IS killing and genocide.

An unpublished report by Iraq's Kurdistan regional government KRG reportedly reveals that an **18,000 peshmerga** forces of KRG were on the spot and retreat without mounting any defense when Islamic state IS attacked the Yazidi area of Sinjar.

Many Yazidis, critics, Kurdish politicians and observers **blame** Massoud Barzani, the commander in-chief of the Peshmerga, for the Yazidi massacre.

In 2017 Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament Speaker Yusuf Mohammed Sadiq said parliament had **informed** Massoud Barzani that KDP Peshmerga forces in Sinjar were weak, several weeks before the district fell to the Islamic State IS in August 2014.

Thousands of Yazidi families fled to Mount Sinjar, where they were trapped in it and suffered from significant lack of water and food, killing and **abduction** of thousands of Yazidis as well as rape and captivity of thousands of women.



Thousands of Yazidi fleeing Islamic State violence in Sinjar town in northwest Iraq toward Syria, August 10, 2014. Photo: Reuters

Thousands of Yazidi women were raped and murdered, with many of the survivors **sold into sexual slavery** and taken away to other parts of Iraq, Syria, and even further afield. Men and boys were systematically murdered, forced to work for the group, or coerced into becoming child soldiers.

It is estimated that 3,000 Yazidis were killed over a period of several days and 6,800 others were abducted.

Although several thousand Yazidis have been rescued over the last four-and-a-half years, another 3,000 remain missing.

Hundreds of thousands more were displaced and most of those have not been able to return home.

Sinjar remains one of the least stable parts of Iraq, with many Yazidis reluctant to return because of their houses were destroyed. A lack of public services or jobs prevents many who would like to return from doing so.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad has repeatedly criticized both Erbil and Baghdad for not doing more to rebuild the area's infrastructure and create the conditions that would enable displaced Yazidis to return home.

In a statement marking the fifth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide, Kurdistan Democra-

tic Party (KDP) President Masoud Barzani on Saturday urged Baghdad and Erbil to do more to rebuild Sinjar.

"Today we remember a catastrophic event that happened to the residents of Sinjar by the hand of [Islamic State]," he said, adding that the victims should receive compensation from the government.

"We ask of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Government to cooperate in rebuilding Sinjar and to let the people there have authority [over local affairs]," said Barzani, who was President of the Kurdistan Region at the time of the massacre.

Barzani added that what happened in early August 2014 constituted genocide and that it is necessary for the international community to recognize it as such.

But most Yazidis lost faith in Barzani when

his Peshmerga forces failed to protect them from Islamic State, while the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK and its Syrian sister party are widely seen as the Yazidis' saviors.

The Yazidis are a Kurdish speaking religious group linked to Zoroastrianism and Sufism. The religious has roots that date back to ancient Mesopotamia, are considered heretics by the hard-line Islamic State group.

Some 600,000 Yazidis live in villages in Iraqi Kurdistan region and in Kurdish areas outside Kurdistan region in around Mosul in Nineveh province, with additional communities in Transcaucasia, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey and Syria. Since the 1990s, the Yazidis have emigrated to Europe, especially to Germany. There are almost 1.5 million Yazidis worldwide. Copyright © 2019 Ekurd.net. All rights reserved

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La prix Nobel de la paix 2018 Nadia Murad appelle les Yazidis à rentrer au Sinjar

"LES AUTORITÉS IRAKIENNES ET KURDES N'ONT RIEN FAIT POUR NOUS"

La prix Nobel de la paix 2018, Nadia Murad, a appelé les Yazidis à rentrer dans leur région irakienne du Sinjar, samedi à Stuttgart à l'occasion du 5e anniversaire du début des exactions commises contre son peuple par le groupe EI.

"Aujourd'hui, plus de 90.000 (Yazidis) sont revenus à Sinjar, il faut que plus encore rentrent pour faire échouer le plan de l'EI qui consistait à les chasser de Sinjar", a déclaré la jeune femme, porte-voix de cette minorité décimée qui réclame une reconnaissance des crimes djihadistes.

Nadia Murad a fait partie des milliers de femmes et de petites filles yazidies enlevées et réduites à l'esclavage par le groupe EI lorsqu'il s'est emparé de pans entiers de l'Irak en 2014.

"Les autorités irakiennes et kurdes n'ont rien fait pour nous et actuellement il n'y aucune autorité locale dans la région de Sinjar", a toutefois déploré l'Irakienne qui répondait à l'invitation du Conseil central des Yazidis d'Allemagne.

Estimant que "le déminage et l'exhumation des charniers" étaient "une avancée positive", elle a réclamé que soient rétablis les services publics dans cette région, notamment les écoles et les hôpitaux.

Les autorités irakiennes et kurdes doivent



Iraqi Nobel laureate Nadia Murad (pictured December 2018) was the victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, but trafficking is also used to "finance activities" or increase workforces. SABAH ARAR (AFP/File)

aussi, selon elle, "dédommager les survivantes yazidies de l'EI mais jusqu'ici elles n'ont toujours rien eu".

Bagdad a versé à certaines Yazidies un versement unique d'environ 1.700 dollars, soit un peu plus de trois fois le salaire mensuel moyen en Irak pour tout dédommagement. En août 2014, l'EI s'est livré, selon l'ONU, à un potentiel génocide contre cette mino-

rité kurdophone adepte d'une religion monothéiste ésotérique. En quelques jours, les jihadistes du "califat" autoproclamé ont tué des centaines d'hommes de la communauté, enrôlé de force des enfants-soldats et réduit des milliers de femmes à l'esclavage sexuel.

Près de 3.000 Yazidis sont toujours portés disparus, en majorité des femmes et des enfants peut-être toujours captifs de l'EI.

'Guarantor States' Reach Understanding Against Syria's Kurdish Administration

The guarantor states of the Astana process - Russia, Iran Turkey - failed on Friday to reach any decisions on issues placed on the agenda of the 13th round of talks, amid Russian-Iranian disputes on the Golan Heights

The talks in Nur-Sultan took place in the presence of representatives from Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, in the absence of UN special envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen.

Diplomatic sources told Asharq Al-Awsat that the meeting "failed to reach the results that the guarantor states had hoped for."

The three states postponed announcing the creation of a committee, which will be tasked with drafting a constitution for post-war Syria.

Instead, they agreed that the committee would be announced at the Russia-Iran-Turkey summit expected next month.

The three countries also disagreed on the implementation of the Sochi agreement reached on Sept. 17, 2018 between Turkey and Russia, and the withdrawal of fighters from the demilitarized zone in northwest Syria.



Syrian regime representatives and opposition delegates along with other attendees take part in Syria peace talks in Astana on December 22, 2017. AFP file photo. London - Ibrahim Hamidi

Also, a lengthy debate took place between the Russian and the Iranian delegations on the Golan, until the two states agreed on general terms, including "respecting and adhering to goals and principles of the UN Charter and the international resolutions, that reject occupying the Syrian Golan, mainly Resolution 497."

In return, the guarantor states said they oppose the autonomous regions set up by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and the Kurdish People's Protection Units in northern Syria, saying they threaten the security of neighboring countries, in reference to Turkey.



August 03-2019

171 remains of Kurds unearthed in first mass grave in Iraq's Samawah desert: official

During the excavation of the first mass grave in the Iraqi desert of Samawah, 171 remains of Kurds had been extracted, an official said on Saturday.

Fuad Osman, a spokesperson for the Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs, said the 171 bodies belonged to Kurdish victims of the former Iraqi regime's brutal Anfal campaign.

"This is the first of the three mass graves that have been found," Osman told Kurdistan 24, adding they plan "to unearth the remaining two in the near future."

On July 23, the unearthing of the first mass grave began in the outskirts of Samawah city, which lies on the borders of Muthanna province in southern Iraq.

Sirwan Jalal, the Director of the Mass Graves Department, said they were surprised at the number

of remains after initial estimates pointed to about 80 victims, but the final results were more than doubled. Jalal said the remains would be transferred to Baghdad for DNA tests.

Traditional Kurdish clothes, children's accessories, including pacifiers, dresses, shoes, and baby powder, were found buried among the bodies.

Between 1986 and 1989, the government of Saddam Hussein undertook a campaign of genocide against the Kurds in the north. Nearly 182,000 ethnic Kurds were killed in an operation spearheaded by the infamous Ali Hassan al-Majid, also known as "Chemical Ali."

Many people, including women and children, were forcefully displaced and transferred to camps in southern Iraq where the government eventually killed them and consigned them to mass graves, burying others alive in the desert.



The remains of Kurdish victims of the former Iraqi regime's Anfal campaign were found in a mass grave in the Samawah desert of Iraq's Muthanna province. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

The recovery of bodies from the Samawah mass grave would serve as closure as well as proof of the injustices citizens suffered under the former Iraqi regime so that they can ask the current federal government for reparations.

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany

20 Turkish soldiers killed in clashes with PKK in Turkey's Kurdish southeast: HPG

DIYARBAKIR-AMED, Turkey Kurdistan,— Twenty Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes with Kurdish militants belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK in Turkish Kurdistan in the southeast of the country, HPG, the military wing of PKK said in a statement on Saturday.

HPG Press Center issued a written statement published by Firat News Agency ANF, announced that 14 Turkish soldiers were killed in a PKK action in Sirnak's Uludere district and 6 soldiers in the ensuing clashes.

The HPG statement said: "On August 1 our forces carried out an action against the invading Turkish army positioned on a hill to ensure security of the Martyr Kendal outpost in Sirnak's Qileban (Uludere) district. Our forces advanced to the positions in a raid style and struck the enemy soldiers at close range. They entered the positions and killed 14 enemy soldiers on the hill, and injured several. After the action the Turkish army bombed the vicinity with Howitzers, mortars and jets."

"On August 2, the invading Turkish army launched an operation in the vicinity of Martyr Welat Hill. Clashes broke out between our forces and Turkish soldiers. 6 soldiers were killed in these clashes and 4 were injured."



Kurdish PKK female fighter, 2019. Photo: ANF

"On July 29 at noon, our forces carried out a sabotage action against a Turkish army vehicle transporting supplies to the Stuna Hill in Hakkari's Cele (Cukurca) district. In this action the vehicle was damaged and 1 specialist sergeant and 1 counter guerrilla unit were heavily injured." the statement added.

Four PKK fighters were killed in the clashes, according to the statement.

The statement said "4 of our comrades fought until their last bullet and detonated their own bombs to not fall captive to the enemy."

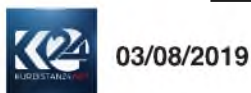
Turkey has been fighting the PKK since a fragile ceasefire between both sides collapsed in 2015.

The Turkish military routinely carries out airstrikes and artillery bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan against suspected PKK targets, but their frequency has increased since Ankara launched "Operation Claw" in May 2019, as have civilian casualties.

A second phase of that operation was started in July 2019.

The PKK took up arms in 1984 against the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to push for greater autonomy in Turkish Kurdistan for the Kurdish minority who make up around 22.5 million of the country's 79-million population. More than 40,000 Turkish soldiers and Kurdish rebels, have been killed in the conflict.

A large Kurdish community in Turkey and worldwide openly sympathise with PKK rebels and Abdullah Ocalan, who founded the PKK group in 1974 and currently serving a life sentence in Turkey, has a high symbolic value for most Kurds in Turkey and worldwide according to observers.



Barzani calls for joint Baghdad-Erbil plan to help return displaced Yezidis

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani, has called for a joint effort action plan to be worked out between Baghdad and Erbil to rehabilitate the city of Sinjar (Shingal) and facilitate the return of Yezidis (Ezidis) displaced by the Islamic State.

The comments came in a statement released on Saturday, Aug. 3, which marks five years since the beginning of the extremist group's attack on the Ezidi majority city and the start of its radical fighters' horrific crimes against the religious minority.

In a statement, Barzani said, "Erbil and Baghdad need to work together to rebuild



Yezidis (Ezidis) in tears fleeing the Islamic State's 2014 attack on the city of Sinjar (Shingal). (Photo: New York Times / Afam Ferguson)

the city of Shingal to provide a suitable foundation for displaced Ezidis to return to their home."

"What happened to Ezidis at the hands of the Islamic State is a continuation of heart-rending adversaries the people of the Kurdistan Region have suffered throughout history," he added, in reference to the regime of Saddam Hussein's deadly Anfal campaign against the Kurds.

He called for strengthening "local and international efforts to identify the attack on the ethnic minority as genocide, and to intensify the search to find and recover the kidnapped and missing Ezidis."

A statement by Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani read that the region, in cooperation with the federal government, would "do everything possible to ease the suffering of our Ezidi brother and sisters and also to help them get back to

their homes and compensate them for their losses."

Also on Saturday, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani urged the United Nations to officially declare the Islamic State's acts against Ezidis as a genocide. In a tweet, he said, "On 5th anniversary of genocide against Yezidis in Shingal, we solemnly remember those who fell victim to ISIS atrocities in Kurdistan & beyond. We won't rest until we eradicate terror & bring kidnapped victims home. We urge UN to recognize this genocide to prevent similar acts."

Multiple UN agencies and commissions have referred to the Islamic States' crimes against Ezidis as acts of genocide since 2016.

On Thursday, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert called for swift action from both the Iraqi government and the

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to restore stability to war-torn Shingal.

On Saturday, the Kurdistan Parliament held its final vote to officially designate Aug. 3 as Ezidi Genocide Remembrance Day.

So far, 80 mass graves containing the remains of Ezidis have been found in Shingal and its surroundings among the remains of what used to be a thriving city, now mostly rubble. At least 68 temples and other religious buildings were also destroyed.

Disputed between Erbil and Baghdad, the area is currently under the control of Iraqi security forces and mostly Shia militias. These forces, plus a limited number of Peshmerga and other Kurdish fighters, are present in Shingal and its outskirts, with reports of tensions over who will control the strategic town that lies near the Syrian border.



03/08/2019

Iraqi president urges parliament to pass Yezidi Survivors Act

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Iraqi President Barham Salih on Saturday called on the Iraqi parliament to pass a law introduced by him in April that aims to help female Yezidis (Ezidis) who suffered under the Islamic State.

Salih's appeal came in a statement issued on the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the extremist group's attack on the Ezidi majority city of Sinjar (Shingal) and the start of its radical fighters' horrific crimes against the religious minority.

Just before the president's statement was released, the Kurdistan Parliament held its final vote to officially designate Aug. 3 as Ezidi Genocide Remembrance Day.

Salih said, "We expect the presidency and members of the Council of Representatives to accelerate the ratification of the bill of survivors... to ensure the rights of survivors and their behalf and compensate them, materially and morally."

The Iraqi president's law, called the Ezidi Survivor's Act, is supported by many but did cause controversy when it was first made public because it only addresses female Ezidi survivors.

"It ought to include the rest of the victims, as there are male and children survivors who are living under very precarious conditions. Especially in the case of the children, who lost all family members and became orphans with no breadwinner," said Ezidi writer Saman Daoud to AL-Monitor at the time.

Earlier on Saturday, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani, called for a joint effort action plan to be worked out between Baghdad and Erbil to rehabilitate the city of Sinjar (Shingal) and facilitate the return of Yezidis (Ezidis) displaced by the Islamic State. In a statement, he argued to strengthen "local and international efforts to identify the attack on the ethnic minority as genocide, and to intensify the search to find and recover the kidnapped and missing Ezidis."

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President Barham Salih's appeal came on the fifth anniversary of the Islamic State's attack on the Yezidi (Ezidi) majority city of Sinjar (Shingal). (Photo: Getty Images/Emrah Yorumaz)

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On Thursday, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert called for swift action from both the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to restore stability to war-torn Shingal.

"As we pay our tributes and honor the past," she said, "we must also look towards the future and thus take decisive action. Decisive action to facilitate and accelerate the reconstruction of affected areas, enabling the safe return of the people, as a very first priority to cope with deep tragedy."



03/08/2019

„SDF can contribute to prosecution of foreign ISIS fighters: Dutch gov't advisor

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Although it would be difficult to set up an international court in the region, other nations can ask the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) for support to prosecute foreign Islamic State fighters, the Dutch government's external advisor said in a report.

Dr. André Nollkaemper, Professor of Public International Law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam, underlined that it would be difficult to set up an international court absent of United Nations support or without consent from Iraq or Syria in semi-autonomous regions such as northeast Syria.

Nevertheless, he noted that the US-backed SDF has de-facto control over Syria's northeast, and has a legal system "under Kurdish rule."

Although it is not legally possible for the SDF to reach an agreement with a state to create an international tribunal, Nollkaemper said the SDF could be involved in an agreement between two or more countries to set up such a court.

"To the extent that the SDF has members of ISIS in custody and has evidence and/or can facilitate access to witnesses, this could make an important contribution to the effective trial of members of ISIS," he stated in the report, adding it could happen without permission from Damascus.

The SDF, which holds thousands of foreign Islamic State fighters and their families, refuses to put them on trial in Syria because it



A member of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). (Photo: Archive)

lacks the capabilities to hold foreign Islamic State fighters indefinitely.

According to an International Crisis Group report, the SDF set up an anti-terrorism court run by five judges in 2015 for Syrians accused of being implicated in Islamic State crimes.

One of the judges said the court had handled 800 local cases in 2017 and 1,200 in 2018; it has 7,000 pending.

Related Article: [SDF official says international court solution to foreign ISIS problem](#)

According to Professor Nollkaemper, the creation of a new body in the region, close to the group's victims, would help solve the problem of Islamic State detainees and assist in the collection of evidence.

Many nations in the European Union fear that due to the lack of evidence, Islamic State supporters could be quickly released once they appear in court after they return home.

As such, the notion of an international criminal court to try them either in Iraq or Syria appears to be an attractive solution for them. The Dutch government has also supported the idea of creating such a court.



03/08/2019

Christians evacuating their villages due to Turkish bombardments

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Around 10 Christian villages in the northern Kurdistan Region have been evacuated due to frequent and increasing Turkish bombings targeting apparent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions.

Rudaw visited Christian villages in the Kani Masi District, where some homes are locked up and abandoned. There are 25 such villages in the district, including 10 or so evacuated ones, according to district officials. One local told Rudaw the PKK should leave the area.

"PKK better to go back to Turkey, and fight against the Turkish army inside Turkey, and leave Kurdistan region for peace," said Shlimon Aseel from the village of Duri, where 15 of the 40 homes have been evacuated.

The PKK is a Kurdish militant group that has fought the Turkish state for decades for greater autonomy for Turkey's Kurds. Ankara considers the PKK a terrorist group and regularly strikes apparent targets of the group in the Kurdistan Region. The PKK is based in the Qandil mountains along the Turkey-Iraq border.

PKK fighters are present in the areas around the city of Amedi where Kani Masi is. The area is in Duhok Province and close to the Turkish border. Most Christians there identify as ethnic Assyrians. Sarbast Sabri, the head of Kani Masi District, says the Turkish airstrikes hit the district on a daily basis, and negatively impact the lives of civilians.

"Civilians in the area are living in continuous panic, due to the Turkish bombardments and PKK movements in the areas of

Kani Masi," he told Rudaw. Civilians are frequently caught in the crossfire between Turkey and the PKK, and people empty the villages to escape the fighting.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has repeatedly asked PKK fighters to stay away from populated areas and villages. Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has also [voiced](#) concerns to Turkey

over civilian deaths resulting from Turkey's airstrikes.

Baghdad has likewise called on Turkey to end its attacks, while simultaneously demanding the PKK leave their territories.

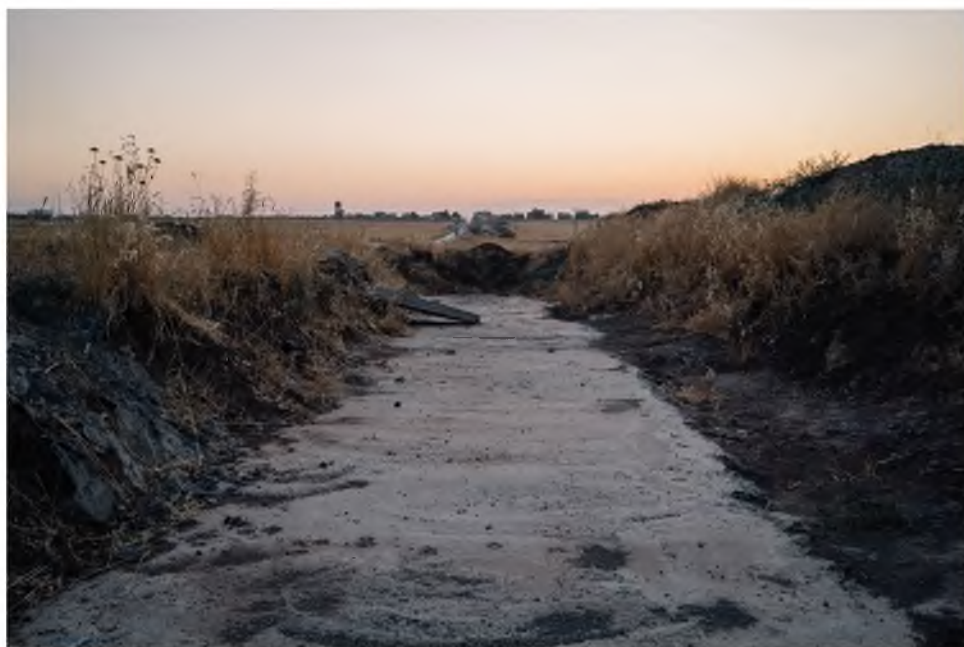
Turkey launched Operation Claw in late May to drive the PKK away from its border with the Kurdistan Region.

On June 27, Turkish airstrikes [resulted](#) in the

deaths of at least four Kurdish civilians near the village of Kurtak at the foot of the Qandil Mountains, where the PKK is headquartered. There was a short-lived peace process between Turkey and the PKK which ended in failure in July 2015. Since then, at least 4,397 people, including Turkish security forces, PKK fighters, and civilians have been [killed](#), according to the International Crisis Group (ICG).

The Washington Post 04/08/2019
By Karen DeYoung, Souad Mekhennet and Louisa Loveluck

U.S. launches last-ditch effort to stop Turkish invasion of northeast Syria



Syrian Kurdish officials say they have built concrete tunnels along the border, such as this one in the countryside of Hasakah, to prepare for a possible attack by the Turkish army. (Alice Martins for The Washington Post)

The Trump administration has launched a last-ditch effort to head off a Turkish invasion of northeast Syria that it expects will come within the next two weeks.

With tens of thousands of Turkish troops massed near the border, a high-level Defense Department delegation plans to present what U.S. officials describe as a final offer to address Turkey's concerns at a meeting Monday in Ankara.

The meeting marks the climax of a years-long dispute between the two NATO allies over U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish fighters who have led the ground war against the Islamic State, but whom Turkey considers a terrorist threat to its own security. Kurdish-led victories against the militant group have effectively left them in control of much of the border area.

Failure of the U.S. effort could throw the war-devastated region into even deeper turmoil, endangering efforts to rout [Islamic State remnants](#) and President Trump's goal of withdrawing [U.S. troops](#) from Syria.

The proposal includes a joint U.S.-Turkish military operation to secure a strip south of the Syria-Turkey border that would be about nine miles deep and 87 miles long and from which the Kurdish fighters would be withdrawn.

The U.S. and Turkish militaries would destroy Kurdish fortifications and then jointly patrol the area, located in the middle third of the northeastern border stretching between the Euphrates River and Iraq. The other two-thirds would be cleared later.

An underground medical facility set up by

the Kurdish Red Crescent in a town in Hasakah province, near the Turkish border. (Alice Martins for The Washington Post)

Turkey has already rejected those parameters, insisting on a "safe zone" at least 20 miles deep and expressing a preference to control it alone. The Turkish government is also looking to establish areas that would allow the safe return of some of the more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey.

It is not the first time Turkey has threatened an invasion. But this time, the threat is real and imminent, according to U.S., Turkish, Kurdish and European officials, some of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the volatile situation.

"Now we are going to enter [Syria] east of the Euphrates," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Sunday at a ceremony opening a highway and hospital in the city of Bursa. "We have shared this with Russia and the United States," he added. "We can only be patient for so long."

If Turkey refuses the U.S. entreaty, the administration has made clear that it cannot, under existing congressional authorities, intervene to protect the Kurdish fighters. The Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG in the Kurdish abbreviation, dominate the more than 60,000-strong army, called the Syrian Democratic Forces, that the United States equipped, trained and directed to defeat the Islamic State's self-declared caliphate.

Adding to the extreme tension over the issue, the administration is engaged in a separate conflict with Turkey over its purchase of a sophisticated [Russian missile defense system](#), which already has caused the United States to cancel Turkey's participation in [the manufacture and purchase of the F-35](#), the next-generation American stealth aircraft.

U.S. law also requires Trump to impose economic sanctions on Turkey over the Russian purchase. Trump, to the bipartisan ire of Congress, has so far avoided implementing the mandate, at least in part to keep from destroying any chance of a deal over the Kurds.

At the same time, the Kurds have warned that a fight with Turkey may leave them unable to guard makeshift prisons in eastern Syria holding Islamic State inmates. The militants — 8,000 Syrians and Iraqis and about 2,000 from other countries — were captured during operations that led to the dismantling of the caliphate earlier this year.

“Either we will fight” the Turks “or guard” the prisoners, said Aldar Xelil, a leading Kurdish politician in northeast Syria. “We cannot do both together.”

He said that Kurdish forces, who were recently visited by Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the head of the U.S. Central Command, had agreed with the United States to withdraw from a zone limited to three miles from the border.

“Honestly, we are not using ISIS prisoners as a card” to be played, said Xelil, who was interviewed in the Syrian border city of Qamishli. “But maybe we are going to lose control here.... These are not like formal prisons; some of them are just schools where we built a wall and converted it into a prison.”

“If the ISIS members see that there is fighting and that Turkey has attacked... they will break the walls and flee,” he said, using an acronym for the Islamic State.

In northeast Syria, the Kurdish administration is preparing for war with Turkey.

Roads in border towns and cities are scarred with freshly dug tunnels, and dozens of homes have been turned into shelters. Makeshift hospitals have been built underground.

The Kurds say they have no illusions about victory against the Turkish military. “If they enter, our territory will be destroyed,” Xelil said.

The bigger problem

The conflict over the Kurds is a story of U.S. efforts to delay dealing with one problem — Turkey — to address what was considered a far bigger one — the Islamic State.

It also reflects the different imperatives of the U.S. military, which has considered the Kurds by far the most effective fighting force available to it in Syria, and the American diplomats responsible for explaining U.S. policy decisions to Ankara.

The U.S.-YPG alliance was formed when the Kurdish forces, aided by U.S. airstrikes, re-

took the border city of Kobane and surrounding towns and villages from the Islamic State in 2015.

Turkey considers the YPG and its Syrian political affiliate to be subgroups of Turkey’s Kurdistan Workers’ Party. For decades, the PKK, as it is known, has fought the Turkish military, initially to achieve an independent Kurdish state and more recently to gain a level of Kurdish autonomy inside Turkey.

Both the United States and Turkey have designated the PKK a terrorist organization, and Turkish-PKK clashes markedly increased in recent months. Turkey also considers the YPG a terrorist group, but the United States does not.

U.S. officials initially told Turkey that their alliance with the YPG was temporary and that the weapons they supplied to the Kurdish fighters to take back Kobane would be reclaimed. But those promises were quickly overtaken by the need to field an effective ground force against the militants in eastern Syria.

American diplomats avoided publicizing their contacts with the Kurds, but the U.S. military was eager to praise their battlefield prowess. More and more weapons were supplied — although not the artillery and other heavy weaponry the Turks have claimed — and U.S. commanders proudly posed with the fighters for photographs published on YPG social media.

Each picture further infuriated the Turks, as did the 2016 U.S.-backed takeover from the Islamic State of the city of Manbij, near the border and about 25 miles west of the Euphrates. The river had long been an informal dividing line between the U.S. fight against the Islamic State and the rest of Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies were battling Syrian opposition forces.

Although a U.S.-Turkish deal to remove the YPG from Manbij was eventually struck, its implementation has been slow and spotty.

Beginning in 2016, Turkish forces moved into western parts of northern Syria, in large part to prevent the U.S.-backed Kurds from uniting with other Syrian Kurdish groups and forming a solid line along the entire border. As it cracked down on the PKK north of the border, Turkey charged that the Syrian Kurds were lobbing mortar shells and artillery into Turkish territory. The Syrian Kurds said it was the Turks who were attacking them across the border.

The phone call

When Trump announced in December — after a phone call with Erdogan — that he was ordering the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, the U.S. Syrian Kurdish allies said they feared Turkey would increase its attacks against them.

In January, amid a backlash, Trump tweeted that the United States would “de-estate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds.” But he added: “Likewise, do not want the Kurds to provoke Turkey.”

The withdrawal announcement was among the factors that led to the resignation of Trump’s defense secretary, retired general Jim Mattis, for whom a permanent replacement was not installed until Mark T. Esper’s confirmation last month.

For the military, the ground campaign against the Islamic State in Syria — supported by U.S. and coalition airstrikes — has been among the most successful and lowest-cost U.S. operations in decades, although human rights groups have said the U.S.-led air war resulted in thousands of civilian casualties.

With no more than about 2,500 deployed at their highest level, most U.S. troops were far from the front lines and took only a handful of casualties over the years. But their presence was seen as a largely symbolic but effective bulwark against Syrian government, Russian and Iranian incursions into eastern Syria.

If it accomplished nothing else, the shock of Trump’s announcement — which was eventually tempered with an agreement to slow-walk the U.S. withdrawal — has helped put the State and Defense departments in closer agreement on how to resolve the Turkey problem.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has pushed back against what largely had become a military-directed relationship, and the two bureaucracies have found common cause in dealing with the often-irascible Turks. Trump, with his eye on reelection, is seen internally as having no real objective except bringing home the troops but has also played a sometimes-useful role in placating Erdogan.

The U.S. military presence is now down to about 1,000 troops, a number of whom would be needed to conduct patrols with Turkish forces in the U.S.-proposed safe zone.

The Syrian Kurds are hedging their bets. They are in communication with the Assad regime — where there is little room for rapprochement — and the Russians.

Russia is “suggesting a deal where we push the Americans out, and then they will stop the Turks,” said Xelil, the Kurdish politician. “We told them: ‘How are we going to kick the Americans out? Did we bring the Americans here?’”

Mekhennet and Loveluck reported from Qamishli, Syria. Kareem Fahim in Istanbul contributed to this report.

Syrie, nouvelle trêve fragile dans la province d'Idlib

Le régime de Bachar Al Assad a proclamé, jeudi 1er août, une trêve dans le dernier bastion insurgé du nord-ouest syrien, meurtri depuis trois mois par les bombardements de Damas et de son allié russe. Mais la principale force djihadiste régionale a déjà refusé, samedi 3 août, de se retirer de la future « zone démilitarisée » qui conditionne ce cessez-le-feu.

Un nouveau sursis, éloignant le risque imminent d'un « bain de sang » tant redouté par la communauté internationale. Jeudi 1^{er} août, le régime de **Bachar Al Assad** a proclamé une trêve dans la province d'Idlib, le dernier bastion insurgé du nord-ouest syrien, pilonné sans répit, depuis la fin du mois d'avril, par les forces de Damas épaulées par leur parrain russe.

Au cours d'une session de négociations organisée début août à Nur-Sultan (le nouveau nom de la capitale kazakhe) et les autres signataires du processus d'Astana – Ankara, soutien des rebelles, et Moscou et Téhéran, alliés du régime –, la Syrie a en effet donné son accord pour un cessez-le-feu dans la région, « à condition que l'accord de désescalade [conclu en septembre 2018 avec la Russie et la Turquie] soit appliqué », a rapporté l'agence officielle Sanaa, citant une source militaire.

Trêve fragile

À la rentrée dernière, ce précédent pacte du triptyque d'Astana devait entériner la création d'une « zone démilitarisée » à l'ourlet de la province d'Idlib, censée séparer les zones gouvernementales des territoires rebelles. Ultime refuge de dizaines de milliers de déplacés originaires d'autres fiefs rebelles repris ces dernières années par Damas, la province est aujourd'hui retombée à 90 % aux mains du groupe Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTS), considéré comme l'ex-branché syrienne d'Al-Qaïda.

Dans la pratique, et même si les rebelles et djihadistes avaient à l'époque accepté de retirer des armes lourdes de cet espace tampon, l'accord de Sotchi n'a jamais vraiment été respecté, les terroristes ayant refusé d'en partir. Le dernier round des discussions kazakhes a-t-il des chances de déboucher sur un plus grand succès ? Le négociateur russe à Astana, Alexandre Lavrentiev, a de nouveau appelé, vendredi 2 août, les rebelles « modérés » à prendre leurs distances et à « n'avoir aucun contact » avec les groupes djihadistes, ajoutant s'attendre à ce que ces derniers « continuent les combats ».



Patience « limitée »

Une crainte qui s'est confirmée moins de 24 heures plus tard, alors que le leader d'HTS, Abou Mohamad al-Joulani, a réaffirmé, samedi 3 août, son refus d'obtempérer. « Ce que le régime n'a pas pris militairement et par la force, il ne l'obtiendra pas de manière pacifique par la négociation et la politique. Nous ne nous retirerons jamais de la zone », a-t-il martelé, « nous ne changerons pas de position, ni à la demande des amis ni à celle des ennemis ».

« L'accord de cessez-le-feu est conditionné au respect par la Turquie des accords d'Astana et de Sotchi sur le désarmement des terroristes », a de son côté souligné l'émissaire syrien aux négociations de paix d'Astana, Bachar Jaafari, accusant ceux-ci de bombarder les troupes syriennes « depuis des territoires que la Turquie contrôle. Même si nous sommes patients, notre patience est limitée: nous n'attendrons pas indéfiniment que la Turquie respecte ses engagements... ».

Une « ruse russe » ?

« Ankara tient particulièrement à Idlib parce qu'il veut éviter de voir affluer deux ou trois millions de réfugiés supplémentaires sur son terri-

toire, et aussi parce qu'il souhaite l'utiliser comme monnaie d'échange contre les territoires kurdes qu'il veut à terme éliminer », rappelait de son côté début août à *La Croix* le géographe Fabrice Balanche, spécialiste de la Syrie et maître de conférences à l'université Lyon II.

Pour l'analyste Samuel Ramani, Bachar Al Assad « ne tolérera pas qu'Idlib soit en dehors de sa sphère d'influence ». « Je ne vois pas le cessez-le-feu durer » longtemps, a affirmé à l'Agence France-Presse (AFP) ce spécialiste du conflit syrien, chercheur à l'université d'Oxford. « Il s'agit d'une ruse probablement à l'instigation de la Russie pour renforcer la crédibilité des pourparlers » au Kazakhstan, décryptait-il encore.

En trois mois, la recrudescence des bombardements menés par Damas et Moscou sur la région d'Idlib a coûté la vie à près de 790 civils, d'après le dernier décompte de l'Observatoire Syrien des Droits de l'Homme (OSDH), proche des rebelles. Les Nations unies ont, quant à elles, condamné avec virulence le déplacement de 400 000 personnes, principalement vers le nord de la province, épargné par les pilonnages.

LE FIGARO 04/08/2019

La Turquie va lancer une opération militaire dans le nord de la Syrie

La Turquie va lancer une opération militaire contre les forces kurdes dans le nord de la Syrie, à l'est de l'Euphrate, a annoncé dimanche le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Le chef de l'Etat turc, qui brandissait cette menace depuis des mois, a précisé qu'il avait averti la Russie, qui soutient le président syrien Bachar al Assad, et les Etats-Unis, qui se sont appuyés sur les

Kurdes pour combattre le groupe djihadiste Etat islamique (EI), de l'imminence de cette offensive.

Ankara considère les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), la milice kurde qui constitue le noyau des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), comme une extension du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui lutte pour l'autonomie des territoires

majoritairement kurdes de Turquie.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan réclame de longue date l'établissement dans le nord de la Syrie d'une «zone de sécurité» qui écarterait les combattants kurdes de la frontière turque, le principal point de crispation se situant à Manbij, ville située sur les rives de l'Euphrate que les FDS ont reprise à l'EI en 2016.

AMN 2019-08-05

Turkey informs US, Russia about upcoming military operation in eastern Euphrates region

BEIRUT, LEBANON (9:25 A.M.) – Turkey is planning to launch a large-scale military operation against the People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed on Sunday.

Erdogan stated that he has informed his Russian and U.S. counterparts about the military operation, which he said would specifically target areas controlled by the YPG and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

"We entered Afrin, Jarabulus, and Al-Bab [in northern Syria], and now we're going to enter east of the Euphrates," Recep Tayyip Erdogan told an inauguration ceremony in Bursa.

"We shared this [information] with the U.S. and Russia," he added.

Erdogan and his administration have often referenced the PKK in Syria, despite the fact that the organization controls no territory inside the country.

The PKK has been outlawed by Ankara for several years now, as the organization was involved in a long conflict with the Turkish Armed Forces in the latter part of the 20th Century.

During the PKK-Turkish Army conflict, Syria, under the leadership of President Hafez Al-Assad, provided military assistance to the Kurdish group, including a base to launch attacks on the border.



Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan addresses the 42nd Mukhtars Meeting at the Presidential Complex in Ankara on December 20, 2017. (Photo by AFP)

This military assistance caused friction between Damascus and Ankara for years, until they both reached an agreement at the city of Adana in the late 1990s.

NRT 2019-08-04

ELEVEN KURDS HANGED IN IRAN, INCLUDING TWO WOMEN

SULAIMANI – Eleven ethnic Kurds were executed in Iran during July, including two women.

"Ten out of the eleven executed people were residents of Urmia city [in West Azerbaijan province] and the other was from Luristan province," reported Hengaw Organization, which monitors human rights abuses in the Iranian Kurdistan.

The executed individuals were all convicted of deliberate murder, Hengaw added.

After China, Iran executed the largest number of people last year, according to human rights groups.



Syrie: Erdogan menace de lancer «très bientôt» une opération contre une milice kurde

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a affirmé ce mardi que les opérations lancées par Ankara contre la milice kurde syrienne YPG, soutenue par Washington, entreraient dans une «nouvelle phase très bientôt».

Rappelant que son pays avait déjà lancé deux offensives dans le nord de la Syrie depuis 2016, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a déclaré: «Si Dieu le veut, le processus que nous avons commencé [...] va entrer dans une nouvelle phase très bientôt». «Si nous ne faisons pas aujourd'hui ce qui est nécessaire, nous serons contraints de le faire demain en payant un plus lourd tribut», a-t-il ajouté lors d'une conférence retransmise à la télévision.

Ces déclarations interviennent alors que la Turquie menace depuis plusieurs jours de lan-

cer une nouvelle offensive contre la milice kurde des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), soutenue par les Etats-Unis contre les djihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI). «Assécher le marécage du terrorisme qui se trouve dans le nord de la Syrie est notre principale priorité», a insisté Recep Tayyip Erdogan. «Tant que les [zones contrôlées par les YPG] n'auront pas disparu, la Turquie ne se sentira pas en sécurité», a-t-il ajouté. Peu avant le discours du président turc, le chef du Pentagone Mark Esper avait prévenu qu'une offensive turque contre les combattants kurdes dans le nord de la Syrie serait «inacceptable».

Ankara considère les YPG comme la branche en Syrie du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), un groupe qui livre une sanglante guérilla sur le sol turc depuis 1984. La Turquie me-

nace depuis plusieurs mois de lancer une opération contre les positions des YPG à l'est de l'Euphrate.

En janvier, alors qu'une telle offensive paraissait imminente, Washington avait proposé à Ankara de créer une «zone de sécurité» séparant la frontière turque des positions des YPG en Syrie. Mais alors que les négociations achoppent sur des paramètres clés d'une telle zone, notamment sur sa largeur, Ankara multiplie les signes d'impatience. Des responsables américains et turcs négociaient mardi à ce sujet à Ankara, au lendemain de discussions qui, selon la presse turque, ont été infructueuses du point de vue turc. Mardi, le président turc a déclaré qu'il attendait des Etats-Unis des «mesures seyant à un vrai allié».

Syrie: Ankara menace d'une offensive contre les Kurdes, Washington gronde

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a menacé mardi de lancer "très bientôt" une nouvelle opération contre une milice kurde syrienne soutenue par les Etats-Unis, qui de leur côté ont prévenu qu'une telle initiative serait "inacceptable".

Rappelant qu'Ankara avait déjà lancé deux offensives depuis 2016 contre les positions des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), M. Erdogan a déclaré: "Si Dieu le veut, le processus que nous avons commencé (...) va entrer dans une nouvelle phase très bientôt".

Ces déclarations interviennent alors que des négociations entre Ankara et Washington en vue de créer une "zone de sécurité" séparant la frontière turque de certaines positions des YPG achoppent sur plusieurs points, notamment la profondeur de cette zone.

Des responsables militaires américains se trouvaient mardi à Ankara pour tenter d'arracher un accord, au lendemain de discussions infructueuses.

Ces derniers jours, la Turquie a plusieurs fois affirmé que si les propositions américaines n'étaient pas "satisfaisantes", elle lancerait une opération en Syrie pour mettre en place cette "zone de sécurité" de façon unilatérale.

Mais le nouveau chef du Pentagone, Mark Esper, a averti mardi que toute "incursion unilatérale" de la Turquie contre les combattants kurdes serait "inacceptable".

"Ce que nous allons faire, c'est empêcher des incursions unilatérales qui seraient contraires aux

intérêts que nous partageons", a ajouté M. Esper, qui s'exprimait peu avant le président turc.

Au sujet des négociations en cours sur la création d'une "zone de sécurité", M. Esper a indiqué que Washington tentait de "trouver (avec les Turcs) un arrangement qui réponde à leurs inquiétudes", évoquant des "progrès" sur "certains des points les plus importants".

Cependant, la presse turque a fait état mardi de divergences profondes sur deux points principaux: Ankara veut une bande de 30 km de profondeur, plus que la formule proposée par Washington, et réclame le contrôle total de cette zone.

Le président turc a déclaré qu'il attendait des Etats-Unis des "mesures seyant à un véritable allié".

"A la première occasion"

Les YPG sont l'épine dorsale des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une coalition kurdo-arabe que les Etats-Unis et d'autres pays occidentaux, comme la France, ont appuyé et armé contre les jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI).

Mais Ankara considère les YPG comme une "organisation terroriste" en raison de ses liens étroits avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), un groupe qui livre une sanglante guérilla sur le sol turc depuis 1984.

La Turquie redoute que l'implantation d'une zone autonome kurde à sa frontière ne galva-

nise les velléités séparatistes sur son sol.

"Assécher le marécage du terrorisme dans le nord de la Syrie est notre principale priorité", a insisté M. Erdogan mardi. "Si nous ne faisons pas aujourd'hui ce qui est nécessaire, nous serons contraints de le faire demain en payant un plus lourd tribut".

Le soutien de Washington aux combattants kurdes empoisonne depuis plus de trois ans les relations entre la Turquie et les Etats-Unis, alliés au sein de l'OTAN.

En 2016, l'armée turque a lancé une offensive terrestre dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie contre l'EI et les YPG. L'an dernier, elle a lancé une deuxième offensive contre les combattants kurdes, s'emparant de l'enclave d'Afrine. Cette fois, ce sont les territoires contrôlés par les YPG à l'est de l'Euphrate qui sont dans le collimateur d'Ankara.

Ces dernières semaines, les médias turcs ont fait état de l'envoi de véhicules militaires et d'unités de commandos vers des localités turques à proximité de la frontière syrienne. Un haut responsable kurde, Aldar Khalil, a estimé que la Turquie passerait à l'offensive dans le nord de la Syrie "à la première occasion". "Erdogan est sérieux", a-t-il dit dans un entretien à l'AFP lundi.

Selon lui, les groupes kurdes, qui refusent toute présence turque dans cette région, avaient accepté une zone tampon de 5 km de large mais Ankara a refusé cette proposition.

Djihadistes français en Syrie : le gouvernement reste dans l'embarras

La question des Français djihadistes retenus dans les camps et les prisons du nord de la Syrie, surveillés par les kurdes, demeure un épineux problème pour le gouvernement, qui tente de mettre en place une sorte de tribunal international.

Que faut-il faire des Français djihadistes retenus dans les camps et les prisons du nord de la Syrie sous la surveillance des forces kurdes? La question reste embarrassante pour le gouvernement français, défavorable au retour dans l'Hexagone de ces islamistes radicaux. Comme l'a confié le **ministre des Affaires étrangères, Jean-Yves Le Drian, au JDD**, des discussions sont en cours pour **la mise en œuvre d'une sorte de tribunal international**. "Il faut trouver la forme d'un dispositif de justice spécifique, a-t-il confié. Nous y travaillons en ce moment même avec plusieurs partenaires européens. Cela nous paraît être la seule option possible."

La question est d'autant plus délicate que cette région n'est pas sous l'autorité d'un Etat reconnu. L'Irak voisin dispose, lui, de tribunaux qui ont déjà condamné plusieurs Français, parfois à la peine de mort.

Environ 200 adultes détenus dans le nord de la Syrie

Selon plusieurs sources du renseignement, les adultes détenus dans le nord de la Syrie et identifiés comme membres de Daech seraient environ 200. Ce chiffre est stabilisé depuis plusieurs semaines. Mais la situation n'est pas la même selon qu'ils sont incarcérés dans une prison ou enfermés dans un camp. En dépit de tensions sporadiques, les établissements pénitentiaires conservent un bon niveau de sécurité, à la différence des camps. Ceux-ci souffrent d'une surpopulation explosive.

Ainsi à Al-Hol, à proximité de la frontière irakienne, quelque 70 000 hommes, femmes et enfants sont retenus pour 20 000 places disponibles. La surveillance y est aussi plus relâchée. Une femme est parvenue à s'enfuir au mois de juillet du camp de Roj, avant d'être reprise au bout de quelques heures. L'expert Jean-Charles Brisard, de retour de Syrie, évoque un chiffre noir des évasions facilitées par l'autorisation donnée aux femmes de quitter momentanément le camp : une source d'inquiétude à Paris, où l'on pointe l'extrême radicalité de certaines d'entre elles.

L'insécurité, toujours très élevée

Sur place, dans cette zone du nord-est de la Syrie, le calme est loin d'être revenu. En dépit de la défaite militaire de l'Etat islamique, concrétisée le 23 mars par la

chute de Baghouz, l'insécurité reste élevée. Les attaques se sont multipliées depuis le printemps, les opérations de démantèlement de cellules terroristes se poursuivent. Et les Kurdes, désormais favorables à l'instauration d'une Cour internationale sur le territoire syrien, comme les Français, ont la conviction que la situation actuelle ne peut être que transitoire.

Jean-Charles Brisard, président du Centre d'analyse du terrorisme « Il y a eu 400 attaques de Daech en quatre mois »

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR PASCAL CEAUX



Jean-Charles Brisard entouré par des membres des forces spéciales kurdes à l'entrée de Raqqa. DR

À l'occasion d'une conférence internationale organisée en juillet dans le nord-est de la Syrie sur le sort des djihadistes étrangers détenus par les forces kurdes, Jean-Charles Brisard a pu rencon-

trer des responsables locaux, des magistrats, des diplomates et des chefs militaires. Le président du Centre d'analyse du terrorisme a aussi pu se rendre à Raqqa, capitale reconquise de l'Etat islamique (EI) vaincu. Il alerte sur une situation qui reste tendue et préconise le retour en France, pour y être jugés, des Français soldats de l'EI actuellement détenus dans des camps dans le nord de la Syrie. S'il n'a pas pu accéder directement à eux, il a recueilli de précieux renseignements.

Vous revenez de Syrie, de la zone contrôlée par les forces kurdes. Quelle est la situation sur place, un peu plus de quatre mois après la chute de Baghouz, dernier bastion de l'Etat islamique ?

Le retour au calme est loin d'être acquis. Depuis la chute de Baghouz à la fin du mois de mars, environ 400 attaques terroristes ont été enregistrées dans le nord-est de la Syrie. À Raqqa [ancienne capitale de l'EI], j'ai encore entendu des enfants crier les slogans de Daech. Ce qui est frappant, c'est le contraste entre le Kurdistan irakien et le Kurdistan syrien. Nous sommes arrivés à Erbil, dans la région autonome des Kurdes

d'Irak, une zone prospère. Dès que l'on passe la frontière syrienne, les routes sont défoncées, les infrastructures très endommagées. En chemin, nous avons ainsi croisé une cinquantaine de puits



DOCUMENT: Dans les sous-sols du stade de la ville, des cellules désaffectées qu'utilisait l'état islamique.

de pétrole laissés à l'abandon.

« Le risque, c'est d'être incapables de savoir ce que les combattants français deviennent »

Vous avez pu vous rendre à Raqqa. À quoi ressemble la ville où résidaient les principaux responsables de l'EI, dont le calife Baghdadi ?

La ville a été détruite à 80 %. Et la reconstruction n'a pas véritablement commencé. On n'a fait revenir qu'environ 50 000 personnes, moins de 20 % de la population. Nous avons vu beaucoup d'immeubles à moitié détruits qui menacent de s'effondrer. Pourtant des gens y habitent dans des conditions précaires. Quelques commerces subsistent, mais les problèmes d'approvisionnement sont énormes. À ma connaissance, une seule ONG est présente à Raqqa. Et le climat sur place est très tendu. Les forces démocratiques syriennes [FDS], composées majoritairement de Kurdes, stationnent à l'extérieur de la ville pour ne pas provoquer la population arabe. Le risque de résurgence est loin d'être écarté et l'EI n'a pas disparu du Nord-Est syrien. Des opérations régulières de démantèlement de cellules dormantes de l'EI ont lieu. Une cinquantaine d'entre elles ont été détruites.

Reste-t-il des traces visibles du pouvoir islamiste ?

J'ai visité les sous-sols du stade de Raqqa, même s'il est interdit d'y pénétrer. Plusieurs dizaines de cellules désaffectées y témoignent encore du pouvoir qu'exerçait le califat autoproclamé. Dans l'une d'entre elles, j'ai même trouvé des explosifs. J'ai aussi vu le siège des opérations extérieures de l'EI. Dans ce bâtiment ont été conçus et préparés les attentats qui ont frappé Paris le 13 novembre 2015. Aujourd'hui, il a été transformé en tribunal militaire.

L'un des buts de votre voyage était d'examiner le sort des djihadistes français retenus dans des prisons. Avez-vous pu en rencontrer ?

Non. Les forces kurdes refusent qu'on puisse accéder à eux. Elles ne veulent même pas donner le chiffre exact des Français prisonniers. En outre, au moins 300 djihadistes ressortissants ou résidents français sont encore présents sur le sol syrien. Certains ont réussi à gagner l'Afghanistan ou la Libye. D'autres ont trouvé refuge dans la région d'Idlib, où sont rassemblés des opposants au régime de Bachar El-Assad, le président syrien, ou encore en Turquie.

Certaines figures du djihadisme français sont détenues dans le nord de la Syrie. Avez-vous obtenu des informations les concernant ?

Oui. J'ai recueilli des éléments sur Adrien Guihal, par exemple. Autrefois garagiste dans le Val-d'Oise, il était devenu l'un des plus éminents propagandistes de Daech en direction du territoire français. Pour la première fois, un lien a pu être établi entre cet homme et l'attentat de Nice du 14 juillet 2016, alors que rien ne semblait jusqu'alors permettre de rapprocher directement Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, l'auteur de cette tuerie qui a coûté la vie à 86 personnes, et l'EI. Il est détenu dans une prison au Kurdistan syrien. Les autorités kurdes m'ont assuré qu'il serait livré à la France si la justice française le réclamait, et qu'il pourrait être auditionné sur place si les magistrats le demandaient. Quelques orphelins, dont le sort est toujours en suspens, vont eux aussi être rapatriés.

La France semble réticente à juger elle-même ses ressortissants. Ne préfère-t-elle pas laisser ce soin aux tribunaux locaux ?

Nous avons pu nous entretenir avec les deux coprésidents de la cour antiterroriste. Ils ont jugé environ 7 000 djihadistes syriens au cours des derniers mois ; 6 000 autres sont encore en attente.

Le problème ? Ils disposent de très peu de preuves pour régler le cas des étrangers. Et manquent cruellement de moyens matériels et humains. Jusqu'à récemment, ils préconisaient de renvoyer les terroristes dans leur pays d'origine. Désormais, ils prônent la création d'un tribunal international dont le siège se tiendrait dans la Syrie kurde. Ils proposent aussi d'examiner chaque dossier avant d'y apporter une réponse. À mes yeux, il serait préférable que la France décide de rapatrier ses ressortissants pour les remettre à la justice française, même du point de vue de notre sécurité. Les magistrats kurdes ne prononcent pas de peine supérieure à vingt ans pour des faits qui, ici, seraient passibles de la réclusion criminelle à perpétuité. Il serait en outre inconcevable pour les victimes que des individus potentiellement impliqués dans des attentats en France, échappent aux autorités françaises et ne répondent pas de leurs actes devant un tribunal français.

En attendant une éventuelle décision, les détenus étrangers sont sous surveillance dans des camps. N'y a-t-il pas des risques ? Saturation ?

Évasions ?

Ces camps sont des bombes à retardement. Aujourd'hui, il y a autant de djihadistes français qui sont retenus par les Kurdes de Syrie que de revenants sur le sol national, soit environ 400. Il faut s'emparer du problème et désengorger d'urgence les camps où les étrangers se montrent très virulents. Les Kurdes m'ont indiqué qu'en raison des multiples incidents impliquant des femmes étrangères, ils envisageaient de créer des prisons pour femmes, mais ils n'en ont pas les moyens. Al-Hol, par exemple, a une capacité d'accueil de 20 000 places. On y compte plus de 70 000 détenus. Des tentatives de mutinerie ont été entreprises en avril dernier. Il y a quelques semaines, une Française est parvenue à s'évader. Elle a vite été interceptée, mais le règlement permet aux femmes de sortir du camp à condition d'être accompagnées. Je suis certain qu'il existe un chiffre noir des évasions de femmes. Cette situation intenable porte en germe une catastrophe humanitaire et à terme, sécuritaire. Ces camps deviennent des zones d'attente pour des djihadistes qui n'ont en rien renoncé à leur idéologie et qui entendent perpétuer le projet de l'EI.

Pourquoi êtes-vous plutôt favorable à des procès en France ?

Un risque pèse sur nous, celui de la fragmentation de la menace. Si nous abandonnons les djihadistes français à leur sort en Syrie, nous serons très vite incapables de savoir ce qu'ils deviennent. Ne pourraient-ils pas se disperser et créer ainsi les fondements d'un nouveau danger visant la France ? Je rappelle que dans cette zone, l'administration reste embryonnaire. Le manque de moyens est criant. En France, il serait beaucoup plus facile de les suivre et de mieux garantir notre sécurité. Les Kurdes de Syrie nous ont apporté une aide capitale dans la lutte contre l'EI, et hélas nous ne faisons rien pour les aider à neutraliser les vecteurs de cette menace.

QUI EST ADRIEN GUIHAL ?

IL EST CELUI QUI PERMET de matérialiser pour la première fois un lien entre l'État islamique (EI) et l'auteur de l'attentat de Nice, le 14 juillet 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel. Né en 1985 à Paris, Adrien Guihal a été arrêté à Raqqa, le 19 mai 2018, avec sa femme et leurs six enfants. Il est aujourd'hui détenu par les forces kurdes, qui n'ont pas permis à ce jour aux Français de l'entendre. Proche des frères Clain, il est aussi soupçonné d'avoir été la voix française de l'EI lors de deux autres attentats commis sur le territoire national en 2016, l'assassinat d'un couple de policiers le 13 juin à Magnanville (Yvelines) et l'assassinat d'un prêtre le 26 juillet à Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray (Seine-Maritime). Il a déjà été condamné en France en janvier 2012 à quatre ans d'emprisonnement dont un avec sursis pour un projet d'attentat visant un service de renseignement.



By Suleiman Al-Khalidi
August 5, 2019

Syrian rebels say ready to back Turkish-led operation in northeast

AMMAN (Reuters) - Syrian rebel commanders said on Monday they are ready to join Turkish troops in an offensive to seize back largely Arab-populated towns and villages in northeast Syria held by Kurdish-led-forces.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday his country, which already has a foothold in northwest Syria, will carry out a military operation in a Kurdish-controlled area east of the Euphrates in northern Syria.

Turkey had in the past warned of carrying out military operations east of the river but put them on hold after agreeing with the United States to create a safe zone inside Syria's northeastern border with Turkey that would be cleared of the Kurdish YPG militia.

The spokesman for the National Army, a Turkey-backed rebel grouping, said a 14,000 strong force was ready to start a campaign against the YPG militia that rules vast swathes of northeast Syria.

"There are over 14,000 fighters who are ready to engage in combat operations east of the Euphrates alongside Turkish forces," Major Youssef Hamoud told Reuters.

The rebel official did not set a date for the operation, while another opposition source said preparations were already underway as Turk-

ish army deployment gathered pace along the border in an operation expected to start from both Syrian and Turkish territory.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) affiliated with the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria condemned Turkey's "growing threats", and it urged Western powers to act.

"We stand as one front with all our ethnic and religious components and will resist with all possible means in defense of security and stability," Abed Hamed al-Mihbash, the head of the council said in a statement.

"Turkey wants to destabilize the co-existence between the various groups of the Syrian people," he added.

The Turkish-led campaign, which has for months been delayed due to resistance from Washington, is aimed at evicting YPG forces from a string of border towns in Raqqa and Hasaka provinces.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled during the conflict from these areas are now in Turkey and in the opposition-held northwest.

Tribal leaders and rights groups accuse the ruling Kurdish militia of preventing many

Arabs from returning to their former homes which they say have been confiscated and demolished, a charge the SDF denies.

"The goal is to end the presence of the separatist terrorist group (YPG) and wreck their plan to change the demographic composition of the area and allow those displaced from all sects to go back to their home towns and villages," the rebel official Hamoud said.

With U.S. backing, the SDF have taken control over the last four years of much of northeastern Syria from Islamic State militants.

But resentment against SDF rule in eastern Syria has grown among the predominately Arab population, residents and tribal elders say, with many objecting to compulsory conscription of young men and discrimination at the leadership level.

Kurdish YPG leaders deny any discrimination and say they are seeking to redress decades of repression against their national rights by Syria's Arab Ba'ath party.

Reporting by Suleiman Al-Khalidi; Additional reporting by Rodi Said in Qamishli, Syria; Editing by Hugh Lawson



25/08/2019

Airstrike kills six ISIS militants in Makhmour, south Erbil

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) - Iraqi operations command in coordination with US-led coalition warplanes killed six remnants of the Islamic State in the disputed town of Makhmour, the military said on Sunday.

The airstrike targeted militants near Qerechukh Mountain and the village of al-Samr, Iraqi security forces said in a statement, some 60 kilometers south of Erbil.

"The force carrying out the duty also found the bodies of the dead terrorists as well as four rifles," the statement added.

Makhmour is one of the disputed territories between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government of

Iraq. It is currently under the control of the Iraqi forces.

Islamic State sleeper cells in the area, however, have remained active over the past few years. Iraqi forces and Kurdish Peshmerga forces occasionally launch military operations in attempts to eliminate the threat the jihadist group poses, but this has been limited to the outskirts of the town.

Iraq's military also announced on Sunday afternoon that counter-terrorism forces, with the support of Iraqi and US-led coalition aircrafts, carried out the "New Dawn" operation against the Islamic State in the Hawija, Rashad, and Abasi areas, located southwest of Kirkuk Province.

The attack reportedly killed a number of terrorists and led to the seizure of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and destruction of underground tunnels, according to the statement.

"It comes as part of preemptive operations to track the remnants of terrorist gangs in these areas," the military statement explained.

Iraq declared military victory over the Islamic State in late 2017, but the group continues to launch insurgency attacks, ambushes, and kidnappings in the country.

En Syrie, une trêve s'effondre et de nouvelles menaces surgissent

Analyse

Après quatre jours de cessez-le-feu, Damas et son allié Moscou ont repris, lundi 5 août, leurs frappes contre la région d'Idlib, dernier bastion insurgé dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie.

Faisant fi de la colère de Washington, Ankara brandit de son côté la menace d'une opération militaire contre les milices kurdes « à l'est de l'Euphrate ».

Malo Tresca

La trêve n'aura pas fait long feu. Quatre jours après avoir annoncé une fragile accalmie dans son offensive sur le nord-ouest de la Syrie, le régime de Damas, épaulé par son grand allié russe, a relancé, lundi 5 août, ses raids aériens sur la province d'Idlib, dernier grand bastion insurgé du pays, retombé ces derniers mois à 90 % aux mains des djihadistes d'Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTS), l'ex-branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda.

Entériné début août au Kazakhstan lors d'un nouveau round de discussions entre les trois signataires du « processus d'Astana » – Ankara, parrain des rebelles, Moscou et Téhéran, soutiens de Damas –, « ce cessez-le-feu de quelques jours était tactique. Il a notamment permis au régime de renforcer sa ligne de défense pour protéger ses gains territoriaux récemment repris aux rebelles », décrypte le spécialiste Fabrice Balanche, maître de conférences à l'université Lyon 2.

Depuis fin avril, plus de 790 civils ont été tués

Coïncée entre les djihadistes et les troupes loyalistes, la population civile, qui compte des milliers de déplacés d'anciens fiefs rebelles reconquis, continue de payer le prix fort. Premières victimes de la reprise des pilonnages, quatre Syriens ont été tués lundi 5 août par des barils d'explosifs lâchés sur des immeubles de la ville de Morek, dans le nord de Hama. Depuis fin avril, plus de 790 d'entre eux seraient morts, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Et 400 000 autres auraient fui les violences, d'après l'ONU.

« La fin de la trêve a été particulièrement choquante pour les civils de la province qui commençaient tout juste, après s'être réfugiés plus au nord, à regagner leurs maisons et leurs fermes dans le Sud », déplore le docteur Mazen Kewara, directeur de l'antenne turque de la Société médicale syro-américaine (SAMS), qui prodigue des soins dans la région. « Nous avons malheureusement recommencé à recevoir, dans nos hôpitaux, des victimes d'attaques. »

Des frappes en lien avec les négociations en cours

Le glas du cessez-le-feu, initialement conditionné par Damas à la création d'une « zone démilitarisée » – censée séparer les zones gouvernementales des territoires rebelles dans la province insurgée –, intervient peu après l'annonce, par les médias syriens, d'une « chute d'obus » aux abords d'une base russe de la province limitrophe de Lattaquié. Selon certains experts, cette dernière attaque, aux circonstances toujours opaques, pourrait avoir servi de « prétexte » à la reprise des bombardements.



« Ces nouvelles frappes pourraient ainsi s'inscrire dans les négociations en cours, si les Russes cherchent à faire pression pour en obtenir davantage des Turcs et des rebelles, analyse Thomas Pierret, chargé de recherche au CNRS et à l'Iremam. La deuxième hypothèse, plus machiavélique, serait d'imaginer qu'elles aient un lien avec le projet d'offensive turque à l'est de l'Euphrate : Ankara aurait pu demander à Moscou de lui laisser les mains libres sur les Kurdes, en échange de certaines concessions à Idlib. »

« Colère » d'Ankara

Brûlant d'en découdre avec les miliciens des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG) épaulés par Washington, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a en effet brandi, dimanche

4 et mardi 6 août, la menace belliqueuse – récurrente, mais non mise à exécution ces derniers mois – d'une opération militaire dans la région, qui reste aussi sous contrôle américain. « Nous ne pouvons plus rester silencieux, notre patience est à bout. (...) Nous allons aller à l'est de l'Euphrate », a martelé le raïs, redoutant les velléités indépendantistes de ce qu'il considère comme un « groupe terroriste ».

Mardi, des responsables turcs et américains se sont entretenus à Ankara sur la création d'une « zone de sécurité », visant à séparer la frontière turque des positions des YPG dans le nord de la Syrie. Mais les discussions achoppent toujours sur les modalités de cet espace tampon. « Washington est actuellement en proie à un dilemme : sanctionner Ankara pourrait faire peur à Erdogan, comme au contraire provoquer sa colère, conclut Fabrice Balanche. Dans le contexte aussi de l'achat par Ankara de S-400 russes au détriment de systèmes de défense américains, la Turquie a plus de chances d'attaquer aujourd'hui. »

=> Idlib, coutumière de trêves fragiles

Septembre 2018. La mise en place d'une « zone démilitarisée » à Idlib fait l'objet d'un accord – dit de « Sotchi » – entre Moscou (Russie) et Ankara (Turquie), pour éviter une offensive d'ampleur de Damas dans la région. Mais celui-ci n'est jamais vraiment appliqué.

Fin avril 2019. Le régime, épaulé par Moscou, relance des raids presque quotidiens sur Idlib.

Jeudi 1er août. Lors d'une réunion au Kazakhstan des signataires du processus d'Astana, Damas accepte un cessez-le-feu, à la condition d'une entrée en vigueur effective de l'accord de Sotchi. Les djihadistes, qui contrôlent Idlib, s'y opposent.

Lundi 5 août. Damas annonce la reprise de son offensive sur la région.



August 06-2019

SDF issues new military order to prevent child recruitment

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) issued a military order over the weekend to all commanders in Syria's northeast to end the recruitment of males and females under 18.

The SDF and the Self Administration of North East Syria (SANES) signed a Joint Action Plan with the United Nations on June 29 in Geneva, at Palais des Nations to prevent child recruitment.

The new military order is based on an [older military order](#) from September 2018 and is part of the latest SDF-UN action plan.

As a result, the YPJ (Women's Protection Units) and YPG (People's Protection Units) have been moved from the UN's List A (actor not taking action in the reporting period) to List B (actor taking some action, including engaging with the UN on child protection).

UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the SDF action plan last week during his presentation, in which he announced the new annual UN report on children and armed conflict.

"I urge SDF to expedite its implementation, notably the screening of all children within their ranks, including their swift handover to civilian authorities," Guterres said.

He also emphasized the need to implement "awareness-raising activities" and establish "a public com-

plaint procedure to report the recruitment and use of children."

According to the new order, the UN action plan's decisions are released to all military offices and academies.

Moreover, offices were activated where families whose children the SDF had recruited can make complaints.

The UN report notes that the YPG/YPJ recruited 313 children.

However, other Syrian opposition factions recruited 424 underage fighters combined; this included the HTS (187), FSA (170), Ahrar al-Sham (34), Army of Islam (17), and Nur al-Din al-Zanki (16). The so-called Islamic State recruited 30 underage fighters, and the Syrian government forces recruited 10. Unidentified armed elements recruited 29.

SDF spokesperson Kino Gabriel told Kurdistan 24 that they had been working to resolve the problem for a while. "We acknowledge such cases, that's why we [introduced the] order of the General Command of the SDF."

The SDF has significantly grown since it was established in October 2015, becoming the second-largest armed forces after the Syrian army, with an estimated 80,000 troops.



Virginia Gamba, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and SDF Commander-in-Chief Mazlum Kobane (left) sign a Plan of Action to stop the recruitment of child soldiers, June 29, 2019. (Photo: UN/Jean Marc Ferre)

Kino underlined that in the past, there was not "enough discipline within the military forces due to ongoing military operations against ISIS." He added that some commanders recruited children "without our knowledge."

However, the SDF is now taking active steps to end this problem and is committed to the Geneva conventions and international law now that the Islamic State has been territorially defeated.

The SDF official said children under 18 were often trained in military academies, but not used for combat.

Editing by Karzan Sulaivany

Ahval 06/08/2019

Social media campaign for Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş

A group calling themselves the "Free Demirtaş Initiative" launched a social media campaign demanding freedom for imprisoned former Co-chair for Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Selahattin Demirtaş, [reported left-leaning news site Duvar on Tuesday](#).

The campaign was launched with a photograph of Sadiye Demirtaş, the popular Kurdish politician's mother, holding a sign that read "#freeDemirtaş". Another hashtag used by participants is #FreeTheMAll, referring to Demirtaş's co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ and the thousands of HDP members awaiting trial in prisons.

Among participants of the social media campaign are journalist Can Dündar, human rights campaigner and lawyer Eren Keskin, member of the



German parliament Cem Özdemir, German Die Linke's Co-chair Katja Kipping and Dutch MEP Kati Piri.

Accused of spreading propaganda for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), among other terrorism-related charges, [Selahattin Demirtaş faces up](#)

[to 142 years in prison](#), and has already served three years since 2016.

Demirtaş was convicted in one of the charges against him for a speech he gave in 2005. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) [ruled in July 2019](#) that the conviction was a violation of the politician's right to free speech. The ruling came after another decree by the court in November 2018 that Demirtaş's detention throughout two crucial elections had stifled pluralism and limited political debate.

Days after the ECHR ruling in July, a Turkish court ruled for the [continuation of Demirtaş's arrest](#).

The next hearing for Demirtaş's case at the ECHR will be held on September 18.



05/08/2019

Peshmerga, Iraqi army launch anti-ISIS op in Diyala

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi armed forces launched simultaneous operations against Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Kolajo, Diyala province on Monday morning, just days after militants killed four Kurdish security personnel in the disputed area.

“The objective behind this operation is to pursue ISIS militants and troublemakers in this region,” Brig. Gen. Kamal Mahmood, commander of the Peshmerga Infantry Force Brigade 5, told Rudaw on Monday.

Mahmood’s forces have been deployed by the Ministry of Peshmerga to reinforce troops already stationed on the Kifri front.



Heavily armed Peshmerga units assemble in Kolajo early on August 5, 2019 for an operation with Iraqi forces against Islamic State (ISIS) remnants in the disputed area. Photo: Rudaw

They are joined by Brigade 131 of the Peshmerga 70 Unit, a force affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

“We will increase watch posts in Kolajo and we have brought in more reinforcements and will station them in newly established frontlines,” Mahmood said.

Kolajo, a district of Kifri in Diyala province, is 188 kilometers southeast of Erbil between Kalar and Tuz Khurmatu. Sections of Diyala are disputed between both the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi federal government.

Monday’s operation comes just four days after ISIS militants killed four members of the Kurdish security forces and wounded eight others in a late-night assault on a checkpoint in Kolajo.

The extremist group claimed responsibility on Sunday.

Although the two forces worked together in the battle to retake Mosul from ISIS in 2016-17, joint Peshmerga-Iraqi armed forces operations have since become extremely rare, owing in part to the collapse of Erbil-Baghdad relations in October 2017.



Photo: Rudaw

Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, as Iraq’s commander-in-chief, is coordinated the Iraqi side of the operation.

Abdul-Mahdi arrived in Diyala early on Monday to supervise the third phase of “Will of Victory” – a military campaign launched in July targeting ISIS sleeper cells, hideouts, and weapons caches across the country’s northwestern provinces and disputed territories.

“Day after day, activities by Daesh militants are increasing and this is because of the massive void left between Peshmerga and the Iraqi forces,” Jamal Iminiki, Peshmerga chief-of-staff, told Rudaw, using an Arabic acronym for ISIS.

ISIS militants who retreated from Syria have reestablished their foothold in the disputed areas, he warned.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, spokesperson for the Iraqi Joint Operations Command, acknowledged ISIS has increased its activities in the disputed areas, but insisted the threat will be removed through coordination with the Peshmerga.

“We have controlled a 605 kilometer long border with Syria,” he told Rudaw. “We carry out special operations into areas where ISIS militants are hiding.”

In a report published in late July, UN Security Council monitors said although ISIS has been militarily defeated, the terrorist group “has large numbers of fighters and other supporters in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and is able to operate freely in many locations and mount regular attacks to show its potency and undermine public confidence in the local authorities”.

ISIS is consolidating and creating conditions for an eventual resurgence in its Iraqi and Syrian heartlands, the report warned.

“This process is more advanced in Iraq, where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and most of the ISIL (ISIS) leadership are now based. Others are elsewhere in the former ‘caliphate’ area and parts of the immediate neighborhood,” the report added.

ISIS was declared territorially defeated in Iraq in December 2017, but its remnants and sleeper cells remain active, returning to their earlier insurgency tactics.

The group sized vast areas of northern Iraq in the summer of 2014. At the height of its power between 2014 and 2016, ISIS controlled an area roughly the size of Great Britain, spread across both Iraq and Syria.

Iraq’s defense ministry announced on Sunday that US-led coalition warplanes killed six ISIS militants in an airstrike in Makhmour, 60 kilometers southwest of Erbil.



Photo: Rudaw

Rapprochement entre la Turquie et la Russie : vers une sortie de la Turquie de l'Otan ?

La Turquie, longtemps opposée à la Russie sur le sort du régime de Bachar Al-Assad en Syrie, s'est rapprochée ces dernières années du Kremlin après avoir été abandonnée par ses alliés occidentaux dans la guerre civile syrienne.

La montée de l'organisation État islamique (EI) dans la zone irako-syrienne avec la proclamation d'un « califat islamique » en juin 2014, où les villes de Raqqa et Mossoul sont devenues les deux capitales de l'EI avait inquiété les puissances occidentales quant à l'avenir sécuritaire du Moyen-Orient et de l'Occident. Contre la volonté du président Erdogan, les puissances occidentales avaient décidé de soutenir les milices kurdes dans la lutte contre l'EI en Irak et en Syrie, y compris les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), dans lesquelles la Turquie est hostile en raison de leurs liens avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) (Balci 2019 ; Brosseau 2018).

Cette décision a contribué à faire basculer le président Erdogan vers Moscou, mécontent que les puissances occidentales aient voulu mettre en péril la sécurité turque (Ankara redoute de voir s'instaurer un État kurde dans le nord de l'Irak et la Syrie qui pourrait renforcer les velléités séparatistes de la minorité kurde sur son propre territoire) (Balci 2019). Constatant que plus personne à part lui ne voulait vraiment le départ d'Assad, le président Erdogan s'est résigné à pactiser avec la Russie (Balci 2017). Le président Erdogan a promis de ne plus réclamer le départ d'Assad alors que le président Poutine a promis de réduire le soutien du Kremlin aux Kurdes en Syrie (Balci 2017).

Livraison du système antimissile russe S-400. L'achat du système antimissile russe S-400 est révélateur de la volonté du président Erdogan de mettre en péril la sécurité de ses alliés de l'Otan et de se rapprocher avec l'ennemi juré de l'Alliance. Le système S-400 contient quatre divisions de batteries antimissiles, capable d'abattre des avions dans un rayon de 400 kilomètres, à une vitesse de 17.000km/h (Avril 2019). Une mise en exploitation de ce système peut permettre à Moscou d'avoir la main sur des données stratégiques relatives aux F-35, qui équipent par ailleurs six armées de l'Otan (Avril 2019).

En conséquence, Washington a pris la décision d'exclure la participation de la Turquie du programme d'avions de chasse F-35. Les entreprises turques devront faire face à une perte de 9 milliards de dollars (Jégo 2019). De plus, plusieurs membres du Congrès américain, républicains et démocrates, menacent d'imposer des sanctions contre la Turquie prévues par la



loi américaine dite Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

L'achat du système S-400 est révélateur de l'évolution autoritaire et provocatrice du président Erdogan. La victoire d'Erdogan au référendum constitutionnel (2017) sur l'extension de ses pouvoirs a entraîné un renforcement des mesures liberticides dans l'espace public turc. Les manifestants sont souvent arrêtés lorsque leurs revendications vont à l'encontre du régime (Mediapart 2018).

Le président Erdogan s'est également montré hostile à ses alliés de l'Otan. Le président Erdogan avait accusé la Haye d'être responsable du massacre de Srebrenica, la pire tuerie commise en Europe depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Douïeb 2017). Des propos infondés étant que pour mémoire des unités de l'armée de la République serbe de Bosnie avaient tué 8100 hommes et garçons musulmans à Srebrenica. En mars 2017, le président Erdogan avait aussi accusé la chancelière allemande de « nazie » suite à la décision du gouvernement allemand de suspendre l'annulation de meetings dans les villes allemandes où des ministres turcs étaient censés participer à la défense du « oui » au référendum constitutionnel (Wieder 2017).

Les valeurs défendues par les puissances occidentales de l'Otan, telles que le pluralisme et le devoir de chaque membre de l'alliance de préserver la sécurité de chacun, suggèrent que depuis le renforcement des pouvoirs du président Erdogan et son rapprochement avec le président Poutine que la Turquie s'est éloignée de ces principes.

Perspective

La Maison-Blanche ne devrait pas se précipiter vers des sanctions contre Ankara pour l'instant. À l'heure actuelle, les enjeux sont trop élevés pour que le président Trump mène une telle position. La Turquie est la deuxième armée la plus puissante de l'Otan, de sorte que toute nouvelle sanction à son encontre les poussera à vouloir quitter l'Otan, affaiblissant l'organisation de défense. La Turquie aux confins de l'Europe, du Caucase et du Moyen-Orient, Washington perdrait un allié stratégique.

Les États-Unis ont des intérêts stratégiques en Turquie notamment la base militaire d'Incirlik, une base importante pour les forces américaines pour lutter contre le terrorisme au Moyen-Orient. L'armée américaine avait utilisé cette base pour mener des frappes contre l'EI en Irak et en Syrie (Maligorne 2015).

Pour Ankara, une sortie de l'Otan et un rapprochement de défense plus affirmé avec la Russie ne feraient que priver la Turquie d'importants équipements militaires américains. L'exclusion de la Turquie du programme d'avions de chasse F-35 met en évidence les pertes de défense qu'un allié de l'Otan encourt quand des contrats de défense sont conclus avec la Russie.

Il est donc temps de négocier avec Ankara sur la non-mise en service du système S-400. Le fonctionnement de ce système ne ferait qu'affaiblir les relations entre les deux pays au profit du Kremlin.

Syrie : Ankara menace d'une offensive contre les Kurdes

Erdogan cherche à mettre la pression dans ses négociations avec Washington sur la « zone de sécurité » à la frontière.

PROCHE-ORIENT La menace d'une intervention militaire turque dans le Nord syrien est de nouveau à l'ordre du jour. Mardi, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a évoqué la possibilité de lancer « très bientôt » une opération contre les forces YPG, une milice kurde soutenue par les États-Unis et que la Turquie considère comme « organisation terroriste ». Le président turc, qui s'exprimait à l'occasion de la visite de responsables militaires à Ankara, et au lendemain de discussions infructueuses, a précisé : « Si Dieu le veut, le processus que nous avons commencé (...) va entrer dans une nouvelle phase très bientôt. »

Au cœur de la discorde entre les deux pays alliés de l'Otan : la fameuse « zone de sécurité » qu'Erdogan ne cesse d'appeler de ses vœux depuis le début de la guerre syrienne pour faire barrage aux velléités indépendantistes des Kurdes de Syrie - et empêcher leur effet domino sur les Kurdes de Turquie. Pour ce faire, Ankara cherche à imposer deux conditions : sur la profondeur de la bande, qu'elle souhaite être de 30 kilomètres ; et sur le contrôle de cette zone, qu'elle revendique dans son intégralité.

Déterminé, le président turc a déclaré qu'il attendait des États-Unis des « mesures seyantes à un véritable allié ». Mais Washington ne partage pas la même vision. Si les Américains ont fait le choix de se désengager de Syrie, ils n'ont pas pour autant l'intention d'abandonner les milices kurdes, qu'ils considèrent parmi leurs principaux alliés dans la région. Les YPG sont en effet l'épine dorsale des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une coalition kurdo-arabe que les États-Unis et d'autres pays occidentaux, comme la France, ont appuyée et armée contre les djihadistes de l'État islamique (EI).



Recep Tayyip Erdogan (ici le 15 juillet, à Istanbul) a évoqué la possibilité de lancer «très bientôt» une opération contre les forces YPG, une milice kurde soutenue par les États-Unis. Murad Sezer/REUTERS

Deux opérations en trois ans

Cherchant visiblement à mettre la pression dans les négociations turco-américaines, Ankara aurait d'ores et déjà déployé des véhicules militaires et des unités de commandos vers des localités turques mitoyennes de la Syrie, selon des médias turcs. De quoi rappeler certains précédents. En trois ans, la Turquie a déjà lancé deux offensives terrestres remarquées dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie contre les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG). La première, en 2016, s'était concentrée sur la zone de Djarabulus, où l'armée turque avait d'abord délogé les djihadistes de l'EI avant de s'en prendre aux forces kurdes. La seconde, en 2018, avait directement visé les combattants kurdes dans l'enclave d'Afrine. Cette fois, ce sont les territoires

contrôlés par les YPG à l'est de l'Euphrate qui sont dans le collimateur d'Ankara.

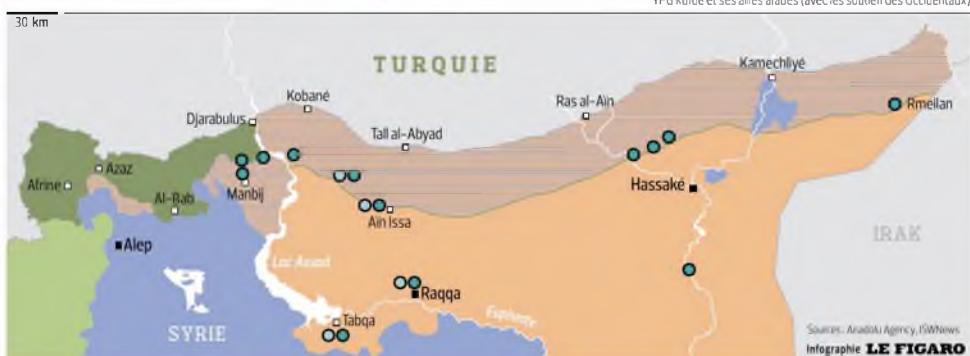
Ces derniers jours, la Turquie n'a cessé de le répéter : si les propositions américaines ne sont pas « satisfaisantes », elle lancera une opération en Syrie pour imposer cette « safe zone » de façon unilatérale. De quoi provoquer l'ire du nouveau chef du Pentagone. Mark Esper, qui s'exprimait mardi devant la presse, a jugé « inacceptable » toute « incursion unilatérale » d'Ankara contre les combattants kurdes. « Ce que nous allons faire, c'est empêcher des incursions unilatérales qui seraient contraires aux intérêts que nous partageons », a-t-il ajouté dans son allocution qui précédait celle du président turc, tout en maintenant ouverte la porte des négociations. Washington, a-t-il précisé, tente de « trouver (avec les Turcs) un arrangement qui réponde à leurs inquiétudes ». Il a même évoqué des « progrès » sur « certains des points les plus importants ».

Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est montré plus ferme. « Assécher le marécage du terrorisme dans le nord de la Syrie est notre principale priorité », a-t-il insisté. Au-delà de la question kurde, la fameuse zone tampon recèle un intérêt particulier pour Ankara : c'est dans cette bande de territoire syrienne accolée à la Turquie que les autorités turques aimeraient, à terme, relocaliser les réfugiés syriens.

Situation militaire tendue à la frontière turco-syrienne

CONTRÔLE (OU PRÉSENCE) LE 6 AOÛT 2019

LES OCCIDENTAUX EN SYRIE LES EXIGENCES TURQUES
 Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS)* Régime syrien Présence américaine
 Rebelle syriens... avec le soutien de l'armée turque Présence française
 *YPG kurde et ses alliés arabes (avec le soutien des Occidentaux)



D. M. (À ISTANBUL)

Une offensive turque contre les Kurdes syriens serait «inacceptable»

Le nouveau chef du Pentagone, Mark Esper, a estimé mardi qu'une offensive de la Turquie dans le nord-est syrien contre les combattants kurdes serait «inacceptable» et prévenu que Washington empêcherait toute «incursion unilatérale».

La Turquie négocie avec les Etats-Unis de l'éventuelle création d'une «zone de sécurité» dans les zones contrôlées par les Américains dans le nord de la Syrie, afin de séparer la frontière turque de certaines positions kurdes. Ces derniers jours, la Turquie a plusieurs fois affirmé que si les propositions américaines n'étaient pas «satisfaisantes», elle lancerait une opération en Syrie pour mettre en place cette «zone de sécurité» de façon unilatérale.

«Nous considérons que toute action unilatérale de leur part serait inacceptable», a prévenu Mark Esper dans l'avion qui l'acheminait à Tokyo, troisième étape de sa première tournée internationale qui l'a déjà mené en Australie et Nouvelle-Zélande. «Ce que nous tentons de faire, c'est de trouver avec eux un arrangement qui réponde à leurs inquiétudes», a ajouté le chef du Pentagone.

La Turquie a renouvelé lundi son appel aux Etats-Unis pour qu'ils cessent de soutenir les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une coalition de combattants arabo-kurdes qui se sont battus aux côtés des Occidentaux contre les djihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie. «Nous attendons des Etats-Unis qu'ils répondent positivement à notre appel de cesser leur coopération» avec les Kurdes syriens, a déclaré le chef de la diplomatie turque Mevlüt Cavusoglu.

Dimanche, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait menacé de lancer une offensive contre les positions des Unités de protection du peuple



Mark Esper à Sydney (Australie), le 4 août 2019. Saeed KHAN / AFP

(YPG, composante kurde des FDS) à l'est de l'Euphrate. Mark Esper a rappelé que l'EI restait actif dans la région, même s'il a perdu le territoire qu'il contrôlait dans le nord de la Syrie et de l'Irak. En outre, les FDS détiennent des milliers de djihadistes locaux et étrangers dans le nord de la Syrie et les Kurdes, qui ont peur d'être abandonnés par les Occidentaux, ont prévenu qu'ils ne pourraient pas continuer à les garder s'ils étaient attaqués par la Turquie.

«Nous n'avons aucune intention de les abandonner», a assuré Mark Esper. «Ce que nous allons faire, c'est empêcher des incursions unilatérales qui seraient contraires aux intérêts que nous partageons - Etats-Unis, Turquie et FDS - en ce

qui concerne le nord de la Syrie». La Turquie considère les YPG comme un «groupe terroriste» qui menace sa sécurité nationale.

Selon la presse turque, les négociations avec les Américains achoppent pour l'instant sur la profondeur d'une éventuelle «zone de sécurité», Ankara réclamant une bande de 30 km de large, bien plus que la formule avancée par Washington. Par ailleurs, la Turquie souhaite avoir seule le contrôle de cette zone. Mark Esper a indiqué que les négociations se poursuivaient sur cette question. «Nous avons progressé sur certains des points les plus importants», a-t-il indiqué, sans plus de précision. «Nous allons poursuivre nos discussions et je suis convaincu que nous trouverons une solution en temps voulu».



REUTERS Wednesday, August 07, 2019

Two Iran Revolutionary Guards killed in clash with militants

DUBAI (Reuters) - Two members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards have been killed in clashes with militants in a northwestern region near the border with Turkey, Iranian state television reported on Wednesday.

"The governor of Maku said two Guards were martyred in a clash with terrorists

while defending the fatherland," the television reported.

It gave no further details. There are frequent clashes in western Iran between the Islamic Republic's security forces and Iranian Kurdish militant groups mostly based in neighboring Iraq, including the Party of Free Life

of Kurdistan (PJAK), accused by Tehran of links to Kurdish PKK insurgents in Turkey. (Reporting by Dubai newsroom; Editing by Alexandra Hudson)

Opération turque dans l'Est : le ton durcit entre Ankara et Washington

Semblant plus impatient que jamais d'en finir avec la présence armée kurde des YPG (Unités de protection du peuple, considérées comme « terroriste » par la Turquie) dans le Nord syrien, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé hier, lors de la conférence annuelle des ambassadeurs, que le combat que son pays mène en Syrie allait « très bientôt » entrer « dans une nouvelle phase ». « Nous ne pouvons plus rester silencieux, notre patience est à bout. (...) Nous sommes entrés dans Afrin, Jarabulus et al-Bab (Nord-Ouest). Nous allons aller à l'est de l'Euphrate », avait déjà martelé le reis dimanche dernier, indiquant notamment avoir « partagé cette information » avec Washington et Moscou.

Ces déclarations interviennent au moment où les Américains, toujours présents militairement en Syrie et soutenant les combattants kurdes dans le cadre de la lutte contre le terrorisme dans la région, tentent de trouver un accord avec Ankara afin d'empêcher cette offensive, notamment à travers la création d'une « zone de sécurité » entre la frontière turque et les forces armées kurdes. Mais les discussions autour de cette « zone », un projet posé sur la table des négociations depuis plusieurs mois, et réclamé par les Turcs depuis des années, sont actuellement au point mort. La dernière offre proposée par l'administration américaine à la Turquie devrait, selon les analystes, être refusée par la Turquie pour non-respect des conditions qu'elle a imposées. Ankara souhaite en effet étendre son contrôle exclusif sur une bande de terre profonde de 30 à 40 km, et longue entre Tall Abyad et la frontière irakienne (soit plus de 300 km). Ces mêmes territoires avaient été conquis par les YPG à la suite de leur lutte sur l'EI. De leur côté, les Américains proposent aux Turcs des patrouilles conjointes sur un territoire profond de 14 km, long de 140 km, et débarrassé des YPG. Le gouvernement turc envisage également d'utiliser cette « zone » pour faciliter le retour des réfugiés syriens présents sur son sol au nombre de trois millions et demi.

« Fondamentalement, les Turcs ont une mauvaise expérience avec les Américains en ce qui concerne les négociations autour de la question du dossier

des PYD (branche politique des YPG) », explique Nawar Oliver, chercheur et analyste au centre Omran, un groupe de réflexion basé à Istanbul, contacté par L'Orient-Le Jour. « On a parfaitement vu ces casse-têtes à Manbij après la signature d'une feuille de route (en juin 2018) pour évacuer la zone des membres des PYD. Les Américains sont certes en train de s'en tenir, mais de manière très lente, ce qui ne plaît pas aux Turcs », ajoute-t-il.

Mais cette fois-ci, l'heure semble néanmoins être à l'urgence. Des informations du Washington Post affirment que l'offensive turque devrait se produire « d'ici à deux semaines », ce qui laisse très peu de temps aux Américains pour trouver une solution qui satisfasse à la fois la Maison-Blanche et le Saray (palais présidentiel turc). « Si la Turquie refuse les conditions des États-Unis, l'administration a clairement indiqué qu'elle ne pouvait pas (...) intervenir pour protéger les combattants kurdes », explique le quotidien américain. Une chose est néanmoins sûre, c'est que les Américains ne comptent pas laisser leur partenaire au sein de l'OTAN intervenir sans rien faire.

Réponse américaine

Suite aux dernières déclarations du président turc, le nouveau secrétaire américain de la Défense Mark Esper est monté hier au créneau, estimant qu'une offensive de la Turquie serait « inacceptable ». Il a également prévenu que Washington empêcherait « toute incursion unilatérale menaçant les intérêts mutuels que partagent les États-Unis, la Turquie et les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) dans le nord de la Syrie ». « Ce que nous tentons de faire, c'est de trouver avec eux un arrangement qui réponde à leurs inquiétudes », a ajouté le chef du Pentagone.

Mais l'un des points essentiels concerne la présence (persistante) de l'EI en Syrie malgré la disparition de son « califat » territorial. Les forces armées kurdes détiennent en effet plusieurs milliers de jihadistes locaux et étrangers dans le nord de la Syrie. Les Kurdes, qui ont peur d'être abandonnés par les Occidentaux, ont prévenu qu'ils

ne pourraient pas continuer à les garder s'ils étaient attaqués par la Turquie. « Nous n'avons aucune intention de les abandonner, a assuré M. Esper en parlant des combattants kurdes. Ce que nous allons faire, c'est empêcher des incursions unilatérales qui seraient contraires aux intérêts que nous partageons en ce qui concerne le nord de la Syrie. »

Mais devant la détermination et l'impatience turques, et compte tenu de l'impossibilité de trouver (pour l'instant) un accord, la Turquie peut-elle prendre le risque de faire grimper la température en se frottant aux YPG malgré la présence américaine ? « Je vois mal la Turquie entrer en guerre contre les États-Unis », explique Thomas Pierret, chargé de recherche au CNRS (Paris) et à l'Iremam (Aix-en-Provence), contacté par L'OLJ. « Ou alors, les Turcs sont en train de bluffer et tablent sur le fait que le président Trump ne va pas hésiter à partir en courant s'ils attaquent », ajoute-t-il. « Si les forces turques entrent en masse dans l'Est syrien et que les Américains se retirent du jeu, l'échiquier est complètement transformé (...) et là, la Russie peut avoir un rôle important à jouer même si elle n'a rien à dire sur ce qui se passe dans le Nord-Est », explique Thomas Pierret.

« En cas d'actions militaires entreprises par les Turcs dans la région, la réponse américaine se limiterait à des actions de surveillance (...) Ils n'essaieront pas de repousser l'attaque ni de riposter », estime Nawar Oliver, expliquant que « le seul élément qui conduirait à une riposte américaine serait dans le cas où une menace réelle est exercée sur un soldat américain ou une base américaine ». L'offensive turque, si elle a lieu comme prévu, devra toutefois être millimétrée. Tout malentendu ou erreur de calcul pourrait très sérieusement endommager les relations entre les deux partenaires de l'OTAN, déjà mises à mal non seulement sur la question syrienne, mais aussi sur celle des missiles S-400 que la Turquie a achetés à la Russie. Les YPG ont de leur côté prévenu qu'ils riposteraient à toute attaque de la Turquie, au risque de dégarnir le front de la lutte contre l'EI.

La Nouvelle Tribune 7 août 2019

Iran : deux soldats d'élite tués par des terroristes

Deux membres de l'élite des gardes de la révolution iraniens, rapporte la télévision nationale iranienne ce mercredi, auraient été tués lors d'affrontements avec des militants dans la région de Maku, une ville montagneuse du nord-ouest de la province de l'Azerbaïdjan occidental en Iran. Les « terroristes » seraient des activistes kurdes iraniens, basés en Irak.

Des soldats qui défendaient la "Mère patrie"
Selon le communiqué du gouverneur de Maku, les soldats tombés, les Lts. Nasser

Mehdizadeh and Nasser Sorori auraient été engagé aux côtés de l'armée régulière iranienne, « Les gardes de la Révolution » dans le conflit que le pays avaient engagé avec les séparatistes nationalistes kurdes du PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan).

Le PJAK étant groupe nationaliste kurde militant établi dans les régions montagneuses du nord de l'Irak, ayant des liens avec le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) groupe armé répertorié comme terroriste par

la communauté internationale, dont il partagerait les idéologies, la logistique et surtout le même leadership, celui d'Abdullah Ocalan. A la différence du PKK agissant surtout en Turquie, le PJAK lui se serait concentré sur l'Iran.

Les soldats tombés en martyrs « tout en défendant la mère patrie » poursuivait le gouverneur de Maku au cours de son communiqué, aurait reçu les hommages de la Nation au cours d'une cérémonie qui eut lieu à la mosquée Abulfazl de Bazargan.

Turkish attack on Syrian Kurds would spark a 'big war' if U.S.-Turkish talks fail: leader

QAMISHLO, Syrian Kurdistan,— A Turkish attack on Kurdish-led forces in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) in northeast Syria would spark a “big war” if U.S. efforts fail to block Ankara’s plans, a top Kurdish official told Reuters on Wednesday.

Badran Jia Kurd also said most forces would have to deploy to the border with Turkey in case of attack, and could no longer hunt Islamic State sleeper cells or guard thousands of IS prisoners.

NATO allies Ankara and Washington have been deadlocked for months over a planned “safe zone” in northeast Syria. They agreed on Wednesday to establish a joint operation center in Turkey to manage the zone, but neither said if they had overcome two main points of division: how far the zone should extend and who would command forces patrolling it.

Jia Kurd and a second top Kurdish politician said the fruits of U.S.-Turkish talks remained unclear.

“We want a political solution and dialogue,” said Jia Kurd, adviser to the Kurdish-led administration running Syrian Kurdistan, much of north and east Syria, after eight years of civil war that has largely abated over the past year.

“But if these regional and international efforts are exhausted, then we will be in a total, grave military confrontation.”

Ankara views the Kurdish YPG militia, which spearheads the Syrian Democratic Forces, as terrorists posing a threat along its border. It has already sent troops into northern Syria twice in recent years targeting the Kurdish fighters.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan had said on Sunday that a military operation was **imminent** in Syria east of the Euphrates river, territory which the Kurdish SDF control and where U.S. forces are stationed.

Washington, which armed the SDF in the fight against Islamic State, had resisted Turkey’s demands for full control of a long strip of land that would extend 32 km (20 miles) into Syria.

Jia Kurd said a Turkish assault would lead to a “catastrophic conflict” that officials in the SDF region were doing all they could to



Badran Jia Kurd, top Syrian Kurdish official, Qamishlo, Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), January 3, 2019. Photo: Reuters

prevent through talks with foreign states. But he added there was silence from European countries and “lack of seriousness” from Russia.

“On the American side, there are attempts to block the Turkish attack but it needs resolve.”

He repeated warnings from Kurdish leaders in recent months that an assault would create chaos which Islamist militants could exploit for a resurgence.

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said this week any Turkish operation into northern Syria would be “unacceptable”. He said the United States did not have any “ambition” to abandon the SDF, but stopped short of guaranteeing that it would protect them in case of a Turkish attack.

Aldar Xelil, the senior Kurdish politician, said he did not expect Washington and its allies to back away from helping the SDF combat Islamic State sleeper cells to secure the region.

The Turkish “threats are serious and have dangerous implications on Syria,” he added. “We do not want a war with any side. But if we come under any attack, we will not sit back and watch.”

Syrian Kurdish forces have played a key role in the US-backed fight against the Islamic State group.

The Kurdish YPG forces **expelled** the Islamic State group from its last patch of territory in the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz in March 2019.

Washington has for years supported the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against the Islamic State group in Syria, as part of an international anti-jihadist coalition dominated by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). But U.S. President Donald Trump abruptly announced the **pullout** from Syria.

The Kurdish **PYD** and its powerful military wing YPG/YPJ, considered the most effective fighting force against IS in Syria and U.S. has provided them with arms. The YPG, which is the backbone of the SDF forces, has seized swathes of Syria from Islamic State.

Despite Kurdish fears, on Monday the Pentagon insisted any unilateral offensive by Turkey would be “**unacceptable**”.

Turkey fears the creation of a Kurdish autonomous region or Kurdish state in Syrian Kurdistan could encourage separatism amongst its own Kurds, according to analysts.

Turkey has launched two previous offenses into Syria against the Kurdish YPG, in 2016 and 2018 respectively.

In 2016, the Turkish troops **entered** northern Syria in an area some 100 km east of Afrin to stop the Kurdish YPG forces from extending areas under their control and connecting Syrian Kurdistan’s Kobani and Hasaka in the east with Afrin canton in the west.

In January 2018, Turkish military forces backed pro-Ankara Syrian mercenary fighters to clear the YPG from its northwestern enclave of Afrin. In March 2018, the operation was completed with the capture of the Kurdish city of **Afrin**.

The flags of Turkey and Syrian rebel groups were raised in the Kurdish Afrin city and a statue of Kurdish hero **Kawa**, a symbol of resistance against oppressors, was **turned down**.

Residents of the Kurdish city and Human right groups accuse Turkey and pro-Ankara fighters of **kidnappings** for ransom, armed robberies and torture.

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by Hardi Mohammed | 08-08-2019

Kurdish parties reject 2020 provincial election in disputed Kirkuk

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Including the disputed province of Kirkuk in Iraq’s 2020 provincial elections will strip displaced Kurds of their right to vote and entrench the ‘Arabization’ policies which have forced Kurds out of military and administrative posts, Kurdish parties warned this week.

Iraq’s parliament [recently agreed](#) to hold provincial council elections across Iraq on April 1, 2020, including the disputed province of Kirkuk, which has long enjoyed a special status and has not held a provincial election since 2005.

Under new amendments to the election law, Kirkuk’s voter register is to be based on food ration cards and Civil Status Identification Cards. Local Kurds who have had their documents transferred to other cities as a result of displacement and Arabization would be disqualified.

Iraq’s deposed president Saddam Hussein implemented Arabization policies between the 1970s and 90s to ethnically cleanse the disputed territories of their Kurdish communities and settled Arab families in their place.

Although many of these policies were reversed after Saddam’s removal from power in 2003, Arab settlers have since returned to stake their claim to the land, while Kurdish officials have been removed from positions of influence.

Kurdish parties insist the election register should instead rely on the 1957 Iraqi census, which pre-dates the Arabization policy and better reflects Kirkuk’s ethnic population.

Almas Fazil, a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) member of the Iraqi parliament, has called for the provincial election in Kirkuk to be delayed until the law is amended.

“According to Article 4 of the law, the [Iraqi] Council of Ministers could exclude and delay a province from the elections,” she told Rudaw English on Thursday.

“We will start appealing the law in the parliament and pursue other legal procedures later,” Fazil added.

The Provincial Elections Law is still progressing through parliament and has not yet been submitted to the Iraqi presidency.

A group of Kurdish political parties including the PUK gathered on Wednesday in Kir-



A Kurdish man walks through the streets of Kirkuk, September 18, 2017. File photo: AFP

kuk to discuss the Provincial Elections Law and put forth steps to appeal it before it is signed by the President of Iraq Barham Salih – also a Kurd of the PUK.

“This problem has existed in Kirkuk since 2005. Arabs and Turkmen have doubts about Kirkuk’s voter list. They think it requires revising through a mechanism that depends on food ration cards and IDs,” Rebwar Taha, another PUK MP in the Iraqi parliament, told Rudaw English.

The Turkmen community has been particularly vocal about what it calls “Kurdish demographic change”.

Turkmen Front leader Arshad Salehi claimed in mid-July that Kurdish leaders have settled as many as 600,000 Kurds from Erbil, Sulaimani, and neighboring countries in Kirkuk to tip the demographic balance in their favor.

The Kurdish side believes one potential solution is to amend the law so that Kurds acknowledged by the Article 140 Investigative Committee as belonging to Kirkuk are included in the election register to “guarantee” their right to vote.

Kurdish parties are now forming a joint committee so they have a common voice on political matters in the disputed province.

“We must be united this time in Baghdad and Kirkuk,” said Mohammed Jalil, head of the Komal election office.

Even if Kurdish sides fail to stop the law’s amendment, they should “get together to form a joint Kurdish list in order to face all the challenges”, he added.

A Gorran official, who spoke to Rudaw on condition of anonymity, said the party may call on other Kurdish parties to boycott the Kirkuk provincial election if the amendment passes.

Kurdish residents of Kirkuk are also concerned about the weight of the Kurdish vote if the election takes place on April 1.

“We are in favor of elections. We will stand by our Kurdish [ethnic identity]. But it is not in our interests if the election is held at this stage,” said Salar Star, a shopkeeper in Kirkuk.

Haval Abdulsamad, a Kurdish resident, said Kurdish parties should not boycott the election. However, he is not convinced an election will bring about change in the troubled province.

Due to rivalries between Turkmen, Arabs, and Kurds, provincial elections have not taken place in the ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk since 2005.

As many as 900,000 voters are eligible to vote across the province.

Since 2003, Iraq has allowed Kirkuk to hold just one single provincial election due to its “exceptional status”.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) did not stand candidates in Kirkuk during the May 12, 2018 Iraqi parliamentary election. It said the city was “occupied” and demanded the normalization of its politics and security before it would agree to take part.

Kirkuk was seized by Iraqi Army and Hashd al-Shaabi forces on October 16, 2017 after Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdrew in the face of a major assault.

Oil-rich Kirkuk is a flashpoint between Erbil and Baghdad, which both stake a claim to the province. It is one of the disputed territories and as such falls under Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, drafted to resolve the dispute but never implemented.

Under Article 140, a census and referendum should have been held by 2007 to determine whether Kirkuk should join the autonomous Kurdistan Region or remain a federal Iraqi province.

La Syrie fustige l'accord américano-turc visant à établir une zone de sécurité à sa frontière

L'accord américano-turc établi mercredi dernier vient de mettre le feu aux poudres. Après trois jours de négociations entre Ankara et Washington, le feu vert a été donné pour la création d'une zone de sécurité au nord de la Syrie. La Syrie voit rouge et dénonce « une violation des principes du droit international ».

Damas rejette « catégoriquement » l'accord américano-turc visant à établir un centre d'opérations conjointes pour le nord de la Syrie en vue de l'établissement d'une « zone de sécurité » dans cette région à majorité kurde, a rapporté ce jeudi un média d'Etat.

Mercredi dernier, la Turquie et les Etats-Unis ont décidé d'établir un « centre d'opérations conjointes » pour coordonner la création d'une « zone de sécurité » dans le nord de la Syrie, une mesure visant à prévenir un affrontement entre forces turques et kurdes.

« L'accord constitue une agression flagrante »

« La Syrie rejette catégoriquement l'accord des deux occupants américain et turc sur la création de ce qui est appelé zone de sécurité », a indiqué l'agence officielle Sana, citant une source au ministère syrien des Affaires étrangères.

« L'accord constitue une agression flagrante contre la souveraineté et l'unité territoriale syriennes ainsi qu'une violation des principes du droit international », a déploré Damas.

« La Syrie appelle la communauté internationale et les Nations unies à condamner cette agression américano-turque qui constitue une escalade dangereuse (...) et s'oppose à tous les efforts visant à trouver une sortie à la crise syrienne », a ajouté la source diplomatique citée par Sana.



Des gens marchent dans une allée de la ville de Manbij au nord de la Syrie, le 5 août 2019. | AFP

Damas dénonce l'instrumentalisation des kurdes par les américains

L'annonce de l'accord américano-turc est intervenue après trois jours d'intenses négociations entre Ankara et Washington, qui cherche à éviter une nouvelle opération militaire turque contre les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), une milice kurde qui contrôle des zones du nord de la Syrie.

Damas a accusé les Kurdes syriens d'être un « outil » dans ce « projet hostile » américano-turc, affirmant que ces derniers « assument une responsabilité historique à cet égard ». Les autorités syriennes appellent les Kurdes à « réviser leurs comptes et à retourner dans le giron national », a ajouté Sana.

La Turquie craint la création d'une zone kurde autonome

La Turquie avait multiplié ces derniers jours les menaces d'intervention contre les positions kurdes dans le nord de la Syrie. Mardi dernier encore, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan affirmait que, faute d'accord, il lancerait « très bientôt » une opération.

Les Kurdes, une minorité ethnique longtemps marginalisée en Syrie, a créé une zone semi-autonome dans le nord du pays à la faveur du conflit syrien, déclenché en 2011.

Ankara voit d'un mauvais oeil ce projet d'autonomie à sa frontière, par crainte qu'un noyau d'Etat kurde ne galvanise les velléités séparatistes de cette minorité sur son propre sol. Quant au régime syrien, il cherche à reconquérir l'ensemble du territoire et refuse toute autonomie kurde.

Damas rejette l'accord américano-turc sur la zone tampon

Damas rejette «catégoriquement» l'accord américano-turc visant à établir un centre d'opérations conjointes pour le nord de la Syrie en vue de l'établissement d'une «zone de sécurité» dans cette région à majorité kurde, a rapporté jeudi un média d'Etat.

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R  08/08/2019

Ocalan se dit prêt à trouver une solution au conflit turco-kurde

Le leader kurde emprisonné, Abdullah Ocalan, s'est dit prêt à trouver une solution au problème kurde, déclarant qu'il pourrait mettre fin au conflit turco-kurde. Abdullah Ocalan, leader kurde incarcéré depuis le 15 février 1999 sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, en Turquie.

Le leader kurde emprisonné, Abdullah Ocalan, s'est dit prêt à trouver une solution au problème kurde, déclarant qu'il pourrait mettre fin au conflit turco-kurde en l'espace d'une semaine, ont annoncé ses avocats dans un communiqué jeudi 8 août.

Dans un communiqué publié aujourd'hui, les avocats d'Ocalan ont indiqué qu'ils avaient pu le rencontrer à nouveau mercredi, pour la première fois depuis le 18 juin.

Selon le communiqué, Ocalan a déclaré qu'il dépensait de grands efforts « pour ouvrir un espace aux Kurdes, en conformité avec les relations historiques turco-kurdes réelles, par opposition à l'histoire factice produit de l'esprit de chauvin ». Il a ajouté que, dans ce cadre,



Abdullah Ocalan, leader kurde incarcéré depuis le 15 février 1999 sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, en Turquie.

les Kurdes n'avaient pas besoin d'un État propre.

« J'essaie d'ouvrir un espace pour les Kurdes, venez-donc, résolvons le problème kurde », a-t-il dit. « J'affirme pouvoir résoudre en une se-

maine cette situation conflictuelle ou potentiellement conflictuelle. Je peux la résoudre, j'ai confiance en moi, je suis prêt pour une solution. Mais l'État et l'esprit d'Etat doivent faire le nécessaire »

franceinfo: 08/08/2019

Trente-et-une familles yézidiennes victimes du groupe Etat islamique accueillies en France

C'est la troisième opération d'accueil menée par la France, qui avait accueilli 16 familles en décembre dernier puis 28 autres en mai.

Trente-et-une familles yézidiennes, victimes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) sont arrivées en France, jeudi 8 août, pour y être accueillies, ont annoncé le Quai d'Orsay et le ministère de l'Intérieur dans un communiqué commun. Leur vol en provenance d'Erbil, dans le Kurdistan irakien, s'est posé en début de journée à l'aéroport de Toulouse-Blagnac, précise le ministère des Affaires étrangères. Ces femmes, "particulièrement éprouvées par les exactions de l'organisation terroriste" et leurs enfants vont être pris en charge "dans différents départements français". L'Etat français va leur assurer "protection, sécurité, éducation et accompagnement médico-social".

Les ministères expliquent que l'accueil de ces familles "s'inscrit dans la continuité des deux opérations déjà coordonnées par le ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères". Ainsi, en décembre 2018 et mai 2019, 16 et 28 familles ont été respectivement accueillies sur le sol français. Cela "répond à l'engagement du pré-



Les populations yézidiennes fuyant les violences commises par le groupe Etat Islamique, en Irak, le 10 août 2014. (ART JALAL / REUTERS)

sident de la République auprès de Nadia Murad, prix Nobel de la paix 2018, à accueillir sur le territoire français 100 familles yézidiennes victimes des crimes" de l'EI.

Vivant dans les coins reculés des montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, dans le nord du pays, les Yézidis sont une minorité kurdophone adepte

d'une religion ésotérique monothéiste. En août 2014, leur sort a basculé lorsque l'EI s'est emparé d'un tiers de l'Irak. Les jihadistes ont alors tué des hommes, transformé en enfants-soldats les plus jeunes et condamné des milliers de femmes aux travaux forcés et à l'esclavage sexuel.

LE POPULAIRE 08-08-2019
DU CENTRE

« Particulièrement éprouvées par les exactions »

Ce jeudi matin, 151 femmes et enfants yézidis sont arrivées à l'aéroport de Toulouse-Blagnac (Haute-Garonne), en provenance d'Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien.

Ces personnes « seront principalement dispatchées en Haute-Vienne et dans le Tarn-et-Garonne », a précisé à l'AFP Lionel Pourtau, directeur général de la section "réfugiés" à Habitat et Humanisme, l'une des associations chargées de la logistique d'accueil.

Une information confirmée au Populaire du Centre par les services de la préfecture de la Haute-Vienne, qui n'ont toutefois pas souhaité préciser le nombre de ces familles ni leur lieu d'hébergement. Un silence également observé par le Ministère des Affaires étrangères qui avance l'argument de la sécurité de ces familles, victimes des exactions commises par le groupe Etat Islamique (Daech).

Ces femmes et leurs enfants sont « particulièrement éprouvées par les exactions » de Daech. L'Etat leur assurera « protection, sécurité, éducation et accompagnement médico-social », selon le ministère de l'Intérieur.

Une promesse du président

Cette arrivée porte à 75 le nombre de familles yézidiennes arrivées en France depuis le premier

groupe en décembre 2018 (16 femmes et leurs enfants - 83 personnes au total), suivi d'un autre (28 familles - 132 personnes) fin mai, ajoute le ministère français dans un communiqué, sans préciser le nombre d'enfants concernés cette fois.

L'opération est organisée comme la précédente par l'Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM) et financée par le ministère français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, précise le ministère de l'Intérieur.

Ce nouvel accueil répond selon le ministère à « l'engagement » pris par le président de la République Emmanuel Macron auprès de Nadia Murad, prix Nobel de la paix 2018, « à accueillir sur le territoire français cent familles yézidiennes victimes des crimes commis par Daech ». Nadia Murad a fait partie des milliers de femmes et de petites filles yézidiennes enlevées et réduites à l'esclavage par Daech.

Cette démarche témoigne selon le ministère « de la volonté renouvelée de la France », membre de la coalition militaire internationale qui a aidé le gouvernement irakien et des milices syriennes à vaincre militairement l'Etat Islamique ces dernières années, d'accueillir « des victimes de violences ethniques et religieuses au Moyen-Orient ».

Enfants soldats et esclavage sexuel

En août 2014, l'Etat Islamique s'était livré selon l'ONU à un potentiel génocide contre les Yézidis, cette minorité kurdophone adepte d'une religion monothéiste ésotérique. En quelques jours, les jihadistes du "califat" autoproclamé avaient tué des centaines d'hommes de la communauté, enrôlé de force des enfants-soldats et réduit des milliers de femmes à l'esclavage sexuel.

Près de 3.000 Yézidis sont toujours portés disparus, en majorité des femmes et des enfants, peut-être toujours captifs de Daech.

Des centaines de milliers de réfugiés

Sur les 550.000 Yézidis d'Irak avant 2014 - soit un tiers des Yézidis du monde -, 100.000 ont pris le chemin de l'exil depuis 2014, principalement en Allemagne, et 360.000 sont toujours déplacés, notamment dans des camps où ils sont aidés par les autorités et ONG.

Un dernier groupe de Yézidis devrait arriver en France en novembre, d'après le responsable de l'association Habitat et Humanisme. Avec AFP



09/08/2019

Kurdish forces attack Turkish military base in Afrin, injure two soldiers

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Kurdish forces injured two soldiers in an attack on a Turkish army base in Afrin, northern Syria, soon after a US-Turkey deal over the establishment of a “peace corridor” in a bid to de-escalate tension in the region tensions was confirmed.

“One of our [military] bases was attacked by YPG/PKK terrorists in Afrin using anti-tank warfare, injuring two of our soldiers. The attack was launched from Tel Rifaat region [southeast Afrin],” the Turkish Defense Ministry [said](#) on Friday.

The People’s Protection Units (YPG) is a predominantly Kurdish force in northern Syria. It forms the backbone of the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which controls much of Syria’s north. Turkey claims that the YPG is the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which it has listed as a terrorist organization.

While clashes between the YPG-affiliated forces and Turkish proxies in Afrin are common, the Turkish army rarely makes official confirmation of its own direct involvement or losses in them.

Though the ministry confirmed a retaliation to the attack, they did not disclose when the attack took place or their method of counter-attack.

Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE) - a Kurdish armed group in Afrin affiliated with the YPG - [claimed](#) it killed and injured an unspecified number of Turkish soldiers in Shera district, Afrin on Thursday, in retaliation to the shelling of villages in Shera by Turkish forces that killed of one of its members by the Turkish army.

“[T]he Turkish occupation forces shelled the inhabited villages in the Shera district especially the villages of Marnaz and Al-Malikiyah with artillery and mortar shells [on Thursday]. Clashes took place between our forces and the Turkish occupation soldiers and mercenaries in the village of Marnaz ... where one of our fighters was martyred,” it said.

“In response, our forces carried out a spe-



Turkish forces during Operation Olive Branch in Afrin in January 2018. Photo: AA

cific operation targeting a military base of the Turkish occupation near the areas of clashes in the district of Shera, which resulted in the death of a number of Turkish soldiers, we were unable to determine the number of wounded and dead. Helicopters hovered over the area of Afrin to transport the dead and wounded,” added HRE.

Turkish forces and its Syrian proxies took control of the Kurdish enclave of Afrin in March 2018, after a two-month offensive against the YPG which had been in control of the area since 2014.

Afrin had previously been under the control of Syrian regime forces, who withdrew during Islamic State (ISIS) offensives on the area.

Turkey wants to establish a buffer zone in northern Syria, in which millions of Syrian refugees who have to fled to Turkey during years of conflict are to be resettled.

Following multiple meetings, both the US and Turkey announced on Wednesday that they have agreed to [establish](#) a “joint operation center” to manage tensions between

Kurdish forces in Syria and Turkey.

The deal, described by the US Embassy in Ankara as a way to “implement without delay the first measures aimed at eliminating Turkey’s concerns,” followed fresh threats by Turkish officials to attack SDF-controlled areas in East of Euphrates in Syria.

Kurdish officials from the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), known by many Kurds as Rojava, have warned that Turkish attacks will not end until it controls all SDF-controlled areas – and beyond.

“If Turkey attacks northern Syria, they will not stop until they invade the whole country, not only northern part of Syria,” Samira al-Aziz, member of the Future Syria party’s general council in Darbasiya, Hasakah governorate, told Hawar News, a media outlet close to the NES.

Similarly, Badran Jia Kurd, adviser to the Kurdish-led administration in northern Syria [told](#) Reuters on Wednesday that any Turkish attack on the northern parts of Syria will result in creation of a “big war.”



10/08/2019

Kirkuk official alleges 'Arabization' as province gains new Arab voters in 2019



A market in the disputed city of Kirkuk. (Photo: Kurdistan 24) 10-08-2019

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – As local governments gear up for provincial elections scheduled to take place in early 2020, a senior Kurdish official from Kirkuk alleged on Friday that forced demographic change was taking place in the province with tens of thousands of ethnic Arabs having moved there in recent months and given the ability to vote.

“This will have a major effect,” said Rebwar Talabani, the head of the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC). He told Kurdistan 24, “We call upon the federal government [of Iraq] prevent any changes as soon as possible.”

According to official numbers from the Ministry of Trade, in the past seven months, ration cards of close to 39,000 ethnically Arab individuals have been switched from other provinces to Kirkuk. This effectively allows persons of eligible age to vote in the provincial elections, now set to be held next April.

Ration cards are a form of identification

through which the government provides families with a number of food items each month as a form of aid to low-income households. However, all families are eligible to receive it and it is a primary civil identity document used in connection with elections.

“There is an official decree from the Council of Ministers to all provinces including Kirkuk that says no department is allowed to make any change in the nationality registration or ration cards with the intended purpose of creating demographic change,” Talabani added.

“This goes against the constitution... but there is no one to hold to account” those behind these actions, he concluded.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi federal government contest whether or not the province should be part of the Kurdistan Region.

Kirkuk, home to Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen,

and Christians, is the epicenter of contention between Erbil and Baghdad and the most prominent of the territories disputed by the two.

Article 140 was introduced into the Iraqi constitution to allow its 2005 ratification by kicking controversial decisions on the disputed territories down the road, but over a decade has passed since the 2007 deadline for the article's implementation.

Claims of forced demographic change have been commonplace in Kirkuk province, which historically has a Kurdish majority population. The demography of the area was dramatically shifted in the late twentieth century during the reign of Saddam Hussein, who led a genocidal campaign against the Kurds.

Read more: [Kurdistan parliament investigates 'Arabization' in Iraq's disputed territories](#)

Following the ouster of Hussein's Baathist regime in 2003, the process entered a reversal and many Kurds moved to the province, with some allowed to return to lands that had previously been taken from them.

However, after Iraqi forces and Iran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi militias pushed Kurdish Peshmerga forces from Kirkuk in late 2017, allegations of the forced displacement of Kurds began to pop up as more and more cases emerged where landowners were told to vacate by ethnically Arab claimants who were in possession of Saddam-era documents.

Several Kurdish officials have accused the ethnically Arab acting governor that was installed at the time, Rakan Saeed, of facilitating ethnically divisive policies in efforts to tip the balance against Kurds, who have a majority of seats in the KPC and as a result are entitled to choose Kirkuk's governor.

Editing by John J. Catherine

Turkey plans to relocate 700,000 Syrians to northern Syria - Wall Street Journal

Turkish government plans to relocate 700,000 Syrians in Turkey to the territories it aims to seize from the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria, the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) on Friday.

The government has stepped up measures against refugee population in Turkey, after the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) faced defeats in five of the country's six most populous provinces in local polls on March 31. Experts said in addition to Turkey's ailing economy, resentment among voters against some 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees also played a role in the AKP's election losses.

While the Ministry of Interior announced measures against irregular migration, the authorities in Istanbul set Aug. 20 as deadline for Syrians to return to the provinces they were registered or face punitive measures and the police intensified controls to detect unregistered Syrians in Istanbul. Turkish law-enforcement authorities are also



using a hotline to collect information from the population on the location of refugees illegally living in the city, the WSJ said.

The government last year announced plans to launch a military offensive in northern Syria to seize some enclaves controlled by the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey sees the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the SDF, as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), while the YPG forms the backbone of the U.S.-led coalition fighting against ISIS in Syria.

After nearly eight-months of negotiations with no concrete results, the United States and Turkey on Wednesday announced that they had agreed to establish a joint operation centre in Turkey for a planned safe zone in northern Syria that would serve as a "peace corridor" for the safe return of the Syrian refugees to their homeland.

The government is working on a plan to relocate 700,000 Syrians to territories it hopes to seize from the YPG in northern Syria, people familiar with the matter told the Wall Street Journal.

Refugees and advocacy groups say Turkish authorities in recent weeks have rounded up hundreds of Syrians and forcibly sent them back to their war-ravaged country, Politico [reported](#) on Friday.

Cases of Syrians being sent back against their will have been reported before, but the scale of the recent crackdown, which began in July, has no precedent, Politico said.



10/08/2019

Opinion: Take Turkey's threats to invade Syria seriously

A Turkish invasion of Syria appears to be imminent. But a new military offensive could have self-destructive consequences for Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, writes journalist Rainer Hermann.

Turkey is not a country that lets threats go unanswered. Twice already, Ankara has followed through after announcing plans to invade Syria. The first was with [operation "Euphrates Shield"](#) from August 2016 to March 2017, and then another offensive, "Olive Branch," in the first quarter of 2018. Since then, Turkey has controlled 2% of Syrian territory.

Intoxicated by its success, Turkey now wants to extend its control considerably to the eastern part of northern Syria with a third invasion. When the four-day Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice, comes to an end, the operation could get underway east of the Euphrates River. The military preparations along the border seem to be complete, and the conditions also seem favorable.

Nobody to hold Turkey back

When it comes to international politics, no one is willing to get in Turkey's way. After US President Donald Trump threatened to "devastate" Turkey's

economy at the beginning of the year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan suddenly held his tongue. These days, however, Washington is not discussing the possibility of imposing sanctions in response to Turkey [purchasing the Russian S-400 air defense system](#). Once again, Erdogan played his cards well: By brandishing his sword to invade Syria, he is increasing pressure on the US in the hope of preventing another showdown.

On the homefront, conditions for the president are favorable. Following his party's [setback in municipal elections](#), Erdogan needs a common purpose to reunite the nation behind him. The conflict with the Kurds reliably serves this purpose. Since Turkey killed a top cadre of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on June 27 — followed by the PKK's retaliatory slaying of a Turkish diplomat in northern Iraq on July 21 — the old Kurdish conflict [has also flared up again](#). On top of that, resentment against Syrian refugees among the Turkish population is mounting. To this end, Erdogan can justify an operation by way of clearing space for their return to northern Syria.

A third Turkish offensive in Syria, however, could very well lead to one of two self-destructive scenarios: Turkish and Kurdish-allied US soldiers

could come face-to-face in combat. However, if US troops do not fight alongside the Kurds, the Kurds could then call upon Bashar Assad's forces to help — a move that would give the Syrian regime a chance to regain another lost region of its territory. As a result, Washington would have to surrender its bases in the Kurdish region, and Turkey would confront Assad again on the other side of the border. In the meantime, the "Islamic State" militants could utilize the power vacuum to regain strength.

Everyone at odds

The strategists in Ankara are clever enough to understand both scenarios: They are, therefore, hoping that maximum pressure will force the United States into agreeing to a much broader and deeper buffer zone than the present one. In such a buffer zone, however, the Kurds will be unable to call any of the shots. But Syrian Kurds have made it clear that they will not bow down to Ankara, nor will they give up the gains made by their autonomous government.

The parties in play are pitted against each other. In the eighth year of the Syrian war, a new wave of violence could be on the doorstep. History teaches us that Turkey's threats must be taken seriously.

En Iran, la population entre pressions et répression

Analyse

Dans un contexte de tension croissante dans la région du golfe persique, les autorités iraniennes resserrent l'étouffement sur la société civile.

Celle-ci est asphyxiée économiquement par les sanctions américaines.

« Je ne crois plus, depuis longtemps, un mot de ce que les autorités racontent ». La voix teintée de lassitude, Mona (1), étudiante fraîchement sortie de l'université de Téhéran, ne décolère pas en évoquant le discours politique dominant dans la République islamique. « J'ai aussi arrêté de lire la presse internationale, parce qu'elle nous oublie trop souvent dans l'équation géopolitique. On se sent un peu abandonnés par tout le monde », poursuit-elle, alors que les tensions dans la région du golfe Persique s'accroissent sous la pression américaine.

« Globalement, les Iraniens ne se reconnaissent pas dans le discours de leur classe dirigeante, et ne cautionnent pas sa politique agressive actuelle », commente la politologue Mahnaz Shirali, directrice d'étude à l'Institut catholique de Paris (ICP) et auteure de *La Jeunesse iranienne: une génération en crise* (2). Ces dernières semaines, certains officiels iraniens n'ont en effet pas hésité à brandir la menace de guerre, invoquant l'appel du guide suprême, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, à mettre en œuvre « l'ordre militaire ».

Résilience

Comment la population perçoit-elle ce risque d'une escalade armée? « La majorité des Iraniens ne prend pas vraiment au sérieux, à ce stade, le risque d'un affrontement militaire », tempère un quadragénaire téhéranais. Toutefois, si ce scénario se dessinait, les autorités n'auraient pas besoin d'en faire beaucoup pour rassembler des soldats. « À l'élection présidentielle de 2017, seize millions d'électeurs ont voté pour le candidat conservateur Ebrahim



Désabusés, les iraniens ne sont pourtant pas prêts à se rebeller contre le régime. Wana News Agency/Reuters

Raïssi, ajoute cet interlocuteur. Ce sont des gens prêts à partir au combat, mobilisables en une semaine si besoin... ».

Contrairement au vœu de quelques responsables américains, la population n'est pas prête non plus à se rebeller contre le régime. « Les Gardiens de la Révolution, l'armée idéologique des autorités, sont extrêmement puissants et balaient toutes prémices de contestation populaire », affirme Mahnaz Shirali.

« Extrêmement résiliente, la société ne croit plus ni dans les conservateurs ni dans les réformateurs », décrypte de son côté le spécialiste Clément Therme, chercheur au Centre de recherches internationales (Ceri) de Sciences-Po Paris. « Les autorités tentent de se présenter comme les défenseurs de la sécurité nationale, en présentant cette "priorité" comme incompatible avec les enjeux de développement économique du pays. Or ce n'est pas une alternative... »

« Guerre sur deux fronts »

Esseulés sur la scène internationale, éprouvés par la violente inflation des prix

qui sévit depuis le retour de l'embargo américain, les Iraniens sont sommés de se ranger derrière « l'unité nationale ». « Certains estiment aujourd'hui faire les frais de la paranoïa du régime: menacé à l'extérieur, celui-ci est plus sévère vis-à-vis de toute personne susceptible d'incarner une menace sécuritaire intérieure », poursuit Mona. Les opposants se retrouvent par exemple davantage accusés d'être à la solde des Américains...

Fin juillet, Téhéran a annoncé avoir arrêté, entre mars 2018 et mars 2019, dix-sept Iraniens dans le cadre du démantèlement d'un « réseau d'espions » de l'Agence centrale du renseignement américain (CIA). Ces derniers ont été condamnés à mort.

« Le ton se durcit, comme en témoigne ce type d'acte répressif diligent contre la société. L'ambiance policière se fait plus forte dans le pays, tandis que l'espace de liberté d'expression s'y rétrécit », conclut Mahnaz Shirali. À ses yeux, les dirigeants de la République Islamique sont maintenant en guerre sur deux fronts: international, et national.

En Turquie, Öcalan se dit prêt à mettre fin au conflit

Le chef historique de l'insurrection kurde, détenu depuis 1999, pourrait renoncer à ses revendications séparatistes sous conditions.

TURQUIE Un nouveau processus de paix est-il en gestation ? Le chef historique de la rébellion kurde, Abdullah Öcalan, a ouvert une nouvelle fenêtre d'espoir, ce jeudi, dans la guerre opposant le PKK à Ankara, en annonçant être prêt à trouver une solution avec les autorités turques sur la question kurde. « J'essaie d'ouvrir un espace pour les Kurdes, a-t-il affirmé dans une déclaration relayée par ses avocats. Je veux dire que je peux mettre fin à ce conflit (...) en une semaine. Je peux le régler, j'ai confiance en moi. »

Fondateur du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, à l'origine d'une insurrection séparatiste dans le sud-est de la Turquie en 1984, Öcalan est emprisonné sur l'île d'Imrali, au large d'Istanbul, depuis 1999, année de sa capture au Kenya par les forces spéciales turques. En 2013, il avait participé, à distance, au lancement du processus de paix dans ce conflit qui a fait plus de 40 000 morts. Mais le cessez-le-feu avait volé en éclats en 2015, sur fond de guerre en Syrie et de nouvelles revendications indépendantistes des Kurdes de Turquie, inspirés par leurs « frères » d'à côté.

Au mois de mai dernier, les autorités turques ont, les premières, créé la surprise en levant l'interdiction de rendre visite à Öcalan - en vigueur depuis 2011 - et en permettant à ses avocats de le voir pour la première fois en huit ans. Une occasion inédite pour le leader kurde de relayer un message dans lequel il appela les centaines de personnes alors en grève de la faim dans les prisons turques pour protester contre ses conditions



Le fondateur du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan (ici en 1998, à Rome), est emprisonné depuis 1999 par les forces spéciales turques.

de détention à ne pas mettre leur vie en danger. Loin d'être anodin, ce geste de clémence d'Ankara était survenu en pleine période électorale. Il répondait, de l'avis des experts, aux tentatives du parti au pouvoir, l'AKP, de regagner des voix parmi les Kurdes d'Istanbul à l'approche de l'élection municipale du 23 juin (après l'annulation du scrutin remporté, fin mars, par l'opposition).

Cette fois-ci, c'est sur fond de négociations turco-américaines sur le devenir des Kurdes du Nord-Est syrien qu'est relayé le nouveau message d'Abdullah Öcalan - le premier depuis le scrutin turc de fin juin. « Ce n'est pas une coïncidence si Öcalan s'exprime juste après l'accord américano-turc. Ces deux événements semblent profondément liés », estime le sociologue Mesut Yegen, spécialiste de la question kurde.

Coordonner la création d'une « zone de sécurité »

Le « deal » scellé mercredi dernier au terme d'intenses discussions assorties de menaces d'offensive turque contre les milices kurdes de Syrie (alliées des États-Unis et considérées comme « terroristes » par Ankara) vise à établir un « centre d'opérations conjointes » pour coordonner la création d'une « zone de sécurité » dans le nord de la Syrie. Ces dernières années, le président Erdogan n'avait cessé d'appeler de ses vœux l'établissement d'une zone tampon pour maintenir à distance les combattants kurdes de Syrie et empêcher la création d'un mini-État kurde à sa frontière.

Si la déclaration d'Abdullah Öcalan est inédite, elle n'en est pas moins assortie de conditions. « Je suis prêt pour une solution. Mais l'État (...) doit faire le nécessaire », précise-t-il dans son message, qui a également été relayé sur les réseaux sociaux. Une façon, estiment les observateurs, d'insinuer que les Kurdes sont prêts à renoncer à un État séparé s'ils peuvent trouver leur place au sein de la Turquie. « C'est un message fort. D'une part, Öcalan sous-entend qu'il a la faculté de faire cesser le conflit armé dans le Sud-Est turc. D'autre part, il garantit au pouvoir turc que le PKK ne va pas se battre pour la création d'un État indépendant, à condition, cependant, d'obtenir en contrepartie une reconnaissance légale et un cadre qui respecte leurs droits », analyse Mesut Yegen. D. M. (à Istanbul)

Ahval

By Deniz Tekin Aug
13 2019 2019

Security force vehicles killing civilians with impunity in southeast Turkey

Turkish authorities are turning a blind eye to a rising number of accidental deaths caused by armoured vehicles in Kurdish-majority regions, leaving grieving families with little chance of finding justice.

A report by the non-governmental Human Rights Association's (IHD) Diyarbakır chapter found that 36 civilians, including 16 under 18 years of age, were killed by armoured vehicles in Turkey's Kurdish-majority eastern and south-eastern regions from 2008 to 2018, while 85 people were injured. Just in the past three years in Diyarbakır, 12 civilians, including two children, were killed by armoured vehicles.

Turkey has not documented any efforts to prevent further deaths. Armoured vehicle drivers get off scot-free or with minimal sentences that are often deferred, while grieving loved ones, rather than receiving justice, can face a bill from the state for vehicular damages.

On June 19, 2017, three civilians, including 10-year-old Zilan Yamankılıç, lost their lives when a police armoured vehicle crashed into their bus in Diyarbakır. Driving home from her memorial service a few days later, five members of Zilan's extended family lost their lives in another crash, marking the highest death toll in a single accident involving an armoured vehicle.

A preliminary report on the first accident said the cause had been a flat tyre on the armoured vehicle. The vehicle's driver, Burhan Kolbaşı, was detained, then immediately released after giving a deposition.

A gendarmerie report found Kolbaşı fully to blame for the crash, but another by the Ankara Forensics Institute stated the cause as a flat tyre. An expert at Istanbul Technical University wrote a third report, saying the sharp object that had caused the flat tyre had been to blame for the accident, not the police officer.

Based on the latter two reports, the



Turkish military vehicle is surrounded by security forces after it hit and killed a local woman in an accident in the Kurdish-dominated southeastern city of Diyarbakir, Turkey April 27, 2016. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

Diyarbakır court dismissed the Yamankılıç family's case against the governorate and ordered them to pay court expenses. That case is currently at an appeals court.

Two years later, Diyarbakır's chief prosecutor defied expectations and charged the driver with multiple counts of manslaughter. Kolbaşı faces up to 15 years in prison.

The security forces' driver in the second accident, in which a Cobra-type armoured vehicle crashed into a car returning from Zilan's memorial service, killing five people, was released from custody in less time than it took to remove bodies from the wreckage.

The gendarmerie report said the civilian driver of the car, Fikri Demirbaş, had primarily been at fault for crossing lanes, while the AV driver, Officer Nuh İpek, was partially at fault for speeding. The report discounted the tyre tracks from the armoured vehicle that were found in the civilian car's lane. Onboard cameras were not recording at the time of the accident due to a malfunction, the gendarmerie said.

The Ankara Forensics Institute returned with another report, saying Officer İpek was absolutely not to blame for the crash, drawing an objection from the family's lawyer. This brought the case to the forensics institute in Istanbul, which issued a similar report.

Lice's chief public prosecutor still charged the officer with five counts of manslaughter. But the charges were dismissed in Diyarbakır and the case was thrown out, as expert reports said İpek was not responsible, putting the full blame for the crash on the deceased Demirbaş.

Then Diyarbakır police sent a notice to Demirbaş's heirs demanding 250,000 euros for damage to the 350,000-euro vehicle.

"They killed my husband, now they send me the invoice. Who would accept that?" said Fikri Demirbaş's wife of 38 years, Halime Demirbaş, who with her eight children has fallen on hard times since her husband's death.

The family has not paid, and has been warned they will face trial as a result. Halime said she believes the camera on the vehicle was recording during the accident, but the footage has been concealed.

The Demirbaş family's lawyer, Velat Bozhan, believes the family has been denied due process, from the forensics reports onward.

"If there was video (of the crash), we could have seen what happened," he said. "[Without it], it is nearly impossible to state fault with either party with any certainty."

Bozhan criticised the collection of evidence

for the case, saying the court had unfairly rejected submissions made by the family. He said the lack of evidence gathered initially meant it was vital for the scene of the accident to be re-examined again, and that the armoured vehicle's hard disks must be reviewed to recover any data that could shed light on what happened.

Regardless of the exact circumstances of the accident that killed Demirbaş, the armoured vehicles should not be cruising Turkish roads in the first place, said Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV)'s Diyarbakır representative, Barış Yavuz.

The armoured vehicles are made for operations, not regular driving in urban traffic as visibility is low due to their cabin designs, according to the lawyer. Additionally, drivers often lack the proper training to safely drive among regular traffic, he said.

These incidents are reported as regular traffic accidents, but more extensive statistics should be kept for vehicle specifications, driving conditions and drivers' training levels for specific vehicles, he added.

"If armoured vehicles are treated like ordinary cars, then this beast of a machine is left at no fault at all, and that creates impunity. The drivers turn malicious as they understand they won't face consequences," Yavuz said.

The Dark Side of Turkey's Intelligence Community

Last week the U.S. Embassy in Turkey released a statement that said Washington had reached an [agreement](#) to implement “initial measures to address Turkey’s security concerns” and to establish a “peace corridor” inside Kurdish-controlled portions of Syria. The agreement aims to diffuse a crisis which saw the Turkish military mobilize along the Syrian border and [threaten](#) to occupy northern Syria, ostensibly to fight terrorism. The details of the agreement have not been made public.

Turkish officials have long complained that the U.S. partnership with Syrian Kurds is a betrayal of decades of U.S.-Turkey partnership. The People’s Protection Units (YPG) and associated militias, Turkish diplomats argue, are affiliated with the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terror group. Turkish authorities have repeatedly [told](#) their American counterparts that “you can’t fight one terrorist group with another.”

It is true that there are [links](#) between the PKK and YPG, though the two are not interchangeable. It is also true that the PKK is a U.S.-designated terrorist group, but Turkish authorities are dead wrong to suggest equivalency between the YPG in Syria and the Islamic State. Indeed, the Turkish insistence is ironic given that the United States only began partnering with the YPG when evidence became [overwhelming](#) that Turkey’s political leadership—including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s [own family](#)—and intelligence services actively supported and profited from [the Islamic State](#) and other [Al Qaeda-affiliated groups](#) in Syria.

The problems with Turkish arguments are multi-fold. First, there is no evidence that the YPG or PKK plot or direct terror operations from Syria. This accusation was the stated reason behind Turkey’s launch in January 2018 of Operation Olive Branch but, twenty months later, it is clear the operation was more about [ethnically cleansing](#) the region’s Kurdish population than eradicating terrorism. Underlying both Turkish bad faith has been Turkey’s willingness to welcome several dozen [Islamic State fighters](#) into Turkey’s own militias now operating in Afrin. Most American officials—as well as a growing array of European and Arab diplomats—understand that Turkey misuses the terrorism label as a political weapon against opponents.

Spurious Turkish accusations against the YPG are only the tip of the iceberg. Erdoğan has accused rival politicians both from the predominantly Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) and the center-left Republican People’s Party (CHP) of supporting terrorism, imprisoning many. He has also accused the followers of his one-time ally, Pennsylvania-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, of being terrorists, [imprisoning](#) tens of thousands while somehow ignoring his own role in Gülen’s empowerment. Yet, the thousands of documents he turned over to U.S. authorities to win their support for Gülen’s extradition provided no proof; the U.S. Jus-



Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar (L) and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, US Air Force General Tod Wolters, Brussels, Belgium, June 26, 2019. Photo: Reuters

tice Department concluded documents Turkey provided were often deeply flawed if not fraudulent. Alas, such poor intelligence has become the rule rather than the exception under the Erdoğan regime. In the years leading up to the [abortive July 2016 coup](#), Erdoğan presided over multiple [purges](#) of political opponents based upon evidence which even Turkish courts later deemed fraudulent. After I first [criticized](#) corruption and financial opacity in Turkey fifteen years ago and then, drawing upon a wide range of sources and contacts, successfully [predicted](#) a coup, Erdoğan deemed that I, too, was a [terrorist](#) and a business ally issued a [bounty](#) for my capture.

That Turkish intelligence is based more on political expediency and wishful thinking than professional tradecraft is clear. The question for U.S. policymakers, then, becomes how long has Turkish intelligence been so corrupt? Long before today’s diplomatic crises, the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department have relied upon and integrated Turkish intelligence.

Consider the PKK: The U.S. State Department [designated](#) the group in 1997, against the backdrop of Clinton administration efforts to finalize a large arms sale to Turkey. As Aliza Marcus shows in her seminal history of the PKK, *Blood and Belief*, while the PKK engaged in violence and perhaps terrorism in the early years of its campaign, its insurgency had matured by the late 1990s. Turkish president Turgut Özal was even planning serious negotiations with the group prior to his fatal 1993 heart attack. Twenty years on, it is not clear whether such terror designation fits the PKK. Indeed, earlier this year, a Belgian court [ruled](#) that the PKK and its civil society affiliates are not a terrorist organization. That ruling marks the latest in a string of Turkish losses when European courts examine the evidence behind the PKK’s terrorist label. This is not to say there has not been Kurdish terrorism perpetrated against Turkey—the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) has launched attacks inside Turkey, but there is no evidence these were organized in either Syria or the PKK stronghold on Qandil mountain in Iraq, or that

the PKK and TAK are interchangeable, any more than other terrorist spoilers seeking to undercut reconciliation over the years.

Within the U.S. context, the question is not only whether there is any evidence independent of Turkish government sources to back claims that the PKK is a terrorist organization, but also whether leading Kurdish officials are criminals. Consider, for example, the case of [Adem Uzun](#), an executive council member of the Kurdistan National Congress (KCK) and a leading Kurdish intellectual and political activist, whose 2012 [arrest in Paris](#) sparked the Belgian lawsuit, which ultimately overturned the PKK terror designation. In 2011, at a time when President Barack Obama still [considered](#) Erdoğan to be one of his “most trusted” foreign friends, the U.S. Treasury Department [named](#) Uzun and several colleagues as “Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficking Kingpins.” The Erdoğan government [celebrated](#). But, while such designation paralyzes any ability for U.S. officials to discuss, debate, or interact with leading Kurdish activists, there is no indication that the information supporting the designation provided to the United States by Turkey is based on reality.

Simply put, Turkey and its National Intelligence Organization (MIT) appear to abuse the intelligence and diplomatic process by seeking to insert flawed and false intelligence in order to constrain and subvert U.S. diplomatic options. Rather than blindly accept Turkey’s accusations against the YPG, PKK, and top Kurdish intellectuals and activists, it is time the United States intelligence community audit every piece of intelligence that Turkey has provided over the past several decades to ensure that U.S. intelligence remains apolitical and uncorrupt and that Turkey does not abuse intelligence cooperation to interfere in U.S. diplomacy and policy formations.

Perhaps such an audit will find that the conclusions now embraced by the Central Intelligence Agency and State Department are warranted. More likely, however, given the exposure of recent Turkish dossiers as fraudulent, it will become clear that a major reassessment is warranted in Washington. Either way, as the Trump administration and its Special Envoy on Syria James Jeffrey make life-and-death decisions that could impact the region for decades, no official should put the diplomatic nicety of taking Turkey at its word above a fundamental quest for truth.

Michael Rubin is a former Pentagon official whose major research areas are the Middle East, Turkey, Iran and diplomacy. He is author of “Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engaging Rogue Regimes” (Encounter, 2014). He is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute AEI. His major research area is the Middle East, with special focus on Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Kurdish society. Read more by [Michael Rubin](#). The article first published at [American Enterprise Institute](#).

A Syria Safe Zone Will Create More Problems Than It Solves

The United States and Turkey have agreed on a way forward that may marginalize Kurdish forces.

After months of stalemate, Turkey and the United States have agreed to establish a joint operations center to coordinate efforts to carve out a safe zone stretching more than 250 miles along Syria's northeastern border with Turkey. Much of the region is controlled by the Syrian Kurdish militia that Turkey considers to be a terrorist organization, but which played a key role in the U.S.-led fight against ISIS. In the last few years, Turkey launched two military incursions into the area to drive back the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forces from the border and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said a third incursion into YPG-controlled northeastern Syria, where hundreds of U.S. troops are stationed, was imminent. With the recent deal, a major point of contention between the United States and Turkey seems to be softening. Down the road, however, disagreements will flare up. For any deal in northeastern Syria to work, it has to provide a sustainable solution to U.S. and Turkish security interests and address Kurdish concerns. The current agreement fails on all counts.

Although the announcement by the two countries left out key details, including who would control the zone and how deep into Syrian territory it would extend, Turkey's Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar said the United States is getting closer to Turkey's views on the safe zone. Turkey has long pushed for at least a twenty-mile-deep zone that would be off limits to YPG forces and expressed a preference to control it alone. If those are indeed the parameters of the proposed zone, it will create more problems for all parties involved.

Safe zones are generally established to protect people in conflict zones and are usually designed to be neutral, demilitarized, and focused on humanitarian purposes. Imposing a twenty-mile-deep safe zone east of the Euphrates would have the opposite effect—likely displacing more than 90 percent of the Syrian Kurdish population, exacerbating what is already an extremely challenging humanitarian situation, and creating an environment for increased conflict that would require an extended deployment of military forces.

The proposed safe zone will hurt U.S. interests as well. The United States has been trying to prevent the resurgence of ISIS, protect those who fought it alongside the Global Coalition, and thwart Iranian efforts to use the area to propagate its sectarian activities and directly threaten others. The U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces are the most effective fighting element in Syria



Image: Reuters

against ISIS. Their presence promotes stability and the return of local governance, which is key to prevent the resurgence of ISIS, and their control of the area shuts down facilitation, movement, and resources that ISIS requires to achieve its objectives. Implementing a safe zone that would drive Kurdish forces out would likely disrupt those efforts.

Turkey has a well-established and widely recognized interest in ensuring that areas along its border cannot be used as a platform to attack Turkish citizens. Ankara claims that the presence of Kurdish forces in this area poses a security threat to Turkey. While there continue to be some incidents along the border, these are low level and low impact, and there is no evidence to suggest the area is being used as a platform to attack Turkey. When combined with a small coalition presence, the United States is able to heavily influence the Kurdish forces, and by extension help assure the security of the Turkish border areas.

The people of northeast Syria have interests as well, such as recovery from years of conflict, protection from attacks, and an opportunity to live in peace. Displacing the Kurdish population will not only deny them these rights, but also create further conflict.

What is needed is not a safe zone, but rather a sustainable security mechanism that addresses the specific concerns of all the parties involved and creates a structure that monitors and controls security operations while also facilitating communication among all sides. It will not be perfect, and no one will be completely satisfied with the arrangement, but this is the only viable way forward. This arrangement must include accommodations by the Kurdish forces to allow vulnerable areas to be jointly patrolled, the removal of heavy weapons to safe distances away from the border, and the dismantling of security positions along the border. Turkey must refrain from insisting on

permanent forces in the area and work closely with the U.S.-led coalition on combined patrols, surveillance, and jointly manned checkpoints at critical locations on the border.

The United States and the coalition must continue to exert their influence and be the trusted partner that ensures the interests of the various parties are observed. There are myriad issues that will have to be addressed (including the necessary return of refugees currently in Turkey)—and they can be—but we must first have an agreed security mechanism in place. We have this in Manbij and in the southern Syrian enclave of Al Tanf, where the coalition worked with Russia to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid to refugee camps. None of these models are perfect, but they are working and creating a more stable and secure environment that will give diplomacy a chance to pursue longer-term political solutions.

But the ideal solution to the security dilemma of all parties involved is for Turkey to resolve its domestic Kurdish problem peacefully. While conditions in Turkey might not be ripe for that at present given Erdogan's electoral vulnerability and reliance on the nationalists, the United States must remain diplomatically engaged to encourage a peaceful solution.

Gönül Tol is the founding director of The Middle East Institute's Center for Turkish Studies. She is also an adjunct professor at the George Washington University's Institute for Middle East Studies. A former adjunct professor at the College of International Security Affairs at the National Defense University, she has taught courses on Islamist movements in Western Europe, Turkey, world politics, and the Middle East, and has written extensively on Turkey-U.S. relations, Turkish domestic politics, foreign policy and the Kurdish issue.

Gen. Joseph Votel served as commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) from March 2016 to March 2019. As commander of CENTCOM, Votel oversaw military operations across the region, including the campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Before CENTCOM, he was the commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). He was the commander of the 75th Ranger Regiment when they deployed to Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. While assigned to the Pentagon, he organized the original IED Task Force that eventually grew into the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO). He has extensive operational experience across the Middle East, Levant, Central and South Asia, Northern Africa, and the Horn of Africa. General Votel will be joining the Middle East Institute (MEI) on July 1 as a non-resident Distinguished Senior Fellow on National Security.

Au nord de la Syrie, des agriculteurs kurdes dépossédés par la Turquie

Les attaques permanentes de l'armée turque de l'autre côté du mur construit par la Turquie tout au long de sa frontière de 600 km avec la Syrie, empêchent les agriculteurs du Rojava d'accéder à leurs terres situées à proximité du mur. À ce jour, de nombreux agriculteurs ont été blessés par les tirs des militaires en poste le long de la frontière. Plusieurs ont perdu la vie. En dernier lieu, le 30 juillet, un adolescent du nom de Meher Hesen a été touché à la tête par un tir de l'armée turque, dans un village de Kobanê. Il est décédé trois jours plus tard.

Dans le district de Tirbê Spî, qui se trouve dans le canton de Qamislo, ce sont des dizaines de kilomètres de terres dont l'accès est de fait interdit par l'armée turque. Outre les agriculteurs, les bergers de la région sont également concernés par cet empiètement de la Turquie sur le territoire syrien. Les propriétaires des terres accusent par ailleurs l'armée turque d'incendier leurs champs.

« Ils ouvrent le feu sur les enfants »

Xelil Abdullah, 50 ans, dit ne pas être en mesure



A Tirbê Spî (Al Darbasiyah), un agriculteur dont les champs sont situés le long de la frontière turque, n'a pas cultivé ses terres depuis quatre ans, en raison des tirs indiscriminés de l'armée turque.

de planter ses champs depuis des années. « Les soldats turcs ouvrent le feu sur tous les villageois qui s'approchent de leurs champs, dit-il. Auparavant, je ne pouvais cultiver que la moitié de mes terres, c'était mon gagne-pain. Aujourd'hui, je n'ai plus rien. »

Abdullah possède 20 hectares de terres le long de la frontière. Voilà 4 ans qu'il n'a pas pu les cultiver.

« Les soldats turcs ouvrent le feu sur tout le monde, y compris les enfants », peste Ali avant d'ajouter : « Ils lancent des boules de feu depuis les blocs de béton près de la frontière pour incendier les terres cultivées ».

2500 hectares de terres non exploitées

Selon Kemiran Umer, Coprésident du Conseil des agriculteurs de Tirbê Spî,

l'armée turque empêche l'exploitation de 2500 hectares de terres. Cinq pour cent des terres agricoles de la région sont situées le long de la frontière et ne peuvent être cultivées.

IRAN NEWS UPDATE
August 13, 2019
By INU Staff

Kurdish Porters Continue to Be Killed and Injured by Regime Agents

INU - The Iranian regime has been targeting religious and ethnic minorities for many years. It has been reported that in the past few weeks, a number of Kurdish porters have been killed or injured by regime agents.

Sources concerned with human rights have said that porters have been fired at by agents of the notorious Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). A number of porters have been killed and dozens have been injured.

Reports say that state security forces killed a young man identified as Reza Ebrahimi. Another porter was injured in the same incident. On another occasion, border patrol agents in the city of Sardasht in the western part of the country shot and injured a young porter. The relatives and friends of this victim identified as Younes Pirooti took him to the hospital for medical attention. He lives in a village close to the city of Sardasht.

In a nearby area – Khoy district – a group of porters were targeted by IRGC and border patrol agents. A young man named Naji Abu-Bakri was severely injured when a bullet went through a massive artery on his thigh. He lost a huge amount of blood and had to be taken to a hospital in Urmia – a nearby city.



Over the past few years, many porters have been killed or injured by the regime's suppressive forces. As well as being deliberately targeted by violent agents, the people that work as porters are also at risk because of a number of other factors. Some porters have died after stepping on landmines that are still around since the Iran-Iraq war of the eighties. There are also the risk factors that come from working in the mountains, such as extreme weather, falling rocks, uneven terrain, and so on.

The Iranian regime has tried to justify its killing of porters. Officials have said that the porters are effectively smugglers and should be treated as such. Unfortunately for the porters, this

means that the regime will carry out shootings on porters with impunity. No legal implications affect those that carry out such atrocities.

Being a porter is a physically tough and demanding job. It is not a desirable profession, but many fall into it because they have very little choice because of social factors. In the province of Kurdistan, the unemployment rate has reached 40 per cent in some areas for the young people. Instead of willingly working as a porter, it is seen as an obligation for many. It is a profession that is concentrated across many areas on the Iranian border with Turkey.

In its annual report on the human rights situations in Iran, Amnesty International expressed its deep concern about the discrimination that ethnic minorities face. It said that the organisation is worried about the unlawful killing of tens of Kurdish kulbars (porters) over the course of the year 2018.

The regime's treatment of these porters is just one more example of its blatant disregard of human rights.

Turkish gov't removes 2 more elected pro-Kurdish mayors on terror charges, bringing total to 8



Medeni Özer, the co-mayor of Edremit district of Van province, and Faruk Demir, the co-mayor of Çaldıran district have been removed from their positions for having “links to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK),” according to [the GazeteKarınca](#) news portal.

They have been replaced with state-appointed trustees.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has been removing local mayors, particularly in the Kurdish-populated southeastern region, especially since a coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Tens of elected Kurdish mayors were replaced by government appointees.

The Turkish government has suspended pro-Kurdish mayors for Turkey’s Çaldıran and Edremit districts over the weekend,

bringing the tally of suspended HDP officials elected in March to eight mayors and 56 municipal assembly members.

Ahval 14/08/2019
By Paul Iddon

Could Turkey use Syria safe zone to remake the area’s demographics?

Turkey’s track record in Syria suggests it might use a U.S.-backed safe zone planned for Kurdish-majority northeastern Syria to fundamentally reshape the region’s demographic makeup, though Washington would likely stand in its way.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has for months threatened to launch a cross-border military operation to drive out the People’s Protection Units (YPG) from the area, saying the Syrian Kurdish force is an extension of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) that has been fighting for self-rule in Turkey’s mainly Kurdish southeast for more than three decades.

Turkey’s offensive into northeast Syria has so far been blocked by the United States, which armed, trained and backed the Syrian

Democratic Forces (SDF), largely made up of YPG fighters, to help it defeat Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria. But Turkey and the United States last week agreed to establish a joint operations centre to oversee a safe zone in Syria. Details of the deal have not been revealed, but most observers believe differences remain over safe zone size and which troops would patrol it.

Turkey’s previous cross-border offensives suggest the zone would be less than safe for many of its present, mainly Kurdish, inhabitants. After Turkey seized the northwestern Syrian Kurdish district of Afrin in early 2018, its Syrian militia proxies, the Free Syrian Army, looted houses in broad daylight.

Throughout the ongoing occupation, Turkey has done nothing to prevent [documented](#)

[human rights violations](#), including the displacement of more than 100,000 native Afrin Kurds.

Turkey also oversaw the resettlement of displaced Arabs from elsewhere in Syria in vacated Kurdish homes. It has even [given them residence permits](#) to stay in the region. By doing so, it is creating new demographic facts on the ground in a region that has historically been overwhelmingly Kurdish.

The main regions of Syrian Kurdistan are situated east of the River Euphrates. After the Aug. 7 preliminary agreement between Turkey and the United States to create a safe zone in that area, the U.S. embassy in Ankara [said](#), “that the safe zone shall become a



peace corridor, and every effort shall be made so that displaced Syrians can return to their country.”

“The term peace corridor refers to two different animals: for Turkey, it’s the total elimination of PKK cadres in northern Syria; for the U.S., it is a workable solution to make both Turkey and the YPG/PKK avoid clashing,” Mustafa Gürbüz, a non-resident fellow at the Arab Center in Washington. “Unless a paradigm shift occurs on either side, it is impossible to have a long-term safe-zone agreement.”

Turkey frequently talks of its intention to send the majority of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees back to their homeland. This could mean resettling Syrian Arabs in Kurdish-majority areas, as it has done in Afrin, so as to destroy any contiguous Kurdish-majority region on Turkey’s border.

Turkey plans to [resettle some 700,000 Syrian refugees](#) in Kurdish-majority northeast Syria following the safe zone’s establishment. This is possibly part of a project to lessen the unpopular presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey and [fundamentally change the demographics](#) of northeast Syria in a similar fashion to the Syrian Baathist Arabisation drive of the 1960s and 1970s. That plan [sought](#) to repopulate Kurdish-majority areas on the Syrian border with Arabs to separate Syria’s Kurds from the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq, where Kurdish nationalism was on the rise.

The Syrian government planned to remove Kurds from a zone along the Syrian border with Turkey nine miles deep and 174 miles wide. It never fully materialised, though

many Kurds were forcibly uprooted and their land resettled by some 4,000 Arab families.

Turkey may well see the safe zone as the first step to building a similar “Arab belt” along the border. The exact size and location of the safe zone is not yet clear. Turkey wants a 20-mile deep zone spanning the entire border while the United States has [suggested](#) a much smaller nine-mile deep zone. Turkey remains adamant that the zone should be [no less than 20-miles deep](#) and says it will launch a unilateral military operation if it does not get what it wants.

A zone that size would include all of Syrian Kurdistan’s major cities, many of which are close to the Turkish border, and would be unacceptable to the YPG and the multi-ethnic SDF umbrella force.

The United States may convince Turkey to instead settle for establishing the safe zone around the Arab-majority border town of Tel Abyad, where resettled Syrian Arab refugees may prove less contentious in Kurdish-majority areas.

“Kurds see Tel Abyad as a part of Syrian Kurdistan because it is one of the regions where the Arab belt project was implemented and the demographics there were changed decades ago,” said Mutlu Çiviroğlu, a Kurdish affairs analyst.

It is unclear whether the United State will be able to persuade Turkey to make significant concessions.

“The American team was convinced that Erdoğan was going to invade northern and

eastern Syria,” said Nicholas Heras, Middle East security fellow at the Center for a New American Security. “There was an air of desperation from the American side during these talks that has not existed before.”

His party’s defeat in mayoral elections in Turkey’s biggest city and financial capital Istanbul shook the president, Heras said. Consequently, Erdoğan views the Syria issue “as a cornucopia that he can use to satisfy the Turkish body politic that he senses is turning against him”.

“The American team believed that Erdoğan was going to invade, push out the SDF from a large swathe of the border, and nearly simultaneously move refugees into the void,” Heras said. “What is really bothering the American side is a belief that there could still be a moment when U.S. and other coalition forces will need to fire on Turkish troops in order to protect the SDF.”

Heras said there had been a quiet war between the U.S. State Department that wanted to give the Turks more room to operate in SDF areas, and the U.S. military that was pushing back hard.

“Neither the Turks nor the Americans have agreed to much, except to keep talking,” he said. “But that is a win for both the U.S. military and the SDF, because the longer the Turks are kept at bay, the less likely Turkey can pull off an invasion.”

Heras doubted the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army would be able to operate in any safe zone, noting that they had “no protection whatsoever from coalition forces”.

“U.S.-led coalition forces in northern and eastern Syria have almost no trust for Turkey’s Syrian rebel proxies,” he said. “If they try to operate in SDF areas, they will be shot.”

Syrian Kurds believe Turkey uses its Syrian proxies in order to shield itself from charges of abuse, Çiviroğlu said. He said he doubted the United States would permit Turkey to alter the demographics of northeast Syria.

“I don’t think the U.S. will accept this because this is against international law and it doesn’t solve any problems,” he said. “Also ethically, the U.S. will not accept such a thing in my view because these are the people that have been fighting side-by-side with the U.S. against

British-Iranian academic 'arrested in Iran'

A British-Iranian dual national has been arrested in western Iran, according to his family.

The wife of Kameel Ahmady, a social anthropologist, said he was taken into custody on Sunday from their home without a reason being given.

Mr Ahmady has researched female genital mutilation and child marriage in Iran, among other subjects.

Another British dual national, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, has been in Iranian custody since 2016 over spying claims.

Earlier this year, [the UK foreign office advised all dual nationals against all travel to Iran](#) because of the risk of arbitrary detention.

The new alleged arrest comes as high tensions, caused by oil tankers seizures, continue between the two countries.

- [The uncertain fate of Iran's jailed dual nationals](#)
- [What is Zaghari-Ratcliffe case about?](#)
- [British Council names employee jailed by Iran](#)

Professional websites in Mr Ahmady's name identify him as "British-Iranian originally from Kurdistan". His LinkedIn profile says he studied at a number of UK universities, including the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).



Kameel Ahmady's wife (right) said she has not been informed of charges against him

A spokesman for the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, who reported his arrest, said Mr Ahmady has lived in Iran for many years.

Officials in both countries are yet to confirm he has been taken into custody.

In an interview with BBC Persian, his wife Shafaq Rahmani alleged security agents came to the couple's house and "took away documents, including his ID card".

She said a local judicial official later confirmed a one-month temporary detention order had been issued against Mr Ahmady.

"They have not provided any information about the reason for the arrest or the charges against Kameel," Ms Rahmani wrote on Instagram.

Iran does not recognise dual nationality and there are no exact figures on the number of detainees who are also foreign nationals.

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British-Iranian Kurdish academic Kameel Ahmady arrested in Tehran

TEHRAN,— Kameel Ahmady, a British-Kurdish academic originally from the city of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan was arrested on Sunday in Tehran, according to his wife and [human rights](#) activists.

Ahmady, a British-Iranian dual national and social anthropologist who studied at the London School of Economics (LSE), was taken by security forces on August 10, his wife Shafaq Rahmani told the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN).

KHRN said Ahmady's house and car were search repeatedly and some of his belongings confiscated. Rahmani told BBC Persian they took away some documents and Ahmady's ID card.

He has reportedly been given a one-month detention order and is being held at the notorious Evin Prison.



British-Iranian Kurdish academic Kameel Ahmady, 2019. Photo: Ahmady's FB

According to KHRN he had been living in the Iranian capital for several years.

The arrest comes at a sensitive time in UK-Iran relations after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) seized a British-flagged vessel in the Strait of Hormuz July 19 in retaliation for the detention of an Iranian vessel in the Strait of Gibraltar on July 4.

Another British-Iranian dual national, [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#), has been held by Iranian authorities since 2016 accused of spying.

Iran does not recognize dual citizenship and regularly accuses those with foreign ties of espionage.

According to KHRN, Ahmady last year won the World Peace Foundation's Literature and Humanities Award at America's George Washington University for his research.

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The Washington Post August 14, 2019
Liz Sly

Captured ISIS fighters get short sentences and art therapy in Syria

QAMISHLI, Syria — At a closely guarded prison in this northeastern Syrian town, former Islamic State fighters make papier-mâché models of birds, flowers and trees while serving sentences that typically run two or three years.

Across the border in Iraq, Islamic State detainees are being held in **degrading conditions**, subjected to torture and often, when brought to trial, given long sentences or the death penalty, according to human rights groups.

The Syrian Kurdish allies of the United States are attempting a different approach. Their goal, Kurdish officials say, is to rehabilitate and reintegrate many of the Islamic State fighters in their custody, in hopes of deterring a revival of the militant movement.

The Syrian Kurds' leftist ideology precludes the death penalty, and their few functioning courts issue light sentences for fighters not found to have committed major crimes. Hundreds more militants have simply been freed in deals with local Arab tribes whose cooperation the Kurds need to maintain.

By acting with leniency, the Kurds hope to break the cycle of revenge that has trapped so much of the region in conflict for decades, said Khaled Barjas Ali, a senior judge in the terrorism courts run by the self-proclaimed Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria.

"If I sentence a man to death, I am spreading hate. We want to give people reasons to trust us," he said. "If you take revenge, people will be radicalized. But with reconciliation we are sure we can finish the problem."

It is an imperfect effort that is patchily enforced, inexpertly applied and acutely under-resourced. But it raises a question unanswered by the wider international community despite nearly two decades of war against terrorism: Do harsh punishments work to deter extremism?

"It's the million-dollar question," said Colin Clarke, an expert in counterterrorism and deradicalization with the nonprofit Soufan Center. "We still don't have a good understanding of what works and what doesn't work. We don't have a large body of evidence to look back upon."

Men accused of being Islamic State militants stand in a cell. Prison officials asked



Detainees stand in a cell at the prison in Qamishli. The Syrian facility holds men accused of being Islamic State militants. (Alice Martins/For The Washington Post)

them to turn away from the camera to protect their identities. (Alice Martins/For The Washington Post)

The United States and its allies vigorously prosecuted the military campaign that resulted in the territorial defeat of the Islamic State in March. They have put less effort into managing the aftermath of the war, including what to do with the approximately 90,000 Islamic State fighters and family members who survived the battles, he said.

"As soon as the kinetic fight was over, it's, 'Oh, ISIS is done,' and we walk away," Clarke said, using another name for the Islamic State.

The Syrian Kurds have been left almost alone to accommodate, feed and guard the captives now being held in either prisons or **internment camps**. Among the detainees are 1,000 foreign fighters and 9,000 of their wives and children from 46 countries, only 14 of which have agreed to repatriate citizens and mostly only children, according to the Kurdish administration.

[Months after the fall of ISIS, Europe has done little to take back its fighters]

The Kurds are appealing for international help and are promoting a proposal for a U.N. tribunal to bring to justice the foreign fighters they hold. But the international

community has shown little interest in backing the plan, said Letta Tayler of New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Unlike Iraq, the Kurdish administration in Syria's northeast is not an internationally recognized sovereign state and is moreover closely affiliated to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and Europe. That precludes many forms of direct assistance that might imply recognition, diplomats say.

The Kurds are keen to demonstrate that their judicial system is fair and meets international standards, in the hope of receiving assistance, Tayler said. But trained legal staff are scarce, and the system appears haphazard, at best.

In the past five years, the three terrorism courts established by the Kurds have tried some 1,500 cases, according to Hassan Hassan, an administrator at one of the courts in the city of Qamishli. An additional 4,000 Syrian fighters are awaiting trial — a backlog that will take 13 years to clear at the current pace. The Kurds are also holding 1,500 Iraqi fighters and 1,000 foreigners whom they have no intention of bringing to court unless their proposal for an international tribunal is adopted, Hassan said.

One recent trial held in a small side office

at the Qamishli court seemed a makeshift affair. A 19-year-old defendant called Omar sat handcuffed on a chair in the middle of the room. Four people squeezed behind a desk, three of them judges, one the prosecutor. He read out the charge: that the accused had fought with the Islamic State.

Omar had no defense lawyer. He said he was 15 when he joined the militants and did so only for the money. After a process that lasted seven minutes, he put his thumbprint on a copy of his statement and was led away. A sentence will be issued later, but convictions in such cases typically draw about two years, Hassan said.

Some, including members of the Arab tribes who allied with the Kurds against the militants, believe the Kurds are being too lenient, according to Hassan Hassan of the Washington-based Center for Global Policy, who is from eastern Syria but is not related to the court official.

“Some people complain it’s a process that will backfire,” he said, “that you have too many former ISIS fighters who are sitting with their families back home and you don’t know if they are just waiting to be reactivated.”

There is also the question of fairness, he said. While some fighters are being freed and others are given light sentences, others wait years for a trial. And there is no process for dealing with the cases of the tens of thousands of women and children detained in the dismal internment camps.

[New suffering for the children of the ISIS caliphate as hunger and sickness spread]



A suspected Islamic State member faces judges at a makeshift courtroom in Qamishli. (Alice Martins/For The Washington Post)

Access to the prisons housing the fighters still awaiting trial is prohibited. There have been scattered but persistent reports of abuses against captives by Kurdish and Arab fighters with the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish-led militia that fought the Islamic State.



Men accused of being Islamic State militants stand in a cell. Prison officials asked them to turn away from the camera to protect their identities. (Alice Martins/For The Washington Post)

A visit to the prison in Qamishli where about 400 convicted fighters are serving their sentences suggests conditions for at least some are better than those in Iraqi prisons. The torture and mistreatment of Iraqis suspected of involvement in insurgent activities helped fuel the resurgence of the Islamic State after U.S. troops left Iraq in 2011, and there are indications that conditions have not improved, human rights researchers say.

Photographs obtained by Human Rights Watch and published in a recent report showed prisoners piled on top of one another on the floor of a cell. During a month of trials that the group’s researchers secured permission to attend, in February last year, 655 of the 758 accused were given sentences in excess of 15 years, and 203 were sentenced to death, according to Belkis Wille, Human Rights Watch’s Iraq representative.

The Qamishli facility, originally a Syrian government prison, features a visiting hall with glass booths and intercoms, a barber and a dentist clinic. The air-conditioned cells have three-tier

bunk beds and televisions tuned to Arabic soap operas.

Two dozen prisoners were attending an art class, where they were painting papier-mâché palm trees in a room crammed with models, some of them elaborate reconstructions of towns and villages that were apparently made by prisoners.

“Here we have learned that the ISIS ideology was wrong,” said a 36-year-old former fighter, who said he had 10 weeks left to serve, in the presence of prison guards. Many prisoners said they were weeks or months away from release, but a handful had been given 20 years, the maximum, because they had been found guilty of planting bombs or killing people, prison officials said.

In a classroom, most of the few books were by Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK and the intellectual father of the Syrian Kurdish group that controls northeastern Syria. Prisoners are not forced to embrace his leftist ideology, staff said, but apparently it helps. Some who do are given jobs in the Kurdish-led militia or the administration when they are released, said a prison administration official who asked to be identified by her nom de guerre, Haval (Comrade) Abir.

Most only joined the Islamic State because they needed the salary and are not committed to the militants’ ideology, she said.

“It is our philosophy to give them a chance to start a new life. Maybe a man made a mistake and he joined Daesh, but maybe he’s a victim of his circumstances and he’s repentant,” she said, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State.

Haval Mohammed, the prison’s director, seemed less sure. “Of course there are some who still love Daesh,” he said.

Kamiran Sadoun contributed to this report.

*Photo editing by Olivier Laurent.
Design by Brandon Ferrill*

Syrian Kurdish commander set conditions for safe zone talks with Turkey

A proposed safe zone deal between Turkey, the United States and the Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria must run the full length of territory lying between the Euphrates River and the Tigris, the commander of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces asserted in an interview published today by the pro-SDF Hawar News Agency.

Striking a moderate tone on the US-led talks to establish a safe zone, Mazlum Kobane confirmed that no firm agreement on the precise nature and scope of the zone had been reached.

Kobane stressed that the SDF would not accept any plan that did not include the full stretch of the border separating the Kurdish-controlled northeast of Syria from Turkey. He did not elaborate.

But a senior SDF official speaking on condition of anonymity because of the delicate nature of the topic told Al-Monitor, "The reason the agreement needs to encompass the whole border is because otherwise Turkey will continue to threaten unilateral action against the territories that fall outside it. We have no reason to believe that Turkey's fundamental hostility toward us has changed."

The official noted, however, that the United States had stood firmly behind the Kurds and that this support had played a critical role in heading off a potential Turkish incursion.

A second SDF-affiliated official was even more upbeat. Speaking not for attribution, he said, "The United States is currently speaking to Ankara on behalf of the SDF, voicing Kurdish demands, and that's actually quite amazing."

Kobane confirmed in the interview that the United States was conveying Turkey's demands to the SDF and the SDF's demands back to Ankara.

The SDF-affiliated official continued, "Ankara looks set to accept a YPG presence in northeastern Syria in the long term. A *modus vivendi* seems within reach." The YPG is the People's Protection Units, the Syrian Kurdish militia that is the driving force behind the SDF. It's the target of Turkey's ire because of its intimate ties with Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The PKK has been fighting the Turkish army for Kurdish self rule since 1984. Today marked the 35th anniversary of the beginning of its guerrilla campaign.

The official speculated that a thaw was made possible when a slew of officers in the Turkish military who purportedly advocated for intervention against the YPG in Syria and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean were either



Mazlum Kobani, SDF's commander in chief, shakes hands with the adviser for the US Department of State in northern Syria William Robak, at al-Omar oil field in Deir ez-Zor, Syria, March 23, 2019. REUTERS/Rodi Said

forced into early retirement or passed over for promotion during the Supreme Military Council's annual meeting on Aug. 1. The alleged purge was reported by the Turkish press.

Bellicose comments by Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu today suggest, however, that little has changed. Cavusoglu said that Turkey would not "tolerate" any "delaying tactics" by the United States. He repeated Turkey's demands that the safe zone would reach a depth of 32 kilometers (20 miles) and be cleared of all YPG and PKK "terrorists" in line with "a promise" from President Donald Trump.

Cavusoglu confirmed that a US military delegation led by EUCOM deputy commander Lt. Gen. Stephen M. Tweety was traveling to the southeastern province of Sanliurfa in connection with a proposed joint operations center to oversee the implementation of the safe zone. He added that Turkish drones had begun overflying the area.

Kobane appeared to contradict him, asserting that Turkey's request to the United States to open the airspace over the region under negotiation had been denied. "We did not agree to this and we never will," Kobane said.

The SDF says it will not accept a zone any deeper than five kilometers (three miles). The presence of Turkish troops other than in joint patrols with US forces is another red line. "The Turkish footprint has to be light and in low-profile spots, and any joint patrols need to be carried out in coordination with the SDF," the SDF-affiliated official said.

Kobane acknowledged, however, that the SDF had agreed to let the zone widen up to 14 kilometers (nine miles) in the chunk of land between the towns of Ras al-Ain and Arab-majority Tell Abyad. He did not explain why.

The SDF official described the region "as a pilot area" where the safe zone project would kick off.

It's presumably intended to accommodate the thousands of Syrian refugees in Turkey who originally lived there. Turkey has made clear its intentions to return Syrians indigenous to the area, calling it a "peace corridor."

Kobane indicated that they were welcome, saying, "We have invited them back." But those who belonged to the Islamic State or other extremist groups that had subjected "the Arab people, the Kurdish people and the other peoples of this region to tyranny," he warned, "can return assured that they will be tried by our courts."

Amberin Zaman, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Daily Telegraph ve Amerika'nın Sesi gibi medya kuruluşları için Türkiye'de muhabirlik yapmış olan, İstanbul'da yerleşik bir gazeteci yazardır. Türk televizyon programlarına sık sık yorumcu olarak katılan Zaman, 1999'dan bu yana The Economist dergisinin Türkiye muhabiri olarak görev yapmaktadır. ABD düşünce kuruluşu German Marshall Fund'ın "On Turkey" yayınlarına düzenli olarak katkı yapan Zaman, önde gelen Türk gazetelerinde de köşe yazarlığı yapmıştır. Uzmanlık alanları, Türk dış politikası, Kürtler ve Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkileridir.

Did France end efforts for intra-Kurdish rapprochement in Syria?

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S) announced Aug. 1 that French endeavors toward Kurdish-Kurdish rapprochement have come to a halt.

The political report of the party stated, "Regarding the endeavors and efforts toward achieving a form of consensus or understanding on shared issues between the Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC/ENKS) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), we, the KDP-S and the KNC confirm that no meeting has ever been held except for what happened in Paris and only once through the mediation of France. We also assert that these endeavors stopped a while ago because the PYD did not cooperate in the issue of the abductees and the politically and judicially pursued members. France asked the PYD to clarify its stance vis-a-vis the detainees after receiving a detailed list of their names and the date of their abduction." The KNC and the PYD had met in Paris in April.

In a video report by al-Arabiya channel on June 18, PYD leader Saleh Muslim praised the initiative of France and the international coalition to unite Kurds in Syria. In the same report, Mohammad Ismail, a KDP-S political bureau officer, said that they accept the French initiative, as it fulfills its purpose and ensures dialogue and rapprochement.

Mohsen Taher, member of the KDP-S political bureau and head of the local councils of the KNC, told Al-Monitor, "Since the start, we gave the French mediators our remarks that pave the way for measures to build trust. They were positive and showed understanding. But, neither we nor the French felt the PYD were serious regarding the discussed issues."

Also read

Taher fears for the Kurdish region based on Turkish threats. "I think the quick developments east of the Euphrates have overshadowed and jeopardized the French initiative," he said. "The possible scenarios are either to end the talks on a consensual note that pleases the US and Turkey or move toward war, conflict and Turkish military intervention."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced Aug. 11 that Turkey "will expel People's Protection Units and the Kurdistan Workers Party from eastern Euphrates." Regarding their stance as a party and council, Taher said that "there is a possibility of resuming the French initiative to bring Kurds



Kurdish women hold flags of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) during a demonstration against the exclusion of Syrian Kurds from the Geneva talks in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli, Feb. 4, 2016. DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/Getty Images

together and in uniting the Kurdish stand to avoid threats and protect the Kurdish region, based on trust and international solidarity."

Taher added, "The KDP-S will not save any effort to unite Kurds, and we will cooperate with any international mediation, especially the French, which aims at uniting our ranks and position on Syria in general, and the Kurdish movement in particular."

Al-Monitor tried to contact the PYD and autonomous administration leaders, but they did not respond.

Ahmad Suleiman, a political bureau member of the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (PDPKS) — distancing itself from the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict and calling for dialogue — told Al-Monitor, "The PDPKS was not banking on the success of the French initiative since the start, and we clarified our stance to the French, despite our full support for the initiative. Such an initiative cannot solve the pending issues between the two parties (the PYD and the KDP) because they are unable to reach an understanding amid the regional situation."

Suleiman believes the situation will worsen and tensions will peak. He said, "The tensions and intra-Kurdish disputes won't allow Kurds to influence the powers intervening in Syria and the Kurdish area. Instability and threats are looming large on the horizon."

Regarding the possibility of forming a new administration and ruling structures that enjoy the approval of the wide social base, Suleiman said, "It all depends on how responsive the Kurdish parties are and how willing and decisive they are to reach an understanding. This understanding should serve the interests of Kurds and at the same time fit with Syrians' interests in general, while shielding the Kurdish areas from serious threats."

Suleiman noted that the Kurdish-Kurdish understanding ensures "preserving the gains that resulted from huge sacrifices and convincing all parties that Kurds are an integral part for resolving the situation and instilling stability in Syria."

Some observers believe the French initiative established Kurds' rights in the new Syrian Constitution. Political researcher and activist Omran Mansour told Al-Monitor over the phone from Paris that France wants to guarantee Kurds' rights in Syria and that it is sorry that the French endeavors and initiative have so far failed.

He noted, "Kurdish-Kurdish consensus is needed first, followed by Kurdish-Arab understanding and finding new Kurdish legal ground to deal with the Syrian government and the Arab forces in the opposition. But partisan interests got the best of the situation, and Kurdish political parties were unable to overcome their differences. Therefore, the initiative was frozen."

Mansour added that if the safe area in the eastern Euphrates is formed, "it would be based on the decision of the disputing countries on Syrian territories, and Turkey wouldn't agree to a Kurdish role in Syria's future. If France had succeeded in its initiative, a new Kurdish structure capable of negotiating with Turks and the regional powers would have been able to prevent the establishment of this region and dispel all Turkish excuses and concerns."

Mansour noted, "The peshmerga Rojava will be part of the US equation and decision to beef up military forces that will guard and manage the safe area. There are concerns about demographic changes in the Kurdish area, especially since Turkey will try to naturalize Syrian refugees in the Kurdish area in eastern Euphrates instead of sending them to Arab provinces like Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor."

Some parties were surprised with the decision to stop the initiative. Akram Hussein,

an independent Kurdish politician, told Al-Monitor, "Why did the KDP-S announce freezing the French initiative endeavors, knowing that France should have been the announcing party? We have not heard from the PYD yet. But, was the initiative stopped because its timeline ended or because of the declared conditions or other reasons? In any case, stopping efforts and endeavors for rapprochement is bad, because negotiations and dialogue regarding the Kurdish future in Syria should remain on the table."

Hussein believes that each party will accuse the other of obstructing efforts to reach an understanding. He criticized the autonomous administration that should have "built trust by opening the closed offices of Kurdish [groups], releasing the KNC detainees or revealing their fate, ensuring freedom of political, media and civil work and setting the stage for a common Kurdish stand. It should have also taken a stance and formed a delegation to represent Kurds in international conferences and events, espe-

cially in the Syrian Negotiation Commission, and worked on restructuring the current administration to serve the partnership with all components of the Kurdish area, which is facing a real threat to its existence from Turkey."

Aldar Khalil, a leader in the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), told a local satellite channel that they do not have any political detainees and that the other party should stop asking for such demands.

"The KNC had handed over a list of 12 names to the French, claiming the self-rule administration and the PYD were detaining them," he said.

Kurds in Syria are expecting political consensus on Syria, in general, and Syrian Kurdistan, in particular, especially with the increasing Turkish threats in the eastern Euphrates. The political and public scenes are gripped with fear and worry.



16/08/2019

SDF command reveals details about buffer zone in northeast Syria



Mazlum Abdi, head of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), speaks at a ceremony to mark the end of the Islamic State's so-called caliphate near the city of Kobani, April 8, 2019. (Photo: Hawar)

QAMISHLI (Kurdistan 24) - Commander in Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Mazlum Abdi on Thursday revealed details about the controversial plan for a buffer zone in northeast Syria amid threats by the Turkish and Syrian regimes.

"The buffer zone includes the area from the Tigris to the Euphrates along the border with Turkey and we did not accept to include only a specific area," Abdi told Hawar, the official Kurdish news agency in northeast Syria.

Abdi's statement came after reports that the [buffer zone](#) included specific areas from the towns of [Serekaniye](#) to [Tal Abyad](#), covering about 115 km of the border with Turkey.

Thus, Abdi said, "If there is an agreement, it should cover all areas of northeast Syria."

"The entire area is 5 km deep, but in some areas between Serekaniye and Tal Abyad, the area is 9 km deep and in some other areas the depth increases to 14 km," he continued.

Regarding the forces that will be present in the buffer zone, Abdi said the YPG and YPJ, the leading components of the SDF, will withdraw, leaving local forces to guard the territory in coordination with US-led coalition forces.

Here, Abdi referred to the local military councils. YPG and YPJ commanders now in the area are not from the predominantly Kurdish border towns.

This plan is similar to what happened in Manbij when it was liberated from the Islamic State in 2016. YPG and YPJ commanders who were from towns west of the Euphrates such as Hasakeh and Qamishli withdrew, leaving security responsibilities there to local commanders who formed Manbij Military Council (MMC).

According to Abdi, the SDF has rejected Ankara's demand that the Turkish air force would have a presence in the buffer zone. "We consider it a threat to our military forces," he said.

He also objected to the notion of referring to the buffer zone as a "safe zone" or "peace corridor."

"Turkey has formed the term of 'peace corridor' and we reject it because our region is already peaceful and not a place of terrorism as Turkey claims," he said, adding, "We assure that our regions are the safest and most stable areas in Syria."

Regarding the return of Syrian refugees now living in Turkey, Abdi said the SDF had al-

ready pledged to accept them but under some conditions.

"We issued a statement in which we called on the people of the area to return to their homes including the people of northeastern Syria in Turkey, but those who were in the ranks of al-Nusra Front, the Islamic State, and terrorist groups must be put on trial first," he explained.

Regarding his characterization of the Syrian government's position, Abdi said that, despite ongoing meetings, Damascus has not yet taken serious steps toward a solution.

"The Syrian regime believes that the Turkish state will attack and we will be forced to meet the regime from a position of weakness, but we will never step back and never give up the gains of our revolution in northeast Syria."

He added, "The regime believes that if there is an agreement on a buffer zone and the danger

of the Turkish state goes away, we will be in a stronger position and the chances of the regime to return to the region will diminish... That's wrong and we don't think that way, rather to the contrary. If there is an agreement on a buffer zone, it would be an important factor to protect portions of Syrian territory. This would be great for all of Syria."

Abdi then said that the Syrian government should look positively at any agreement with neighboring countries that prevents the occupation of any Syrian land, such as what occurred in Afrin.

Regarding the Islamic State, Abdi said that there is a serious risk the group could cause greater harm to the entire world, especially if its followers are seeking to carry out retaliatory attacks in Europe and America.

"Previously, the Islamic State was fighting in a limited area, but now it is spreading everywhere

and sleeper cells are scattered around the world," he said. "Currently, in areas controlled by the Syrian regime west of the Euphrates, there is territory to which the Syrian regime is unable to enter, similar to those in Iraq where the Iraqi army cannot reach, so the Islamic State has revived its power again."

Abdi further explained that there are about 12,000 Islamic State prisoners in northeast Syria guarded by thousands of SDF fighters and other security forces. "If there are any attacks by Turkey or the Syrian regime on the region," he warned, "those guards will have to protect and fight for their homes and people. This will increase the risk posed by Islamic State prisoners."

"In order to strengthen our common struggle with the coalition against the Islamic State, our borders in northeastern Syria must be stable."

Editing by John J. Catherine

Ekurd Daily August 18, 2019
By Editorial Staff in Kurdistan

Kurds almost half of political prisoners in Iran: UN rapporteur

NEW YORK— A newly circulated United Nations report on Iran has noted that nearly half of the country's political prisoners are ethnic Kurds and that they are executed at a disproportionately higher rate than other ethnic groups.

In a report submitted on July 18, 2019 but only circulated to the UN General Assembly on Friday, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran Javaid Rehman expressed concerns about a range of issues, including the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities and women, freedom of expression, and judicial conduct.

Rehman found that "Kurdish political prisoners charged with national security offences represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Moreover, they "constitute a disproportionately high number of those who received the death penalty and are executed."

In 2018, 828 ethnic Kurds were arrested related to civic activism.

So far this year, 199 Kurds have been arrested, including 17 women, on charges of belonging to banned Kurdish parties, organizing Newroz celebrations, or being engaged in labor, environmental, or civic activism.

Others were arrested for engaging in banned religious activities or managing social networks through platforms like Telegram.

"At present, 55 of the 199 Kurdish detainees

were sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. At least 17 Kurdish prisoners were executed: 14 for murder and 3 for drug-related crimes," the report found.

Rahman also expressed concern that Iran has more than 80 offenses are punishable by death, including adultery, homosexuality, drug possession, "waging war against God, corruption on Earth, blasphemy, and [insulting] of the Prophet [Muhammad]."

Iran conducted 253 executions last year, the most of any country other than China, according to Amnesty International.

Rehman also wrote that Iran's Kurdish population is concentrated in "provinces [that] are characterized by a lack of economic development and high unemployment rates."

He also noted that Kurdish language rights are restricted and that Kurdish is not recognized as an official administrative language and is not taught in schools.

Asma Jahangir, the former UN Special Rapporteur-designate for Human Rights in Iran, released her advanced remarks on the violation of rights in Iran in March 2017. "Kurdish political prisoners are said to represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in Iran," she said.

Ever since its emergence in 1979 the Islamic regime imposed discriminatory rules and laws against the Kurds in all social, political and economic fields.

Iran's Kurdish minority live mainly in the west and north-west of the country. They expe-

rience discrimination in the enjoyment of their religious, economic and cultural rights.

Parents are banned from registering their babies with certain Kurdish names, and religious minorities that are mainly or partially Kurdish are targeted by measures designed to stigmatize and isolate them.

Kurds are also discriminated against in their access to employment, adequate housing and political rights, and so suffer entrenched poverty, which has further marginalized them.

Kurdish human rights defenders, community activists, and journalists often face arbitrary arrest and prosecution. Others – including some political activists – suffer torture, grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts and, in some cases, the death penalty.

Kurdish armed nationalist groups including PJAK have been carrying out attacks against Iranian forces in the Kurdistan Province of Iran (Eastern Kurdistan) and other Kurdish-inhabited areas.

Since 2004 the PJAK (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane) took up arms to establish a semi-autonomous Kurdish regional entities or Kurdish federal states in Iran, similar to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. The PJAK has more than 3,000 armed militiamen, half the members of PJAK are women.

Estimate to over 12 million Kurds live in Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat).

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18-08-2019

Germany to repatriate over 100 ISIS-linked children, adults from Syria: monitor

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Germany is set to take back over a hundred children born to suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members as well as “scores of men and women,” according to a local monitor in northern Syria, in would be the largest scale repatriation of ISIS-linked nationals by a European country to date.

“On Monday, a number of German orphans born to ISIS members will be handed over to the German Foreign Ministry at the Semalka border crossing,” read a Sunday tweet from Rojava Information Center (RIC), an organization with ties to the ruling Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria (NES).

The repatriations will be Germany’s first, with “over 100 ISIS-linked German children, plus scores of men & women” held by the NES set to be returned, RIC added.

Incapable of managing the tens of thousands of ISIS suspects, spouses and children, the NES, often referred to as Rojava, has called on the international community to take back their nationals.

Over 11,000 foreign women and children live in “dire conditions” at Al-Hol camp - which holds the families of some ISIS suspects - in northern Syria, according to a report by Human Rights Watch in late July.

Tensions between those detained at the camp

and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who control it have reached boiling point, with attacks on camp guards and protests against camp conditions.

French newspaper Le Monde reported in February that 800 Western men, 700 women, and some 1,500 of their children are estimated to be held in SDF camps.

The US government has insisted on European countries’ wide scale repatriation of citizens suspected of ISIS membership, or born of suspected ISIS members.

Some countries, like Belgium, France and the Netherlands, are repatriating the children of ISIS fighters in Syria on a “case by case basis.”

A German court ordered the repatriation of an ISIS wife and their three children in July after the family sued Germany’s foreign ministry, who intended to repatriate the children without their mother.

Germany has repatriated several children from facilities in Iraq, controlled by the Kurdistan



German national Leonora, who fled fighting between Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Islamic State (ISIS) in Baghouz, Syria on January 31, 2019. Photo: AFP

Regional Government’s (KRG) security forces, in April.

“The number of minors already brought back to Germany [from Iraq] has reached a high single-digit figure,” a source from the Foreign Ministry told AFP.

Monday’s repatriation would make a significant dent in the estimate of 117 children who are likely German nationals being held in detention centers in Syria and Iraq, as reported by German channel WDR in June.

Rudaw English contacted the German Foreign Ministry for a comment on the repatriation, but has yet to receive a response.

Courrier international 19/08/2019

Turquie : Erdogan s’attaque aux mairies du parti prokurde

La dissolution des mairies de trois grandes villes kurdes laisse craindre le début d’une nouvelle vague de répression envers l’opposition.

Le président turc Erdogan a mis ses menaces à exécution. Durant la campagne municipale mouvementée qu’a connue le pays avant l’été, il avait déjà menacé les futurs élus et électeurs du parti de gauche prokurde HDP. Lundi 19 août au matin, les maires de Mardin, Van et Diyarbakir, trois grandes villes de l’est du pays, majoritairement kurde, ont été démis de leurs fonctions pour “liens avec une organisation terroriste”, rapporte le quotidien Cumhuriyet.

Pas moins de 418 interpellations ont été effectuées simultanément parmi les sympathisants et militants du parti à travers le pays. Une façon pour le pouvoir turc de punir ses opposants, mais aussi de s’assurer du soutien de son allié d’extrême droite, le MHP, dont le président a appelé le ministre de l’Intérieur pour le féliciter : “Nous renouvelons notre entière confiance dans le gouvernement”, a-t-il déclaré, re-

late le journal progouvernemental Sabah.

Les Kurdes peuvent néanmoins compter sur le soutien du CHP, le principal parti de l’opposition laïque et nationaliste, traditionnellement très hostile aux revendications autonomistes kurdes, mais qui cette fois-ci fait bloc contre le président Erdogan.

Ekrem Imamoglu, le maire CHP d’Istanbul, triomphalement élu au mois de juin, notamment grâce au soutien du parti prokurde, a fait immédiatement part de son indignation sur Twitter : “Relever de leurs fonctions des maires élus est un affront fait à la démocratie, il est inacceptable de bafouer la volonté du peuple.”

En 2016 déjà, plus de 70 équipes municipales kurdes avaient été dissoutes, et une partie des élus emprisonnés. La reconquête des mairies lors des



Devant les bureaux du parti pro-kurde HPD, le 19 août à Istanbul, des manifestants protestent contre la destitution par Erdogan de trois maires du parti. OZAN KOSE / AFP

dernières municipales avait donné lieu à des scènes de liesse.

Les maires nouvellement élus avaient alors abattu les murs et les barricades dressées autour de leurs mairies et fait visiter les bâtiments, où les tuteurs nommés par l’État “s’étaient construits de véritables palais” avec l’argent du contribuable, comme le dénonçait dans le journal en ligne Diken le nouveau maire de Diyarbakir, celui-là même qu’Erdogan vient de démettre de ses fonctions.

Turkey ousts three Kurdish mayors for suspected militant links, launches security operation



Police use a water cannon to disperse demonstrators during a protest against the replacement of Kurdish mayors with state officials in three cities, in Diyarbakir, Turkey, August 20, 2019. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (Reuters) - Turkey on Monday replaced Kurdish mayors with state officials in three cities and detained more than 400 people for suspected militant links, the Interior Ministry said, a move likely to fuel tensions in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

The ministry also said it had launched an operation with some 2,300 commandos against militant fighters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in southeastern provinces.

The mayors of three major southeastern cities - Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van - are accused of various crimes including membership of a terrorist organization and spreading terrorist group propaganda, the ministry said in a statement.

Riot police fired water cannon on small groups of people protesting against the mayors' dismissal in central Diyarbakir, where police sealed off the municipality headquarters with metal barriers, Reuters TV video showed.

President Tayyip Erdogan had warned ahead of local elections in March of such a move against elected officials if they were found to have had connections to the PKK.

"For the health of the investigations, they have been temporarily removed from their posts as a precaution," the ministry said, referring to Diyarbakir Mayor Selcuk Mizrakli, Mardin

Mayor Ahmet Turk and Van Mayor Bedia Ozgokce Ertan.

Police detained 418 people in 29 provinces in a related investigation targeting suspects with links to the PKK, the ministry added.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), to which the three mayors belong, said they had been dismissed "on an order based on lies and illegal justifications".

"This is a new and clear political coup. It is a clear and hostile stance against the political will of the Kurdish people," the HDP executive board said in a written statement.

It said the three mayors had been elected with between 53% to 63% of the vote in their cities in March and called for support from other political parties.

Police use a water cannon to disperse demonstrators during a protest against the replacement of Kurdish mayors with state officials in three cities, in Diyarbakir, Turkey, August 20, 2019. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

"This is not just the problem of the HDP and the Kurdish people. It is the shared problem of all Turkey's peoples and all democratic forces," it added.

MAIN OPPOSITION SLAMS DISMISSALS

Veli Agbaba, deputy leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), wrote on Twitter that the dismissals were tantamount to fascism and a blow against democracy, while Istanbul's CHP mayor Ekrem Imamoglu also slammed the move.

"Negating the will of the people is unacceptable," he wrote on Twitter. Imamoglu himself was removed from office over irregularities shortly after coming to power in the March election, but won a re-run election in June.

More unusually, Turkey's former president Abdullah Gul and ex-prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, once allies of Erdogan from his AK Party who have emerged as potential political opponents, said on Twitter the dismissals were out of line with democracy.

The removal of the mayors echoed the dismissal of dozens of mayors in 2016 over similar accusations, part of a purge that began after a failed coup. Nearly 100 mayors and thousands of party members were jailed in a crackdown that drew expressions of concern from the United States and European Union.

Erdogan warned before the March elections that HDP mayors could again be dismissed if they, like their predecessors, were deemed to have ties to militants.

Erdogan frequently accuses the HDP of links to the PKK, which is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the EU and the United States. The HDP denies such links.

The PKK launched an insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

The Interior Ministry said recent operations had led to PKK militant numbers falling to their lowest level in 30 years, with the number of fighters in Turkey falling to some 600 from around 1,800-2,000 in the past.

Announcing the new operation against PKK militants, launched on Sunday in the provinces of Van, Sirnak and Hakkari, the ministry published images showing security forces firing machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

The security forces destroyed 43 caves and shelters used by the PKK, the ministry said, adding that operations would continue until all militants in the areas were "neutralized".

**Writing by Daren Butler;
Editing by Dominic Evans
and Gareth Jones**

Iran Mobilizes Forces on Border with Kurdistan

Gunmen from opposition Iranian Kurdish parties are increasing their activities on the Iranian border, prompting the army to boost its presence along the border with Kurdistan Region, according to residents of the Sidakan village, 90 kilometers northeast of Erbil in the Soran district.

Soran mayor, Kirmanj Izzat said the army has been amassing its forces there since last fall in anticipation of any military action.

He told Asharq Al-Awsat that the military has set up more surveillance points on the mountains, but has not entered the Region yet.

"We do not have accurate information on the size or strength of those forces," he announced.

He indicated that the armed groups of the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties are still active, especially near the mountainous border.

Izzat expressed serious concerns about the possibility of an escalation in light of the ongoing operations by the gunmen, who are good at infiltrating deep into Iranian territory, despite the heavy military deployment.

He pointed out that this will negatively affect the situation in the border areas within the Kurdistan Region, calling on the opposition parties to consider the political and security

conditions and withdraw from the area.

Izzat expressed concern over renewed escalation, citing Iranian artillery shelling that killed an 18-year-old girl and injured two of her brothers in the border village of Derri two months ago.

He noted that the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdish regional government are fully capable of controlling the security in the border areas, but they can not control the mountainous border.

Mayor of Derri, Sabri Kamal said that the residents had warned the gunmen against staying in their positions or launching attacks against Iran, which would provoke a response from Tehran that would harm the locals. The residents would take up arms and kick them out by force if they have to.

Derri is located at the foot of the mountainous border and sometimes comes under Iranian bombardment.

Kamal told Asharq Al-Awsat that the residents



Members of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDPI) check the damage after a rocket attack inside their headquarters in Koysinjaq in September 2018. (AFP file photo)

would be forced to defend themselves if the authorities continued to neglect the security of the village.

Residents were forced out of the village after the Iranian shelling burned down their farms and fields and regional authorities did not provide them with any compensation.

The opposition gunmen responded to the warnings and relocated their headquarters a few kilometers away from the village, but they are still in the area, said Kamal.

Joint Statement by 28 Bar Associations Against Removal of Mayors from Office

28 bar associations have released a joint statement and announced the removal of elected Metropolitan Mayors of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van from office. "Turkey has once again woken up to a lawless morning", the bars have stated.

After Metropolitan Mayors of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van have been removed from office by the Ministry of Interior, 28 bar associations have released a joint statement and denounced the appointment of trustees.

"We do not accept this unlawful practice that has completely removed the idea of living together in peace and the belief in the ideal of rule of law", the associations have indicated and stated the following in brief:

'We witness this shame for the second time'

"Turkey has once again woken up to a lawless morning. It is the second time that we witness this shame. In 2016, several mayors were also detained and 96 elected mayors were similarly replaced by trustees.

"Though the State of Emergency has been lifted, the unlawful practices of the State of Emergency still continue apace. Democracy and law have been suspended and ruined once again.

'The threat uttered before March 31 realized'

"The threat of 'If they are elected, we will appoint trustees' uttered before the elections on March 31, 2019, has been put into practice.

"The fact that three elected mayors, whose nomination was approved by the Supreme Election Council (YSK), have been removed from office with an 'administrative decision' not five months later and on the ground of not yet finalized investigations and court cases has once again showed the tutelage of the executive on the judiciary.

"This action has dealt a blow to not only to the administrative structure of the country, but to its judiciary as well.

'It will not bring any good to Turkey's democracy'

"The elimination of the election and the people's

will as a reflection of the election with an administrative decision is an administrative coup in the mildest sense of the term. This coup stages against the will of the people will not bring any good to Turkey's democracy."

Concluding their statement, the bar associations have emphasized, "We do not accept this unlawful practice that has completely removed the idea of living together in peace and the belief in the ideal of rule of law."

The associations have also requested that the dismissed metropolitan mayors be reinstated in their positions immediately.

The undersigned bar associations are as follows:

Adana, **Adıyaman**, Ağrı, **Ankara**, Antalya, **Artvin**, Batman, **Bingöl**, Bitlis, **Bursa**, Denizli, **Diyarbakır**, **Düzce**, **Gaziantep**, Hakkari, **Hatay**, İstanbul, **İzmir**, Kars-Ardahan, **Mardin**, Mersin, **Muş**, Siirt, **Şanlıurfa**, Şırnak, **Tunceli**, Van, **Yalova** (HA/SD)

Dismissal of HDP Mayors: Statements by Rights and Professional Organizations

The Association of Contemporary Lawyers (ÇHD), the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), the Lawyers for Democracy, the Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV) have released statements on the dismissal of mayors.

İstanbul

Following the dismissal of the HDP Metropolitan Mayors of Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin, rights and professional organizations made a statement on the issue.

The Association of Contemporary Lawyers (ÇHD), Mülkiyeliler Birliği (the alumni association of the Ankara University Faculty of Political Science), the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), the Lawyers for Democracy, the Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV) released the following statements:

Joint statement by İHD and TİHV

The Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TİHV), which issued a joint press release on the issue, stated that the first and indispensable condition of democracy is to recognize the will of the voters.

Emphasizing Article 38 of the Constitution, the İHD and TİHV emphasized said that no one can be charged unless convicted by a finalized court order:

"Today's impeachment and municipality seizure operation is an absolute violation of the Constitution and an operation to seize municipalities with anti-democratic laws and powers that political power cannot seize by elections.

"Directly appointing governors is literally a state of emergency action. Governors running the metropolitan municipalities which could not be won in elections means that the ruling party will run these municipalities.

The İHD and the TİHV also recalled that 94 mayors from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) were dismissed during the state of emergency period, and five mayors from the HDP were not given the mandates in the March 31 local elections, even though they won the elections.

Urging the government to return elected mayors to office, the İHD and the TİHV invited all democratic forces to oppose the interference by the government.

Lawyers for Democracy: Will of the people are not recognized

The lawyers for Democracy said that the elected mayors were dismissed without law and without any rules, and that this was once again a declaration that democracy and the will of the people are not recognized.

"The fact that the government has applied the same method again is nothing more than insistence on one man rule.

"The corruption of the trustees is clearly revealed by the elected mayors in how the municipality's facilities are used for personal benefit, while the re-submission of the municipalities to the trustees also means continued and insistence on this corruption and vested interests.

"This means the destruction of democracy and the rule of law for the entire country. This recklessness, which does not recognize the law and ignores the will of the people, may appear anywhere else in the country in the future.

TMMOB: Political morality of the one man regime

Stating that the dismissals made under the pretext of judicial-administrative investigations carried out on the mayors have nothing to do with democracy and the understanding of the rule of law, the Union of Chambers of Engineers and architects of Turkey (TMMOB) said that the similar ones of this understanding were the product of the fascist government mentality they saw during the periods of coup:

"This insistence on the trustee regime is a blow not only to the will of the people, but also to the people's faith in democracy and elections. Trying to usurp what was lost at the ballot box by non-democratic means is also indicative of the level of political morality of the one-man regime.

"Those who have no ties to the people and have no sense of responsibility to the people do not only cause great and lasting damage to democracy but also to the local governments to which they are appointed.

"This shame of democracy, this blow to the will of the people should be abandoned immediately. The concept of neutralizing opposition politicians through illegal means, repression and difficult methods should be abandoned."

Mülkiyeliler: Mayors must be quickly returned to their posts



"The Interior Ministry's decision to usurp the will of voters poses a grave threat to all opposition municipalities that are not regarded as acceptable by political power.

"Today, through the trustees, the most basic principles of democracy are trampled upon once again. Local governments are the main veins of democracy in Turkey.

"We would like to point out that the elected mayors are quickly returned to their posts and that this practice is vital to our political life.

"It should be remembered that what we need urgently is a strong democracy. The strengthening of democracy is possible through the existence of an egalitarian, libertarian, just and peaceful life."

ÇHD: No more surprises

Describing today's events as 'banditry', the Contemporary Lawyers' Association interpreted the confiscation of municipalities as an indication that the political power was in New preparations.:

"It is no longer surprising that the AKP, which considers the elections legitimate when they are in favor of it and declares them 'illegal' when it loses, has seized the municipalities that have taken the people's vote through the elections today.

"The government has openly launched attacks on its representatives and institutions chosen by the people's vote in order to eliminate the reactions of the Kurdish people prior to the operations which are intended to be aimed at the Kurdish geography.

"It is never acceptable for the Kurdish people to confiscation of the municipalities they have chosen by their own votes. The extermination policies against the Kurdish people should be stopped immediately." (HA/VK)

Le pouvoir turc révoque trois maires pro-kurdes

Nouveau coup dur pour l'opposition, ces élus de Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van ont été démis de leurs fonctions pour « terrorisme ».

TURQUIE: C'est un nouveau coup dur pour l'opposition. Après l'espoir suscité par les municipales du 31 mars, trois maires pro-kurdes du parti HDP ont été subitement démis de leurs fonctions dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi. Élus dans d'importantes villes du sud-est de la Turquie (Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van), Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, Ahmet Türk et Bedia Özgökçe Ertan sont poursuivis pour « appartenance à une organisation terroriste » et « propagande terroriste », selon un communiqué publié par le ministère de l'Intérieur. Raison avancée : des plaintes auraient été déposées contre ces trois membres du HDP (régulièrement accusé de collusion avec la rébellion armée du PKK) pour avoir « lancé des pratiques soutenant les objectifs, discours idéologiques et actions de l'organisation séparatiste (...) et orienté les moyens de la mairie pour soutenir l'organisation terroriste, plutôt que pour couvrir les besoins locaux des citoyens ».

L'annonce, qui intervient dans une période de relative clémence à l'égard du chef du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, récemment autorisé à voir ses avocats après des années d'isolement total, a déclenché de vives réactions. « Tant que la volonté du peuple ne sera pas prise en compte, aucun système établi par ceux qui ont été nommés (par le gouvernement) ne sera légitime aux yeux du peuple », s'est insurgé Selçuk Mizrakli devant la mairie de Diyarbakir, pla-

cée sous haute surveillance, en dénonçant son remplacement par le gouverneur de sa province (choisi par les autorités). Le 31 mars, M. Mizrakli avait été élu avec 63 % des voix dans cette ville considérée comme la « capitale » du Sud-Est à majorité kurde du pays. Pour le HDP, qui rejette en bloc les accusations, cette mise sous tutelle est symptomatique du « problème commun de tous les peuples de Turquie et de toutes les forces démocratiques ». Un point de vue partagé par le maire d'Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoglu. « Ignorer la volonté du peuple est inacceptable », a-t-il déclaré, en évoquant une démarche qui « ne peut être associée à des pratiques démocratiques ».

Percée aux législatives
Ce membre du CHP (opposition sociale-démocrate), élu lors de la convocation d'un second vote le 23 juin, parle en connaissance de cause : sa première victoire, obtenue en mars, avait été annulée après un recours déposé par l'AKP, le parti du président Erdogan.



Des manifestants affrontent la police turque alors qu'ils protestaient contre le remplacement de maires kurdes par des représentants de l'État dans trois villes du pays, à Diyarbakir, le 19 août 2019. ILYAS AKENGIN/AFP

Le HDP n'en est pas à ses premiers déboires. Après sa percée aux législatives de juin 2015, les autorités avaient organisé un scrutin anticipé cinq mois plus tard. Aux municipales de 2014, des maires du parti pro-kurde avaient également remporté 102 municipalités. Mais 95 d'entre eux avaient été ultérieurement remplacés par des administrateurs nommés par le gouvernement. À l'approche du scrutin de mars dernier, le président Erdogan avait d'ailleurs ouvertement menacé d'avoir à nouveau recours à ce procédé.



Avec AFP : 19/08/2019

Turquie: des maires pro-kurdes remplacés par des fonctionnaires

L'AKP avait perdu les municipales le 31 mars, après avoir fait rejouer l'élection à la mairie d'Istanbul. Mais l'opposition a pris dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi 19 août un nouveau coup dur : trois maires pro-kurdes élus dans d'importantes villes du sud-est de la Turquie ont été démis de leurs fonctions, accusés d'activités « terroristes », moins de cinq mois après leur élection.

Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van. Ces trois villes importantes du sud-est de la Turquie avaient élu leur maire - respectivement Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, Ahmet Türk et Bedia Özgökçe Ertan - à une large majorité, entre 54 et 63%. Ces élus du HDP sont désormais remplacés par des fonctionnaires.

Dans un communiqué, le HDP a dénoncé ce lundi un « geste clairement hostile à la volonté politique du peuple kurde ». Il a été soutenu par le maire d'Istanbul : Ekrem Imamoglu, élu



Ahmet Türk, comme deux autres maires pro-kurdes du sud-est turc, élus lors des élections municipales du 31 mars, a été démis de son mandat dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi 19 août. ILYAS AKENGIN / AFP

d'un autre parti d'opposition le CHP a critiqué « une pratique » qui « ne peut être associée à des pratiques démocratiques ». « Ignorer la vo-

lonté du peuple, a-t-il écrit sur Twitter, est inacceptable. »

Remplacer des élus par des fonctionnaires choisis par le pouvoir, la pratique est connue : aux municipales de 2014 déjà, le parti pro-kurde avait remporté 102 municipalités ; 95 sont ensuite passées sous contrôle direct du gouvernement...

À chaque fois, la même rhétorique : les élus sont accusés d'appartenance au PKK. L'organisation est classée terroriste par la Turquie, les États-Unis et l'Europe.

La répression s'est en tout cas accentuée depuis trois ans. Les dirigeants du parti sont derrière les barreaux et à la présidentielle de juin 2018, son candidat avait fait campagne... de sa prison.

Turkey removes three top Kurdish mayors in major crackdown



Image copyright Getty Images Image caption : Turkish anti-riot police deployed in Istanbul after protests erupted over the crackdown

Turkey has removed three elected mayors from office and detained more than 400 people as part of a crackdown over alleged links to Kurdish militants.

The mayors, who were elected in March, are accused of spreading "terrorist propaganda" and "financing terrorism".

Ankara says they - and the many others detained - have ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

There are fears that the move could escalate tensions in the mainly Kurdish south-east

regions of the country.

The operation on Monday saw teams of officers conducting raids in 29 provinces across Turkey.

Those detained include the mayors of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van provinces - all of whom secured large majorities in the March elections.

They are members of the opposition pro-

Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), but are accused of sharing links with the PKK.

The charges reportedly include renaming local streets and parks after imprisoned PKK members and offering jobs to the relatives of militants, Turkey's interior ministry said in a statement.

"Through judicial and administrative investigations, our ministry suspended mayors who were identified and proven to be engaged and affiliated with terrorist organisations," the ministry said.

It added that the officials were "deliberately and wilfully nominated as mayoral candidates in some municipalities".

But the HDP has labelled the decision a "blatant move to hijack electoral will" and has called on all opposition parties to raise their voice in protest.

The mayor of Diyarbakir, Selcuk Mizrakli, said the move by the Turkish government "disregards the will of the people", AFP news agency reported.

The vice-president of the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), Ozgur Ozel, tweeted: "Once again the ruling AK [party] chose fascism instead of democracy."

In June, the AK party suffered defeats in Turkey's major cities, losing control of Istanbul after a re-run of the city's mayoral election in a stinging blow to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Kurdish PKK has waged an insurgency in Turkey for more than three decades, costing more than 40,000 lives.

The group is blacklisted as a terror organisation by Ankara and its Western allies, and there have been several military operations against them since 2015.



ALJAZEERA

19 Aug 2019

Turkey removes pro-Kurdish mayors, arrests more than 400

Interior ministry says it has cases against the mayors for 'spreading propaganda' and being members of the banned PKK.

The Turkish government has removed three mayors from office over alleged links to a Kurdish armed group as authorities arrested more than 400 people amid a deepening crackdown on a pro-Kurdish party.

The mayors of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van provinces in eastern Turkey - all members of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) elected in March - were suspended on Monday.

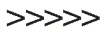
The Ministry of the Interior said it had active cases against them for "spreading propaganda" or being members of a "terrorist" organisation.

Al Jazeera's Sinem Koseoglu, reporting from Istanbul, said the mayors have also been accused of diverting money and resources from their municipalities to support the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) agenda.

President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** has repeatedly claimed that the HDP has ties to the PKK, which has fought a bloody armed campaign against the Turkish state for much of the past 35 years.

The PKK is designated as a "terrorist" organisation by Turkey, the **United States** and the **European Union**.

Erdogan had warned ahead of nationwide local elections in March that elected officials



The Turkish government has long accused pro-Kurdish HDP of having links to the outlawed PKK [File: Sertac Kayar/Reuters]

would be removed if they were found to have connections to the PKK.

The Ministry of the Interior said the mayors' roles would be taken over by their provincial governors, who are appointed by the central government.

Diyarbakir Mayor Selcuk Mizrakli told reporters outside the municipal building that the move "disregards the will of the people".

'Vile coup'

The cases against Mizrakli and Van Mayor Bedia Ozgokce Ertan date back to their time as members of parliament.

The Ministry of the Interior in a statement accused the mayors of supporting the PKK through their actions and behaviour "rather than meeting the needs of citizens".

The HDP denies any links to the PKK but has [tried to broker peace talks](#) between the fighters and the government.

Hundreds of its members and around 40 of its mayors [are currently in detention](#).

The former HDP head, [Selahattin Demirtas](#), has been in prison since November 2016 - a case that [has been criticised](#) by the European Court of Human Rights.

Our Municipal Co-chairs, who were elected with 63% of the vote in Diyarbakir, 56% of the vote in Mardin and 53% of the vote in Van, have been removed from duty with an Interior Ministry order based on lies. Statement by our central executive board: <https://t.co/gBbLhmFUQ3>

— HDP English (@HDPenglish) August 19, 2019

The government [launched a crackdown](#) on opposition politicians as well as the public sector, media and civil society following a [failed coup](#) in July 2016.

Although the coup was not directly linked to the [Kurdish](#) issue, the crackdown saw 95 of the 102 pro-Kurdish mayors removed from their posts and replaced with central government appointees.

HDP legislator Garo Paylan said on Monday that all parties and the public must oppose this "vile coup".

"Remaining silent will mean [Ankara, Istanbul next](#)," he [said on Twitter](#), referring to the fact that the ruling party lost control of Turkey's two largest cities this year.

Hundreds arrested

Turkish police also carried out raids across

29 provinces on Monday, including Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, detaining at least 418 suspects over alleged PKK ties, the interior ministry said.

In Diyarbakir, the municipality building was cordoned off by police, a correspondent from AFP news agency said, with employees being searched by officers as they entered.

The sacked mayors had won with large majorities in the elections held in March.

Mizrakli won in Diyarbakir with 63 percent of the vote, Turk won in Mardin with 56 percent and Ertan took Van with 54 percent.

The HDP said in a [statement](#) that the decision was "clearly a hostile move" against the Kurds and called for solidarity between all "democratic forces".

There was also criticism from the new Istanbul mayor, [Ekrem Imamoglu](#) of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), who was forced to rerun his own campaign this year after being controversially stripped of his initial victory.

"Ignoring the will of the people is unacceptable," Imamoglu [wrote on Twitter](#).

SOURCE: Al Jazeera and news agencies

UN body recognises four Kurds' cases as enforced disappearances by Islamic Republic of Iran

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) has recognised all four cases of activists executed in 2010 as enforced disappearances and is now asking the Islamic Republic of Iran's authorities to submit evidence to determine the details of their fates and whereabouts.

On 9 June 2010, authorities contacted the families of Shirin Alam Holi, Ali Heydarian, Farzad Kamangar and Farhad Vakili, and informed them that their children had been executed. Their bodies were never returned, and after nine years, the locations of their burial sites remain undisclosed.

On October 10th (the international day against death penalty) Justice for Iran made a request to the UN WGEID and asked them to hold the IRI accountable in relation to the unlawful prosecution and execution of these four political prisoners.

The WGEID's recognition necessitates that authorities grant victims' families the right to know the truth about the victims' fates and their whereabouts and the right to justice, according to international law. As long as the details of the fates and whereabouts of those killed extra-judicially remain concealed, the crimes of enforced disappearances committed at any time will continue to remain as human rights violations, not subject to any statute of limitations.

Farzad Kamangar, a teacher and a civil rights activist, was arrested in Tehran in April 2006. Prior to his arrest, he had been a teacher in Kamyaran for 12 years. In letters which Farzad wrote from prison, he spoke of the extensive pressures that the security forces had exposed him in order to extract televised confessions from him.

Mehrdad Kamangar, Farzad Kamangar's brother, told Justice for Iran about the unclear process and the unjust ruling of his brother's case, emphasising its unlawfulness. He says: "According to Farzad's attorney, Khaliil Bahramian, there was no reason for his arrest based on Islamic Republic laws. He had to be released... this is the reason why he was not given a public trial."

Mehrdad Kamangar blames the influence of the intelligence forces on his brother's case as the reason why their efforts for his release had been unsuccessful. He says that after his family's repeated visits to Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi's office, Tehran's prosecutor at the time, they were told that the case has gone 'missing'.



Farzad Kamangar's brother talks further about his sudden execution: "It was agreed that a number of parliament representatives and members of the teachers union would visit Farzad in Evin Prison to see how he is. Correspondence were held between the judiciary and parliament representatives as well as the involved commissions, and where fruitful. The permit and dates of this visitation were issued by the Judiciary. Mr. Karami, the then representative from Sanandaj, communicated with our family the confirmation of the date of this visit between four parliament representatives, three members of the teachers union and Farzad, which was May 12th. Unfortunately, they did not allow this effort to hear the voice of the imprisoned teacher. Meaning on May 9th they already carried the execution in a very fast way and without informing any judicial authority."

Mehrdad Kamangar then talked about his family's encounter with Esmail Najari, the then governor of Kurdistan, and five other Kurdistan representatives after the execution: "Najari had been the head of provincial security council at the time of the execution. He met with my family in a room. He made justifications and misleading arguments about the legitimacy of the execution. He took the body hostage and said he would return it when Kurdistan's protests against the sentence settled."

Farzad Kamangar's brother emphasised on his family's lack of information about the fate of his brother's body as well as the lo-

cation of his burial till this day. He commented on the formal recognition of his brother's case as enforced disappearance: "Now after almost ten years, this nightmare has taken over my family. No government organisation or body is willing to talk to Farzad's family about his body or the place of his burial. Therefore, my family is putting in the effort to work with international organisations to pressurise and hold Iran's regime accountable. By hiding the body for ten years, they have increased the depth of the atrocity. Therefore, Farzad Kamangar's family is thankful and appreciative towards international organisations who are putting pressure on the Iranian regime which is committing these crimes."

Shirin Alam Holi was arrested on June 2008 by the IRGC forces in Tehran, based on allegations of being a member of the PJAK group. She was transferred to Evin Prison after enduring 21 days of torture. According to a letter she wrote prior to her execution, Shirin continuously suffered from nightmares based on the physical and psychological pressures.

Malaekeh Alam Holi, Shirin's aunt, told Justice for Iran about the handling of Shirin's case and her hidden execution: "As Shirin's family member, I want to announce that not only were her rights taken from her, but she was given a cruel sentence. She was not given the right to defend herself and therefore she was given a cruel sentence without her family or her lawyer being informed, and she was executed along with her comrades in secret."



Symbolic gravestones for Shirin Alam Holi, Farzad Kamangar, and Ali Heydarian, made by their families.

Malaekeh Alam Holi added that her body was 'stolen' and was kept hidden from her family. She pointed to her family's repeated visits to different governmental bodies, such as the revolutionary court, parliament, the provincial government etc. and said: "Her father passed away from heartbreak due to her body not being delivered. Despite this, our family is still waiting for her body to be delivered."

Malaekeh Alam Holi believes that Shirin's body should be buried at home in Kurdistan. She has reached out to human rights organisations, international bodies and the world community to pressurise the IRI and have Shirin's body returned to them.

Farhad Vakili, a political activist, was arrested in Sanandaj in April 2006 and was held in isolation for several months. According to other prisoners on his ward, he was repeatedly tortured, and as a result, his shoulder was broken. Farhad was sentenced to death during his short trial in February 2007.

Sadiyeh Vakili, the sister of Farhad Vakili, told Justice for Iran about the unsuccessful effort of her family to retrieve her body, or even gain information the location of his burial. She also spoke of the unjust cruelty that her family has been receiving from the Islamic Republic. She spoke of the cruelty and unjust her family suffered at the hands of the Islamic Republic: "This issue has caused us immense mental and psychological damage., It may be odd for others to hear this but we have to say that even after all these years, martyr Farhad's wife and children still have hope that he may be alive. The never ending continuation of this pain, which has been deliberately inflicted upon us by the Islamic Republic regime, has become an endless nightmare for us."

She added: "We hope by reaching out to human rights organisations, such as Justice for Iran, we can find a new light in this endless nightmare."

Ali Heydarian was arrested alongside Farzad Kamangar in August 2006 in Tehran by

security forces. After being heavily tortured during interrogations, he was sentenced to death in a short trial on charges of "enmity against God" and "storing and smuggling of weapons and other ammunitions". Ali Heydarian's family were amongst the families of other Kurdish political prisoners executed simultaneously with Ali, who met the governor of Kurdistan on May 22nd 2010. They were inquiring as to how they could retrieve the bodies. Kurdistan's governor responded: "They are buried in a place which we cannot currently announce due to security reasons. The officials will inform you about the location at an appropriate time in the future."

Until now, there has been no information given to Ali Heydarian's family about the place of burial and no death certificate has been In confirmation of his execution.

TRIBUNE par Aldar Xelil,

membre du comité exécutif du Mouvement pour une société démocratique (Tev-Dem), et l'une des principales personnalités de l'auto-administration du nord-est de la Syrie.

Nord-est de la Syrie : la menace turque

Un des plus hauts dirigeants kurde de Syrie, Aldar Xelil, lance un appel à la France pour empêcher l'occupation turque de la région.

Tribune. Dans la période difficile que connaît actuellement le nord-est de la Syrie, la position et le rôle de la France sont d'une importance cruciale pour nous, Kurdes, Arabes et chrétiens qui avons vaincu l'EI et libéré toute cette région de son joug.

Daesh représentait un immense danger pour la Syrie et le Moyen-Orient, mais aussi pour le reste du monde. C'est pourquoi la France a été victime – comme d'autres pays – du terrorisme et que nombre d'innocents ont périés dans les attentats menés sur son sol. C'est grâce à nos victoires militaires – celles des Forces démocratiques syriennes – et aux 36 000 tués et blessés dans nos rangs pendant les sept années de cette guerre terrible, que la défaite de l'EI a pu être annoncée officiellement le 23 mars. Cette victoire a été, d'une certaine manière, celle du monde entier. Une victoire de l'humanité. Et une revanche pour toutes les victimes de l'EI, françaises comprises.

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes entrés dans une nouvelle séquence de notre histoire, tout aussi importante que la précédente : nous devons lutter contre les sources idéologiques du radicalisme prôné par Daesh. La persistance de cette mentalité constitue un danger considérable pour l'avenir. C'est la première chose qu'il nous faut combattre, sans quoi nous assisterons au retour de l'extrémisme et à de nouvelles menaces sur le monde.

Nous avons vu qu'elles pouvaient être les conséquences en France de la mentalité dont je parle. Les opérations terroristes menées contre vous étaient le résultat de l'adoption par certaines catégories de votre population de la pensée et de la mentalité de Daesh – et cela malgré l'absence d'un quartier général militaire de l'EI en France. Pour nous, cela confirme l'idée que la seule victoire militaire est insuffisante contre un péril de ce type.

La France est un pays important qui a pleinement contribué à la lutte contre l'extrémisme. Elle nous a soutenus de bout en bout au sein de la coalition internationale, jusqu'à la victoire, nous permettant d'établir dans le nord et l'est de la Syrie une administration autonome grâce à laquelle nous tentons de construire une expérience démocratique pionnière en Syrie. Mais aujourd'hui, cette victoire est menacée par les visées expansionnistes de la Turquie sur ces régions que nous avons libérées. Pour justifier qu'il puisse nous attaquer, Erdogan prétend sans cesse que nous l'agressons, ce qui est totalement faux, tout le monde le sait. Pour nous, il est clair qu'il a la volonté de nous en-



Un manifestant kurde près de la frontière turque, au nord-est de la Syrie. Photo Delil Souleiman. AFP

vahir pour freiner les avancées de notre lutte totale contre le terrorisme – lutte que l'ensemble de notre peuple, avec toutes ses composantes, mène au côté de la coalition internationale. La Turquie représente un vrai danger, soyez-en convaincus. Par ses menées contre nous, vos alliés, elle met en péril nos efforts communs de stabilité dans les territoires que nous avons libérés et dans toute la Syrie. N'oubliez pas que les Turcs continuent d'imposer la présence des milices islamistes qui leur sont inféodées dans les territoires dont ils se sont déjà emparés. Erdogan veut accentuer leur occupation et renforcer son contrôle sur tout ce qu'il pourra de la Syrie.

Nous espérons profondément que l'opinion publique française est consciente de ce danger et que le président Emmanuel Macron, ainsi que l'équipe qu'il a mise en place pour suivre le dossier syrien, sont convaincus du danger représenté par Erdogan, qui ne cesse aussi d'utiliser la carte des réfugiés installés chez lui comme arme de représailles contre l'Europe. Le peuple français est un peuple ami pour nous. Il a subi le terrorisme que notre peuple a subi. Nos ennemis sont les mêmes, qu'ils s'appellent Daesh ou Erdogan. Il ne faut pas négliger les ambitions de l'Etat turc.

Le défi auquel nous faisons face en ce moment même est donc un défi difficile à relever. Pour y parvenir, nous avons besoin de positions

claires de la part de nos amis. Des positions permettant de soutenir notre peuple dans son expérience démocratique, dans ses efforts pour stabiliser la région, dans sa lutte contre l'extrémisme sous ses différentes formes. Toute attaque turque contre notre région menacerait ces objectifs en même temps que les valeurs démocratiques portées par nos pays respectifs et le reste du monde.

Le gouvernement français peut réduire ces risques en empêchant la Turquie de nous attaquer. C'est ce que nous lui demandons. Lors de l'invasion turque de notre canton d'Afrin il y a un an et demi, la position de la France avait été positive. Hélas, elle n'a pas eu d'effets concrets : l'armée turque fait subir aux habitants d'Afrin un génocide intellectuel, physique et social qui se poursuit tous les jours dans l'indifférence générale.

Notre peuple ne demande que la paix. S'il a combattu le terrorisme international, c'est parce qu'il n'avait pas d'autre choix et il l'a fait au nom de l'humanité. Il a consenti à de grands sacrifices pour cela et il est prêt à en accepter d'autres. Mais il faut que la communauté internationale nous aide et accomplisse son devoir sans plus tarder en empêchant une occupation de notre région par la Turquie.

En la matière, la France et son peuple peuvent jouer un rôle déterminant. Nous faisons appel à elle.

Iranian Kurdistan: Open Letter to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Sweden and Norway

On the 17th of August 2019, UNPO Member the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) has sent an open letter to the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Ministries of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of a planned visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister to these countries. The letter calls upon Finland, Sweden and Norway to take a firm stance against the Iranian regime's systematic violations of the human rights of the Kurdish people, which has manifested itself in various ways. This is an issue that should be of interest to the Scandinavian countries themselves, as Iran's internal human rights violations have also extended outwards to European countries, where the Kurdish diaspora, many of whom reside in Scandinavia, continues to be the victim of intimidation, targeted attacks and assassinations. In addition, Iran, alongside other repressive regimes, [continues to target activists engaged at the United Nations](#).

Below is an open letter released by the PDKI: It is high time for Finland, Norway and Sweden, important actors committed to human rights and lasting peace and stability, to consider the fact that the Iranian regime's internal and external policies are linked and cannot be separated. Western policy has aimed at changing the "behavior" of the Iranian regime. This has almost exclusively aimed at the Iranian regime's external behavior. For example, it seems to be current EU policy to separate the nuclear issue from the broader and interconnected internal and external problems emanating from the Islamic Republic. However, systematic human rights violations at home, the quest for nuclear weapons, support for various terrorist groups, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, destabilization of important parts of the Middle East and so on are interconnected and need to be addressed as such.

Iran has during the past four decades systematically targeted the non-Persian communities and subjected them to all sorts of oppression and violence, ranging from systematic linguistic, cultural, economic, social and political oppression to forced demographic change as well as forced assimilation.

However, the political and security situation in Iran has in many respects even worsened during the past couple of years, especially when it comes to the status of the different non-Persian nations and human rights violations. The 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani, painted as a "moderate", was expected to result in a reduction of human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet, the human rights situation in Iran has worsened dramatically. For example, according to the Iran Human Rights Organization (IHRO), the Islamic Republic has executed at least 110 people between January 1 and June 30, 2019, in



Picture courtesy of David Holt @Flickr

prisons or in public. However, the unofficial figure is estimated to be much higher. It is also worth mentioning that a disproportionate number of prisoners to have been executed are Kurds.

At the same time, the human rights violations in Iranian Kurdistan are systematic and manifest themselves in other ways than in the execution figures. The Iranian state extracts the natural resources of Kurdistan and at the same time pursues a deliberate policy of keeping Kurdistan in a state of economic underdevelopment. Thus, poverty and unemployment have forced a growing number of Kurds to carry goods on their backs from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iranian Kurdistan as their only source of income. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) targets these individuals, known as "Kolbar" (meaning those who carry goods on their backs) in Kurdistan.

Figures from various human rights organizations show that since the year 2014, the number of Kolbars killed and injured by Iranian paramilitary forces and the terrorist Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has increased annually. In 2018 alone, at least 231 Kolbars were either killed or seriously wounded due to indiscriminate shootings from the regime's paramilitary and so-called border security forces.

Furthermore, according to Iranian authorities more than 2.2 million Iranians are drug addicts. The situation in Iranian Kurdistan is so alarming in that regard that activists as well as the general public describe it in terms of a "white genocide"

since Iran's intelligence agency is widely suspected to facilitate the distribution of narcotics among Kurdish youths. It should be mentioned that 70 percent of the population in Iranian Kurdistan are under the age of 40. Experts believe Iran intends to destroy the fabric of Kurdish society by facilitating the distribution of drugs among Kurdish youths as part of its strategy to undermine the Kurdish national movement.

Alongside the various forms of human rights violations, oppression and discrimination are constant elements in Kurdistan and other non-Persian regions in Iran. Numerous reports, compiled by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, have documented that the non-Persian nations, including Kurds, Baluchis, Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, and Turkmen, are subject to entrenched oppression and discrimination, curtailing their access to employment, political office, and their exercise of cultural, civil and political rights. Members of these nationalities who spoke out against violations of their rights face arbitrary arrest, torture and other ill-treatment, grossly unfair trials, imprisonment, and in some cases the death penalty.

The international community has over the years remained silent in the face of these human rights violations carried out by the Islamic Republic of Iran against the Kurdish people. The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) calls on the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish governments to take a firm stance against the Iranian regime's repeated and ongoing violations of the human rights of the Kurdish people.

Syrian schools continue to struggle with Kurdish curriculum

Amid repeated school closings and reopenings in the Kurdish-led autonomous administration of north and east Syria (widely known as Rojava), the [Kurdish language](#) is now being taught in most parts of the Jazira region. However, going down that particular road was — and still is — complicated, to say the least.

In 2012, after the Kurdish Language Institute decided to teach Kurdish in schools across Jazira, the Ministry of Education affiliated with the Syrian regime shut those schools down. The Kurdish nationalist Democratic Union Party (PYD) then had the doors broken down to keep giving Kurdish lessons.

The two sides subsequently agreed that three Kurdish courses per week would be taught to ninth-grade students and five courses to seventh- and eighth-grade students instead of Arabic, computer, social sciences and [science courses](#).

In 2015, the Kurdish-led autonomous administration replaced the Syrian regime's primary education curriculum with its own in the areas it controlled. This led the regime's Education Ministry to prevent its teachers from cooperating, causing [primary education courses to be suspended](#). Meanwhile, schools in areas under regime control taught classes as usual.

Also in 2015, the Rojava administration developed the Democratic Society [Education System](#), which includes educational bodies in the area, the Kurdish Language Institute, and Kurdish teaching academies and institutes.

This system is in place across the autonomous area. Its basic principle is that Arabs should learn Arabic during the first three years of school, and Kurds should learn Kurdish. Based on the system, a local language is introduced in the fourth grade.

In other words, Kurdish students start learning Arabic in the fourth grade, and Arab students start learning Kurdish. Starting from the sixth grade and until students graduate, French or English courses are introduced.

The course, called National Education, has been abolished under this system and replaced by the Democratic Nation course. In addition, geography and history courses have been adjusted, and the Islamic Education course was replaced by one called the [History of Religious Beliefs](#). As these courses are taught in Kurdish, this has affected the Kurdish students' Arabic skills.

Of note, these curricula are taught only in public schools — not private schools affiliated with religious institutions.

The Rojava administration in 2015 began imposing its curriculum on primary classes only, but it is [expanding the courses](#) to some secondary students beginning this academic year and will add others for 2020-21.



Kurdish students attend class at a school in Qamishli, Syria, March 11, 2019. REUTERS/Issam Abdallah

The autonomous administration imposed these curricula on Kurdish families as well as a small number of Arab and Syrian students whose parents work for the administration. Many oppose the curriculum and have refused to comply.

Rojava school diplomas are not recognized by any higher educational institution. Al-Monitor met Aug. 3 with Samira Haj Ali, co-chair of the Education Authority in Rojava, who said the people's recognition is what matters the most.

"A lot of significant countries and universities are visiting us, which is a kind of recognition. We shouldn't wait for people to come to us and say they recognize us. Real recognition emanates from those involved," she added.

Shatha al-Wafi is a second-grade preparatory student who used to attend the Suez Canal Middle School in east Qamishli. Even though she lives very near the school, her parents refuse to send her there, so now she travels a long way to go to a regime school instead.

"I don't understand my courses [because] there are a lot of students in class and the noise is annoying. But my father tells me, 'What's important is to get a recognized diploma regardless of the hardships.' I want to complete my studies at the University of Damascus, which is an ancient and recognized university," she told Al-Monitor.

Fred Saadoun, who has a doctorate in Arabic literature, told Al-Monitor, "The educational system is part of the state system. It is subject to a specific law and a clear constitution set by the state. There is a law in each state that regulates the education process based on a specific format."

Saadoun said legitimacy is key to preserve the future of students.

"The curriculum is valid as long as the state is valid, legitimate and recognized. When a state, an area or a system is no longer recognized, the curricula and the diplomas become unrecognized, and students lose the right to go to university to complete their studies. In other words, the future of the region in [northeastern Syria](#) is vague and not clearly defined, and no university recognizes the autonomous administration curriculum."

Haj Ali said, "There are 20,913 autonomous administration teachers in the Jazira region spread across 1,652 primary schools, 405 preparatory schools and 86 secondary schools. Schools where primary and secondary education is available amount to 82." He added that there are "200,901 primary education students, 24,820 preparatory education students and 4,768 high school students."

But a source in the regime's Education Ministry questioned those figures and told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that many schools under the auspices of the autonomous administration are actually teaching the regime curriculum.

The source added that because it's difficult to accommodate all the students who want to attend regime schools, the regime has turned some government centers into temporary schools in [Qamishli](#) and Hasakah "security squares" areas protected by the regime where security and military institutions and schools affiliated with the regime can be found.

Classes designed for 30 or 35 students are accommodating as many as 80, despite an increase in the number of dropouts, which was 161,600 in 2018. That figure is likely to increase this year, the source said, adding, "Students in regime schools located in security squares and areas under the control of the regime amount to approximately 496,400 in total."

August 20, 2019

Turkey: 3 Kurdish Mayors Removed from Office

Violates Voters' Rights; Suspends Local Democracy in Major Southeast Cities

(London) – The Turkish Interior Ministry's removal of three democratically elected mayors in the major municipalities of the Kurdish southeast and eastern regions blatantly violates the rights of voters and suspends local democracy, Human Rights Watch said today.

The Interior Ministry on August 19, 2019, removed the mayor of Diyarbakır, Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı; the mayor of Mardin, Ahmet Türk; and the mayor of Van, Bedia Özgökçe Ertan, accusing them of supporting terrorism. All three mayors are from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The three mayors should be allowed to resume their posts immediately.

"President Erdogan's government has effectively cancelled the results of the March local elections in the three main cities of the Kurdish southeast and east by removing voters' chosen mayors, all valid candidates, and taking over these municipalities," said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Smearing the mayors by alleging vague links with terrorism to deprive the Kurdish population of their chosen representatives endangers everyone in Turkey who is committed to democratic elections, human rights, and the rule of law."

The Interior Ministry justified substituting government-appointed provincial governors in each municipality because the mayors face investigations and legal proceedings under terrorism laws for their speeches and non-violent political activities. None have received a final conviction.

Abusive prosecutions and investigations for overly broad and vague terrorism offenses are widely used in Turkey to silence and arbitrarily detain government critics, journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition politicians, Human Rights Watch said.

The European Court of Human Rights has harshly criticized Turkey for its actions in pursuing baseless terrorism charges against elected members of parliament. In one example, the un-



The elected mayors from the main southeastern municipalities removed by Turkey's interior ministry on August 19, 2019; from left to right: Mardin mayor Ahmet Türk; Diyarbakır mayor Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı; Van mayor Bedia Özgökçe Ertan. © 2019 private

lawful detention of Selahattin Demirtaş, former co-chair and HDP member of parliament, the court found in 2018 that his detention "pursued the predominant ulterior purpose of stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate, which is at the very core of the concept of a democratic society."

The three mayors won their seats in the March 31 local election, with Mızraklı winning 63 percent of the vote, Türk 56 percent, and Özgökçe Ertan 53 percent. It is the second time that elected mayors in the southeastern part of the country have been removed from office and replaced with Ankara appointees.

In September 2016, the Law on Municipalities was changed under a state of emergency decree to facilitate the removal of mayors accused of terrorism links and their substitution with provincial governors. Ninety-four mayors from the

pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP) were subsequently removed, and many were held in prolonged pretrial detention. Türk, a veteran Kurdish politician, was previously stripped of office as elected mayor of the Mardin greater municipality under that decree and arrested in November 2016. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech in February, in advance of the March elections, in which he stated that mayors found to be linked with terrorism could be removed once again.

These moves by Erdoğan's government against democratically elected officials violate Turkey's obligations under international and regional human rights law, Human Rights Watch said. The moves violate the right to political participation, the right to free elections, and the right to freedom of expression under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

PS 20/08/2019

TURQUIE : le Parti socialiste condamne les dernières arrestations de maires kurdes

Le Parti socialiste dénonce vigoureusement la suspension le 19 août 2019, des maires de Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van, municipalités situées dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde.

Démocratiquement élus le 31 mars au nom du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), ils ont été remplacés arbitrairement par des gouverneurs nommés par l'État. En parallèle, 418 per-

sonnes, essentiellement des conseillers et employés municipaux, ont été arrêtées dans 29 provinces, toujours au nom de la lutte contre le terrorisme.

Le Parti socialiste condamne ce nouveau coup porté à la démocratie et réitère ses vives préoccupations face à l'acharnement du pouvoir contre toute opposition démocratique, et en particulier contre le HDP. Depuis trois ans, une centaine de maires ont ainsi été remplacés par

des gouverneurs fidèles à Ankara – une douzaine de maires issus du HDP et les deux vice-présidents de ce parti sont toujours incarcérés.

Le Parti socialiste réaffirme que la lutte contre le terrorisme ne justifie ni ces atteintes à la démocratie ni l'oppression du peuple kurde, en rien concerné. La situation appelle une condamnation forte de la France et de l'Union européenne.

Le Conseil de l'Europe réagit à la suspension des Maires kurdes par le gouvernement turc

Anders Knappe, Président du Congrès des Pouvoirs locaux et régionaux du Conseil de l'Europe, s'est dit préoccupé de la suspension par le gouvernement turc des Maires HDP (Parti démocratique des Peuples) de Diyarbakir, Van et Mardin.

« Je suis très préoccupé par la décision des autorités turques de suspendre de leurs fonctions les maires élus de trois villes métropolitaines du sud-est du pays, à savoir Diyarbakir, Mardin et Van, et de les remplacer par des gouverneurs », a déclaré Anders Knappe dans un communiqué publié aujourd'hui, 20 août, sur le site du Conseil de l'Europe.

Lundi 19 août, Selçuk Mizrakli, Bedia Özgökçe Ertan et Ahmet Türk, respectivement Co-maires de Diyarbakir, Van et Mardin, ont été destitués de leur mandat par décision du ministre de l'intérieur turc, 5 mois après leur élection. Accusés de « terrorisme », ils ont été remplacés par des préfets désignés le jour-même par le gouvernement. Dans le même temps, le ministère de l'intérieur annonçait l'arrestation de 418 personnes. Parmi elles, figurent de nombreux conseillers municipaux, ainsi que des dirigeants et membres du HDP.



Le Conseil de l'Europe réagit à la suspension des Maires kurdes par le gouvernement turc

Soulignant que les Maires destitués ont été élus démocratiquement aux élections locales du 31 mars 2019, M. Knappe a par ailleurs rappelé que le Congrès avait, par le passé, exprimé sa préoccupation concernant « le recours excessif aux procédures judiciaires contre les élus locaux en Turquie ».

A partir de 2016, 95 Co-maires du HDP, sur

106, ont été destitués et un grand nombre arrêtés, de même que de nombreux conseillers municipaux. Aujourd'hui, beaucoup sont encore détenus, à l'instar de l'ancienne Co-maire de Diyarbakir, Gultan Kisanak. Aux élections du 31 mars dernier, le HDP a réussi à récupérer 63 Mairies. Suite aux destitutions, il n'en a plus que 60.

Pour conclure, le Président du Congrès a invité la Turquie à remédier à « cette pratique [qui] compromet gravement le bon fonctionnement de la démocratie locale » et ajouté que l'institution continuerait « de suivre cette situation de près, en particulier lors de sa prochaine réunion à Strasbourg le 11 septembre 2019 ».

LE FIGARO 21/08/2019

Turquie: la police empêche des manifestations après la destitution de maires prokurdes

La police a dispersé plusieurs manifestations mercredi dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, après la destitution par les autorités des maires prokurdes de trois importantes villes de la région.

Au moins 200 personnes ont manifesté à Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, pour protester contre le remplacement lundi de leur maire par le gouverneur nommé par le gouvernement. Sept personnes ont été arrêtées lors de cette marche, selon un correspondant de l'AFP sur place, et la police a ensuite dispersé à l'aide de canons à eau un rassemblement qui s'était constitué devant la mairie. Les manifestants ont finalement organisé un sit-in, rapidement encerclé par environ 500 policiers, ajoute le correspondant.

Les maires HDP (Parti démocratique des peuples) de Diyarbakir, Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, de Mardin, Ahmet Türk, et de Van, Bedia Özgökçe Ertan, ont été démis de leurs fonctions dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi, accusés d'activités «terroristes».

Autorisés par les autorités à se présenter aux élections municipales du 31 mars, ils avaient remporté le scrutin respectivement avec 63%, 56% et 54% des voix. Le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuse régulièrement le HDP d'être lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation classée terroriste par Ankara et ses alliés occidentaux. Mais le parti affirme être visé en raison de son opposition virulente au gouvernement. Lors d'un briefing avec la presse étrangère à Istanbul, le ministre de l'Intérieur Süleyman Soylu a minimisé l'import-

ance des manifestations qui se tiennent depuis lundi.

«Le principal problème c'est l'attitude du HDP qui a défié l'Etat en nommant comme maires des gens qui font déjà l'objet de poursuites judiciaires», a-t-il insisté. «Ils traitent la démocratie comme un cheval de Troie». Le gouverneur de Van, Mehmet Emin Bilmez, a par ailleurs dissout mercredi l'assemblée municipale de la ville, à majorité HDP, ce qui lui permet de diriger seul la mairie. Plus de 500 membres et sympathisants du HDP protestant contre la destitution des trois maires ont été arrêtés depuis lundi, a affirmé à l'AFP une source au sein du parti. Par ailleurs, le gouvernorat de Sinark, une province située près des frontières syrienne et irakienne, a annoncé mercredi qu'un soldat a été tué et trois ont été blessés dans des affrontements avec le PKK.

Trustee Dissolves Van Metropolitan Municipal Council with an SMS

Appointed as a trustee to the Metropolitan Municipality of Van after Mayor Bedia Özgökçe Ertan has been removed from office, Governor of Van Mehmet Emin Bilmez has dissolved the municipal council and informed the members about the decision with an SMS.

Trustee Bilmez has also stated that the duties and authorities of the dissolved municipal council will be undertaken by the municipal committee.

He sent an SMS to municipal council members

Mehmet Emin Bilmez, Büyükşehir Belediye Başkan Vekili olarak görevlendirilmiştir

5393 sayılı Kanununun 45. maddesinin 2'inci fıkrası gereğince bundan böyle Belediye Meclisinin görev ve yetkileri Belediye Encümeni tarafından yürütülecektir
Bu nedenle 19/08/2019-23/08/2019 tarihleri arasında yapılacağı ilan edilen Büyükşehir Belediye Meclis Üyelerinin katılacağı toplantının yapılmayacağı bilgilerinize B002

The municipal council members have been informed about the dissolution of the council with an SMS. Indicating that Governor of Van Mehmet Emin Bilmez has been appointed as an Acting Metropolitan Mayor, the message has stated that the municipal council has been dissolved as per the 2nd Additional Paragraph of the Article 45 of the Law no. 5393 on Municipalities.

In his message, trustee Bilmez has also informed the members that the municipal council meetings to be held between August 19 and 23 and to be attended by the council members will not take place.

'They committed the same unlawfulness before'

Speaking to *bianet*, municipal council member Cemil Komi has described the decision as unlawful and stated the following in brief:



Trustee Dissolves Van Metropolitan Municipal Council with an SMS

Governor of Van Bilmez, who has been appointed as a trustee to the Municipality of Van, has dissolved the municipal council. Speaking to *bianet*, council members have denounced the decision: "The aim is to make the municipality dysfunctional."

"On the day when a trustee was appointed, they prevented us from entering the municipality. On this day, he chose the permanent municipal committee. He chose these people among the municipality bureaucrats. We cannot understand how he made this selection in such a short time.

"Now, he has transferred our authorities to them. We regard it as an unlawfulness and do not accept it. Among the municipal council members were also people from the Justice and Development Party (AKP). That being the case, he has dissolved them as well.

"Something similar happened before. They committed the same unlawfulness. We were administered like that for two years. We experienced this unlawfulness before."

'They do not even recognize their own laws'

Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Group Deputy Chair of the municipal council İsmet Tan has also denounced the decision and stated that he has not received such a message. Tok has said,

"Normally and legally, the municipal council can convene and decide to dissolve itself. (...) However, they do not even recognize their own laws. The appointed trustee can dissolve the council. It is an utterly unlawful action. The primary objective is to make the Municipality dysfunctional.

"The trustee appointed to people's will can act as he wishes and dissolve the council. I do not accept this unlawfulness. To top it all, this message is sent from a mobile phone, which means that it can only be an informative message. It should not have a legal return. It is also legally like that."

27 members were from the AKP

The Council of Van Metropolitan Municipality had 71 members. While 44 of these members were from the HDP, the ruling AKP had 27 members.

When a trustee was appointed in 2016 after the declaration of the State of Emergency, the municipal council was dissolved again and the municipal affairs were undertaken by the municipal committee members. (EMK/SD)

U.S. concerned over Turkey's removal of Kurdish mayors

WASHINGTON,— The US State Department on Wednesday called the removal of three democratically elected mayors from the Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey "obviously concerning."

U.S. Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said during a [press briefing](#) "I think in general, anywhere in the world, it's always concerning when you see the removal of elected officials and then their replacement by unelected officials."

On Monday the Turkish government [removed three](#) elected Kurdish mayors of Diyarbakir, Van, and Mardin from office over alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK militants, and replaced them with state officials.

Turkish police also carried out raids across 29 provinces and detained more than 400 people for over alleged PKK ties in a step sharply criticised by opposition parties. The HDP party said the mayors' removal was a political coup and that it is a hostile stance against the political will of the Kurdish people.

"That's obviously concerning, right? So what we hope is to see that Turkey resolves this matter in a way that is consistent with their commitment to democracy, and we, of course, always encourage a broad approach in Turkey's engagement with the Kurdish communities," she said.



U.S. Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus, June 30, 2019. Photo: AP

The US Embassy in Ankara said on Sunday it was concerned by reports of clashes in Kurdish southeastern Turkey, after a government decision to remove elected Kurdish mayors in two dozen municipalities on suspicion of links to Kurdish PKK militants.

"We are concerned by reports of clashes in Turkey's southeast following the government's decision to remove some elected local officials from office on charges of supporting terrorism, and appoint local trustees in their place," the embassy said in a statement posted on Twitter.

On Tuesday Turkish riot police [use batons](#), fired water cannon and tear gas to disperse protesters demonstrating in Turkish Kurdis-

tan, the Kurdish region in the southeast of the country, against the ousting of three Kurdish mayors five months after they were elected.

Turkish police on Wednesday [blocked](#) protests over the government's sacking of three mayors.

The government says the HDP is a political front for the PKK, which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

The HDP denies such links and says it is being targeted because of its opposition to the government.

The PKK took up arms in 1984 against the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to push for greater autonomy in [Turkish Kurdistan](#) for the Kurdish minority who make up around [22.5 million](#) of the country's 79-million population. More than 40,000 Turkish soldiers and Kurdish rebels, have been killed in the conflict.

A large Kurdish community in Turkey and worldwide openly sympathise with PKK rebels and Abdullah [Ocalan](#), who founded the PKK group in 1974 and currently serving a life sentence in Turkey, has a high symbolic value for most Kurds in Turkey and worldwide according to observers.

(With files from AFP | Reuters)



24/08/2019

By Salim Ibrahim

PKK leader praises Masoud Barzani's comments on intra-Kurdish conflict

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — A high-ranking Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader said he welcomes Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) head Masoud Barzani's initiative to prevent intra-Kurdish conflict.

Murat Karayilan said that he appreciated the KDP leader's statement because the Kurdish people's enemies want to sow division among them.

"This comes at a time where the enemy is trying to play games and wants to create problems and crisis among Kurdish parties," Karayilan told the PKK-affiliated Roj News. "The statement made by Mr Masoud Barzani is important and we concur with his statement and appreciate it."

Earlier this month, Barzani visited the Balakayati district in the Kurdistan Region near the border with Iran and [told](#) locals and party members "Kurdish blood should not be shed by Kurds."

The PKK is an armed group fighting for greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey. The KDP and PKK fought in the 1990s during the Kurdish civil war, and relations have been strained since then. The KDP has close economic ties with Turkey.

The PKK has long based itself in the Qandil mountains along the Kurdistan Region's borders with Turkey and Iran. Turkey routinely [bombs](#) apparent PKK targets there.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has [said](#) it has concerns about Turkey's airstrikes, which have killed civilians. The KRG has also called on the PKK and others to respect the KRG's territorial integrity.

Karayilan said that there has been no action in reducing tensions between Kurdish groups yet, but that Barzani's comments are a start.

"The statements we made and those made by Mr Masoud reduced tensions," he said. "No practical steps have been taken yet, but we are hopeful."

This was not the only statement by a Turkish Kurdish leader on relations with the KRG lately. Following the removal of Kurdish mayors in Diyarbakir and other predominantly Kurdish cities in Turkey this month, a politician from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) called on KRG president Nechirvan Barzani to address the situation.

"We also expect Mr Nechirvan Barzani to express his position [on the issue] because whatever sufferings we Kurds have experienced in the past was due to the lack of alliance and unity," [said](#) member of the Turkish parliament Leyla Guven.



Rudaw 24/08/2019
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

SDF calls on Syrian regime to talks about Kurdish rights

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have called on the Syrian regime to meet with them and address the Kurdish issue in the country, including political rights.

SDF military commander Mazlum Abdi made the call for talks in Hasakah today, according to the SDF-affiliated ANHA news outlet.

"We ask Damascus to negotiate with representatives of the Autonomous Administration [of North and East Syria or NES] and the Syrian Democratic Forces," **said Abdi**. "And to favor a political solution, on the principle of recognizing democratic self-administrations and recognizing the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people within Syria."

The NES is in control of much of north and east of Syria - as indicated in its name - and is dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Abdi did not elaborate whether any of their delegations have been accepted or declined by the Syrian regime.

However, some of their delegations met with the regime officials in **summer 2018** to discuss electricity infrastructure and military collaboration.

A senior commander of the SDF told AFP in May reaching a solution with the regime over Kurdish rights is "inevitable."

"Reaching a solution between the autonomous administration and the Syrian government is **inevitable** because our areas are part of Syria," said SDF spokesman Redur Khalil at the time.

Kurds have been marginalized in Syria for decades by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and before him, his father, Hafez. The Baath regime refuses to issue identity cards for a considerable number of Kurds.



General Mazlum Kobani Abdi led the campaign against Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria, forging a partnership between scrappy local militias and elite U.S. forces. Then Trump withdrew the American. Photo: Delil Souleiman/AFP

However, when the Syrian war broke out in 2011, the regime largely refused to fight the Kurdish People's Protection Units' (YPG), the armed wing of the PYD and the backbone of the SDF. The YPG has more often fought Turkish-backed rebel forces and the Islamic State (ISIS).

Assad's Syrian Arab Army (SAA), with some exceptions, left Kurdish areas for the YPG in order to fight opposition groups in other Arab-populated areas, like Damascus and Aleppo. This allowed the YPG to carve out an autonomous region for Kurds, Arabs, Christians and others living in the northeast.

Syrian officials have occasionally declared their intent to take back these Kurdish-led areas from the YPG. Regime and Kurdish forces fought over the city of Hasakah in 2016, for example. NES leaders have asked for Kurdish autonomy in Syria.

Abdi reiterated that they want to establish an army for a "unified free Syria" in his comments today.

"This meeting will be the basis for building a military force that will guarantee a unified free Syria," he said.

LOBS 24 août 2019

Hassaké (Syrie) (AFP) - Les Kurdes de Syrie ont affirmé samedi qu'ils allaient coopérer en vue de la "réussite" d'une "zone de sécurité" qui doit être mise en place par Ankara et Washington à la frontière avec la Turquie.

L'instauration de cette zone tampon, qui doit être établie dans le nord-est syrien pour séparer les territoires kurdes de la Turquie, avait été proposée par les Etats-Unis pour dissuader Ankara de lancer une nouvelle offensive contre la principale milice kurde de Syrie.

Cette milice, fer de lance de l'alliance arabo-kurde des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), a été un partenaire clé de Washington dans la lutte contre le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI). Elle est toutefois considérée par Ankara comme un "groupe terroriste".

"Nous déploierons tous nos efforts pour garantir la réussite de l'accord avec l'Etat turc, et (la réussite) des efforts menés par les Etats-Unis", a déclaré samedi le haut commandant des FDS Mazloum Abdi.

"Zone de sécurité" en Syrie: les Kurdes prêts à coopérer

"Les FDS joueront un rôle positif pour le succès de cette opération", a-t-il ajouté lors d'une conférence de presse à Hassaké, dans le nord-est du pays en guerre.

Participait également à la conférence de presse le général Nicholas Pond, un représentant de la coalition internationale emmenée par Washington pour lutter contre l'EI.

Il a souligné que l'initiative était "la seule voie pour sécuriser la zone frontalière de manière durable".

Vendredi soir, le commandement militaire américain au Moyen-Orient (Centcom) a annoncé sur son compte Twitter que les FDS avaient détruit jeudi certaines de leurs "fortifications militaires" à la frontière, photos à l'appui. "Cela démontre l'engagement des FDS à soutenir

l'application du mécanisme de sécurité", a-t-il estimé.

Le 7 août, Washington et Ankara se sont mis d'accord sur la création d'un "centre d'opérations conjointes", basé en Turquie, pour coordonner la mise en place de cette "zone de sécurité".

Ses contours sont pour le moment flous --notamment sa profondeur--, et aucun calendrier n'a été avancé pour sa mise en place.

Mi-août, le Pentagone avait indiqué que l'accord serait mis en oeuvre "par étape" mais que les premières opérations allaient commencer "rapidement".

Ankara a assuré que des postes d'observations et des patrouilles conjointes étaient prévus.

Le régime de Damas a dénoncé une initiative au service des "ambitions expansionnistes de la Turquie".

Syrie : le "centre d'opérations conjointes" turco-américain opérationnel

Le "centre d'opérations conjointes" turco-américain sur la Syrie fonctionne désormais à "pleine capacité", a annoncé samedi le ministre turc de la Défense, Hulusi Akar.

"Le centre d'opérations conjointes a commencé à fonctionner à pleine capacité", a déclaré le ministre, cité par l'agence étatique Anadolu.

Il a ajouté que le premier vol commun en hélicoptère avait lieu samedi après-midi.

Sa déclaration survient peu après que la milice kurde alliée des Etats-Unis mais qu'Ankara considère comme "terroriste" a affirmé être prête à coopérer en vue de la "réussite" de la mise en place d'une "zone de sécurité".

Aux termes d'un accord conclu entre Ankara et Washington à l'issue de difficiles négociations, le "centre d'opérations conjointes" vise à coordonner la mise en place de cette "zone de sécurité".



Ministre turc de la Défense, Hulusi Akar
© AFP/Archives / Aris Oikonomou

rité" dans le nord-est de la Syrie pour séparer les territoires kurdes de la Turquie.

Son instauration avait été proposée par les Etats-Unis pour dissuader Ankara de lancer une nouvelle offensive contre les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG).

Cette milice, fer de lance de l'alliance arabo-kurde des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), a été un partenaire clé de Washington dans la lutte contre le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI).

Mais elle est considérée par Ankara comme une extension en Syrie du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), classé "terroriste" par la Turquie, mais aussi les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne.

Vendredi soir, le commandement militaire américain au Moyen-Orient (Centcom) a annoncé sur son compte Twitter que les FDS avaient détruit jeudi certaines de leurs "fortifications militaires" à la frontière, photos à l'appui.

Les contours de la "zone de sécurité" sont pour le moment flous, et aucun calendrier n'a été avancé pour sa mise en place.

Ekurd Daily August 25, 2019

Three Turkish soldiers killed, seven wounded in clash with PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan



Kurdish PKK female guerrilla. 2019. Photo: PKK/ANF

By Editorial Staff

ANKARA,— Three Turkish soldiers were killed and seven were wounded in a clash with Kurdish militants in Iraqi Kurdistan re-

gion, the Turkish defence ministry said Sunday.

The statement came after Turkey on Friday launched the third phase of an operation begun in May to root out fighters of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in the region.

It did not specify the location of the clashes.

Turkey began conducting a ground offensive

and bombing campaign against the PKK in the region in May.

Turkish warplanes conducted two airstrikes in Akre's Zrebar sub-district in Iraqi Kurd-

istan on Sunday, local media reported. Separately, an airstrike in Bakrman destroyed a car reportedly belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). No casualties were reported in either strike.

The PKK took up arms in 1984 against the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to push for greater autonomy in Turkish Kurdistan for the Kurdish minority who make up around 22.5 million of the country's 79-million population. More than 40,000 Turkish soldiers and Kurdish rebels, have been killed in the conflict.

A large Kurdish community in Turkey and worldwide openly sympathise with PKK rebels and Abdullah Ocalan, who founded the PKK group in 1974 and currently serving a life sentence in Turkey, has a high symbolic value for most Kurds in Turkey and worldwide according to observers.

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Rudaw August 26, 2019
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

No permanent Turkish army posts will be in buffer zone: SDF spokesperson

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — A spokesperson for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) denied claims that Turkish troops will be allowed permanent posts in the proposed northern Syria buffer zone, adding that there will also be no Syrian proxies of Turkey or observation points in the area.

Mustafa Bali told [Rojava Information Center](#), a monitor with ties to the SDF, that Turkish forces will enter the zone – but once they “complete the patrol, [they] will return to their country.”

Patrols will be conducted “perhaps once every fortnight, or once a month” over the duration of the buffer zone agreement, he added.

Bali’s statement follows a claim by two unnamed Turkish officials – not wanting to be identified for fear of repercussions – who told Bloomberg on Sunday that the US has agreed to the [deployment](#) of two Turkish soldiers for every American soldier.

Turkey has 12 observation points in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, following an agreement with Russia – the main backer of the Syrian regime.

However, Bali said the construction of observation points would not take place on SDF-controlled territory.

“Observation points will be built, but on Turkish soil. A system like they have in Idlib is unacceptable,” he said.

US and Turkish military officials agreed on the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria, to be developed into a “peace corridor” for the return of 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, on August 7.

They also agreed to establish a [joint operation center](#) in the province of Sanliurfa, on the Turkish border with Syria, which began operating at “full capacity” on Saturday, according to Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, reported the state-owned Anadolu Agency. The first [helicopter](#) carrying Turk-



ish and US commanders flew over the East of Euphrates on Saturday.

“In addition, the destruction of terrorist emplacements and fortifications began,” Akar added.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a [tweet](#) a day earlier that the SDF “destroyed military fortifications” on Thursday “to support implementation of the security mechanism framework.”

The depth and length of the buffer zone was a point of contention between the US, Turkey and the SDF. Turkey demanded a 30-40 kilometre-deep safe zone while both the US and the SDF proposed one of up to 14 kilometers.

However, Mazloum Abdi, commander of the SDF, said on August 16 that they had later demanded a longer and deeper safe zone.

“If there is an agreement, it should cover all areas of northeast Syria,” Abdi said in an interview with the SDF-affiliated [Hawar](#)

[News](#).

The two unnamed officials, who spoke to Bloomberg said that the US and Turkey have agreed on a 125km long, 15 km deep zone in Serekaniye [Ain al-Issa] and Tel-Abyad – two mostly Arab regions under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), otherwise known as Rojava.

They also claimed that Turkey has already deployed 10 brigades to its borders with the SDF, in the first phase of a campaign to drive out all Kurdish fighters in Syria.

The SDF is primarily composed of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) – considered by Turkey as the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

The PKK and Turkey have been locked in a four-decade long, often armed, struggle, killing over 40,000 people including civilians. Turkey considers the PKK – and by extension, the YPG – to be a terrorist organization.



27-08-2019

Syrie: retrait des milices kurdes dans le nord-est du pays

Mazloum Kobani, commandant en chef des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), à majorité kurde, lors d'une réunion à Hasakah dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 24 août 2019. DELIL SOULEIMAN / AFP

Les milices kurdes présentes dans le nord-est de la Syrie annoncent leur retrait de la frontière avec la Turquie. Elles laissent donc le champ libre à la création d'une zone tampon, voulue par les Turcs et les Américains.

Les milices kurdes commencent à retirer leurs troupes et leurs armes lourdes de certaines positions le long de la frontière entre la Syrie et la Turquie. C'est ce qu'affirme un porte-parole des FDS, cette force à majorité kurde qui occupe le nord-est du pays.

Ce retrait est un gage de bonne volonté après l'ac-

cord conclu entre Ankara et Washington pour la création d'une zone tampon entre la Turquie et la Syrie. Une zone de sécurité réclamée de longue date par les Turcs. Ils craignent d'une part l'afflux de nouveaux réfugiés syriens et d'autre part, l'établissement à leur frontière d'une vaste région autonome kurde, pouvant encourager des velléités séparatistes sur leur sol.

Les États-Unis, eux, veulent empêcher une offensive turque contre **ces milices kurdes de Syrie**, qui ont été de fidèles alliées dans la lutte contre l'organisation État islamique ces dernières années.

Un dispositif comme à Idleb « inacceptable » pour les Kurdes

La création de cette zone tampon a été actée ce mois-ci après de nombreuses discussions. Mais les détails de sa mise en œuvre restent encore à préciser.

« Des points d'observation seront mis en place, mais ils seront construits sur le sol turc, précise Mostafa Bali, porte-parole des FDS. Comme nous l'avons dit, un système similaire à celui d'Idleb, avec des points d'observation turcs sur le sol syrien, est inacceptable. Tout comme la possibilité pour l'armée turque de patrouiller en toute liberté. Seules les patrouilles conjointes turco-américaines pourront se déplacer le long de la route qui longe la frontière entre la Turquie et la Syrie. »

Le porte-parole de FDS met en garde : *« Ces patrouilles turques auront la possibilité de franchir la frontière, mais pas de rester en Syrie. Elles devront à chaque fois regagner leur pays. Les armes dont nous disposons et qui pourraient constituer un danger pour la Turquie, seront retirées de cette zone frontalière. Nos combattants reculeront de 5 km. »*

L'Orient LE JOUR 27/08/2019
Editorial de Issa GORAIEB

Début du retrait des forces kurdes de la frontière turque

Le président russe Vladimir Poutine a rencontré hier son homologue turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan en marge d'un Salon aéronautique près de Moscou. Alexey Nikolsky/Sputnik/AFP

Les autorités locales kurdes du nord-est de la Syrie ont annoncé hier le début du retrait de leurs forces de positions le long de la frontière avec la Turquie, à la suite d'un accord entre Washington et Ankara établissant une « zone de sécurité ». Ces autorités ont indiqué dans un communiqué que les travaux avaient débuté samedi sur « les premiers pas pratiques – dans le secteur de Ras al-Aïn – avec l'élimination de monticules de terre et le retrait de certaines unités des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG) et d'armes lourdes ».

Principale milice kurde de Syrie et partenaire-clé des États-Unis dans la lutte contre le groupe jihadiste État islamique, les YPG ont annoncé samedi être prêts à coopérer en vue de la mise en place d'une « zone de sécurité » pour séparer les secteurs kurdes syriens de la Turquie. Fruit d'un accord conclu entre Washington et Ankara, l'instauration de cette zone tampon est destinée à dissuader la Turquie de lancer une nouvelle offensive contre la milice des YPG, fer de lance des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), mais considérée comme « terroriste » par Ankara.

Le 7 août, Washington et Ankara se sont mis d'accord sur la création d'un « centre d'opérations conjointes », basé en Turquie, pour coordonner la mise en place de cette « zone de sécurité ».

Les contours de la zone tampon sont pour le moment flous – notamment sa profondeur – et aucun calendrier n'a été avancé pour sa mise en place. Mi-août, le Pentagone avait indiqué que l'accord serait mis en œuvre « par étapes », mais que les premières opérations allaient commencer « rapidement ».

Le régime de Damas a dénoncé une initiative au service des « ambitions expansionnistes de la Turquie ».

Lundi, les forces kurdes ont procédé à des retraits similaires à Tal Abyad, « cela montre le sérieux de notre engagement » en faveur de l'instauration de cette zone tampon, a encore indiqué hier l'administration semi-autonome kurde syrienne.

Rencontre Erdogan-Poutine

Parallèlement, les combats dans la région d'Idleb, frontalière de la Turquie, que le régime tente de reprendre à des jihadistes et groupes rebelles avec le soutien de Moscou, ont fait au moins 51 morts dans les deux camps hier, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Une partie de la province d'Idleb (Nord-Ouest) et des secteurs adjacents des provinces d'Alep et de Lattaquié restent dominés par les jihadistes de Hay'at Tahrir al-Cham (HTS, ex-branche syrienne d'el-Qaëda). Des groupes rebelles proturcs y sont aussi présents.

Soutenues par l'aviation russe, les forces du régime ont repris ces derniers jours plusieurs localités, poursuivant leur offensive au sol lancée le 8 août, après quatre mois de bombardements quasi quotidiens. Depuis mercredi dernier, ces forces du régime ont repris la ville-clé de Khan Cheikhoun, et plusieurs localités à Hama, au sud, y encerclant un poste d'observation de l'armée turque. Elles ont massé samedi des renforts à Khan Cheikhoun et visent désormais la région de Maarret al-Naaman, plus au nord, selon

l'OSDH. Ces deux villes sont situées sur une autoroute reliant la capitale Damas à la grande ville du Nord, Alep, toutes deux tenues par le pouvoir de Bachar el-Assad.

Hier, combattants rebelles et jihadistes ont attaqué des positions loyalistes dans le sud de la région, a indiqué l'OSDH. « Des affrontements violents ont éclaté à l'est de Khan Cheikhoun à l'aube après des attaques menées par des groupes jihadistes et rebelles sur des positions du régime », a précisé le directeur de l'ONG, Rami Abdel Rahmane. L'attaque a été menée par les combattants de deux groupes jihadistes, a-t-il ajouté. Les combats ont tué 23 combattants prorégime et 20 dans l'autre camp dont 13 jihadistes, selon l'OSDH. De même source, huit rebelles ont en outre été tués dans le sud-ouest du bastion, alors qu'ils cherchaient à s'infiltrer près de positions du régime à proximité de l'aéroport militaire d'Abou Douhour.

Cette offensive intervient malgré un accord sur une « zone démilitarisée », dévoilé en septembre 2018 par la Russie et la Turquie, parrain de groupes rebelles, pour séparer les zones gouvernementales des territoires jihadistes et insurgés.

Moscou et Ankara partagent de « graves inquiétudes » concernant la situation dans la région syrienne d'Idleb, a déclaré hier le président russe Vladimir Poutine après une rencontre avec son homologue turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan en marge d'un Salon aéronautique près de Moscou, ajoutant avoir évoqué « des mesures communes supplémentaires » pour « normaliser » la situation, sans donner plus de détails. La Turquie « prendra toutes les mesures nécessaires » pour protéger ses troupes déployées dans la région d'Idleb, a prévenu de son côté le président turc.

« La situation s'est tellement compliquée qu'à l'heure actuelle nos militaires se trouvent en danger. Nous ne voulons pas que cela continue. Nous allons prendre à temps toutes les mesures nécessaires », a-t-il déclaré.

Source : AFP

Turquie: des maires prokurdes destitués dénoncent une «décision politique»

Trois maires prokurdes déchus de leur mandat en Turquie pour des accusations de «terrorisme» ont qualifié jeudi leur destitution de «putsch politique» et affirmé qu'ils allaient saisir la justice pour la contester.

Accusés d'activités «terroristes», les maires HDP (Parti démocratique des peuples) de Diyarbakir, Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, de Mardin, Ahmet Türk, et de Van, Bedia Özgökçe Ertan, ont été démis de leurs fonctions le 19 août. La destitution des maires de ces trois importantes villes du sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, quelques mois après leur victoire aux élections municipales du 31 mars, avaient provoqué des manifestations réprimées par la police.

«Nous avons été privés de l'opportunité de

servir le peuple par le putsch politique du 19 août», a déclaré Ahmet Türk, maire déchu de Mardin et figure influente de la cause kurde. «C'est une décision politique qui vise à empêcher la lutte pour la démocratie du peuple kurde, à intimider le peuple et à stopper nos efforts pour amener le changement en Turquie», a-t-il ajouté lors d'une conférence de presse à Istanbul.

Bedia Özgökçe Ertan, qui s'exprimait elle aussi lors de cette conférence de presse, a indiqué que le HDP allait «éprouver toutes les voies légales» pour contester cette décision.

La semaine dernière, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a défendu la destitution des trois édiles, les accusant de s'être mis «au service de terroristes au lieu de servir la population». Le ministère de l'Intérieur affirme avoir reçu des plaintes selon lesquelles les

trois maires auraient soutenu financièrement le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), un groupe qualifié par Ankara de «terroriste». Ahmet Türk a qualifié d'«infondées» ces accusations.

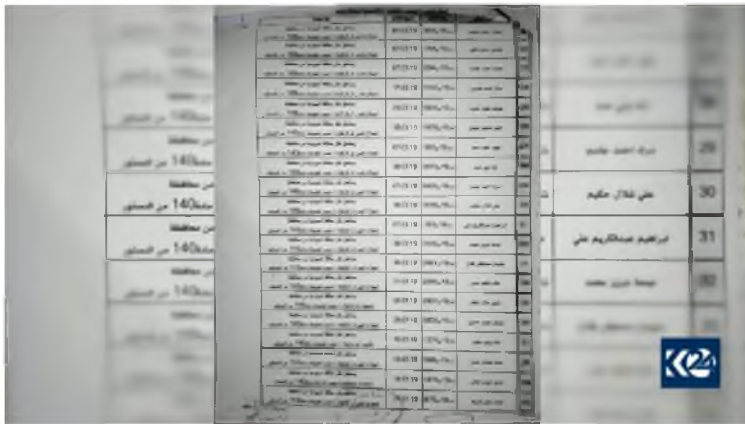
Ankara a nommé des gouverneurs dans les trois villes pour prendre en charge les administrations municipales.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuse régulièrement le HDP d'être lié au PKK. Mais le parti affirme être visé en raison de son opposition virulente au gouvernement. Des dizaines de responsables et élus du HDP ont été arrêtés dans le cadre des purges que mènent les autorités turques depuis une tentative de putsch en 2016.



August 25-2019
By Karzan Sulaivany

Kirkuk experiencing 'organized Arabization campaign': official



Documents Kurdistan 24 received show a list of 600 Arab families who were resettled in Kirkuk. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Official documents reveal the resettlement of 600 Arab families from southern and central parts of Iraq to the disputed province of Kirkuk.

According to documents Kurdistan 24 received, 600 Arab families from the governorates of Salahuddin, Anbar, Maysan, and Baghdad were transferred and given residence in Kirkuk over the past six months.

Rasul Raouf, a representative of the Socialist Party in Kirkuk, said the process of resettling Arabs in the disputed region “is very organi-

zed.” He noted that official documents authorize the transfers to Kirkuk and officially consider the newcomers as residents of the governorate.

“I believe if this continues in the next election, then, after four years, the Kurds will no longer remain the majority in Kirkuk,” Raouf told Kurdistan 24.

Since the Iraqi government’s attack on Kirkuk and other disputed areas in October 2017, Arabs have been brought to the province from different regions in an attempt to implement the demographic changes.

The campaign is meant to change the demography of the areas by forcibly displacing the Kurdish residents and replacing them with Arabs from central and southern Iraq.

Kirkuk, an ethnically diverse province comprised mainly of Turkmen, Arabs, Christians, and a Kurdish majority, is claimed by

both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq.

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.

However, after Iraqi forces and Iran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi militias pushed Kurdish Peshmerga forces from Kirkuk in late 2017, allegations of the forced displacement of Kurds began to emerge. Landowners were allegedly told to vacate their properties by ethnically Arab claimants who had Saddam-era documents.

Several Kurdish officials have accused Rakan Saeed, the Arab acting governor that was installed at the time, of facilitating ethnically divisive policies in efforts to tip the balance against Kurds. The Kurds have a majority of seats in the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC) and, as a result, are entitled to choose Kirkuk’s governor.

30/08/2019
LA CROIX Armelle Canitrot
(à Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône))

Des effacements de la culture kurde par le pouvoir turc

Dans une exposition à Arles, Émeric Lhuisset documente avec photographies et vidéos, les représailles turques contre les Kurdes et les risque d'anéantissement qui menace leur culture.



« Je suis parti sur les traces de ce que l'on essaye de faire disparaître, de ce dont on ne peut pas parler, de ce que l'on ne veut pas montrer, explique Émeric Lhuisset, lauréat de la Résidence BMW aux Rencontres d'Arles. C'est une réflexion sur la disparition de voies dissidentes, d'individus, d'architectures, de cultures et même de peuples entiers. C'est l'histoire d'un territoire construit sur la disparition. »

Ses amis turcs lui parlaient de ce pouvoir turc de plus en plus autoritaire, mais, avoue le photographe, « dominé par mon espoir d'une Turquie modèle de la démocratie, je ne voulais pas voir ». Le projet « Quand les nuages parleront, en contrepoint du photojournalisme » est né de ce déni personnel.

Immense, la première image présentant un paysage a priori anodin trouve une explication dans la suivante à laquelle elle a servi de décor avant que le photographe n'en gomme un groupe de combattants kurdes. Armes à la main dans des nuages de fumée, il les a invités à rejouer leur réalité en zone de conflit dans une mise en scène de peinture classique. « Nous sommes dans la construction d'une image icône. Quelle est la part du réel?, interroge cet enseignant en art contemporain et géopolitique à Sciences-Po. Une guerre sans image existe-t-elle? Telle est la question face à la tentative d'ef-

acement par les autorités turques du conflit avec les Kurdes. »

Poursuivant cette problématique de l'effacement, Émeric Lhuisset s'intéresse aux villes en rébellion contre le régime turc qui, en représailles, a fait disparaître des quartiers entiers. Des zones interdites d'accès, mais dont il a saisi « les quantités astronomiques de gravats hors des villes ».

La question de l'« uricide »

Comparant les vues satellites de 2014 à celles de 2017, Émeric Lhuisset recrée cette sensation d'absence que l'on peut ressentir dans ces villes, en découpant méthodiquement sur les cartes les parties disparues. Ainsi à Diyarbakir, capitale du Kurdistan turc, classée patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco, à Yüksekova, Sîrnak, Sîlopi, Cizre, Nusaybin..., théâtres d'affrontements entre les rebelles du PKK et les forces turques entre 2015 et 2016.

L'exposition pose la question de l'« uricide », cet anéantissement de l'urbain et de l'architecture pour faire disparaître une culture. Hasankeyf et sa cité antique devrait bientôt être engloutie par le Tigre à la suite de la construction d'un barrage, et après des simulacres de fouilles archéologiques à coups de bulldozer.

Un effacement culturel que l'on retrouve avec le pantalon traditionnel kurde que revêt le photographe, mais que plus personne n'ose porter par peur d'être arrêté, comme le révèle une vidéo prise à Diyarbakir.

19 lieux interdits

Une sorte de road movie conduit jusqu'aux abords de 19 lieux interdits, tandis qu'une voix off en murmure l'histoire. Celle des Arméniens, des Assyriens, Chaldéens, des Grecs pontiques, des Alévis, des Kurdes..., l'histoire d'un territoire multiple et de massacres enfouis.

Un ouvrage (1) rappelle le passé de ces villes tout en dissimulant en son sein un journal. « Une œuvre réalisée en hommage aux médias disparus en raison de la censure. » Il montre les lieux de ces 19 sites qui, comme le suggère Ahmet Insel, journaliste et politologue turc, « nous interpellent et chuchotent à nos oreilles une interrogation: l'énergie morbide qui alimente le cercle vicieux de l'extrême violence ne provient-elle pas de ces disparitions successives, toutes niées et refoulées? ».

Parole du commissaire de l'exposition, François Cheval

«Le seul espace légitime de la photographie contemporaine est d'affirmer son refus de la neutralité et de l'universalisation. Le destin des images mécaniques n'est donc pas à rechercher dans d'hypothétiques vertus morales mais dans sa capacité de se remettre en question ! Les effets de réel de la fiction se nourrissent de sources extra-photographiques. Entre geste artistique et usage de documents bruts, les nouvelles pratiques jouent de la multiplicité des matériaux, certains chargés de sens, d'autres moins référentiels. Les photographies s'enrichissent de pratiques socialisées et de références diverses. En ce sens, elles sont lisibles parce qu'investies par le spectateur qui se retrouve dans un espace où l'objectivité côtoie l'invention. Elles remplissent une fonction cognitive au même titre que le document brut en se revendiquant du possible. On retrouva là l'idée du vraisemblable, ce laboratoire de la pensée susceptible d'informer notre expérience.»

Erdoğan: We Desire a More Pluralistic Turkey with a Freer Press

President and ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Chair Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech at the prize-awarding ceremony of Radio and Television Journalists Association in İstanbul yesterday (August 29).

Addressing a series of issues including the national and international media and Gezi Park protests, Erdoğan indicated that "they want a country not only with a strong economy, defense, trade, infrastructure and diplomacy, but also with a strong democracy and freer press."

News and Internet media

Referring to the "stunning progress in communication technologies", Erdoğan said, "These new media tools come with very serious risks and dangers. In no periods of our lives were we subjected to so much disinformation. Today, the dominance of lies and provocative news on social media, where there are no regulations, is many times more than the truths."

Indicating that "the Internet creates a large dump of information with its own media and social networks", he indicated, "The true information and news based on evidence is being gradually replaced with information based on presumptions, speculations, distortions and manipulation."

Gezi Park protests

Within this context, Erdoğan also referred to the Gezi Park protests:

"Fabricated news do not only threaten people, but today's democracies as well. Like several countries of the world, Turkey and democracy of Turkey are not free from this threat. The incidents of the last six years have, unfortunately, manifested this harsh reality for many times.



"In Gezi incidents, with so many fabricated news that have nothing to do with our country, they tried to provoke our nation, especially our youth. Our streets were set on fire. The goods of our store keepers were plundered. Municipality busses with passengers on board were set on fire."

International media

Erdoğan also stated the following about the international media:

"We saw that all together how the foreign media outlets that define themselves as free and objective turned into a propaganda machine instead of doing journalism when it comes to Turkey. We still remember the news reported on the night of July 15 as a proof of shame. We witness the disappointment felt by the failure of the coup attempt on headlines.

"The steps that we take in the direction of economy, democracy, counter-terrorism and protection of regional peace and stability are not reported in the international media in the way it deserves.

"We do not only want a Turkey with a strong economy, defense, trade, infrastructure and diplomacy. We also want a country with a stronger democracy. We desire a more pluralistic Turkey with a freer press. We desire a press where where all ideas are represented no matter how dissident they are as long as they are not involved in violence and insult."

Indicating that "Turkey can compromise neither its freedom of press, nor national security", Erdoğan said, "For that reason, we have to carry on our path by striking a balance between freedom and security." (EMK/SD)